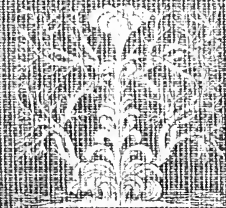


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EDWARD B. COE

Life Indeed

BY

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New York

That they may lay hold on the life which is life indeed.—1 TIM. vi. 19, R. V.



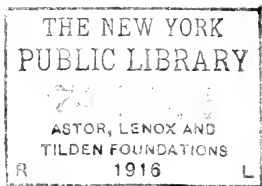
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To my Friends in the Fifth Avenue Collegiate Church who have desired that this volume should be printed, it is affectionately dedicated, with the hope that others who read it may be led to "lay hold on the life which is life indeed."

Ms. A. 11, 1951

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A LOST FAITH

*They have taken away my Lord, and I know
not where they have laid Him.—JOHN XX. 13.*

I

A LOST FAITH

THE first Easter morning brought to this poor woman a sore disappointment. She had gone in the early twilight to the grave where two days before the body of one whom she had loved had been hurriedly and secretly buried. Her visit could of course do Him no good, for He was dead. But she might at least, with the spices that she carried, complete the hurried embalming, which the approach of the Jewish Sabbath had perhaps interrupted. She might, at any rate, sit near Him a little longer, before she must give Him up forever, and offer to Him the affectionate tribute and to her own heart the great relief of her tender thoughts and her silent tears. The almost irresistible impulse, which leads us to cling, to the very last, to those whom we love, though death has touched them, drew her even to the tomb of Him whom she called her Lord.

It was no ordinary friendship which had bound her to Him. We know but little of her history and we may hesitate to accept as true all that is told us of Him. But there is no doubt whatever of the opinion concerning Him or of the feeling toward Him, which prevailed in the little group of persons

to which she belonged. She doubtless believed, as others did, certainly, that He had cured her by direct, supernatural power, of a peculiarly dreadful disease. She had been more or less in His company from that time to this. She appears to have stood in intimate relations with His mother, and with the mother of two of His disciples. She had seen Him perform what appeared to her to be miraculous acts of divine power. She had heard from Him words which seemed to her to be words of divine authority and wisdom. She had felt, in personal acquaintance, the force of a character which was to her the very ideal of divine purity and strength and gentleness and love. We sometimes turn the ancient and fragmentary pages, which tell us all we know about Him, and are strangely impressed by the spiritual depth of His sayings and the spiritual beauty of His life. But whatever He was, this woman from the little fishing town of Magdala had known Him well, and she believed that He was the long-expected deliverer of her people, the promised Messiah, the Christ of God. She may have been wrong in this, but this was her belief. She may have had but an imperfect conception of what He meant by His language concerning Himself; she obviously did not understand Him to have foretold His resurrection; but He was to her a superior being, who had brought into her obscure and sinful life the glory of another world.

Judge, then, of the utter desolation of sorrow with which on reaching the sepulchre she found it empty. Was it that then for the first time she realized that she had lost Him? Not so, for two days before she had seen Him die. She had stood, with the few faithful and loving ones, near the cross on which He had expired. She had looked, to the very end, for some signal display of the power which she believed Him to possess, for a triumphal vindication of the claims which she knew Him to have made. But no help had come from earth or heaven. She had heard His dying cry, and when at last He was taken down from the cross, she saw only too plainly that His life was extinct. She had witnessed His burial, and then, as she sat and watched, while the darkness deepened, before His closed and silent tomb, the terrible certainty had sunk into her soul that all was over. Then it was that she knew that He was gone from her, and that she should never see Him alive again. And long before the hours of the Sabbath had passed and it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, every ray of hope had faded and left her in the stupor of inconsolable grief.

It was not, then, a deeper sense of her irreparable loss, which called out a new flood of passionate tears, as she came to the sepulchre and found it untenanted. But she cherished even the lifeless form from which she could not bear to part. It was that over which she had gone to weep; it was

the loss of that only that had wrung from her the cry, "They have taken away my Lord." Surely in His tomb He could have done no harm. They might at least have left Him to her there. And so she stood disconsolate, in the cold Easter dawn.

So many a human soul has stood by the grave of a dead faith. It was once a living faith, and full of the joy and beauty and strength of life. It was, perhaps, a faith in some man, upon whose knowledge and judgment you had thought you could depend. He seemed to you to possess ample sources of information, and the industry and intelligence to use them wisely. You felt sure that his opinions were not hastily formed, nor distorted by prejudice, not colored by selfishness. He was a man, you supposed, of acute observation, of wide experience; and you received his advice as the final settlement of the questions that troubled you. But you find, as you go on, that he is far from infallible. You buy a security that he recommends, and it tumbles to nothing; you put your property in his hands, and it slips through his fingers; you adopt a course of study or of action to which he has counseled you, and you find, perhaps too late, that your prospects for life are endangered or ruined. He meant well, you say, if you are just to him; you perhaps love him still for the services he once did you and for his kindly intentions, but you sadly own that you no longer believe in him as a clear-sighted and cautious adviser.

You have, perhaps, had a friend in whose affection you trusted. You grew up together, were together at school or at college, passed together through many trying vicissitudes of life, and you always found him staunch and true. You felt sure that you could count on him, whatever might happen; your friendship for each other could never grow cold. But little by little you drift apart, your courses in life take different directions; other friends gather round him and you are left on the rim of an ever-widening circle; till you are forced at last to admit that his special friendship for you is dead. You do not think of blaming him for this. You rally from it, perhaps, and go bravely and cheerfully on with your work, but you bear about for a time a dull pain in your heart, or you carry the scar of wounded feeling forever. It is an experience which comes usually more than once in a lifetime, but it is a sad thing for a man to lose faith in a friend.

Or you have trusted some one for his character, which seemed to you as solid as the hills. His very look inspired confidence, his name was held as a synonym of honor, his simple presence rebuked hypocrisy and fraud. Men whom you knew to be low and mean instinctively avoided him, and he stood in the community as the type of a pure and upright man. He stands so still, but you cannot trust him as you did. Ugly stories are whispered about his business transactions. Dark facts have

come to your knowledge, which throw doubt on his integrity. You look for more complete disclosures which will change your doubts into certainties and ruin his name. But you, meanwhile, have lost your faith in him. Well for you, if you have not also lost your faith in virtue, truth, and human nature itself!

Or perhaps you have given your sympathy and aid to an enterprise which seemed to you worthy of all confidence and honor. It was full of the promise of beneficent and enduring results. It was just what was needed to accomplish a great and desirable end. And so you flung yourself heartily into it, with all the enthusiasm of your nature, and you felt the exhilarating reaction which comes from honest devotion to a noble cause. But the effects that you expected do not appear. The evils that you hoped to destroy still exist; the cooperation of others is withdrawn; public sympathy deserts you; and you come at last to the sad conclusion that the scheme from which you had anticipated so much is a failure. Nay, perhaps as your faith in it dies away, you lose confidence in all attempts to bring about any important and general improvement in society. You settle down into the gloomy conviction that events may as well be left to take their course, that an enthusiasm of humanity is a will-o'-the-wisp.

Or it may be a religious faith that you are at length about to bury. It was dear to you once.

It is bound up with memories of your home and your childhood. You learned its sacred names at your mother's knee. Those whom you have most loved and honored have lived and died in it, and it gave them a courage and gentleness and patience and purity which made their lives beautiful, a joy and trust and serenity of spirit which made their death triumphant. You have seen it held, in various degrees of intelligent comprehension and of moral earnestness, by multitudes around you. On some it has seemed to exert no influence whatever. It has been to others the very breath of a diviner life. It has lifted the fallen to a new manhood and womanhood. It has inspired the strong to a self-denying activity. It has held men true under the shock of a great temptation. It has kept them calm and cheerful under blow after blow of calamity. You have observed the fruits of it, not only in individual characters which it has renewed or developed, but in organized effort for the relief of the suffering, for the rescue of the ruined, for the spread of the principles and the practice of righteousness. To these great undertakings you have seen men giving their fortunes and their lives, not for any personal advantage, but from devotion to that faith, which till lately was yours, and you have instinctively honored them for their loyalty to it. You have looked over history and have noticed that from the first these have been its effects. It has, indeed, often been misunderstood, its hold

on human nature has never yet been complete, and many a crime has been committed in its name. But it has been at least one of the principal agencies in refining and purifying human society. And the more thoroughly any community has been governed by its principles and animated by its spirit, the more conspicuous has been its peace and progress and virtue.

You may even have had experience in yourself of its beneficent power. You have sometimes suffered a keen sense of sin, as you have compared your own conduct with your consciousness of duty and your ideal of character, and you have felt a great load lifted from your conscience as your religion has shown you a God of love, ready to forgive you for the sake of an atoning Redeemer. You have longed for communion with the infinite Father, and you have seemed to draw near to Him in the person of one whom you believed to be His Son. You now think that such communion was all a delusion and a fancy, but it had the same effect upon you in satisfying your highest aspirations and exalting all your spiritual life, as if it had been real. You have been attracted to Him, through whom you have thus come nearer to God, not as a man of superior intelligence and virtue, in spite of an unaccountable hallucination under which He labored, but as the very Word made flesh, the divine mind and character realized in humanity. He not only revealed to you the infi-

nite love, He bound you by a loving devotion to Himself. He lifted you toward all that is noblest and best. You felt that it was your privilege and your glory to serve Him. Duty was transfigured when it became the offering of gratitude to Him. Sorrow was lightened when you thought of His tender personal care. The discipline of life through which you were passing acquired a solemn but joyful meaning, when you looked forward to the home, wherein, if you were faithful, you should one day see His face. Your whole moral nature was broadened and purified by this Christian faith which once you held. You were eager to proclaim it, you sought to win others to the acceptance of it. It was the ground of your deepest hopes ; it was the inspiration of your highest activity.

But now, you say, you have "given it up." It is dead already, and it waits to be buried. Perhaps it is costing you something to part with it. Your whole nature has been wrung and torn in the conflict of reason and feeling through which you have passed. You can mark the precise instant at which your struggling faith in the gospel expired. Perhaps, on the other hand, you do not know what has killed it. Its doctrines have one by one lost their hold upon you. Its threatenings have somehow ceased to alarm you as they did. Its promises have year by year grown less alluring to your heart. Other motives of action have displaced those which it offers, and these have seemed more and

more remote and unreal. The decay of your faith has been a half conscious and gradual process, and you have only awakened to a knowledge of it when it is already too late, as you think,—when the evil, if evil there is, is done.

For it often occurs that our religious beliefs are insensibly altered as the result of simple indifference. They may not have been seriously weighed at the outset, they may have been accepted by tradition as a matter of course, they may have been eagerly embraced in a moment of excitement; or even if maturely and deliberately accepted, they may never have gained any firm hold upon the mind or become the real basis of character. And from simple neglect they are swept away, one by one, in the rush of an eventful and eager life, by other interests that absorb the thought. If they are nothing more than mere intellectual convictions, this will be true of them. You may give your thorough adherence, at twenty years of age, to the principles of a political party, and never think of them again until you are forty, and what is your old political faith worth to you then? If your religion meant to you certain motives of conduct and certain currents of affection, it is truer still. For a motive that is seldom heeded soon ceases to be a motive, and love will quickly die if you pay no attention to it. But if that which is claimed for the Christian religion is true, if it is something more than a system of beliefs and a condition of devout

and trustful feeling, if it does really bring the human soul into communion with God, so that He makes His nearness felt, His truth clear, His love a sweet and sacred possession to those who seek Him through Jesus Christ,—if that is what is meant by a Christian faith, then you surely need not wonder that it has lost its reality if you have lived in disregard of it. That kind of religion, if it is possible to men, is possible only to those who are intent upon it. And if yours was not that, it was not a religion at all, and you might as well let it go. You never have known what a religion is. It is not an opinion or a score of opinions; it is not an emotion or a series of emotions. It is drawing near and keeping near to God, in reverent adoration, in humble contrition, in childlike trust, in holy obedience, in free and peaceful and glad communion. If you have given up your religion, it is possible you never had one, or if you have once possessed it, you may have simply let it die. It matters little to you or to any one else whether you believe certain things or not, if you stop with believing them; it matters very much, if you act on your convictions. But convictions are not always wrought by arguments, they are worn into the mind by experience also. And religious convictions, above all others, are the fruit of experience as well as of inquiry. If your faith was only a belief, you may have lost it by neglect. If it was the beginning of a new life, it may have been smothered

or trampled upon, with all its promise of an ever unfolding and deepening evidence of its own divine origin, in the hot pursuit of other things.

Or it may be that on the other hand the very intensity with which you have embraced and tried to practice some of the principles of Christianity, has ultimately led to your abandonment of them all. You took, for instance, the view which the Bible gives of sin, and you believed it. You looked abroad upon society, you looked within upon your own heart, and you found it confirmed. You read in the Scriptures certain startling and terrible words concerning the destiny of those who live and die in disregard or defiance of God, and you shuddered as you read them. You saw over against them the pattern of a life dazzling in its purity, divine in its disinterestedness, you knew that your life ought to be like it, and your intensest efforts could not make it so. You have struggled and watched and waited and prayed, but it has all been in vain. You felt the universal taint within you, you saw the irreversible doom before you, and in the revolt of despair you have flung it all away. It is perhaps too late to ask you whether your views of the Bible were as broad as they were deep; if you really think that the effect of the life of Jesus Christ ought to be not to save sinners but to drive sinners mad. You may have lost your faith in this way, because some of the doctrines which you held were

so sombre that the very Light of the World could not tinge them with hope.

Or again, such a state of mind may seem to you mystical, monkish, mediæval. Your faith in the gospel has gone down at the touch of the spirit of modern inquiry. It cannot be that if you have ever known it and valued it, if you have any real comprehension of what it is and what it has done, you should let it go merely because others have done so. You will not, if you are a thoughtful and serious person, let a gust of fashion which seems to be blowing across society, topple over your most sacred beliefs. They are but fragile things if that can happen. You will not let them be puffed out of existence by the mockery of a sprightly and flippant essayist, whose easy philosophy quietly ignores what you know to be the broadest facts of human life and the deepest instincts of the human soul. That is not modern thought. St. Paul confronted it at Athens. Horace wove it into graceful alcaics in the sensuous idleness of his Sabine farm. No, it is the great discoveries of natural science, and the methods of thought which it encourages, which have so rudely shaken your ancient faith. But here also you have of course been careful to distinguish what is really established from what is only conjectured. If you are not yourself a scientific expert, you have taken into account only that which wise and cautious men have agreed to accept as proved. And since the

phenomena of religion cannot be measured or weighed, since they belong to a sphere beyond the reach of telescope or microscope, you have tested the fitness of your scientific leaders to be the guides of your thought in these invisible realms. You have inquired into their logical methods. You have made sure that they are as careful in collecting and as impartial in comparing the facts of human as of physical nature. You have exacted of them clear definitions. If they speak of matter and force, you have found out precisely what they mean by matter and force. You have found it established beyond a question that there is here no jugglery of words, that the ultimate fact of the universe is really something else than the God whom you ignorantly worshipped. Such an inquiry has led you along perilous heights of thought, but you have fearlessly scaled them. You have shrunk from no labor, have been daunted by no obstacles in the pursuit of truth. You surely would not give up a faith so dear, so hallowed, so beneficent, because any teacher tells you it is vain, or because much of the literature of your time makes haste to repeat, with every variety of incompleteness and distortion, conclusions which sweep it away. You have yielded your ground only inch by inch, as one who is defending his most sacred treasures. And you have surrendered these at last, precious still, more precious than ever if you have found no other beliefs more consoling and inspiring

to take their place—you have surrendered them because you could keep them no longer. And from your earnest, distracted, truth-loving soul, there rises into the empty heavens the bitter cry, “They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him.”

If now in one of these ways or in any other, you have lost your faith in the religion of Jesus Christ, let me say to you three things.

The first is: Be sure that it is dead. It may be only sleeping. It may rise into a life larger, more beautiful, more fruitful than before. It may be that there is after all a personal, loving, forgiving God. It may be that He has a care for the soul of man, with its certain possession of reason and its passionate longing for immortality. Perhaps He even cares for you, and by paths that you do not know is leading you to a better knowledge of Himself and to a nobler and truer life. Perhaps He will let you see that you cannot do without Him, without the light of His revelation, without the knowledge of His Son. Do not make haste to bury your religion. Do not publish abroad your resolution to get on hereafter without it. You too may find yourself standing one day in helpless and hopeless desolation, among the chilling shadows of life, and One whom you in your blindness supposed to be only a man like yourself will utter your name, and you will fall at His feet, like the Magdalen in the Garden, with a great cry of joy.

But if this is not so and your faith is never again to come to life, then you will do well to mourn for it. Do not exult in your disbelief as an escape from superstition. It is the greatest calamity that has ever befallen you. It is not an emancipation, it is a bereavement. The soul or the century that has parted with its religious faith, ought to be profoundly sad.

Upon the white sea sand
There sat a pilgrim band
Telling the losses that their lives had known,
While evening waned away
From breezy cliff and bay,
And the strong tide went out with weary moan.

One spake with quivering lip
Of a fair-freighted ship
With all his household to the deep gone down ;
And one had wilder woe
For a fair face long ago
Lost in the darker depths of a great town.

There were who mourned their youth
With a most loving truth,
For its brave hopes and memories ever green ;
And one upon the west
Turned an eye that would not rest,
For far-off hills whereon his joys had been.

Some spake of vanished gold,
Some of proud honors told,
And some of friends that were their trust no more ;
And one of a green grave
Beside a foreign wave,
That made him sit so lonely on the shore.

But when their tales were done,
There spake among them one,
A stranger, seeming from all sorrow free :
“ Sad losses have ye met,
But mine is heavier yet,
For a believing heart is gone from me.”

“ Alas ! ” these pilgrims said,
“ For the living and the dead,
For fortune’s cruelty, for love’s sure cross,
For the wrecks of land and sea,
But howe’er it came to thee,
Thine, stranger, is life’s last and heaviest loss.”

Finally, if you have lost the faith that you once had, get another. Not to make you a decent and orderly citizen. Your natural disposition, your early education, the forces of a society which is as full of the influences of the religion you have discarded, as the noonday air is full of light, may still keep you honest and gentle and pure. Not to give you tranquillity of mind ; you may go through life cheerfully and meet death calmly believing nothing. You can stiffen your fortitude to meet the inevitable, you can train your courage to face the unknown. But to be a man whose nature is moulded by the finest influences, whose soul is inspired by the grandest ideals, whose life is exalted to the highest levels, you must have some religious faith. Do not take Christianity if you cannot believe in it, but be sure that the faith which you adopt is a better one than the religion of Christ ;

not freer from mysteries, not easier in its obligations,—these things are not merits in a religion ; but more sublime in its doctrines, more convincing in its evidences, more inspiring in its motives, more mighty in its power to transform and to elevate character. Let it be a religion which not only makes you a broader and better man, but which will do for the world, in the future, more than Christianity has done, and is doing. And if you look in vain for such a religion, then come back and consider whether there is not a divine meaning in a certain Roman cross and a certain empty tomb.

DE PROFUNDIS

*Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O
Lord.—PSALM CXXX. 1.*

II

DE PROFUNDIS

THE depths of which the Psalmist speaks were those of penitence. We do not know his name, or the nature of his sin, or what led him to repent of it, or what caused him to believe that God would forgive it. But it evidently occasioned him great distress, and out of this he cried to God for mercy. His prayer was answered, and he obtained the forgiveness which he sought.

It shows that sin is not a modern thing. It shows that repentance is not a purely Christian sentiment. The sense of guilt is as ancient and as universal as the human race. And whenever and wherever it has been profoundly felt, men have cried to God for pity and for pardon. We observe this in connection with every form of religious belief, and we observe it in the case of those who have had little thought or care in regard to religion. Whenever the conscience is profoundly stirred, men instinctively cry out to God.

The same is true of one who finds himself plunged into great depths of sorrow. When life is bright and the heart is glad, we are very often unmindful of the fact that all our happiness comes from Him, and that we owe to Him at least the tribute of grati-

tude. It is not impossible for us even to go on for many days or years, with no distinct acknowledgment of His goodness, and no recognition of our obligations to Him. But when some overwhelming grief befalls us, we remember Him. We ought to think of Him as the author of our joy. We almost always think of Him as the author of our sorrow. And if we have never before asked anything of Him, we are then very apt to ask His help. Sometimes it is light that we want, and we demand of Him that He shall tell us why He has thus afflicted us. Oftener still it is comfort and strength. Our burden seems heavier than we can bear. The nearest of our friends cannot help us to bear it. And out of the depths of our distress we cry to God. At such a time we seem to be face to face with Him. Things that have long amused us or absorbed us fade away. And we send up our prayer for comfort to Him who alone can enable us to bear the trial He has sent upon us.

The same is true again of almost any one who finds himself in sudden and imminent peril. You remember the vivid picture in the one hundred and seventh Psalm of those who go down to the sea in ships, and do business in great waters, and who are thus exposed to the danger of shipwreck. "Then they cry," it says, "unto the Lord in their trouble, and He bringeth them out of their distresses." It happens far oftener now than then. A careless company of people may somewhere at this moment

be lounging and chatting on a ship's deck. There is an outbreak of fire, or the crash of a collision. Everything is excitement and confusion. And those who never prayed before cry out to God to have pity upon them and save them. So whenever an unexpected casualty happens, and men find themselves confronting death, or when in sickness the resources of human skill prove unavailing, and the tenderest human love is helpless, in the dire emergency and the desperate danger the soul instinctively cries out to God. The danger may pass and the old mood of religious indifference return, but one never forgets such an experience; no one ought to forget the lesson which it teaches.

So it is again very often, when one finds himself facing a difficult duty. In the ordinary concerns of life we may not feel any particular need of divine guidance or help. It is not easy to keep this constantly in mind amidst the innumerable things that we are doing every day. But when an unusual responsibility is laid upon us, and we are compelled to undertake some task of critical importance, we not only recognize, but we do not hesitate to confess it. It is not merely a concession to the religious prejudices of the people, or a compliance with long-established usage when a newly-elected president of the United States, on entering upon his office, publicly expresses the sense of dependence upon God. On the eve of a great battle, many a stout soldier has been heard to pray. Be-

fore attempting a difficult operation, many a devout physician has been known to ask God's help. At such times we feel that we may properly do this. Out of the depths of our need, we naturally cry to God.

We all do the same thing when we find ourselves in the depths of discouragement and of despondency. When we are disappointed at the ill success of efforts we have made; when we are baffled by difficulties that we could not foresee and cannot surmount; when we are uncertain as to what we ought to do; when we are in doubt as to those on whom we can depend; in a word, when our judgment wavers and our courage fails, we are very apt, are we not, to look upward and ask counsel and aid—the counsel and aid of God. Conscious of our weakness, we cry to Him for strength; hopeless of success without His help, we pray that He will guide and help us.

And then once more, not to multiply these illustrations, we are all apt to cry to God out of the depths of some unwonted joy. We take, as I have said, the ordinary blessings of life with little thankfulness, with little serious recognition even, of the source from which they come. But now and then there comes to us a happiness so great, so unexpected, so overwhelming, that our hearts are lifted by it above their ordinary level, as a ship is lifted by a rushing wave. The ordinary language of life is then insufficient to express our deep emo-

tion. It is not enough for us to gather in the congratulations of our friends, or to manifest our new-found happiness by any look or gesture of delight. "Thank God," we say, "Thank God!" The words may sound strangely on our lips. But they are forced from the depths of our rejoicing hearts by that intensity of feeling which finds no other adequate expression.

So it is then very often with men of different natures, different training, different opinions and beliefs. When life moves calmly on upon its ordinary level, they seldom think, perhaps, of God, they care little about Him. He is not in all their thoughts, and perhaps not in any of them. They are not conscious of their dependence upon Him, they do not recognize their obligations to Him. But as soon as they find themselves in some one of the graver and more critical experiences of life, when the depths of their souls are stirred, and the voice of human nature makes itself heard, you find them crying out to God. It may be in faith and hope. It may be in terror and despair. But His is the name which then leaps to their lips. Out of the depths of their souls there goes up to Him an instinctive though perhaps involuntary prayer.

Now there is, I think, something extremely suggestive in this. It may not prove anything, but it certainly seems to indicate that there is a natural affinity between our souls and God. For these are

occasions when our true nature speaks and acts. The restraints of conventionality and of habit are laid aside. The influences of training and of environment no longer control us. There is no fear of men before our eyes. But we feel that we must reach, and reach at once, the highest source of aid and comfort which we can possibly attain. We are face to face with supreme realities. And what do we do? We cry out for God. It is as if we knew that our souls can find their true satisfaction, that our nature finds its real completeness, that our wants attain their full supply, in Him alone. It is as if we realized that we are made for Him as well as by Him, that there is an indestructible bond of kinship between us. So a mother and child, after long separation, rush into one another's embrace, heedless of the throng of unknown or indifferent strangers who may be standing by. So the electricity that is in the cloud recognizes its affinity with that which is in the earth, and leaps to unite with it, forcing its way through whatever obstacles may intervene. If there were not such an indestructible bond between us and the infinite and eternal One above us, we certainly should not so promptly, invariably, passionately, cry out for Him from the deepest experiences of life and in those moments when the deepest impulses of our nature are aroused. Augustine's familiar words are true, "Thou, O God, hast made us, and made us for Thyself; and our hearts are restless until they rest

in Thee." While we are floating calmly on the bright current of our ordinary life, we easily forget this. We feel no need of rest. But when the waves and billows of some tempestuous experience threaten to overwhelm us, it becomes to us a reality in comparison with which everything else appears unreal. The depths are then uncovered, and the fact is revealed to us that we are akin to the Infinite, that we bear the image of our Maker, that we are the children of God.

Then again this habit which we so often observe shows how profound and how ineradicable is the faith of man in God. There is in the world not a little formal atheism; there is much more practical atheism. Men lose themselves in speculation and conjecture as to everything that lies outside the sphere of the senses. Unable to demonstrate that which can be subjected to no sensible tests nor brought within the range of an inexorable logic, they persuade themselves that there is nothing there, or that at least they can know nothing about it. As to the old doctrine of a personal God, who is in living relations with His creatures, on whose care and bounty they depend, whose moral law it is their duty to obey, they declare that they do not believe in it, that no really intelligent man can any longer believe in it. And yet all the time there is in the depths of their souls an underlying and inextinguishable faith in such a God. It is not a matter of tradition or of early training. It is

not a conclusion to which they have been led by processes of philosophic thought. It is one of the elementary principles, one of the primary convictions of the human mind. Look over the world, study its various races, examine its different religions, you will find everywhere the belief in God. Take the men of highest culture and widest knowledge, in this or any other Christian land, those who say that they do not believe in Him, or who act as if they did not, and let some critical experience uncover the foundations of their thought and feeling, and you will find, far down below all the doubts and questionings that may appear upon the surface, a faith in Him and a reverence for Him which have not been and which can never be destroyed.

Then again the fact of which I am speaking shows why it is that men so often do *not* look to God in the spirit of obedience and the spirit of confidence,—why they are so often indifferent or skeptical about Him. It is because they are moving on the surface of life. The inmost depths of their nature have never been disturbed. It is in some respects fortunate that this has been the case. One cannot bear to pass very often through these critical experiences to which I have referred. They are as exhausting as they are illuminating. But so long as one sails calmly and prosperously over summer seas, he has little conception of the great depths beneath him or of what the fury of the

storm can do. And there are few of us who really know what is in the depths of our own souls. We are cheered and charmed by the brightness and beauty of the world around us. We do not suspect the energy or the significance of the tremendous forces within us. And so it is that in their easy-going and comfortable lives men often fancy that they can get along as well without God as with Him. They feel no need of His guidance, His help, His comfort. Why should any one fancy that he needs these or that it is possible to have them? And the skepticism or indifference of those who speak and act in this way affects multitudes of others. Ah, but if you are going to take the testimony of anybody in this matter, take that of some one who knows what life really is, some one who has really lived, some one who has gone down into the depths of sorrow or fear or penitence. Do not be satisfied with the superficial views of life which are very naturally the common views of it. But let the nobler, more serious, and deeper thinkers of the world tell you what they have found out in regard to human nature, its capacities, its needs, its aspirations, and its moral helplessness. Search the Scriptures, or if you will not do that, study the poets from Sophocles to Dante, from Shakspeare to Browning. You will learn from them that life is no holiday matter, that the human soul has both powers and wants of which you, perhaps, have never dreamed. Before you make up your mind

either that there is no living God whom you can cry to, or that there is no use in appealing to Him in your need, consider the witness that has been borne to Him by those who have not been content or been able to drift lazily upon the surface, but have sounded the awful depths of life.

And so the reason is apparent why God often sends us down into these depths. It is not that He has forgotten us or wishes to destroy us. It is only that we may find Him there. He knows very well that otherwise we may fail to discover Him. He knows how easily we are dazzled and misled by the lights that sparkle and dance around us; He knows how easy it is for us to be content with what the passing hour may bring. He knows that when our immediate desires are gratified, we are only too apt to forget that we have any deeper desires. And so He sends disappointment upon us, or perplexity, or sorrow and affliction. He lets all His waves and billows go over us. He suffers us to struggle vainly and in the darkness, until our strength is exhausted and our hope itself extinct. There was, perhaps, no other way by which we could be taught our ignorance, our weakness and our need of His almighty and ever-present help. Out of the depths we were forced to cry to Him, and our cry has brought Him to the rescue. We sometimes pity those who are called to pass through such an experience. We are tempted to ask, like the Pharisees of old, "Who did sin, this man or his par-

ents," that such a calamity should overtake him? And yet they are richer than we in the knowledge of life, and richer far in that knowledge of God which comes by a deep experience of life. He who cries to Him out of the depths, learns in this way to say, "I wait for the Lord; my soul doth wait, and in His word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning; I say, more than they that watch for the morning. For with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption." It is not a costly experience which teaches us that lesson. It is one from which we need not shrink. It is one for which we shall be forever grateful.

And here is the ground of our belief in the permanence of religion in the world. We sometimes feel, no doubt, as if the ages of faith had passed, or were, at all events, swiftly passing away; as if religion were losing its hold on men; as if after one or two generations more have come and gone, it will forever have disappeared. There is so much unbelief around us. And what is worse than unbelief, there is so much indifference to all spiritual things, to all moral obligations. Is not religion something which is peculiar to the earlier stages of human development, and which men will soon be able to dispense with? No, because human nature is really the same to-day that it has always been. Life is more complex, more showy, more exciting. The things that are seen have more

power than they once had to shut out of human view the things that are not seen. And life is not only more varied and intense, it is vastly more fascinating and more joyous for most people than it used to be. But great crises of thought and feeling still come. They come as often as ever. Sooner or later they come to all of us. The great capacities and needs of which men were conscious in the days of Abraham and of David, are just as really in us. Now as then, we are called from time to time to go down into the depths, where no human hand or voice can reach us, and where we are utterly alone and utterly forlorn, unless we cry to God and He hears and answers us. It is only the surface of life which is changing. The depths of life remain from century to century the same. And therefore religion, which appeals to that which is deepest in human nature and in human experience, is not going to lose its power over the mind or heart or conscience of mankind. And those of us who are interested in extending its influence,—what we want is simply to get below the surface of men's lives, and touch if we can their deeper nature. We need to rouse their consciences. We need to stir their hearts. We need to get behind the web of sophistry in which they so often wrap themselves up, to that which is most radical, vital, and essential in their thought. We shall fail very often, no doubt, and be discouraged. But in its appeal to the deepest convictions and the most

secret desires of human nature, has always lain the power of religious truth. And God still speaks to men's souls and in them, with an authority and a power which they recognize when the accidents of life are torn away, and they face its eternal and unchanging realities. Nothing less than God can ever fully satisfy the human heart. And the time will never come when men will cease to cry to Him out of the depths.

And yet it is not only in our times of distress that we need Him; and He who alone is able to deliver us in the hour of trouble, is our ever-present Friend and Guide and Helper. We need Him in our bright days as well as in our dark days,—when all goes well with us, as truly as when the depths are uncovered and the foundations of the earth are seen. We owe to Him our gratitude, our reverence, our obedience, and our love, when He leads us in the green pastures and beside the still waters, just as much as when we are toiling, bewildered and almost exhausted, across the desert places of life. And we shall know how to seek His help in time of need, we shall rely upon it with a tranquil confidence, if we have come to know Him and trust Him in other and happier days. Is it not a sad and humiliating fact that there are so many of God's children who never think of Him or care anything about Him, except when they are forced to cry to Him out of the depths? Happy is he who lives in daily converse and communion with God; who in

joy and in sorrow alike, in sunshine and storm, in life and death, waits patiently, submissively, cheerfully, on Him! He shall know the present comfort and in time of need shall receive the blessed fulfillment of the promise, "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee; for I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour."

GOD WRESTLING WITH MAN

And Jacob was left alone ; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.—GEN. xxxii. 24.

III

GOD WRESTLING WITH MAN

It is no unusual thing to see a man wrestling with himself. There are at least two natures in each of us—the higher and the lower, the flesh and the spirit—and these two often come into sharp collision with each other. A man sometimes discovers that his worst enemy is not outside of but within him. It is his baser self, which is holding him back from the good thing that his soul longs for, which is keeping him down on a low and unworthy plane of life. And he determines that he will not be thus thwarted and baffled. He locks arms, as it were, with the mean, selfish, evil spirit that has such a hold upon him, and by a tremendous and often long-protracted struggle he endeavors to subdue it. It is a splendid sight when it is bravely undertaken and triumphantly carried through. It is one of the saddest of sights when the evil nature proves too strong to be overcome, and when the soul's efforts to win its freedom end in a more complete and hopeless bondage.

Every man whose life amounts to much has also to wrestle with the world. But it is not at all saddening to see one struggling against what we often call adverse circumstances, if his principles are

sound and his heart is pure and true. The contest will develop in him a stronger and manlier character. The truest strength, the most genuine manliness can be developed in no other way. It requires a tough tussle with the world to harden a man's moral muscles, to teach him that he can be independent of the world and live his own life in freedom and peace, to show him how quickly and completely the world acknowledges the mastery of one who has the courage to face it boldly and refuse to submit to its dictation. And if one is to live the higher life of the spirit, it can only be in spite, not merely of the fashions and conventions and maxims of the world, but of the motives that govern it and the ends that it pursues.

Sometimes the enemy that meets one on his way is more formidable, because more mysterious and impalpable. It seems as if some mighty and malignant spirit were wrestling with him and determined to subdue him. Like Jacob he does not perhaps know its name. It has many names. But it lurks near every man's path, springs upon him in unguarded moments, and even when successfully resisted and driven off, returns again and again to the attack. There are not many of us who have not at one time or another encountered that invisible adversary, and our conflict with him has probably left us sorely wounded, even though we may have finally succeeded in putting him to flight.

It is no rare thing, I say, to see men wrestling

with the world, the flesh, and the devil. But who ever heard of a man wrestling with God? What an unequal strife! Who could hope to be successful in it? And what motive would lead any man to attempt it? Can it be the desire to extort a reluctant blessing from Him? But would not a blessing won by violence be in reality a curse? And is not God always ready to grant His blessing to every one who is prepared to receive it? Out of the mysterious story of Jacob's conflict with one whom he did not know, a very strange—I will say a very horrible—conclusion has been drawn. It has led us to speak of wrestling with God. It has made us think of Him as our enemy, or at least our antagonist. It has been understood as teaching that if we want His blessing, we must in some way wring it from Him. And so we still sometimes hear of agonizing in prayer. And the old idea of a strenuous contest still underlies the word. The fact of God's fatherly love is forgotten. The fact of His infinite grace is ignored. The great truth, of which both the Old and the New Testaments are full, that He is "good, and ready to forgive, and rich in mercy to all who call upon Him," is for the moment quite lost sight of. And there rises before us the image of One with whom His children must wrestle in the darkness, and whose blessing, instead of being the free gift of His love, must be won through an agony of soul.

Now I venture to say that whatever may be the

meaning of Jacob's vision at Jabbok Ford, it cannot mean this. And I think that if you will study it with me for a few moments, you will see that it does not mean this. It was not he who wrestled there with God. It was God who wrestled with him. And this is a very different thing.

He had reached a crisis in his life. His character in his early years had been anything but noble. By treachery and falsehood he had deceived his father and stolen his brother's birthright. This had been followed by an exile of twenty—perhaps forty—years, in which he had been practically a bond-servant in a far country. He was now returning to the land of his birth—the land which had been promised him as his inheritance. But his fate depended on the hostile or friendly disposition of his brother, whom he had so deeply wronged and who had now become a powerful chieftain. The next day would decide his destiny. He sent his family over the mountain stream, and remained behind alone.

“And there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.” A *man*? So he thought at first. But as the night wore on he realized that it was not a man. The touch that threw his thigh-bone out of its socket was not that of a human finger. And when he declared, “I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me,” it was no man's blessing that he sought. He knew that it was God who was contending with him. If he seemed to prevail, it

was only because his antagonist did not put forth all His power. He could not make Him tell His name. But he himself received a new name from Him, and the blessing that he asked for was given him.

Is not the meaning of the story plain? He stood, as I have said, at a crisis in his life,—years of penitential and reformatory discipline behind him and a great destiny before him. He was to inherit the land of promise. He was to be the ancestor of the chosen people who were ever afterward to bear his name. In the line of his posterity Jesus the Christ was to be born. For such an eminent position he was not yet wholly prepared. He needed to feel, as he had not yet felt it, the power of God. He needed to be made to yield, as he had never yet done, to the will of God. Before God could use him, as He meant to use him, He must conquer him. And He did conquer him in that solitary struggle at the crossing of the mountain brook. The victory was won when the wounded man felt that he was in the grasp of One who was mightier than himself, and cried out, “Tell me, I pray Thee, Thy name; I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me.” The victory was won when Jacob first realized that he was in the hands of God and then felt and uttered the intense desire to know God and to have God’s blessing. And that, if I may say so, was what God wanted. That is why He met His servant in that lonely place and

wrestled with him till the morning broke. It was the man—not God—who was conquered. And as he passed over Penuel, at sunrise, he was a new man. He was lame from the sore struggle, but he said “I have seen God face to face,” and he was God’s man from that hour onward forever.

Now in this strange and somewhat perplexing story we have a parable of a common experience. “In that mysterious messenger who contended with the first Israelite, we see,” as an able writer has said, “the whole method of God in the education of men:—the girding circumstances, the encompassing ideas and influences, the surrounding moral and spiritual forces, the arms of personal affection that hold us fast, the power of the beloved Teacher that gathers about us, the grasp of Christ, the great wrestle of God Himself. The whole universe comes to us through that symbolic presence, with its infinite power locked round us, with the pull and the twist and the uplift of the divine love, ready to impart an eternal good as soon as human nature shall have been sufficiently roused to receive it.”

To appreciate this we must in the first place recognize the fact that God has designs upon us. He has a work for us to do, an office for us to fill. The humblest life has as truly its place in the divine order as the mightiest. The least of us is as plainly present as the greatest to His eye. But if we are to be fitted for His uses, we must yield our-

selves to His control. We must come into personal contact with Him. We must recognize His power. We must have His blessing. We must receive from Him the new name we are to bear, and must feel that we belong to Him.

Now there are many of us for whom such surrender and submission are not easy. He is not very real to us. Our eyes have never seen Him. Our hands have never touched His powerful and gentle hand. We have never felt the strong embrace of His encircling love. And there is only silence when we listen for His voice. It is hard for us therefore to subject our wills to His, to throw away our self-confidence and cast ourselves on His protection, to give up the attempt to find or make our own way in life, and let Him send us where He chooses. We have had our own way so long, have followed the beckoning of our own ambition, have ministered to our own wants, and pursued our own immediate advantage; we have so long been planning and laboring for ourselves that it is not easy to give ourselves up to the guidance and the service of Him to whom we rightfully belong.

And that is why God has to wrestle with us in order that we may learn how real and how near He is, may have a just appreciation of His power, may yield our wills to His, and so may be prepared to receive His blessing. He meets us, it may be, as He met His servant of old, in some dark and solitary place. It is a crisis in our life. A new chap-

ter in our personal history is about to be begun. We are stepping from boyhood into manhood, are passing from school or college into active life, are making some grave decision which will change all the complexion of the years that are to come. Then it is that God meets us. He throws His strong arms round us. He tries to force us to our knees. He seeks to make us realize that we are His, and submit our stubborn wills to His control. It is a momentous hour. All the memories of years gone by come back to us,—impressions made upon us in our childhood, resolutions formed and broken, convictions of duty that we have put aside, solemn and repeated admonitions of conscience which we have disregarded; they return with overwhelming power, as God's Spirit strives with us once more and seeks to force us at last to give ourselves to Him. To how many a man is such an experience the turning-point from which a new life dates. He feels that he too has seen God face to face, and he rises up a new man and goes forth with the light and peace of heaven in his soul.

Such an experience seems distinctly to repeat that by which the Supplanter was transformed into the Patriarch. But not every one comes thus clearly and consciously in contact with God. We are sometimes aware that there is an invisible power grappling with us, of whose nature and whose name alike we are ignorant. It buffets us when we are tempted to do wrong. It sets before us higher

ends than those we are pursuing. It makes us discontented with ourselves. It puts a certain constraint upon our evil passions. It arouses our purer and nobler desires. It reveals to us the hollowness of an aimless or a selfish life. It appeals to our better nature, and seems trying to make us obedient to this. We feel that it is seeking not to hold us down but to lift us up. And yet so gentle is its grasp that we often succeed in shaking it off. Even when we are distinctly conscious that our true wisdom lies in yielding to it, we resent its mild constraint, assert our freedom, and go our way unblest.

And oftener still we do not recognize any such unseen presence in our lives. The thought that God is wrestling with us, seeking to subdue our wayward wills to His and to induce us to give ourselves to Him, does not so much as occur to us while the current of our life flows smoothly on. It is indeed hard to associate the smiling bounty of His providence, the gracious message of His word, the kindly influences of Christian friendships and examples, the hallowed power of the familiar institutions of religion—I say it is hardly natural to connect these with a divine desire to conquer our pride and passion and self-will, and make us ready to bear and do what God requires of us. But it is seldom by violence that He seeks to conquer men. That would be easy for Him. The mere touch of His finger is enough to make us cringe and cower.

And He sometimes lets us feel it. If He cannot subdue us by love, He sometimes makes us appreciate His power. But what He wants of us is not an abject but a loving and trustful submission. It is not His desire that we should yield to Him because we are not strong enough to oppose Him, but rather because at last we know Him, and know that He is worthy to be loved and trusted. The purpose of the touch of power is not to terrify and crush us. It is rather to make us realize that He with whom we have to do is no mere man, but one whom it is both wise and safe for us to confide in and submit to. It is at once a revelation and a reassurance. But there is love behind it. It is out of His great love for us that God enters into this divine wrestle with us. If He can conquer us by gentleness He will. If He can win our faith and love without our knowing that He has twined His mighty arms about us, He will do this. But all the benign influences that are acting upon us, in the sphere of our own thoughts as well as in the world without, are elements of a patient and determined effort to subdue our selfishness, to break down our pride, to make us realize that we belong to Him, to induce us to trust and to obey Him.

Our common habit of distinguishing secular from sacred things often prevents us from recognizing this. The distinction is an important one. And yet the whole world belongs to God and He is active in it everywhere. And there is nothing in it

which He may not use as a means of winning man's confidence and love. For what other purpose is it really that He has built the solid globe and placed us on it, that He has arched above it the starry sky, that He makes the seasons pour their bounty into our hands? And to what other end does He direct the events that befall us and in which we have our part? Health and sickness, prosperity and disappointment, poverty and wealth, labor and rest, the studies that enlarge our thought, the honorable occupations that employ our time,—what are they all but different phases of the great divine purpose which underlies our life? If God is in anything, He is in everything. All times and places are open to Him. He may meet us at any hour and anywhere. Nay, He never intermits His gracious striving with us, but by night as well as day, with unwearied patience, puts His continual pressure on us, if so be that at last we may recognize His right to us and yield ourselves to His control.

Then only are we prepared to receive His blessing. As you read the story of this memorable scene in Jacob's life, it seems to me that you can touch its turning-point. As he remained at night alone, his nerves strung with keen expectation of what was to befall upon the morrow, there wrestled a man with him till the breaking of the day. Believing at first that it was a man, not only, but an enemy, who had come to oppose his entering on his inheritance, he struggled with all his might to

overcome him. But at a certain moment the mysterious stranger put forth his finger and "touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was strained." And the dawn began to brighten in the east. Then it was that it also dawned upon his mind that it was not an enemy but a friend whose arms encircled him. He no longer sought to overthrow or to escape from Him. He sought rather to hold Him fast till he should obtain His blessing. And he did obtain it. "He blessed him there." That was the purpose for which he had come. But if so, why the long, furious struggle? Not because the blessing must be wrung from Him against His will, but because the attitude of the Patriarch must first be changed from antagonism to entreaty, from a desire to conquer to a willingness to obey. The change came at the moment when He felt that he was fighting against God and that this was vain and worse than vain.

Any man who would have God's blessing must be prepared for it by a similar recognition of Him and a similar submission to His will. He is more ready to bestow than we are to receive the blessing. But so long as we stand out against Him, He will not, cannot, grant it to us. We must first learn the mystery of life, so far at least as to perceive that it is He who has beset us behind and before, and has laid His hand upon us. Realize that along all the way that you have travelled, in the far

countries where you have been living, in weary hours of trial and discouragement, God has been with you, though you may not have discerned Him, and has chosen and marked you for His own. He has been wrestling with you patiently and lovingly for many years. He has sought by the prosperity and happiness that He has sent you to make you conscious of His tender love and care, and to draw you to Him by the cords of gratitude. And when you failed to perceive Him in the daylight, He has met you in the darkness. He has thrown His strong arm around you, and still you have not known Him. He has wounded you—He has had to wound you—because you struggled against Him. Can you not now see that it is He? And is it not idle to resist Him? O, if men only knew that God is not their enemy but their best friend! If instead of holding Him off or trying to break away from His embrace, they would cling to Him, as Jacob did, exclaiming “I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me!” As soon as that prayer is offered the blessing comes and the morning breaks. There would have been no need of the long struggle if the soul had only yielded sooner to Him whose one supreme desire is to bless and save it.

And yet one prayer of Jacob was denied. “Tell me,” he said, “I pray Thee, Thy name.” He did not tell him, but answered, “Wherefore dost thou ask after My name?” He did not, because He could not, tell him. Even Jacob was not pre-

pared for that supreme revelation of God. It was enough that he should know Him under the names by which He had already revealed Himself. The world was not then prepared to know Him as He really was and as, long centuries afterward, He was to manifest Himself to it. Jacob knew that he had looked upon God's face, and it was enough. His nature remained hidden from him.

It is given to us to speak the name which no Patriarch or Prophet ever heard. God's true nature has been unfolded to us. The Christian experience of a later age is woven into the symbolism of the ancient story in those verses of Charles Wesley, which were based upon this incident in Jacob's life.

Come, O Thou Traveler unknown,
Whom still I hold, but cannot see,
My company before is gone,
And I am left alone with Thee ;
With Thee all night I mean to stay,
And wrestle till the break of day.

I need not tell Thee who I am,
My misery or sin declare ;
Thyself hast called me by my name ;
Look on Thy hands and read it there !
But who, I ask Thee, who art Thou ?
Tell me Thy name, and tell me now.

Wilt Thou not yet to me reveal
Thy new, unutterable Name ?
Tell me, I still beseech Thee, tell ;

To know it now resolved I am :
 Wrestling, I will not let Thee go
 Till I Thy Name, Thy Nature know.

Yield to me now, for I am weak,
 But confident in self-despair ;
 Speak to my heart, in blessings speak,
 Be conquered by my instant prayer !
 Speak, or Thou never hence shalt move,
 And tell me if Thy Name is Love !

My prayer hath power with God ; the grace
 Unspeakable I now receive ;
 Through faith I see Thee face to face,
 I see Thee face to face, and live ;
 In vain I have not wept and strove,
 Thy Nature, and Thy Name, is Love.

I know Thee, Saviour, who Thou art,
 Jesus, the feeble sinner's Friend !
 Nor wilt Thou with the night depart,
 But stay, and love me to the end ;
 Thy mercies never shall remove,
 Thy Nature, and Thy Name, is Love.

Contented now upon my thigh
 I halt, till life's short journey end,
 All helplessness, all weakness, I
 On Thee alone for strength depend ;
 Nor have I power from Thee to move ;
 Thy Nature, and Thy Name, is Love.

Yes, that is the name which could not be disclosed to Jacob, but it is that by which we now know God. It is the Infinite Love which is wrestling with us, trying to win our recognition, our

confidence, our responsive love. What a beautiful interpretation it gives to life to think of it in this way; to see, not only in what we are accustomed to call religious influences, but in all the good influences by which we are enfolded, expressions of God's loving desire and purpose to draw and hold us to Himself in order that He may bestow His blessing on us! How strange it seems that we should not recognize Him, that we should ever resist Him! What a blessed thing it is that He continues to strive with us, instead of suddenly vanishing from us and leaving us in utter darkness! And what a joyous thing, when His blessing has been gained, to go forth to meet the new day, the new duties, the new responsibilities, feeling that we are His and He is ours forever! Here is the secret of peace, the secret of power, in the surrender of one's soul and of one's life to God, and in the continuing, confiding fellowship with God that follows it. Henceforth the way is plain, the burden light. We shall never again mistake the hand that touches ours. Though the darkness may gather over us we shall know that the mightiest and best of friends is with us. And when day breaks at last, we shall go, not halting, but with bounding steps, over the river, into the Promised Land.

THE RESTORING OF SOULS

He restoreth my soul.—PSALM xxiii. 3.

IV

THE RESTORING OF SOULS

THERE is only one restorer of souls, but there are multitudes of souls which want restoring. We do not need to have formed any theories of human nature or to have been trained in any theological school ; we only need to look out upon society, or perhaps to look in upon our own hearts, in order to see that there is here a great and difficult and delicate work to be done, whether there is any power which is able to do it or not.

For we have a more or less definite idea of what a soul ought to be—of what our souls were meant to be, when they came from the creative hand of God, and were entrusted, if I may say so, to our keeping and care. They were surely intended both for activity and for enjoyment, but their enjoyment was meant to be derived not from those objects which appeal to the senses, but from those which are spiritual, like the soul itself ; and their activity was meant to be spontaneous and free. They were designed to do easily and well, without friction or conflict, the work assigned them. They were designed to live in harmony with themselves, with nature and with God. They were made to grow, but to grow not by a continual

battling against opposition, by a series of spasmodic struggles, followed by reaction and exhaustion, but by a steady, harmonious, natural development, into an enlarged capacity, a fuller strength, a diviner beauty. That certainly is the law which elsewhere prevails in the universe which God has made. The planets swing smoothly on their bright circles, and there are no discords in the music of the spheres. Every living thing is finely fitted for the part assigned it in the great drama of existence. There is nothing more astounding to us, and yet nothing more characteristic of the infinite resources of skill and power in the mind and will of the Most High, than the manner in which each form of life adapts itself to new conditions in the ceaseless transformations of the material world, unfolding new capacities and putting forth new powers, in the upward movement which is everywhere exhibited. Everything within us and around us is in motion, but whirling atoms and circling suns are alike under a law of progress. There is no pause, there is no diversion, there is no waste of material or of energy. But silently and constantly the new creation is building itself out of the old.

But when we look into the life of human souls, we seem to find not harmonious development but irregularity and discord, waste of power, confusion, and the continual need of restoration into the divine order, which has in some way been lost.

Here, for instance, is a young and eager spirit,

which has entered life full of hope and courage and energy, with pure tastes and generous affections and high ideals, enthusiastic in its pursuit of that which is noble and true, with a profound sentiment of the grandeur of life, the sacredness of duty, the nearness of God, and with the strong desire to make its pathway through the world bright, not with the lustre of material success, but with the glory of a character and a career which men shall honor and God approve. But soon it is caught by some gust of temptation and whirled off, like a wandering star, out of the course which it was appointed to follow, toward some utterly selfish and unworthy end. On this its powers are all concentrated. The fine balance of its faculties is lost. It becomes narrow and sharp, perhaps unscrupulous and cruel. It needs to be brought back to its orbit again, to be restored to the line of orderly, self-restrained, harmonious development, from which it has gone so far astray.

Here is another soul which has become discouraged. It has not been misled by enthusiasm or betrayed by self-confidence. It has fully appreciated the dangers surrounding it and the difficulties that lie in its way. But in spite of these it has honestly and faithfully tried to make something of itself, and it seems doomed to failure. It finds the world a cold, hard, selfish place. It has been baffled by its enemies and deceived by its friends. Its most careful plans have fallen to pieces; its

sudden inspirations have proved bitter delusions. It feels as if there were no place for it in the Babel of human voices and passions, where it is lonely and helpless. And it longs for the day to end, and for the quiet night to come. Or else it feels as if it must give way, abandon the principles to which it is struggling to keep true, throw itself into the torrent, and let that bear it whithersoever it will. It needs, you see, to be restored to courage.

Another soul has lost its faith in men, in God, in all things spiritual. It has been forced to see the darker sides of human nature, its meanness, its insincerity, its sensuality, its predominant selfishness, and it no longer believes in any real disinterestedness, in any incorruptible integrity, among mankind. And God has come to seem further and further away. He does not appear to be accessible to prayer. His providence seems so unequal that the soul has grown to think that there is no providence, or else it cannot reconcile this with the government of the world by natural law. It has found difficulties in believing in a divine revelation, and does not believe in it. A divine incarnation is more mysterious still, and faith in that is swept away. Immortality itself has at last become doubtful. And with the loss of all these the very foundations of morality have been undermined. There is but one step further which such a soul can take in this direction; it is to doubt its own existence. Evidently it needs to be restored to faith.

Or if it has kept its faith, it has lost its joyfulness. Its childish mirth it expected to lose, but under repeated shocks of sorrow its elasticity of spirit is gone. One by one the dearest objects of its love have been taken from it, and it has been left forlorn and desolate. It has not lost its courage, but its courage has become a matter of simple resoluteness of will. It is submissive and patient, but it is broken-hearted. It has no interest in life except to do its duty till the end shall come. It may brighten into a sudden cheerfulness, but it is only now and then and for an instant that the sun breaks through the clouds. Its prevailing temper is one of sadness, and hope is buried by the side of joy. Is it possible that they can ever be restored to life?

Then another soul needs restoration into peace with itself. It is full of abounding and eager life, full of the keen joy of living, but it is conscious that it is not doing the best work that it is capable of doing; it is wasting its energies or a part of them; it is divided in its ideals and its endeavors, and it is aware of a conflict going on all the time within it. It may be simply restless, and hardly understand its own complaint, or it may be dissatisfied, ashamed, even furiously indignant with itself. It may heap upon itself all manner of bitter reproaches and form all manner of good resolutions. But there it is, disturbed by the ancient conflict between "I would not" and "I do," between principle and desire, between purpose and

performance, and it longs for the peace of a soul that is in full harmony with itself.

Or it may be peace with God that it desires. There was a time when it loved Him and strove to do His will. But a great temptation came and it fell,—fell into an open and dreadful sin. In one dark and terrible moment, by one swift and shameful act, it seemed to cut itself off from Him, and the sense of His anger now rests upon it. It has mourned, how often and how bitterly, over its one great fault; it has repented of it with keen self-reproach and floods of tears. But it cannot forgive itself; how then can it hope that God will forgive it? “What possible restoration,” it cries, “into His love, can there be for me?”

Or if its happiness and its hope are not blighted by one conspicuous act of wrong, it has come into bondage to a sinful habit. Little by little this has been tightening its fetters upon it, its very struggles to escape only fixing these more firmly, and making it more vividly conscious of its captivity. But the habit has not yet become a nature; the imprisoned soul is like a caged bird, which has not lost the sense of the free air that it was made for, and still struggles to escape. Who shall restore it to liberty, that it may spread its wings and soar into the large and joyous life of those creatures of God, whom Satan has never caught and bound?

And, once more, for I need not multiply these illustrations, how many souls of us there are which

want to be restored to purity? We are not guilty of flagrant vices, we are not perhaps under the dominion of degrading habits, but we are stained,—spotted by the world. The freshness of our innocence is gone. We have become familiar with many forms of sin. Our consciences have become less sensitive; the light that is in us has been growing dim. Our judgments of character have been growing less severe; our standards less pure and high. We look with allowance on many things at which we should once have revolted; we count it nothing to omit many things which we should once have thought it a shame to neglect. We used to be devout, but we have become indifferent or scornful. We have lost our gentleness and become hard-hearted; we have lost our earnestness and become flippant or cynical. Others observe and deplore the change that has taken place in us, but no one knows, as well as we do, how greatly our purity has suffered, how deeply these stains have struck into our souls. This then is what we want above all other things, to be made clean again, to be restored to purity.

Now we need not, I think, go any more profoundly than this into what may be called the pathology of souls, to perceive that the work of restoring them is a very important and difficult and dangerous task. It is important because a soul that is diseased, that is out of harmony with itself, with nature, and with God, causes in the first

place an immense waste of moral power. Think of the almost measureless capacities which a pure and perfect soul possesses, for knowledge, for happiness, for high and holy service of God, within the sphere of this present life and in the vaster spheres of the life to come; and then consider the incalculable loss of possible good, which comes from the paralyzing of its powers, when it is spending its force in conflict with itself or lying in the lethargy of doubt or despondency or fear. Or rather, since the great law of the conservation of energy holds true in the moral as in the physical government of God, the energies which should have been directed to the building up of character, the advancement of God's kingdom, the promotion of righteousness and peace, become energies of destruction, working toward the overthrow of all moral order, toward the ruin of the soul in which they are operating, and of all other souls upon which it acts. The restoring of a soul is a matter of the utmost consequence for its own sake, by reason of the immortal joys that it misses and of the inevitable miseries that it suffers if it continues unrestored. But the whole moral universe is concerned in it as well, because of the beneficent activity which is wasted and the destructive influence which is let loose, when a human soul breaks away from its orbit and starts off in a wild and wanton career.

And yet it is no easy matter to restore a soul.

If you do not think so, try to do it. Go to one that is crushed by a great sorrow, and see if your tenderest sympathy, your most soothing and comforting words, can bring "the light of smiles again to lids that overflow with tears." Go to one that is despondent, and see if your exhortations to courage and your cheerful tones can lift from the burdened spirit the weight of gloom that has settled upon it. You might almost as well try to draw back the curtains of the midnight and bring forth the sun from the chambers of the east. How much less then is it within the compass of any human power, to restore purity to the soul that is conscious of guilt, or peace to one that is tossed to and fro by the waves of an inward unrest, or the sense of God's forgiveness to one which has come to feel the sense of God's wrath!

Nay, it is an office as dangerous as it is difficult. For the peril is that in delivering it from one evil, you will plunge it into another, and not restore it after all. You may save it from despondency, but it will be by leading it to take a light view of its failures. You may give it peace, but it will be by destroying its aspirations after purity. You may make bold to speak for God and assure it that its apprehensions of His anger are superstitious delusions, but if you persuade it to accept your words, you will have destroyed its reverence for Him and have brought confusion into all its ideas of the principles on which His government is based. And

this incalculable mischief men are all the time doing when they try to restore one another's souls. Sometimes they mistake the true nature of the disorder ; sometimes their fatal error is in applying a remedy which only aggravates the evil. You observe, for instance, on the face of a friend a shadow of anxiety or care, which betokens a soul that is ill at ease, and in order to bring back the old expression of careless gaiety, you invent distraction, and urge rest, amusement, change of scene. But the peace that you perhaps succeed in restoring is not the peace of God, which His Spirit was ready to bestow ; it is the peace of spiritual indifference and death. You may have destroyed the soul that you desired to heal. How often sorrow is sent as a divine influence to make a heedless mind thoughtful or a hard heart tender ; to bring a soul face to face, as it were, with the realities of the unseen world ; to awaken desires that had been slumbering, and open again capacities that had been choked up by earthly pleasure or success. But your first thought is to restore it to happiness, if you can do so, though you can do so only by restoring it to the condition of religious apathy, from which the providence of God has aroused it. And this is why, as I said, the restoration of a soul is such a delicate thing. It is a task too vast for our power and too fine for our skill. We cannot even restore our own souls, and how shall we succeed in restoring others ?

Is it not a comfort then to know that He who alone is equal to this great office is willing to perform it? It is a divine work, and divinely does God accomplish it. He does it often in unnoticed ways, by a power as silent and as gradual, as that by which He brings back the earth from the cold and hard desolation of winter, into the bursting luxuriance of June. But He does it; He does it in His own way; and there is nothing else which He is so intent upon doing. He did not make the soul of man to be a destructive force in the universe, at variance with itself and at enmity with Him, and the very first end of His providence and His grace is to bring it back into an orderly and harmonious life.

And observe how He does this. It is, first of all, by revealing Himself to it. The true source of all the disorders of souls is their forgetfulness of God. They have lost the great consciousness that they came from Him and are to return to Him again, and that He is Himself present within them. The eye has become blind to His glory; the ear has become deaf to His voice. And that is why one has rushed off in hot chase of some earthly good, and another has lost hope and courage, and another is borne down by sorrow, and another has been swept away by temptation, and all have become spotted by the world. It is because they have forgotten Him who is over and around and within them, who is the law and the end of their

life, who is their very life itself. And so when He restores a soul, it is to this first that He restores it, to the appreciation of the fact that He is, that it is encompassed and animated by Him.

Then the second step in the divine process of restoration is to make a soul aware of God's love. Not merely from Him does the power go forth by which it lives and moves, but He is watching over it with a fatherly and faithful care. It is not lost to His view amid the swarms of His creatures, but He has a personal knowledge of it. All its wants and its weaknesses, its successes and its failures, its aspirations and its discouragements are perfectly manifest to Him. It is the wonder of His infinite nature that each soul is as plainly present to Him, as if in all the universe it were the only soul. And not only so, but He has a purpose for it, a definite plan for its life and action. There is a path which He has meant it to follow, and in pursuing that path its true happiness and peace are found. Its disorder and its wretchedness have come from its deliberate choosing of some other course or its unconscious wandering away from that which He has appointed for it. And it cannot be restored till it has learned that God has something for it to be and do. And not merely that, again, but far as it has wandered from Him, it has not gone beyond the reach of His love. He follows it still with a strong, deep, personal affection, and longs to have it return to its duty and to Him. Now it is by

bringing this to its knowledge, by impressing this upon its feeling, that He seeks to restore it to its true relation to Himself, and so to establish within it His own peace and purity and joy.

But it is not enough that it should know and feel this. It is here that its recovery begins, but not here that it is completed. For then He sends a holy and gracious influence upon it, the influence of His own Spirit, to bring it back into the life in Him and for Him from which it has gone so far astray. Silently but mightily that Spirit works upon it, not as a rushing, resistless force, but as an inward, transforming energy. It gives birth to new affections, new hopes, new desires. It begets a fresh courage in the room of despondency. It sheds abroad a holy and heavenly joy in the place of gloom and grief. It restores strength to the fainting spirit, and faith to the heart that has ceased to trust. It subdues the will that has struggled to have its own way, and makes it admit that God's way is best. It comes to the soul that is crushed and broken by the sense of sin, and it does not teach it that sin is a thing of no consequence, to be banished from the thoughts as quickly as possible, or an inherited taint for which we are not responsible, or a disease from which we shall recover by some natural process. But it leads it to see in the Lord Jesus Christ its only and its all-sufficient Saviour. It leads it to trust in Him for pardon and to look to Him for cleansing, to find in

Him the cure of its present distresses and the inspiration of its future character. Not merely by the revelation of Himself in His being, His care, His wise purpose, His gracious love, does God restore the souls that have fallen out of harmony with Him and themselves. But He sends upon them His Holy Spirit to bring them back, through Him who is alone "the Way."

Is it not plain that our souls need to be thus restored? Have we not often found our courage failing, our joy overclouded with sorrow? Have we not found ourselves swinging off from our true course into the pursuit of ends that we knew to be unworthy of us, and been discontented and distressed because we knew it was all so wrong? Have we not, perhaps, found our faith growing faint, and dreadful doubts of God's wisdom and love distracting our minds? Are we not conscious of a sharp conflict within us between our desires and our purposes, or between our purposes and our actual conduct? Do we not tremble sometimes when we think of some great sin that we have committed, which we would gladly have forgotten but which we cannot forget? Are we not in bondage to some bad habit which we have vainly struggled to throw off? Are we not at least conscious of many a stain which has fallen upon us in our passage through the world? However it may be that our souls have become what they are, is it not evident that they are not what they ought to

be? We have broken away from the divine order. We are out of harmony with ourselves and with God. We need to be restored to this again.

And how shall this great result be brought about? Shall we set ourselves upon the task of doing it? Shall we try to brush off this or that fleck that has fallen upon our purity? Shall we try to curb this or that wrong impulse, and to bring our desires under a firm restraint? Shall we say to our souls in their discouragement, "Come, be of good cheer," or in their consciousness of sin, "Go, and sin no more"? Shall we attempt by study to regain our faith, or by self-indulgence to recover our joyfulness? Ah, not in ways like these shall we conquer back that deep and lasting peace which has gone from us and which we long to have restored.

Shall we not rather, first of all, admit the lesson of our own experience that if we cannot keep ourselves steadfast in the line of duty, pure from the corruptions that are in the world, strong in the faith which once we had, true to the high purposes with which we set out in life, we cannot ourselves regain these, after they are lost. Shall we not then go to God, and ask Him to restore us? Shall we not seek the renewing, illuminating, strengthening influences of His Holy Spirit, to do the work which we are powerless to do? Shall we not realize that all our trouble comes from our having got away from Him, and so make it our chief object to get back to Him again, and to come under His inspira-

tions? He is, He loves us, He has a plan for us, He is longing to restore us—it is in the sense of this that our recovery must begin.

And how shall we get back to Him—how, except through Christ in whom He has Himself come near to us? Ah, when we realize God's being, as Christ has revealed it, when we feel His love as Christ has shown it, when His divine light comes in Christ and takes possession of our souls, that is our only true and permanent restoration. It is when we give ourselves to Him in grateful love and consecrated and holy service, when He gives Himself to us, as a power of righteousness formed within us and mastering us more and more—it is only then that we come back into harmony with God and with ourselves. For then it is no longer we who live, but Christ who liveth in us. His own wonderful words are then fulfilled, "I in them and Thou in me." The long strife is ended, and the heavenly peace begun. The shadows have broken apart, and the day has dawned. The fitful fever of our spiritual unrest has subsided; the soul's pulses move with a strong and steady beat, and we begin to grow toward the sound and perfect manhood of those who walk, not after the flesh, but after the spirit.

O Thou great Restorer of souls, come thus into our souls, and restore them to purity and joy and peace!

THE WORK OF GOD

Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent.—JOHN vi. 29.

V

THE WORK OF GOD

THERE is, then, as these Jews thought, a work of God. There is something which He would have us do. But if so, we want, of course, to know and do it. It is certainly our duty, and it will with equal certainty prove in the end to be for our advantage. We are all interested, therefore, in Jesus' statement of it. It is very concise, very simple and at the same time not a little perplexing. "This is the work of God," He says, "that ye believe on Me." His meaning cannot be mistaken. It is not merely that He is entitled to men's confidence, nor that it is the duty of all men to give Him their confidence. He means to assert that this is the one supreme duty of all men. It comprehends all other duties. It is *the* work of God. And to believe on Him, which is the form of expression that He uses here, as He used it on many other occasions, denotes the strongest possible belief; it signifies an absolute, unhesitating, unre-served reliance upon Him. Not merely the acknowledgment that He was a messenger from God; not merely the acceptance of His words as words of unimpeachable authority and truth; not merely the confession of Him as the rightful Lord of thought

and life, or the endeavor to obey His precepts and to copy His example ;—to believe on Christ means even more than this. It is fully to admit His utmost claims as to His nature, His authority, and His mission to this world. It is to render Him the homage to which He is entitled as at once Son of Man and Son of God. It is to yield Him the grateful adoration of our hearts. It is to trust with unbounded assurance in His power, His wisdom and His love. It is to give ourselves with cordial self-surrender to His service. It is to expect by His grace deliverance from sin and death, and exaltation by and by to His right hand. To believe on the Lord Jesus Christ is something more than to believe Him or even to believe in Him. It is to make His person and His work the basis of all our hopes, the object of all our affection, the inspiration of all our activity.

And this He declares to be the work of God, the one great and comprehensive duty of man. If He is right, it is your first duty and mine. If we neglect it, we do so at our cost and at our peril. If we fail in it, we miss the true end and glory of life. It is the keystone of the arch of moral obligation. It is the condition on which alone it is possible for us to have the divine favor and blessing. On our doing this one thing, or not doing it, depends our destiny here and hereafter.

This is the teaching of Jesus Himself, as it has been in later days the teaching of all who have

faithfully proclaimed His gospel. And yet, simple as it is, it is not without its difficulty for many thoughtful minds. It is, no doubt, in some respects easier to believe in Him to-day than when He was visibly present on earth. But there are some of us for whom it is not easy to admit the claims which He makes upon our confidence; some who say that they cannot believe Him to have been the Son of God sent down from heaven. And then there are others who make the great confession very readily, and honestly, and heartily, but whose faith makes but little impression on their characters and lives. Is it then really, we are tempted to ask, so important? Up to a certain point it is not difficult to believe in Jesus Christ. All good men believe in Him as a good man. All minds and hearts that are sensitive to moral beauty pay willing homage to His nobility of character. The most eminent name in history, the greatest benefactor of the human race, the world's ideal and in that sense the world's Saviour, we can readily admit Him to have been. But this believing on Him, in the sense in which He seems to require it of us, this unreserved acceptance of Him as the Son of God, this unlimited confidence in Him, this entire self-surrender to Him,—is it necessary, is it possible? How can it be the first and greatest of all duties? What right had He Himself to say that “this is the work of God”?

I shall try to answer this question in one of the

many ways in which it may be answered. The common answer to it is "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." It is only because of His sacrifice that we can be forgiven. It is only by His Holy Spirit, received into our hearts by faith, that we can be made pure and strong, be delivered from the power of sin and fitted for the heavenly blessedness. And that is true, if the word of God is true. It is the gospel in its simplest terms.

But it is well for us at times to think of some of the things which are implied in such a thorough-going faith in Jesus Christ, and some of the effects which it produces, or, in other words, to consider the gospel in some of its wider relations, and to observe what it does for those who really and truly accept it.

To believe with all one's heart and soul in Jesus Christ means then, for one thing, to believe that God may be known in terms of humanity. There are those who tell us that we cannot know Him at all. If there is anything back of the phenomena of nature besides a mysterious energy, we cannot find out what it is, and our minds soon become bewildered when we try to conceive of a personal being who is eternal and infinite. On the other hand, the popular notion of God is merely that of a magnified man, and it is sometimes said that man is a miniature of the Almighty. No wonder that many reverent minds revolt from the crude idea that the

Most High is "altogether such an one" as even the noblest of mankind, and take refuge in agnosticism. But if the measure of a man must not be applied to Him whom the heavens themselves cannot contain, there is still a likeness between His nature and ours. And the proof of this is not merely that Jesus spoke of Him as His Father and our Father, or that He regarded and treated all men as God's children. The proof is that God could and did become incarnate in Him. He was certainly a man, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh; and another nature did not come and dwell in Him, side by side with the human nature which was so evident in all He said and did, so that there were in Him two persons, one divine, the other human. God simply poured Himself (if I may say so) into the humanity of Jesus and revealed Himself through it. He was at once and in one person man and God. Doubtless in order that this might be possible, some of the divine attributes were laid aside. He "emptied Himself," as St. Paul says, "when He took the form of a slave and was made in the likeness of men." The fullness of the Godhead could not be brought within earthly limitations. "My Father," He declared, "is greater than I." But the essential nature and character of God could be manifested in a human character and life. No man could reveal His omnipotence, or His omniscience, or His omnipresence. But even a man might manifest His holiness, His justice and His love. And Jesus

did exhibit these, and so taught us how we are to think of God. He that hath seen Him hath seen the Father. And we have seen Him, for He was made flesh and dwelt among us in the person of a man. I will not stop to speak of the new light which is shed on human nature by a fact like this. But I call upon you to consider that, while God is not a larger man, it is through a man that we gain our only real knowledge of Him. He is not unknowable, for we have beheld His glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

Then the second thing implied in a true belief in Christ is the belief that God is love. For that is what Christ was. It was in love that He came into this world. It was in love that He gave Himself to the ministry on which the Father had sent Him. It was in love that He sought and tried to save those who were sunk in ignorance and sin. It was in love that He taught and toiled. It was in the fullness of His love that He died upon the cross. A more loving heart than that of the Son of God has never been known on earth. He loved God. He loved truth. He loved righteousness. He loved unlovely and sinful men and women. This was, as anybody can see, the chief trait of His character. This was the impelling motive in all His activity. It is what made Him so pitiful. It is what made Him so patient. It is what made Him so untiring in His efforts to do good. It is what made Him so self-forgetful and so self-sacri-

ficing. Listen to Him as He speaks, on the hill-side, in the streets, on the shore, by Jacob's well, in the temple-courts, in the upper room. Watch Him as He sits at the Pharisee's table, or in the home at Bethany; as He stands by the bedside of the daughter of Jairus, or before Lazarus' grave; as He moves about from place to place, teaching, comforting, healing the sick, raising up the fallen; as He kneels in the garden, stands at last before Pilate, expires on the cross. What love! What boundless love! Did He utter burning words of indignation in regard to the Scribes and Pharisees? It was because of His love for those whom they deceived and oppressed. Did He seize a whip of small cords and drive the tradesmen from the temple? It was because of His love for God whose worship they profaned. Did He depict in language of terrible import the certain consequences of sin? It was because in His great love He longed to save men from them. Did He warn those who heard Him of a sin that hath never forgiveness? It was because even infinite love can save no man against His will. Surely the apostle spoke advisedly when he spoke of the love of Christ as "passing knowledge."

Well then, such also is the character of God. He is love; not power, nor justice, nor holiness, but love. So He also feels toward the children of men—feels toward each of us who are His children. He loves us just as Jesus loved; too well to let us

sin with impunity ; too well to suffer us to perish, if it is possible to save us ; so well that there is nothing which He will not do for us, if we are willing to trust and love and obey Him. In His laws and in His judgments even, we can hear the beating of His heart of love. And in all our trials and sorrows we can lay our heads on it and be at rest.

A third truth which is implied in a profound belief in Christ is that of the supreme importance of character. It was certainly the one thing for which He cared. He was wholly indifferent to wealth and honor, to social rank and public admiration. He had a tender sympathy for physical suffering, but His miracles of healing seem to have been chiefly wrought for the sake of the moral and spiritual help which they so vividly symbolized, or for which they opened the way. Not from pain but from sin did He long to save men ; not from the things that kill the body but from those that destroy the soul. He was not a social reformer, as the work of a reformer is commonly understood and carried on. He did not attack the social customs of the day, or seek to readjust the relations of classes, or even touch in His discourses on the grave political issues which led so soon afterward to the utter destruction of the Hebrew nationality. His teaching all bore on the reformation of personal character. He strove to make men pure and peaceable and forgiving and true and kind and lov-

ing. This is the kingdom of heaven, He said, that a man should love God with all his heart and should love his neighbor as himself. And He taught this by His example as well as by His sermons and His parables.

Now there is such a thing as a belief in Christ which makes no deep mark on a man's own personal character and allows him to remain strangely indifferent to the specific duties on which the Master so strongly insisted. But it is not such a faith as that of which I am now speaking, and it is of very little practical value. A real belief in Him must lead any one of us to set the matter of character far above everything else. It is fatally easy to fancy that faith in Christ may be a substitute for right living ; that one may be mean and selfish and dishonest and impure and almost anything else that is contemptible, and cover it all from the sight of God and men by membership in the Church or by some showy form of religious activity. There can be no doubt as to the way in which Jesus Himself would treat Christians of this kind. He would say to them, "Woe unto you, hypocrites!" A man simply cannot be His disciple without being in the first place absolutely sincere, and without feeling to the very depths of his soul that nothing else whatever is so important, so beautiful, so worthy of most earnest and patient pursuit, as a character like that of Christ Himself, strong, pure, free, generous, self-denying, intent on doing God's will, de-

voted to the promotion of truth and righteousness and happiness among men.

The latent possibilities of human nature—that is another thing which every man must believe in, who truly believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. He Himself believed in men. “He knew,” as John tells us, “He knew what is in man,” the evil and the good alike, and yet He believed in man. He believed that every man was worth saving, that every man might be saved. He knew, of course, that there were some men who would not be saved, but it was because they would not receive the divine gift that was offered them. He saw in every human being the nature which He had Himself assumed, and He sought to win all, of every rank and class and moral condition, for the kingdom of heaven. This was indeed one of the most novel and surprising features of His work—the universality of the invitation which He Himself uttered and commissioned His apostles to utter. It was, “If any man thirst, let him come unto Me. Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden.” And He declared that if He were “lifted up, He would draw all men unto Himself.” This spirit of hope, and of hope even for the least and lowest of mankind, was absolutely new in the world. Who was this young Jew that He should conceive schemes so vast and think that even publicans and harlots had immortal souls? He was the Son of God. He knew God as well as man. And He

actually lifted on His faith and on His love the entire human race to higher destinies.

He taught us who believe in Him to think very poorly of ourselves in some respects. We are not what we ought to be, nor what we might be. But there is no one of us who is not a child of God and (if he will) an heir of heaven. Before the most insignificant of us open boundless spheres of growth and happiness and usefulness. And what is true of us is no less true of the very meanest and most debased of our fellow-men. If we believe in Christ, that is what we believe in regard to ourselves and every member of the race to which we belong. Nothing so precious as a human soul! No human soul beyond the reach of God's love and care, or of His renewing and sanctifying Spirit! There is hope for all mankind, if Christ was right in His estimate of men, and if He was Himself what we believe Him to have been.

I ought not to say "If He was what we believe Him to have been." I should rather say, if He is what we believe Him to be. For He is the same yesterday and to-day and forever, the same on the throne of glory and power as when He walked the streets of Jerusalem or the highways of Judea and Galilee. Nay, He has never left this world, for whose redemption He lived and died. He is still present in it, in the person of His Holy Spirit. He is present in every assembly of His followers. He is present with each individual soul that trusts

and loves and tries to serve Him. He is present in all our labors and struggles, all our joys and sorrows, present with us wherever we may be called to toil for Him, present with us whenever and wherever we may be called to die. "When one remarked on David Livingstone's loneliness in Africa, he answered that he was not alone. 'Christ said that He would be with me always. It is the word of a gentleman of the strictest honor, and there's an end of it.' When he fell upon his knees in an African hut (says Dr. McKenzie), and threw his arms forward on the couch, and rested his head upon them, he believed that the promise was kept. The candle burned low at his side, and his heart ceased to beat, but he knew that he was not alone." He who was with His servant there, is with His servants everywhere. And He is guiding them in their work, and making it successful. If it were not so, they might well shrink from many of the tasks in which they are engaged. He sets before them open doors. He sweeps obstacles out of their way. He rules among and over the nations, as well as over and in His Church, so that "nothing—absolutely nothing—comes to pass either in heaven or on earth without His divine will." We do not believe in a dead and buried Christ, but in an ever-living, ever-present Saviour and King.

And therefore we believe in the future progress of the human race. We believe in a better day that is coming. We believe that the kingdom of

heaven will at last conquer and fill the world. Not because of tendencies which we observe in human nature, nor because of natural forces now at work in society; but because it was to redeem and save the world that Christ came down into it from heaven, and because it is for this great end that He is working still. We have His own word for it. We have the continual evidence of His gracious and mighty activity. And we know that the purpose of God in the incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection of His Son cannot be changed or defeated. We are optimists and enthusiasts—we who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. How can we help it? Can it be for a moment supposed that His redeeming work will fail, that only a handful out of earth's myriads will be at last gathered into the kingdom of heaven, and that He who is infinite in power and pity will be satisfied with that? No, the time must come when all men shall know Him, and worship Him, and rejoice in Him, and the whole earth shall be full of His praise.

It is impossible to gather into a few paragraphs all that is properly included in a hearty and intelligent belief in Christ. But let me enumerate the few points that I have now touched upon: It means believing that there is a natural kinship between man and God, so that from that which is highest and best in ourselves we know something at least of what He must be. It means believing that His nature and His name is love. It means believing

that nothing in the world is so important as character. It means believing in the divine capacities that are latent in every human soul. It means believing that the Lord of all power and grace is still alive, and is still working in and for the world. And it means believing that at last the whole round world will be brought to His feet. It is a grand creed—is it not?—uplifting, inspiring, enlarging the mind, rejoicing the heart. But it is what I believe, and what you believe, if we really believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And now what effect must such a faith have upon one who is truly possessed by it? It will make him, for one thing, profoundly reverent toward God. God gains nothing from distance or mystery. The nearer He comes to us, the more clearly He makes Himself known to us, the more glorious does He appear. But at the same time, beholding His glory as we do in the face of Jesus Christ, we know that we may trust Him utterly. Love cannot always be trusted, unless it is combined, as it is in Him, with equal wisdom, righteousness and power. But God's love may be trusted, even when His dealings with us are most mysterious. It cannot fail. It cannot err. It will have its way. And then any one who has even begun to know that love, as it is revealed in Jesus Christ, will find the first of the two great commandments easy to obey. He cannot help loving God with all his heart. Love does not always awaken love, but dull and

hard must be the heart which can believe in Jesus and not love Him. It is impossible. Faith and love cannot be separated. Faith works by love, as the apostle says, and in its eager thankfulness the loving soul pours forth its praise in word and deed. It finds songs even in the night. It fills the darkness with the music of resignation and trust. The light of heaven shines on and through its tears, and grief and disappointment cannot rob it of its deep and sacred joy. And then it is always looking for new opportunities of service. Do you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? Then you will want to do something for Him. You will have a strong desire to be like Him in character. You will long to have other people far and near know Him and love Him as you do. If you only half believe in Him, you may not feel in this way. You may think that you are safe, and think no further about it. This is, alas! all that the faith of some people amounts to. A mere opinion, a mere spasm of emotion now and then, a mere confession "from the teeth outward"—it is no faith at all! A real, heartfelt belief in Christ will inevitably have the effects of which I have been speaking. It will make a man over. It will make all things new to Him. It will give him new views of God and man, of life and death; new aims, new purposes, new desires and hopes, a new feeling toward his fellow-men, a new spirit and temper in everything he does. It will make him love and seek what is true and good, and

hate what is false and low and selfish. I say a genuine and hearty faith in Christ cannot but have this effect. A little faith, a faith that merely gives him a false sense of security, may do him positive harm. Such a faith as Christ demands, as He deserves, and as He inspires in one who is thoroughly in earnest, will make him such a man as God approves and loves.

And this is why Jesus could say that it is the work of God that we should believe on Him ; that it is what God would have us do, and is all that He requires of us. It leads to everything else that is worth being and doing. It is simpler perhaps, as I have already suggested, to say, "Be not afraid, only believe, and thou shalt be saved." But we need to get down to the realities which underlie these familiar and momentous words. And this is the gospel in its amazing height and breadth and its magnificence of moral power. I pray you receive it into your minds and hearts. Let it mould and sway and inspire and exalt your daily lives. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, believe on Him as you believe that you are here alive to-day ! Nothing else is so true as His words, nothing else so noble as His character, nothing else so certain as that He is the Lord of the world. Other things may pass away, but His kingdom cannot fail. A little while and we shall have vanished from the earth, but His truth shall abide unchangeable forever. There is no other name so great as His in

all the universe. And according as we have believed, or have not believed, on Him, will be our endless destiny. O my dear friends, believe in God, believe in goodness, believe in your own immortal souls, believe in the divine love, believe in the final triumph of righteousness, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; "that He may dwell in your hearts by faith, and that ye being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the length and breadth and depth and height; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled unto all the fullness of God."

PUTTING ON CHRIST

But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ.—ROMANS
xiii. 14.

VI

PUTTING ON CHRIST

A PHRASE so striking as this merits attention, especially as it is twice used by St. Paul. The figure of speech embodied in it is many times employed in the Scriptures: it was a favorite one with this apostle, and it is not infrequently found in classical writers. We recognize its appropriateness and feel its poetical beauty when Job says, for example, "I put on righteousness and it clothed me," or when Isaiah sings, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord," or when Ezekiel prophesies, "The princes of the sea shall come down from their thrones, and lay away their robes and put off their brodered garments, and they shall clothe themselves with trembling." So the promise of our Lord to His disciples, as He was about finally to leave them, was that they should "be clothed with power from on high." In all these passages there is nothing foreign to our modern modes of expression. Neither is there anything strange in the language of St. Paul, when he exhorts the Roman Christians, in view of the fact that "the night is far spent and the day is at hand," to "cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light"; or the Thessalonians to "put on the breast-

plate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation"; or the Ephesians to "put on the whole armor of God." It is interesting to observe how the martial life of the cities where he wrote affected the form of his thought and suggested the imagery which he employed. And so again when he urged his brethren at Colosse to put on various virtues, such as a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering, and over all these, like a large outer garment, to put on love; or when he says to the Corinthians that the corruptible body must put on incorruption and the mortal must put on immortality, he is still speaking as we ourselves might speak; such expressions might be met with in a writer of the present day. But we begin to feel the strain which his thought is putting upon his language, to feel that he is crowding into words more meaning almost than they can hold, when we hear him speaking of the human spirit as "clothed upon with its house which is from heaven," or, as in two different epistles, of "putting off the old man," and "putting on the new man," as if one could change his nature as he changes his garments. But the climax in his use of this strong metaphor is reached, when summing up in one compact phrase all that he would say, as if it were impossible, as it really is, to express his whole meaning more tersely, clearly, or forcibly, he says, "Put on Christ. Clothe yourselves anew with Him. Let your souls be wrapped

up in Him, as in a garment. Wear Him as a celestial panoply, a true armor of light, through the battle of life. It is not enough to be clad, like God's servant of old, in any righteousness of your own. It is not enough to throw around you any separate graces of character. There is only one thing to strive for, only one thing to do; it is to put on the Lord Jesus Christ."

Such language as this is not unparalleled in ancient writers, but it would sound strangely if we were to speak thus of putting on Plato or Aristotle, Bacon or Stuart Mill, Emerson or Herbert Spencer. And if the expression were allowed and were intelligible, it would still mean much less than St. Paul means when he speaks of putting on the Son of God. I want, if I can, to lead you a little way into his meaning, and then to urge you to do the thing which he enjoins.

I have referred to two passages in which the apostle uses the same words, but he does not use them in the two places with precisely the same idea. The other one is in the Epistle to the Galatians (iii. 27), where he speaks of this as a thing already done. "As many of you," he says, "as were baptized into Christ, did put on Christ." But here, in the Romans, he speaks of it as something which those who were long since baptized are to be all the time engaged in doing. Let us try, first of all, to get hold of this distinction.

It will be plain enough if we consider for a mo-

ment what baptism signified to those to whom he was writing. It was the rite of initiation into the new society which Jesus had founded. That was, so to speak, its human side. But it had also a far deeper significance than this, even on its human side. It meant that those who received it began a wholly new life. They ceased to be heathens, and they became Christians. They broke free from their own past, as well as separated themselves from the society around them. Of course they abandoned their old religious beliefs and all their idolatrous forms of worship. But they also withdrew from many of the associations in which they had formerly been held. All their views of things were altered, of God and man, of life and death, of pleasure and pain, of duty and destiny. The profound change which had taken place in their intellectual convictions brought with it a corresponding change in their outward lives. They came out from the corrupt society in which they had been born, and formed at once a community apart. All things literally had become new to them; it was as if they had entered into another world. How great the change must have been, may readily be seen, if you will think what it means for a Hindu in India or a Mussulman in Turkey to become a Christian in our day. It was not merely a change of opinion on certain subjects, or a change of conduct in certain particulars. It was the renunciation of all that one had believed and loved and lived

for, and the beginning of life anew. When a Gentile convert went down into the water of baptism, it was, as St. Paul says, as if he went down into his grave, and he rose from it another man. And this new man was a man to whom Jesus Christ was everything.

Thus for him henceforward Christ was the source from which he derived his knowledge of the truth. When an ordinary Greek or Roman of the time of St. Paul desired to know the truth on any subject, outside of matters of daily experience, he went, if he was a scholar, to the philosophers; if he was a plain man he went to the priests, or he took the current popular opinion, or he gave up the quest in despair. When he became a Christian, he went to Christ or to those who could repeat and explain to him the words of Christ. His only question was, "What has Christ said about this?" and every utterance of Christ was for him the final truth. On His promises he rested with an absolute confidence, and he received every declaration that had come from His lips as being the very word of God. He put his mind, as it were, into the keeping of Christ, and made Him Master of his thought.

And so of his conduct. The law of Christ was his supreme law. The usage of the day justified many things which Christ had forbidden. No matter; it was Christ who was to be obeyed. The law of the state forbade certain things which Christ had commanded. No matter; he would go

to the dungeon or the arena, but he would not disobey Christ. He felt that he belonged to Christ and not to himself. He stood in the lowly relation of a slave to One whose authority over him was absolute and perfect. His supreme purpose was to honor and serve his divine Master, and he felt that nothing could ever release him from the obligation to live and to die for Him. The very name of Christian that he bore, was the badge of his voluntary and honorable servitude.

And then when he became a follower of Christ, he clothed himself, as it were, not only with his Master's thought and will, but also with His righteousness. What righteousness was to a Jew, we all know. It was to keep the letter of the Mosaic law. To a Greek or a Roman it was to obey his own conscience as well as he could, to be not less virtuous than his fellow-citizens and a great deal more virtuous than his gods. The whole conception of righteousness was changed by the gospel, and those who accepted its teachings saw at once that it was vain for them to hope to commend themselves to God by such obedience to His will as they were able to render, and they therefore sought by faith to cover their sins with the perfect righteousness of Christ. Over their polluted souls they sought to throw that spotless mantle. They were taught that they were guilty before God, and could base no claim to His acceptance on the deeds that they had done or tried to do. But they put on the

righteousness of their Master and Redeemer as a white, unsullied robe.

This, I say, was the relation of the first Christian believers—converts from heathenism, most of them, whether among the mountains of Galatia or in the great cities of the Empire,—this was their relation to the Lord in whom they trusted. They confessed it when they were baptized. And this is what St. Paul meant when he wrote to them, “As many of you as were baptized into Christ did then put on Christ.” “You renounced what you had formerly believed and trusted in and lived for. You died to the ideas and practices of your old heathen life, and began a new life in Christ. You divested yourselves of your former principles and habits, and you put on, instead of them, the mind, the will, the righteousness of Christ.”

Now this is not precisely true of us in this age and in this country. No such complete and striking change has ever taken place in us, simply because we are not converts from heathenism. It may have taken place in others around us who were brought up in heathenism, though they have always lived under the shadow of our churches and at the threshold of our doors. But even this is hardly possible, because Christianity is now in all the air; it is in the very blood of all civilized men. We at all events have always been Christians, and we are more Christian than we know or are perhaps willing to admit. Many of the teachings of

Christ are now commonplaces of our thought. Many of the precepts of Christ are wrought into the laws of the land and into the unwritten laws by which all society is governed. In this sense we have never put on Christ. He was born in us when we were born, and has been wrought into us, as our education has gone forward. Still less did any such radical change take place in us at our baptism, for, unlike the believers to whom St. Paul wrote, we were baptized in our infancy, and the faith, if faith there was, was that of others, not our own.

And yet, if we have ever confirmed that baptismal vow, if we have ever taken our places among Christ's people and have declared ourselves His followers, we have done precisely that which the apostle here describes. We may not have had as much to put off as the earliest Christians, but we have had just as much to put on, and we have put it on. We put on Christ when we stood before men and confessed that Christ was our Master. We meant that He was then and thenceforward Master of our thought. We did not profess that we would stop thinking or learning, or that we would accept nothing as true which had not the stamp of His authority upon it, or which lay outside the range of His teaching. But we meant that we would receive His declarations, on every subject of which He spoke, as to the character and will and purposes of God, as to His own nature

and office, as to the nature and condition and destiny of man, his need of forgiveness and of moral renewal, his duty of repentance and faith and self-surrender to God, as the exact and eternal truth. We received these declarations, whether or not we could fully understand them, whether or not they perfectly accorded with our accustomed opinions or with the opinions of other men. We surveyed the whole realm of truth and each particular portion of it, from the point of view of one to whom the greatest and truest of all truths is that of the incarnation of God in Christ. This is what it is to be a Christian thinker, and this is what we became, when we became followers of Christ.

Then we accepted also the yoke of His authority as the Lord of our conduct. We gave ourselves up to His service, we made His commandments the law of our living. What the Galatians did in the time of St. Paul, what every converted heathen does now, in receiving the sacrament of baptism, that each of us has done who has declared himself to be a Christian. We have not only professed our intention to comply with the precepts and to exhibit the spirit of Christ, as these have become elements of decorous and graceful living. As much as that every decent man must do, who lives in a Christian community. But there has been the definite surrender of our personal choice, desire, will, to our divine Master, and the cheerful acceptance of His blessed will in place of our own. We put

off our selfish ambition, and we put on a temper of submission to Christ.

And then, thirdly, we put off our self-righteousness and put on the righteousness of Christ. Not that we then gave up the endeavor to do right. O, far from that! Then it was that we first began to feel such a desire to do right as we had never felt before, to hunger and thirst after a righteousness such as we had not yet attained. There was awakened within us a deep, strong longing to be like Christ, to be worthy of Him, to be fit to appear in His presence. But then, realizing also our sinfulness and weakness, we felt that we could be acceptable in the sight of God, only as the mantle of Christ's perfect righteousness was thrown around us, hiding all our imperfections and our sins. We hoped to be justified (that is the scriptural word) not because of what we do or what we are, but because of what Christ did, and because of what He was and is. By a simple act of self-offering faith we hid ourselves as it were in Christ. We clothed our shrinking, sin-stained souls in the white robe of His holiness.

This is what it is to "put on Christ," by a single, decisive, voluntary act. And it is well for those of us who bear His name and who hope in His grace, to consider what we have already done, what we did, many of us, years ago. If we have to-day any hope of God's mercy, it is not because of the lives we are living, but because we

have put on the righteousness of Christ. Let us feel, then, our utter unworthiness, and empty our hearts of all foolish pride, while we realize and confess our entire dependence upon the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And then let us remember that we are committed to His service. We have pledged ourselves to obey Him. We have accepted Him as our Master. The world has no authority over us; to Him alone we stand or fall, and He is able to make us stand. O let us not forget that the yoke of Christ, when once put on, can never be put off, and that each of us, who have accepted the rule of Christ, owes to Him the same patient, unwearied, complete devotion, which the slave owes to his master, which the subject owes to his king. And, thirdly, what right have we who are Christians, to suffer our minds to be disturbed on any subject on which we have the authority of Christ? How shall we doubt or deny, when He has spoken? How shall we dispute His word? How shall we distrust His promises? Heaven and earth may pass away, but no word of His can ever pass. It is not for me to urge those of you who are already His followers, in this sense of the words, to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ." But I exhort you to remember that you have long ago done so, and to keep ever in mind, and to make your thought and conduct accord with, this close and beautiful relation of dependence and of service, that He may be to you what He was to His first disciples,

all in all—the beginning and the end of your religion.

But there are some of you, probably, who do not stand in this relation. You are to some extent Christians. Yes; I presume there are no heathen here. But you are Christians because you cannot help it, because you were born in this country and in this age of the world. Or you are Christians because it is the decent and proper thing to obey some of Christ's commandments, and to show something of His spirit. But you are not Christians in the true sense of the word, till you have done what I have now been describing,—till you have "put on Christ." And till then you not only have no right to hope for the favor of Christ in the life to come, you have not even begun to know the joy and glory of life on earth. You are all adrift on an ocean of uncertainty, if you do not accept Him as a divine teacher. You are at the mercy of your own ignorance and of your own passions, if you do not let Him rule your conduct. And O, how will you dare to appear before the all-seeing eye of God, if your frailties and your sins are not covered up by something better than such a righteousness as yours? Do not tell me that, so far as you can see, many of those who call themselves Christians have not put on Christ to any very great degree. I know it; I know it. It is the scandal and the shame of Christendom. But after all, the truest, noblest, happiest life is a life in Christ. And there

is no other sure foundation for the hope of blessedness hereafter than that which is laid in Him. This is no longer a proposition to be proved. It is the declaration of the word of God. It is the testimony of an illustrious and increasing company, from the days of the apostles to our own. And this—and nothing else—is what it is to become a real Christian. It is to make the mind and will and righteousness of Christ your own. It is to clothe yourself with Christ. One simple act of self-surrender, and it is done!

But if this is so, why did St. Paul write to the Roman Christians, exhorting them still to put on Christ? Had they not been baptized into Him like the Galatians? Or had they so fallen away that they needed to be converted over again? Ah! but we have not yet got at the full meaning of this deep phrase. There still remained for them, and there still remains for us, the long, hard, necessary task of putting on the character of Christ. And that is what St. Paul refers to in the text. Without it everything may be begun, but nothing is finished. The foundation is laid. Now let the perfect building rise upon it!

And this, my Christian friends, is the one thing that we have to do,—to put on the character of Christ. A man may go and live for many years in a foreign country. He may engage in business there, may learn its language, submit to its laws, and adopt many of its customs; he may even be-

come a citizen of it, and earn a right to its protection. And yet he may never enter at all into the real life of its people, may take no true interest in its prosperity, may cherish toward it no genuine loyalty, but remain to the end as much a foreigner as he was at the beginning. Or one may be a member of a Christian church, he may attend its services and behave with entire propriety, may suffer his name to stand on its roll, may make his little contribution when the plate is passed, and pay his pew-rent with prompt regularity. But he may still have, and may even desire to have, no share in the real life of the Church; its spirit is not in him, he takes no part in its work, and its services perhaps do him about as much good as they do to the rafters of its roof or to the carpet on its floor. And so a man may be a Christian—yes, we cannot deny it, he may be a genuine Christian; he may have put on the Lord Jesus Christ in the sense thus far explained, and to such an extent as to cherish a comfortable hope of his final salvation, who has caught very little of the spirit of Christ, and exhibits a character very different from that of his Master. The world does not want such Christians as these. They are simple obstacles in the way of Christianity. And such Christians we do not want to be. We want with the faith of Christ to put on the character of Christ. His purity, for example, His utter and absolute aversion to evil. We do not want the

spirit which says, "Pardon thy servant in this thing," or that thing, or which does the thing and asks no pardon, because it deems Christ's standard of morality too high. We want a character that will not tamper with evil, but will fearlessly do right at whatever cost. Then the gentleness of Christ. His purity was not of that kind which makes a man hard in his judgments, and repels those whom it ought to attract. "Separate from sinners," and yet the best friend that sinners ever had, always working for them, always winning them to Him, always doing them good—that is what He was, and that is what we ought to be. The constant sense of spiritual things was another trait of His character which we too should strive to put on. The world around Him was not so bright as it is around us, but no earthly splendor could have blinded His eyes to the heavenly vision which was before Him all the time. And what we need, beyond almost anything else, is to realize the nearness to us of the unseen realms, so that influences from them may govern our lives, and that the truth which relates to them may be to us both motive and consolation. The self-denying love of Christ for men,—if we have not something of it, we are not worthy of Him. If we are not willing to sacrifice anything of our wealth, our comfort, our present advantage, for the sake of those whom He died to save, how can we call ourselves His disciples? Surely we need to put on more of this.

We need to show it in our daily life, in our homes, in our business, in our relations to the Church of God, if we are to make on our fellow-men anything like the same impression of character, which was made by the Lord whose example we profess to be copying. And so of His meekness, His patient forbearance, His pity for every form of suffering, His perfect sincerity, His utter indifference to human applause as compared with the favor of His Father in heaven. I cannot enumerate all the traits of His character, but there is not one of them which one who desires to be truly His follower will not strive to put on. And yet, after all, what we need to do is not to seek to adorn ourselves with these separate graces, as one might tie a handful of roses to a dead stem. The true way is to put on, not the characteristics of Christ, but Christ Himself; to get His real spirit into our souls, and then these several graces will soon make themselves manifest, as a tree which is truly alive will burst of itself into a perfect dome of bloom, when it is touched by the summer sun.

And this is Christianity, its secret, its power, its divine, undying beauty. It is Christ, first, last, and midst, and without end. And it is Christ not only on the page of the world's history, not only on the artist's glowing canvas, not only exalted to the right hand of God, but Christ incarnate again in every Christian. It is the hiding of human infirmities and passions, not only from the eye of

God by the cloak of Christ's righteousness, but even from the eyes of men by the radiant garment of His character. Just as fast and as far as men put on the character of Christ, just so fast and so far will Christianity move onward irresistibly. That which hinders it now is simply that those who represent Him in the world are so unlike Him, that you and I, among others, who owe to Him what we most highly prize, who look to Him for what we most ardently desire, have so little of His spirit and are so contented to remain the poor, imperfect Christians that we are. O, let us awake, arise, and put on, more and more, the Lord Jesus Christ !

Then two things will happen. In the first place, those around us will feel the power of His religion as they have never yet felt it. It is not by sermons that the world is to be saved ; sermons enough have been preached to save it twice over ; nor by the printed Bible, translated into every language of the globe ; nor merely by the silent, mysterious influence of the Holy Spirit. It is by the pure, earnest, unworldly, self-sacrificing lives of men and women, who have not only put on Christ, but in whom as a living energy He dwells. If that were true of His people anywhere, the whole community around them would be stirred, as we are told that the city of Capernaum was moved at the coming of the Lord Himself.

And finally, for them at least heaven would al-

ready have begun. For this is heaven—to be like Him. Not golden streets and crystal seas and sapphire walls and gates of pearl! It does not matter where we are; everything turns on what we are. If we are of the earth, earthy, then there can be no heaven for us. But if we bear the heavenly image, then heaven is around us and within us now. “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be hereafter. But we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him.” We know that, and to know that is enough. It is to have the assurance of eternal life.

THE PRACTICAL MAN'S MISTAKES

Where there is no vision, the people perish.—
PROV. xxix. 18.

VII

THE PRACTICAL MAN'S MISTAKES

THERE is a man whom everybody knows, and whom many people admire, though I am persuaded that he commonly receives more respect than he deserves. He has been a pew-holder in many different churches. He has however attended them rather from the force of habit, or because he has thought it to be for his social advantage, than because he has any particular sympathy with the preaching, or much respect for the work in which the Church is chiefly engaged. He is a familiar figure in Wall Street, and is noted for his keenness and shrewdness, his energy and industry. He has great confidence in himself, and is commonly successful in his commercial schemes. He is very careful to keep all sentiment out of his business, and sometimes seems harsh and even cruel toward those with whom he deals. But it is considered safe to trust his judgment, and he is seldom deceived through an over-confidence in other men. He is a member of various boards of administration, and his influence in these is not friendly to large undertakings, but commonly favors a cautious, economical, and conservative policy. He is interested in politics, local and national, and here he

invariably votes with his party. He is a firm believer in the regular organization, and approves, upon the whole, of the methods by which partisan success is secured. He is not, indeed, blind to certain abuses and evils connected with these, but he regards them as inevitable, and he says that as men are actually constituted, a high degree of political morality is an illusive dream.

I say that everybody knows this man. For I am not speaking of an individual, I am speaking of a type. The figure which I wish to set before your eyes is that of the so-called "practical man." He is the man who prides himself on his freedom from illusions. He sees things as they are. He has been trained in the school of experience. He has a clear and exact knowledge of other men. He understands the conditions under which the work of the world is carried on. He has a very definite notion as to that which is possible, and that which it is absurd to attempt. He has measured the motives by which men are governed, and discerned the objects on which their hearts are really set. He is therefore never carried away by enthusiasm. Nothing can tempt him to engage in a quixotic enterprise. The rule of his life is that only those ends are worth seeking which one has good reason to believe that he can finally attain. He holds that in everything a prudent man will observe a just proportion between his efforts and his aims.

There is no one for whom the practical man has

a greater contempt than for the idealist or the visionary ; and he makes no distinction between the two. There is, however, a very important distinction between them. The visionary is the man who is aiming at things that are obviously impracticable, like building a bridge across the ocean or a railway to the moon ; his schemes are idle and fanciful ; his brain is unbalanced, so that he mistakes dreams for realities, and in his fantastic and illogical conduct shows that he lacks common sense. Such a man is to be pitied rather than despised, but no intelligent person can either trust or greatly respect him.

The idealist, on the other hand, is distinguished from the so-called practical man, not so much by the methods that he adopts as by the ends that he aims at. And these, again, are different, not so much in kind as in degree. They are those objects of pursuit which are highest and best. He does not ask what is expedient, but what is right ; not what is agreeable, but what is true. His desire is to know the truth, and to act in conformity with it. His endeavor is to do right, and to make other people do right. And his standard of that which is right and true is not the prevailing sentiment of the day, but the judgment of an enlightened conscience, a clear understanding, a lofty and pure imagination. He is not satisfied for himself to aim at anything lower than absolute righteousness and truth ; and so far as his relations with

other men are concerned, he would bring them and hold them to the same standard. This is the idealist, and you see at once how widely he differs in his way of looking at things from the practical man. And the practical man has a supreme contempt for him.

This is one reason at least why he has so little respect for the Church. It is composed of idealists. The worst of these are its ministers. Utterly ignorant of actual life, with a purely scholastic conception of human nature, living in retirement from the arena on which other men are struggling, and having no faintest conception of the temptations to which they are exposed and the real motives by which they are governed, the minister of the gospel is engaged in presenting ideals of character which he himself does not attain, and which nobody else can hope to attain in this life. His judgment in practical matters is worth nothing, and no intelligent man will pay much attention to anything he says. It is quite true, of course, that he gets these ideals and principles and standards of character out of the Bible, but the Bible is an ideal book, and the practical man has little use for it. It is a curious product of the ancient and oriental mind, but it is not adapted to the present day. The system of religion contained in it has an evident charm for dreamy and poetic natures, and its doctrines and principles might do very well in an ideal world; but in the actual condition of human so-

ciety, the morality enjoined in the Bible is wholly impracticable ; and the representations found in the New Testament of things beyond our sight and reach are too indefinite and uncertain to occupy the attention of a man who is governed by reason and who sees things as they are.

Then the work which the Church has undertaken to do is partly unnecessary and partly preposterous. What more visionary enterprise, for example, have men ever engaged in than that of foreign missions—the attempt to convert the whole world to Christianity ! One might as well try to transform all the trees of the forest into cedars or palms. If the Church were concerned with that which is practical, it would confine its attention to the heathen at home. And yet what it has attempted to do for these is not what they really need. It is trying to make converts of them, to get their names upon its rolls, and lead them to declare themselves Christians. What it ought to be doing is to improve the sanitary and social conditions under which they are living, to relieve their poverty and distress, to provide them with proper food and clothing, and set them in the way of greater physical comfort ; and their spiritual welfare can be taken in hand by and by.

And if the practical man does not approve of the work which the Church is trying to do, he has also very little respect for the thorough sincerity of those who compose the Church. They are indeed

idealists in theory, but in point of fact, he says, they are just like other people. These extravagant notions, these lofty standards and aims,—they do not carry them into their business, and for the very good reason that all business is impossible on any such basis. “And you know it,” he says, “you who call yourselves Christians! You know that a man cannot be honest and true, in the ideal sense of those words, and be successful in mercantile life at the present day. You are therefore simply adding hypocrisy to your other failures and sins. You might far better lay aside such extravagant pretensions, and let your religion, like mine, consist in doing about right, in doing as well as you can, in view of the conditions in which you are placed.”

So, too, as to politics. Nothing is more absurd than the notion that the political life of this city or country, at the present day, can be raised to an ideal level. You have to take men as you find them and do the best you can with them. You must have an elaborate organization, or everything will be in confusion. And such an organization must deal with men as they are. If you want votes, you must pay for them, either in bank-bills or in offices. A great deal of hard and disagreeable work must be done, and done by those who are not influenced by patriotic and unselfish motives. Many of the most useful men of the party are men who are morally corrupt. But their services cannot on

this account be dispensed with. And they are really no worse than multitudes of those who compose the community itself. The idea of an administration in which the public offices shall be held by men who administer them only for the public good, is the dream of an idle idealism. We want practical methods which will give us practical results.

I cannot undertake to exhibit in detail the working of such a man's mind, but I am sure that you will recognize from this rapid sketch a type of character very common among us. There have always been such men. They are the natural product of a keen, commercial, and competitive age. They command a certain amount of admiration. They exert a wide and deplorable influence. For, after all, ideals exist. They are natural to all of us. They commonly have, in our earlier years, great vividness and beauty. They exercise a commanding power over us until they are shattered, or until we voluntarily abandon them. And in considering the contrast between one who is inspired and governed by them and one who is not, it is worth while for us to observe two or three serious mistakes which are made by the practical man.

The first is that of underestimating human nature. Men are sordid, indeed, and selfish and cunning, often treacherous and often false. But the earth would long since have become a mere den of wild beasts, if it were not for the nobler impulses which are also natural to them. If you judge them by

what you see of them in the daily intercourse of life, you are apt to form a very poor opinion of them, especially if their narrowness, their greed, or their obstinacy baffles you in your plans. It is impossible to mingle with them without having this baser side of their nature often thrust upon your notice. And yet they are really better than they often seem to be. And to deny the existence of a pure disinterestedness, a genuine honor, a true nobility of spirit among those whom we call the masses of mankind, is to commit one of the greatest errors into which it is possible to fall. There are reserves, as it were, in human nature, of heroism and self-sacrifice and high aspiration, which are always latent in men's souls, and are often magnificently revealed in their action. To imagine that they are not there because they do not show themselves to us all the time, is as if one were to deny the reality of those prodigious fires that are slumbering in the heart of the earth because every day is not marked by a volcanic eruption, or to assert that there is no electricity in the atmosphere because the roll of the thunder is not constantly heard. One sometimes brings disaster on himself by excessive confidence in the honor, truthfulness, and high-mindedness of others. But he who goes to the opposite extreme, and adopts the old Latin maxim that every man should be presumed to be a wolf until you find out that he is not, makes a practical mistake whose consequences are more

serious still. A man who has his own ideals, and believes that others also have theirs, who is not afraid to trust them, who boldly appeals to them in the interest of that which is noble and true, shows a clearer perception of what they really are, than your practical man who thinks he knows them so well. I do not say that this view of human nature is more attractive than the other. I say that the candid observation of life and the careful study of history show it to be more accurate also. The practical man professes to have great respect for facts, and the fact is that men in general are a great deal better than he believes them to be.

This is his first mistake. The second is that by his repudiation of what he calls idealism, he deprives himself of the power to do much for his fellow-men. You might suppose, that with the long attention he has given to the conditions of successful work, and with his clear understanding of human deficiencies and wants, he would be just the man to help forward the work of moral and social reform; the man who would be most certain not to waste his strength; the man to whom others would go, with the assurance that they would receive from him the most judicious counsel and the most effective aid. But the trouble with him is that he lacks the motive which must be behind every real effort for the moral improvement of others. He has no strong faith in human nature. He has no large conception of what it may become. He has no hope of any

considerable improvement in its actual condition ; and consequently he lacks all enthusiasm, and even boasts of his lack of it. But it requires a great energy to induce any one to labor persistently, and to enable him to labor successfully, for the welfare of others. It involves a vast amount of self-sacrifice ; it requires a prodigious deal of patience. It will not be done by any one who has not within himself an inexhaustible spring of courage and hope. All these the man of ideals has. And they sustain him under discouragement. They inspire him with a hope that never fails and a zeal that never flags. It is a fact of history which cannot be questioned that all the men who have really helped forward in any large way the progress of the human race have been idealists and enthusiasts. The practical man stands by and criticises and sneers. They labor and suffer and die. And he is forgotten. And they are immortal. In a certain sense he was right. The things they strove for were impossible. But their faith and enthusiasm have accomplished the impossible, as faith and enthusiasm are always doing and will do to the end of time.

Then, again, in the third place, the practical man who has dethroned his own ideals, and who treats the ideals of others as an empty superstition, makes the serious mistake of dooming himself to inevitable deterioration. It has been well said that "if there is one lesson more than another which history has to teach, it is this : that without fidelity

to unrealized ideals, there can be no solid advancement in any department of life. And the secret of all retrograde experiences, whether in individuals or in nations, is to be found in their loss of those spiritual elements in man which have hitherto lighted and fed the torch of civilization. No greater misfortune can possibly happen to a man or to a nation than that which arises from meagre ambitions and a cramped and petty outlook. It is not always gross and sensual things by which they are degraded. It is enough that they should be immersed in things mundane and material, given over to the brittle gods of an unideal life, to the lust of wealth, the love of ease and self-indulgence, to the things that are below the level of the house-tops, rather than to those which dwell among the stars." This process of deterioration is subtle and slow, but it inevitably takes place in one who has renounced his ideals and has become a worshiper of that, and that alone, which lies within the horizon of his actual vision. No one can remain stationary in his moral and spiritual life, any more than a star can stand still in its orbit. He will go forward or backward, upward or downward, as he is led on by high ideals, or suffers himself to be pulled down by earthly views and sensuous passions. Emerson's quaint phrase, "Hitch your wagon to a star," has in it a great truth. The world, with its low standards, its fierce competitions, its glittering rewards, is certain to enchant and enchain the mind that is

not always peering into the invisible and reaching forth toward the ideal. There is but a step between what is often called a practical view of things and utter cynicism and misanthropy. Even if our ideals were mere phantasms, the power to form and the disposition to pursue them would be our only salvation from the pessimism which is infecting like an Asiatic plague so many spirits in our time. But it can never be that an illusion is better than the truth. And the reason why a man who insults the ideal inevitably goes down, is that he has committed sacrilege against the truth ; he has insulted human nature ; and he pays the penalty of his sin by being forced downward to the level on which he falsely imagined that other men were living.

And then, once more, he who takes such views of life, and regulates his conduct by them, cuts himself off from sympathy with all the noblest and best of mankind. There have been cynics heretofore in every age,—men who scoffed at the ideal ; who measured their fellow-men by the standard of their own miserable ideas and aspirations ; men without faith in humanity, or in a God whose absolute righteousness and truth are reflected back, however imperfectly, from the character of the highest creature He has made. There have always been such men. But the great mass of mankind, certainly the great leaders of mankind, have been men of ideals. All the progress which the race has made, from the grey dawn of its history down to

the present day, has been the result of its often blind but still persistent endeavor to reach an ever-receding goal. Men have never been content with the knowledge, the power, the comfort, or even the moral excellence, which they have at any moment attained. They have always been reaching out and pressing on toward something higher and better, toward an ideal, in other words, imperfectly conceived, perhaps, and never actually realized, but ever drawing them upward with an irresistible power. Here is the secret of the progress that has thus far been made in individual character, in social refinement and purity, in civil liberty and order. The ideal of what a man should be, of what society should be, of what the state should be, has always floated before men's minds, not like a phantom of their own crude imagination, but like an angel flashing upon them out of some higher sphere. It is often saddening to study the wayward and halting course by which they have struggled onward to the point at which they stand to-day; but there is also something magnificent in the sight of this irrepressible and splendid effort to rise out of actual conditions of ignorance and suffering, of confusion and wrong, into something nearer the ideal of personal and public happiness and virtue.

And now the man who says that all this is merely chasing a will-o'-the-wisp, that it is better to rest content with things as they are, that anything like a thoroughgoing reform in personal character or in

the life of society is an idle dream,—such a man simply steps aside out of the ranks, while the march of humanity goes on. He has no share in it. He has no sympathy with it. He can do nothing to help it. But past him or over him it will go, till somewhere and at some time the vision is fulfilled, and the ideal so long cherished and so long sought is actually realized.

For humanity sweeps onward; where to-day the martyr
stands,
On the morrow crouches Judas, with the silver in his hands;
Far in front the cross stands ready and the crackling fagots
burn,
While the hooting mob of yesterday in silent awe return
To glean up the scattered ashes into History's golden urn.

I submit to you, then, that it is the part of practical wisdom to respect your ideals, to believe in them, to cherish them; for this is at least one secret of the highest happiness, the largest growth, the widest usefulness. Beware of the influences which would tend to persuade you that it is not worth while to expect or strive for anything really great and noble, either for yourself or others; that you will always be substantially what you now are; and that the world is destined to drift on forever, very much as it is doing now. Beware of the pernicious influence of those who tell you that in the realm of personal character, in society, and in the state, the evils which you observe and deplore can-

not be remedied, that you must accept men and things as you find them, and put up with what you cannot help. It is not so. Not the practical man but the idealist holds the true philosophy of life. You need not always live, unless you choose to do so, on the low, malarial plains where you are now dwelling. The hills are all around you, calling you up to their wider vision and their purer air. What if you cannot reach the shining summits, or tarry there even if you should succeed in scaling them? You can reach a higher level than that whereon you are standing now. The idealist is not of necessity an idiot. He does not for a moment suppose that absolute truth and absolute righteousness can be attained here in this imperfect and sinful world. But he will not for this reason cease to aspire after them, or to strive to come as near to them as he can. And in this he finds the glory of life and its unflinching inspiration. He finds his outlook broadened and his character strengthened and elevated, even though he has not reached, and knows that he will never reach in this life, the absolute ideal that he seeks. But he knows also that his security as well as his happiness lies in keeping it steadily in view.

And if this is the dictate of practical wisdom, it certainly is the great lesson of the gospel. Religion, as the practical man says, is concerned with ideals. Ideals so absolute, so glorious, as those which are contained in the gospel of the Lord

Jesus Christ, can be found nowhere else. But here precisely is the secret of its power, not over the imagination only, but over the conscience and the heart. It appeals to our natural idealism. But instead of some vague conception of our own minds, it gives us a definite statement of God's thought and purpose for us. And it sets before us the highest and best of all possible ideals, embodied in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. No man can speak lightly of the ideal life, who believes in the Bible and tries to live according to it. For it is perfectly uncompromising in its demand that we shall be satisfied with nothing less than the persistent and determined endeavor to imitate the example and keep the commandments of our divine Master. If it required anything less than this, or if it confirmed us in our moral indifference or hopelessness, we should know that it was not from God. It would not meet our spiritual needs. It would have no power to renew and ennoble the secret sources of character. And therefore we who believe and rejoice in it as the word of God, are bound to manifest a spirit of loyalty to the highest ideals in everything we have to do,—in our daily conduct, in our domestic life, in our business, in our studies, in our various professions, in our obligations and our opportunities as citizens. Anything less than this involves disloyalty to Christ, disbelief in our own souls, unfaithfulness to our heavenly calling. We may not, we certainly shall

not, in this life attain the shining mark on which our eyes are fixed. But if the word of God may be trusted, we shall reach it hereafter, when at last we shall be like Him whom we have followed to the end.

DIVINE RESTRAINTS

And the Lord shut him in.—GENESIS vii. 16.

VIII

DIVINE RESTRAINTS

MUCH is said in the Bible of the freedom of the people of God. The unknown author of the one hundred and nineteenth Psalm rises out of the somewhat monotonous strain in which his poem is composed, into one of exultation and triumph, when he exclaims, "I shall walk at liberty, because I seek Thy precepts." And the same inspiring word is often on the lips of the apostle to the Gentiles. "Ye were called for freedom," he writes to the Galatians; "for freedom did Christ set us free." And in his letter to the Romans his deep and powerful argument seems to break into song, when he speaks of "the glorious liberty of the children of God." Separated by several centuries from each other, living at different stages of the divine revelation, these two men were agreed in this: that the true freedom of man is in obedience to God. The psalmist was under the law, and rejoiced in it; he found his liberty in obeying its precepts. The apostle rejoiced that the Mosaic law was abolished. It seemed to him a bondage, in comparison with the liberty which was gained by faith in Christ. And yet there is no contradiction between them. Each utters the best and

highest thought of his age. The truth which is common to both is that alienation from God and subjection to sin is a species of slavery, and that he only is free who is brought into right relations to his Maker. Such a man is free from the sense of wilful wrongdoing, and the condemnation which this implies—the reproaches of conscience, the just anger of God. He is free from fear concerning the future. He is free from the fetters of false motives and evil habits and partial and erroneous judgments. He is free from bondage to the opinions, the flatteries, the threats of his fellow-men. He is free from subjection to the outward and visible world, and is brought into relations of familiarity and of sympathy with the larger and more real world that is spiritual and unseen. Such a man is lifted above the accidents of life, above the passions, the prejudices and the narrow ambitions of his day; he breathes a purer air, he looks out upon a wider horizon. His sense of freedom gives him a sense of power and a desire for a larger activity. And as he comes into more perfect harmony with God, his spirit becomes more confident and buoyant and exultant, till at last it bursts all earthly limitations, and passes into the complete and immortal freedom of the sons of God on high.

All this is true, but there are very few Christians who are not more distinctly sensible of the restraints which God often imposes upon those who love and serve Him, than of the liberty to which

He has called them. Something of that sense of emancipation which seems to irradiate the language of psalmist and apostle, we too have doubtless felt ; and yet who of us can enter into the full meaning of their inspiring words and make them wholly his own? And the reason for this is not merely that we are conscious that our obedience is still imperfect and our faith wavering and weak, that we have not surrendered ourselves so completely as the one had done to the authority of the law, or the other to the loving persuasions of the gospel ; that our spiritual freedom is hampered because our spiritual vision is clouded and our spiritual life is languid. It is not that, though we may feel that that is sadly true. But God often seems to have shut us in, within limitations at which we chafe, by restraints which are as fetters on our enjoyment and our activity. We know well enough that it is wrong to murmur at them, but we are often distracted between the desire to accept and submit to them, as His appointment for us, and the desire to break away from and rise above them, into the freedom of our heavenly calling. It may help us, therefore, if we consider some of these restraints, in order to see, if we can, what they are meant for and how we ought to regard them.

But it is important, at the outset, to observe how often it is the man who has shut himself in, and not God who has imposed restraints upon him. We are continually building barriers around ourselves

and then complaining that our freedom is abridged. We shut ourselves up, for example, within narrow views of truth, refusing to let our minds go forth and up to the full breadth and height of the divine revelation. It is sometimes the result of early education, which has fixed us in a certain conception of the great facts and doctrines of the gospel, so that it never occurs to us to inquire whether the truth of God and of our relation to Him may not be vaster and grander than that which we hold. It may be that some other acute but contracted mind has forced its opinions upon us, and we contentedly accept them, without asking if, beyond the domain thus mapped out before us, there may not be other seas and continents, stretching away into the distance. It is simple ignorance sometimes, and sometimes indifference, and sometimes a voluntary and wilful refusal to lift up our eyes and behold the things which God is ready to reveal to our knowledge ; and sometimes it is a timid temper, a want of faith in the truth and in God ; or it is an unwillingness to be disturbed in opinions that have become familiar to us, and in prejudices that have grown so tough with age that we mistake them for principles ; it is some one of these habits of mind that shuts us up within a creed, which in spite of the truth that it contains, becomes false because of the truth which it excludes. When shall we learn that truth is one, and that God has revealed Himself in many ways? The astronomer catches on

the lens of his spectroscope a ray of sunlight ; he enumerates to you the chemical elements which he finds in the blazing and bubbling mass from which it streams, and he tells you that that is the way in which you are to think of the sun. And the poet sees it rise over the Alps, touching every crystal peak with a crimson glory and wakening the valleys into life and song, and it stirs his soul with the sentiment of worship, and he greets it with a hymn. And the explorer, lost amid the trackless expanse of the polar ice, waits for it through the long Arctic night, and to him it means health and hope, escape from the living tomb that encloses him, and restoration to the smiling and happy home that he has left. And so it is with truth—the truth of God's love, for example, the truth of Christ's atonement ; it is not the same thing to all men, but it is larger and grander and more many-sided than any man's conception of it. God pours it, as in floods of light around us, and calls upon us to come forth, out of the narrow views in which we have imprisoned our own minds, into a large liberty of thought.

We suffer, in very much the same way, an unnecessary impoverishment in our spiritual life, because we shut ourselves up within narrow expectations. "According to thy faith be it unto thee," is a far-reaching law. It is one of the laws which govern attainment and achievement in the secular world, where knowledge, wealth, influence,

success of any kind, is in great measure proportioned to ambition and effort. The school-boy who thinks that he never can know much, never will know much. The man who never expects to succeed, never succeeds. And the same thing is emphatically true of the spiritual life. Why is it that our Christian enthusiasm is so feeble, and our Christian joy so small; that we are conscious of so little progress in holiness, so little freedom and exhilaration in our communion with God? It is not because He has condemned us to live as we are living, because there is nothing more in the Christian experience than we have attained, or nothing more, at least, for us. There are still mounts of vision on which the human soul may stand transfigured, as Jesus stood on the summit of Tabor, while celestial forms fill all the air, and a divine companionship and communion is realized, which is a prophecy of heaven. There are still high places of Christian experience, on which your soul and mine may walk with the jubilant and triumphant step of those who are enfolded in a divine protection and upheld and guided by an almighty arm. And if we do not reach them, it is largely because we do not expect to reach them. They are not, we say, for us to tread. We are not contented where we are, or we are contented. In either case, we do not rise to higher things, because we do not expect to rise. Or we push into the indefinite future, into the last years of life on earth, or even, perhaps, into

the life beyond, the fulfilment of a hope which might be fulfilled at once. But the great possibilities of the Christian life are possibilities for every Christian. Not to a few only, but to all who are pure in heart, is it given to see God. Not to now and then one alone, but to all who abide in Christ, is the freedom which He has promised, granted. It is not He, who has shut us into our narrow, unfruitful, joyless experience, but we who have not faith enough in Him, or love enough for Him, to come forth into a larger life.

So again, in the third place, with Christian activity. There is nothing more common than to hear a man lament that He is doing and can do so little for Christ. He is hedged in and hampered by a thousand restraints. He longs to break away from them and be free for some truly great and effective work. But look more closely at these restraints, my brother, and see if they are not such as you have fastened on yourself. Is there anything to hinder your doing God service—service of the grandest and noblest kind—except your simple unwillingness to assume the responsibilities, or to make the sacrifices, which it involves? Is it not your love of your ease, or your absorbing interest in your business, which alone stands in the way of your religious activity? Or is it not some morbid feeling of timidity or self-distrust, which you ought to break over, and which you would break over, if you were really as intent as you think you are on do-

ing good? Or is not the difficulty this, perhaps, that while you are waiting for a wider sphere, you are not yourself widening your sphere, by filling it full of acts of usefulness and love? There is nothing in the world that grows like the opportunity of doing good. If you want to do more, do it, and the more you do, the more you will want to do. But do not at least cheat yourself with the delusion that God has shut you up to a life of inaction, when it is your own selfishness or your own worldliness which alone hinders your religious activity.

But when this has been recognized, that the restraints at which we murmur are often those of our own making, then we must also go on to recognize the fact that God does often shut us in. He does this, for example, sometimes by the limitations of natural capacity which He has fixed for us. It is not possible for us, by the very constitution of our minds, to take those broad and lofty views of truth which others find so satisfying or inspiring. A narrow creed may be the only one which we can firmly grasp and hold, and they who are tempted to blame us for this, should remember that it is not so much our fault as our infirmity. Or our natures are too cold to be easily kindled to such a fervor of Christian feeling as that which others exhibit, and they should not forget that we may be as sincere and as earnest as they, while we are longing, perhaps, for an emotional experience of which we are simply incapable. So there are

forms of Christian activity for which we are not fitted, and however pure may be the motive with which we enter upon them, God has shut us up to failure in them by denying to us the natural gifts which alone insure success. It may, perhaps, seem strange that He should thus refuse to any man the clearest vision of truth, the highest intensity of feeling, to which he can aspire, and stranger still that He should suffer any faithful laborer in His service to miss the end for which he has toiled, because of some involuntary and unconscious defect of mind or of temperament, by which he is in advance condemned to disappointment. But this is certainly one of the ways in which He shuts men in.

Another is by the narrow conditions of their lives. I do not mean to speak of those—the almost innumerable multitude of men—who seem to be placed by the providence of God beyond the reach of every elevating influence; who are shut in by a deadly circle of associations and of circumstances which make their ruin seem almost inevitable; who appear to have no possibility of escape. The frightful picture which the weird fancy of the novelist has painted and which haunts the imagination of the reader like a nightmare, of the prisoner who saw that the walls of his dungeon were slowly but steadily closing in upon him, causing him an agony of suspense which was even more horrible than the certain and terrible death that awaited him—it is not an image too vivid and

appalling of the condition of thousands who are living and perishing around us. But it is not now of them that I would speak. The contrast of their dark and hopeless lives—blots upon our civilization, reproaches upon our Christianity—makes the meanest and poorest of our lives seem large and rich and free. But just because of our wider outlook and our higher aspirations, we feel the restraints amid which we are placed. The petty cares of daily life, the crowding and conflicting duties with which our busy hours are filled, the anxieties and fears and responsibilities by which we are burdened and perplexed,—how they exhaust our energies and baffle our ambitions and fetter our spiritual freedom. We are not engaged in a mad race after wealth, we are simply fighting the great battle of existence. We are discharging as well as we can our duty to ourselves, to society, and to those who are dependent upon us. He who gave the commandment, “Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy,”—did He not say also, “Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work”? And whatever the form or sphere of our labor may be, whether in courtroom or counting-room or school-room, whether it is the care of vast financial interests, or the care of the sick, or the care of little children, whether it is a public service or a domestic service, it is a necessity imposed upon us in the providence of God, and we cannot escape it. It is true that a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of the

things that he possesses ; and yet much of the life of every man and of every woman must inevitably be occupied with things that have no evident religious relations and that seem in their influence directly opposed to all religious activity and progress. We are shut in by the conditions of our physical and social life, and whether we chafe at its restraints or meekly submit to them, we cannot throw them off.

And yet the busiest and most careworn life is free compared with that of one on whom some sore disaster has fallen. The invalid who is fastened for weeks and months to a bed of helplessness and pain, who is withdrawn from all wonted ministries of duty and affection, and made to be the object of the pity and care and anxiety of others,—how suddenly and sadly life is narrowed for such a sufferer ! Nothing to do, but everything to bear ; the range of vision bounded by the walls of a single darkened room, which is like a prison to the restless soul ; the bright and eager faculties of mind arrested in their accustomed activity and set to preying on themselves, or clouded and weakened by the poison of disease,—what a sad, but what a common experience it is of the way in which God shuts us in !

Is it possible that there can be any still closer restraints imposed by Him on the free human spirit ? Yes, the bonds of sorrow are even tighter and more galling than those of physical feebleness

and pain. The body is vigorous and active ; it is the heart which is enchained. The shadows of a great grief have fallen upon you, and you are walking on in solitude and darkness. Between you and the living world, in which just now you were doing your work so easily and so well, there has risen an impenetrable mist, in which you are moving aimless and bewildered. You hear from beyond it the voices of your fellow-men, engaged in the free and joyous activity in which you so lately had your share, and they are calling you to come forth out of your sorrow into the liberty of thought and feeling that you have lost. But you cannot come out of it, and you would not if you could. There is a sacredness in such an isolation and seclusion, which you do not desire or dare to violate. It is the hand of God that has drawn these curtains of darkness around you, and you cannot but wait till He shall lift them and let in upon you the brightness of the day.

Or, once more, the restraints which He imposes may be wholly within the sphere of our spiritual life. There are no outward restrictions on our liberty, but we are in bondage to doubt or fear or religious depression. Our faith is shaken in some cardinal point or doctrine of the gospel and we can do nothing until it is restored. Or the freshness of our Christian feeling has vanished, as the delicate and tender beauty of the morning is lost in the noon-day heat and glare. We used to know the joy of

God's salvation, the mysterious and ineffable sweetness of a loving fellowship with Christ. It was the glorious liberty of which the apostle speaks. But we have lost it, and now religion is to us a weary round of duties and a longing for a spiritual freedom, which would be like heaven itself, if we could only get it back. There are such periods in the lives of God's true children, when the luminous presence that had shone upon their path seems turned to darkness, and when the light has faded from the mercy-seat itself.

Does it not sometimes seem, in view of these various ways in which God shuts His people in, as if there were no real freedom left for us on earth? Who of us has not felt, as his life has gone forward, that the hand of God was laid upon him in the limitations of natural capacity by which he is encompassed, in the restrictive conditions of his life, in sickness or in sorrow, in religious doubt or desolation? Who of us has not felt himself checked, hampered, arrested even, in his spiritual activity and progress? Is this, we may well ask, the freedom of God's children? Is this the light and joy and liberty of faith?

Let me point you for an answer to the threefold purpose which even now we are able to discover, in these divinely imposed restraints,—the purpose which will grow still plainer to us, as it approaches its accomplishment. It is, for one thing, a purpose of protection. The story of the patriarch from

whose biography the text is taken, may at least teach us that first lesson. The barriers by which God shuts us in, are often barriers by which He shuts out from us temptations to which we should certainly succumb. The necessity of labor is not a burden, it is a defence. The seclusion and helplessness of sickness is not a chastisement, it is a safeguard. You say that the purely worldly cares with which your hands and brain are filled, are a hindrance to your spiritual growth. It may be so, but a life of idleness would hinder it far more. You say that your sickness has thwarted your plans of Christian usefulness. It may be so, but unbroken health and prosperity would have diverted you from them more effectually still. Your great affliction has shut you up to a life of melancholy and inaction. I grant it, but you were perhaps becoming too deeply immersed in a happiness which was purely of this world, and this has brought you face to face with the world to come. You say that your religious depression destroys all the zest and freedom of your efforts to do good. I admit and understand it, but you were perhaps becoming too well satisfied with the good that you were doing, and too self-sufficient and self-confident. You did not realize, you do not yet realize, perhaps, the dangers that were threatening you when God thus laid His hand upon you and in His mercy shut you in.

Or His purpose in it may be one of discipline.

It almost certainly is so. Have you learned all the lessons of discipleship so well that you no longer need His training? Perhaps it may be His design to teach you simply that you have not done this, that you are willing to trust and serve Him when He lets you roam at large, but are impatient and rebellious under His restraints. It may thus be something concerning yourself that you are to learn, or something new concerning Him,—the real weakness of the faith that you thought so strong, the irresoluteness of the purpose that you thought so steadfast, the insufficiency of the love that had led you to say, “Though I should die with Thee, or for Thee, I will not deny Thee;” or, on the other hand, the power of His presence in the soul to make the darkest hour radiant and the most heavily burdened spirit glad. He may wish to teach you the great lesson of duty, that all labor is to be made sacred, by being performed in a spirit of Christian devotion; or the great lesson of trust, that our desires are in all things to be subjected to His will. But whatever the lesson may be, be sure of this, that He has a lesson to teach you, and that when you have learned it, He will bring you forth again into freedom and into peace.

Or He may, in the third place, have a work for you to do, which can only be done under the very limitations which He has imposed. It is for you, perhaps, to teach others how meekly and joyfully these limitations may be borne. It is for

you to show how fervent and pure and devout in spirit it is possible to remain amid all the stress of secular activity. It is for you to prove again to the world, what has been proved so often and yet is so often denied, that one may be diligent in his business and yet serve the Lord, or faithful in all the endless round of homely duties, and yet be spiritually minded and full of the gentleness of Christ. Or still again, it is for you to exhibit a cheerfulness which pain cannot subdue, a serenity which sorrow cannot disturb, a faith and zeal which only shine out more brightly through the doubts by which you are enveloped. The most honored and eminent witnesses for God are not they whose feet are set in large places and who walk with buoyant step in pleasant paths. They are those whom He has in His providence shut in to narrow spheres, to conditions of hardship and suffering, but who there exhibit a trust in Him that never wavers, and a fidelity to Him that never fails.

Here, then, are the lessons, too obvious to be missed, too important to be disregarded, to which our meditation brings us. The first is that it is never for His own sake, but always for ours, that God shuts us in. Whether it be to save us from a peril by which we are threatened, or to teach us a lesson which it is well for us to learn, or to enable us to render the service which it is our highest privilege to render, His very restraints are forms of blessing. The limitations which we fasten on our-

selves through prejudice, indifference, or love of this world, are indeed sources of weakness. It is by them that we are held back from the growth that we long for, and from the activity and the happiness that God has designed for us. But let us not murmur at those which are imposed upon us by Him. The little valley, shut in among the hills, might better complain because it is not the level prairie which is bounded only by the sky. But has it not also its use and its beauty? And into its quiet depths do not the same stars shine?

And the second thing is that freedom is found not in the absence of restraints, but in adjustment to them. There is indeed a liberty of the children of God, and it belongs to those about whom the cords of love and duty are most tightly wound. It does not need or seek a larger sphere than that which He has assigned it, but in that sphere it finds ample and harmonious movement, because it moves in accordance with His will. Its direction is upward, rather than outward, and that sphere is large enough for it which brings it into vital contact and communion with Him. The Christian soldier, who ranges over earth and sea, has not always the liberty of the captive, whose cell is illumined by the presence in it of the Son of God. And the narrowest life is sometimes expanded till heaven itself is embraced within its horizon, when the spirit has learned to forget its fetters in loving and joyous fellowship with Christ. That is the liberty with which He

makes free those to whom all privation and hardship are sweet, which hold them more closely to Him.

And that is the prophecy of the still more perfect freedom awaiting us hereafter. We sometimes think of the world to come as a sphere where all restraints shall be removed, and the soul shall be unhampered in its immortal career of happiness and progress. And so indeed it will be with the limitations of sense and time, of earthly toil, of sickness and sorrow, of fear and doubt and death. But the sweet restraints of love and of obedience, and of holy and delightful work, will be around us still. Our freedom will be a freedom from sin, but not from duty, from suffering, but not from service. But the bonds which now seem to us the fetters of servitude shall there be the symbols of citizenship, when the mortal discipline and peril shall be ended, and the celestial security and fruition begun. God make us patient and faithful here, and give us that freedom and that peace hereafter !

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF JESUS

But go your way, tell His disciples and Peter that He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him, as He said unto you.—MARK xvi. 7.

IX

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF JESUS

No one can read what is sometimes called the gospel of the resurrection—the inspired but still imperfect narrative of the wonderful forty days, in which our Lord showed Himself alive after His passion—without observing the changed relation in which He stood to His disciples. Sometimes it seems as if nothing were altered. He sits and talks and even eats with them as before. He declares to them that though His body is possessed of new properties and powers, it is still the same body which was nailed to the cross and laid in the tomb. “I am not a spirit,” He said, “but a real, living man. Handle Me, and see.” It was when He was walking with them as of old, along the familiar path over Olivet toward Bethany, that in the midst of His discourse, He was taken up from the earth and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

And yet evidently, also, He was not with them now as He was wont formerly to be. He was set free from the limitations of physical law by which He had been bound. He came and went, as a spirit might come and go, appearing when the doors were shut and then mysteriously vanishing away. There is something about Him which strangely

eludes us. He seems to be hovering upon the border which divides the sensible from the unseen world.

An extremely suggestive illustration of this is given in the statement made by the angel to those who were early at the sepulchre. Recalling a promise that had been made by Jesus Himself before His death, He said: "Go, tell His disciples and Peter [the particular mention of Peter is especially noteworthy] that He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him, as He said unto you." The command which had made them His disciples was a command to follow Him, and they had literally obeyed it. They had left their boats and nets, the booths where they carried on their business, and even the towns and cities in which they had been living, and gone forth after Him wherever He led the way. They had walked with Him up and down the whole length of Palestine, from Nazareth to Jerusalem, from Jerusalem back to Nazareth, more than once. But it had commonly been with Him. If they were His followers, they were also His companions. He was always in the midst of them. Sometimes, even, He had followed them, as when He sent them, or a part of them, onward before Him, either to prepare for His subsequent coming, or because it was His pleasure to go, after them, alone. Now, however, all this was changed. He was to go before them into Galilee, and they were to follow Him

thither, but it was not as a visible presence moving among them. They could not keep Him in sight as they made the long journey. The path He took they could not take. In other words, they were now to begin to walk by faith, following one whom they could not see. Nowhere, as they went along, could they catch sight of Him. His blessed feet were unstained by contact with the Judean roads and left no print upon them. He passed unseen among the throngs of Passover pilgrims who were returning northward to their homes, bearing the tidings of the strange events which had made the days just past so tragic and so memorable. And the disciples were bidden to follow Him in the belief that though they could not perceive Him, as they pursued their way, He would fulfill His promise and manifest Himself to them when the familiar hills of Galilee were once more beneath their feet.

Now the special thought suggested by this is that our blessed Master has gone and is still going before us along the paths which we are called to take in life. We cannot, indeed, behold Him now, but over every step of the way in which we are moving onward, He has really passed, and we shall see Him by and by, when we reach our journey's end. There is certainly great encouragement and comfort in the fact, when the way seems, as it so often does, lonely and wearisome.

The journey of life! There is something very impressive in the thought of it, when one reflects

upon all that is involved in it, and traces it from its beginning to its remote and unknown end. What a mysterious, winding way it is, through desert and forest, over delectable mountains, perhaps, and perhaps across rude and stormy seas, through mist and darkness very often, and sometimes through bright, exhilarating airs,—a narrow way, with pitfalls and precipices on every hand, and the end coming no nearer, because it never ends! It is “a path which no bird knoweth, and which the vulture’s eye hath not seen,”—that over which the soul of every man is called to move, rising higher and higher toward the heavenly hills, or leading downward into dark and dreary realms of spiritual desolation and death. Well may we sometimes feel dismayed, as we survey it, and ask ourselves, Is life a blessing after all? How shall our souls be made competent to bear the tremendous burden of their own destinies? Who shall guide us so that we shall not stray? Who shall keep our weak and timid feet steadfast in the right path?

It is a great question—the greatest of questions for a thoughtful mind, looking out upon the world into which it finds itself flung by an unseen and irresistible power. And the most cheering answer that can be given to it is in the words, “He goeth before you; follow Him.”

Let me remind you, in the first place, that the Lord Jesus Christ has gone before us through the round of daily cares and duties in which so much

of life consists. It was not for nothing that He was born into the home of the Nazarene carpenter, and lived there quietly and unknown for thirty years. They were years of ripening and of preparation, and the sacred record passes them in silence. We sometimes lose sight of them, while we fix our attention upon the short but crowded ministry that followed them. And yet I think that in some respects they bring Him, who is our divine example as well as our divine Redeemer, nearer to us, than the few months of public activity which were so resplendent with teaching and miracle, and which ended at the cross. For our life is made up (is it not?) of homely duties and of little things. We fill no public stations. We are not called to be apostles. Our sphere is narrow, our opportunities are few. Our years are all silent years; and it is here, in the dull routine of events that make no stir, and of work that comes to nothing great—it is here, if it is anywhere, that we need the power of an inspiring example and the assurance of a divine sympathy and aid. And precisely here it is that we may be daily following Jesus, for He has gone through all this before us. For thirty years the sun rose and set every day upon that Galilean village, and it saw no splendor of miracle surrounding Him who was by and by to catch the tempest on His word and send it back to the caverns out of which it had come forth. It saw only a gentle, faithful, patient human life, employed in such tasks

as others were engaged in—the lowly labor of a small mountain town. There can be in your daily life or mine no humbler or homelier duties than those which for so many years engaged the daily thought and care of Him who was at once the Son of Man and the Son of God. The weariness from which we so often suffer, the consciousness of powers unemployed or only half employed, the restlessness that torments us under the limitations by which we are hedged in, do you not suppose that He also knew them, as the uneventful years moved round, and the sense of His great mission burned more and more brightly in His soul? Think of it, when you are inclined to fret under the duties which every day requires of you, and the burdens which the night, even, does not lift from your heart. You are simply walking in the path in which the Lord has gone before.

But our lives have their crises also, their great decisive experiences, when important interests depend upon the decision of a moment, when our own fate or the fate of others hangs on our action or on our failure to act. At such a time the burden of responsibility or anxiety which is upon us may be almost overwhelming, and the contents of many years may be crowded into a few hours. Measure life not by its duration but by its intensity, and many a young man has outlived whole generations. These are the experiences which test men, coming when they are not looked for, and lifting

one into heroism or dashing character and reputation into irretrievable ruin. They came to Jesus also, and you know how He met them: calmly, bravely, with His heart resting upon God, with His eye fixed upon the future. I do not say that to Him they were unforeseen, as they so often are to us. But there was in Him an energy of faith, a resoluteness of purpose, which is a better safeguard in moments of suspense than any power to anticipate that which is to come. This power does not belong to us. The other may be ours. No man can tell when the emergency may be upon him, or what its issue is to be. But there can certainly come to us no trials of faith or constancy or courage or meek endurance which are worthy to be compared with those through which the Lord has gone before us. If He walked on the loftiest heights of human life, He also sounded its deepest depths. His human nature was not more perfect than His human experience, passing from that which is lowliest to that which is grandest both in achievement and in endurance. If He asks us to follow Him in the one, He asks us only to follow Him in the other.

So, too, He has gone before us in the conflict with temptation. Yes, He condescended even to that. One might have expected that if God was to come into the world, making His glory visible to mortal eyes, it would be in such a way that evil would flee away before Him, as darkness vanishes

before the sun. How could it be possible for Him to feel its fierce and deadly assault? How could it seize Him with a grip so strong that it required an almost superhuman effort to shake it off? It was possible only because He took our nature upon Him so completely, even to its capacity of being tempted to sin. He did not sin. He conquered where we are all beaten. But He knew the tremendous strain which we all know so well. Not once only, as we are apt to imagine when we read or speak of The Temptation, but through all His life He carried on the conflict, in which we too are all the while engaged. Here is the explanation of the nights spent in prayer upon the mountains. Here is the secret of the mysterious scene in the shadow of the olives of Gethsemane. And if we would estimate the strength of the temptations which He endured, we must measure the malignity of the powers of darkness, toward one who seemed about to overcome them, and who did overcome them and break their reign on earth. But you, O tempted soul, who are trying hard to stand your ground against the same principalities and powers of evil, and who are bruised and wounded in the tremendous struggle—remember that even the Son of God has gone before you through the same life-long battle; that even for Him it was not wholly ended till He cried, "It is finished," and breathed out His spirit into the hands of God. Remember that He who has now become our high-priest for-

ever, is still touched with the sense of our infirmities, because He was tempted in all points as we are now tempted every day.

You will certainly anticipate me in thinking of sorrow, as another of the universal experiences of life through which the Lord has gone before us. There are elements of sorrow which He cannot have known by any actual experience of them. He who made no mistake, and who committed no sin, can have felt no self-reproach. He preached repentance to others, but He had Himself nothing to repent of. The sorrow that springs from the sense of shame, He often witnessed, but He did not feel it. Or rather, He did feel it all, just as He felt the weight of sins which He had not committed, because by His divine sympathy He entered so perfectly into the actual life of humanity and made it all His own. It was not the burden of His own guilt, but of the world's guilt, which crushed Him in the garden and on the cross, and He has borne on His strong and loving heart the burden of the whole world's sorrow. He has gone before you, O sad and suffering heart, through the valley of tears in whose deep shadows you are walking, and you are only following Him. We sometimes look, in the midst of our grief and desolation, for something just like it in the life of our Lord, and we say, "How can He know precisely my sorrow, when His experience was so different from mine?" Ah! it is not that. Your experience is His, be-

cause His infinite nature comprehends yours, as the ocean comprehends each several drop in the vast volume of its waters. And not only sorrow like yours, but your very sorrow—He has taken it upon Himself, in His divine compassion and love. Go forward, then, with patient steps, saying :

“Not as I will,” because the One
Who loved us first and best has gone
Before us on the road, and still
For us must all His love fulfill,
“Not as we will.”

And then, not through life alone are we literally to follow Christ—through its more common and more critical experiences, its conflicts with temptation, its endurance of sorrow ; He has also gone before us through death. Through death—it is His resurrection which has taught us to use these words. Into death, the world has said before. Generation after generation had gone down into the grave, as shattered ships go down into the sea, and it had closed over them, and all was still again. It was an insatiable and a bottomless abyss. What was beyond it? Was anything beyond it? Who could say? Into that silence and that darkness the Lord of life and light descended. He also was laid in the tomb, and they rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre and sealed it and left it. But that was not the end. There is something beyond the grave, and out of the shadowy world—

shadowy only because our sight is so dim—He who had gone thither before us comes back and speaks to us again. He does not promise to us or to any of us immunity from physical death. That is not a curse, it is a blessing. It is rest for the weary hand and brain and heart. It is freedom for the imprisoned soul. But He says to us, "I have gone before you through it; follow Me." "He that believeth on Me shall never really die." So it is that the darkest of all paths is brightened, and the deepest of all mysteries dispelled. We need not fear to follow where He has passed. What if the way is lonely when it goes out beyond the little space over which our vision ranges? What if we shrink with natural recoil from new and untried conditions of existence? Lo, He has gone before us through the grave itself. And for us to die is but to follow Him.

"There shall ye see Him," added the angel, "as He Himself said unto you." And the promise was fulfilled. They did not find Him where they sought Him, in the sepulchre; but among the hills of Galilee, on the shore of the lake where they had so often walked together, He made Himself visible to them again. It is an inspiring prophecy and promise to all who follow Him in faith. It is no sign that He is not near us that we cannot behold Him now. But the perfect and rewarding vision of the Lord will not be ours till we have gained the heavenly hills, and looked forth

upon the crystal sea. There at last the way will end, and we shall be with Him forever. It was, after all, only a vanishing glimpse of the Master which rewarded the obedient faith of the disciples. The presence, which was manifested to them, was soon again taken from them, and they were left to walk once more by faith. But there will be no further separation from Him for those who have followed Him into the other world. There at last we shall behold Him as He is, and the great reward of all our earthly struggle, the final fruition of our hopes, the full satisfaction of our souls, which this world can never yield, will be attained, when we shall there be with Him forever.

But now in speaking thus of the way over which our Lord has passed before us, through life and through death, I would not forget, or have you fail to remember, the other thought, which I suggested at the outset, that He is still going before us, and that we have only to follow Him, through every difficult service and every dark path. It is not merely true that He once moved across the earth on which we live, leaving a line of light behind Him, and then vanished into the world unseen. That is not the gospel of the resurrection, or the great truth of Christianity. He is still moving among men and before them, as when He then went onward, in advance of the disciples, from Judea into Galilee. He goes before the missionary of the cross to heathen lands, preparing the way

by which His servant is to follow Him, and opening the path for the entrance of the truth into darkened minds and dying souls. He goes before the sister of Christian charity, on her divine errand of love and pity, to the abode of ignorance and poverty, or the bedside of disease and death. He goes before every trusting, obedient disciple to the spot where a difficult or perilous service is waiting to be done, or to the hour which is to call for some still more difficult, still more heroic endurance. We cannot see Him, but we shall find Him there, and His presence will make the achievement possible, the trial light. Ah! if we could but realize this, how strong and courageous and confident it would make us! There is no loneliness—the most solitary way is bright and peaceful—to one who knows that the Lord is always with him. There is no such thing as failure for one who can (as it were) feel the nearness of that divine form which the eye cannot discern. Then difficulties seem to be swept from before us, as the summer wind sweeps away the mists that have settled upon land and sea. Then fear and doubt are dispelled, as when after many days of storm the sun breaks forth again, and all the sky is clear. So it was that the disciples, believing that the living Lord was going before them, went forth, in the might of an invincible faith, not to Galilee merely, but to the ends of the earth. The power by which they accomplished their great work was not in themselves. It was in

Him, whom they obediently and gladly followed, and who not only manifested Himself repeatedly to them, but gave them strength and fortitude and courage for the stupendous task which He called them to undertake.

And here is also our hope and our strength, in presence of the duties and trials by which we are so constantly confronted. It is comforting to remember that the path of life which we are treading has once been trodden by the Son of God. It gives dignity and beauty to the lowliest career, and takes their terror and threat from the greatest emergencies. It makes temptation easier to face, and sorrow lighter to endure. The power to meet even death without shrinking, comes to us from the knowledge that He has passed through it into a larger and more glorious life; and it is the glory of heaven itself that He—the Lord—awaits us there. But sweeter still to those who are weary and worn with the toil and conflict of life—sweeter and more inspiriting still, is the divine assurance of Him whom the grave could not detain, “Lo, I am with you always,” or, more exactly, “all the days,”—with you every day,—“till the world shall end.” He will go before you in a few moments, to your homes, and there He will be with you. He will go before you to-morrow to your business, and there, too, He will be with you. He will see you, though you may not see Him. He will hear you, as you speak to Him, though you speak to Him in

the softest whisper, or only in your thought. He will not leave you, even if you forget Him, and wherever He may send you, He Himself will go before.

All unseen the Master walketh
By the toiling servant's side ;
Comfortable words He speaketh,
While His hands uphold and guide.

Grief nor pain nor any sorrow
Rends thy heart, to Him unknown ;
He to-day, and He to-morrow,
Grace sufficient gives His own.

Holy strivings nerve and strengthen ;
Long endurance wins the crown ;
When the evening shadows lengthen,
Thou shalt lay thy burden down.

O the comfort and the glory of walking thus after the unseen Lord ! O the glory, greater still, of walking with Him by and by, in the light and peace and joy of Paradise !

JESUS ASLEEP

And He was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow. And they awake Him, and say unto Him, Master, carest Thou not that we perish?—MARK iv. 38.

X

JESUS ASLEEP

It had been a busy day in the life of our Lord. For many hours He had been teaching on the shore of the lake, and the multitude which gathered to hear Him was so great that He had at last stepped into a little boat, and making that His pulpit, had spoken from it to the crowds which lined the beach. Parable after parable of extraordinary beauty and power had fallen from His lips. No doubt, in the course of the day He had wrought many miracles of healing. At last, toward evening, He said to His disciples, "Let us cross over to the other side." Accordingly they dismissed the multitude, took Him as He was in their small fishing-boat, and accompanied by many other boats of the same kind, set sail to cross the lake. It was only some six miles wide, and in an hour or so they should easily have reached its eastern shore. But a sudden squall came up, with the rapidity and violence with which such changes in the weather often occur on lakes that are embosomed in the hills. The skies grew dark, the waters became boisterous, the boat became unmanageable; it was rapidly filling, and seemed to be on the point of going down. And Jesus was asleep.

It was the sleep of weariness. He was a man, and like many another man was tired out with His long day's work. The physical limitations and infirmities with which we are all acquainted, were no less familiar to Him. He was exhausted by the mental tension and strain, involved in continuous teaching during so many hours. Not without a conscious drain upon His physical strength, as other circumstances indicate, did He perform His miraculous cures. And heavier still was the burden of sympathy resting upon His heart, as He observed the sad spiritual state of the men and women around Him, whom He compared to sheep without a shepherd, to lost children who had wandered far from their Father's house. It evidently cost Him something, more, doubtless, than we always realize, to do His daily work; and greater far than the physical fatigue or the mental effort involved in it, must have been the stress of feeling under which He lived, through all His public ministry. He must indeed have been thoroughly worn out, to have been able to sleep in such a storm.

It was also the sleep of innocence. In such an hour of obvious peril, one who is troubled by a guilty conscience cannot sleep. Have you never gone to your rest, when the day's work was done and everything was quiet around you, and then been kept wide awake, hour after hour, by thoughts of the mistakes you had made, or the sins you had

committed during the day? Have you not sometimes even been roused out of a restful slumber by the memory of some act of folly or of wickedness, which you perpetrated many days or weeks or years ago, and found yourself unable to expel it from your thoughts and go quietly to sleep again? Have you never lain awake through some wild night at sea, when the great, strong ship was rolling heavily in the tumultuous waves, and wondered what would become of you, if anything should give way and the brave vessel should go down? Jesus never made a mistake. He never committed a sin. He never neglected or turned aside from a duty. There was nothing to cause Him self-reproach, His conscience was always perfectly clear. And therefore He could sleep even amidst the fury of the storm.

And then again, it was the sleep of confidence. Who of us has not seen a little child falling asleep in the arms of its mother, with a look of perfect content and perfect trust on its pure face, lifting its little hands in a silent caress as the eyelids closed, and then resting, no matter what turmoil or peril might surround it, without a motion or a sound, absolutely secure, absolutely peaceful? So Jesus slept, on that stormy night, in the open boat, amid the howling waters, under the pelting rain, no doubt, and through the wild raging of the wind, trustfully confiding in His Father's care.

Now look at the disciples. They were not

asleep. They had no business to be asleep. They were toiling with all their might. They were stoutly battling against wind and sea, striving to keep their little boat from being driven from its course or capsized or carried down. But they were terribly frightened; and the whole story shows that they had good reason to be frightened. They were not timid men. They were not unused to such an experience. They were stout and hardy fishermen. They had lived for years on these treacherous waters. They had been caught before in many a storm. But never, it would seem, had they felt themselves to be in greater peril. They had done all that strong men could do, but they evidently thought that their last hour had come. They were looking death directly in the face. And then it occurred to them to do what we cannot help wondering that they had not done before,—it occurred to them to wake the Master. But they awoke Him with a strange question. They did not call upon Him to prepare to die, or if possible to try to save Himself. They asked Him, reproachfully, almost angrily, as it would seem, “Carest Thou not that we perish?”

The answer of Jesus was still more surprising. “Where is your faith?” He said, or, as another account of the incident reads, “How is it that ye have no faith?” That, then, was the trouble. They had skill enough, they had strength enough, they had courage enough, but they ought to have

had more confidence, not in Him only, but in God. Even at that moment of excitement and danger, they ought to have remembered that they were in no real danger. They should have remembered that it could not be God's will that He and they should perish on that stormy night, in the dark waters of the Lake of Galilee. It was not for this that He had come into the world, leaving His heavenly glory and entering into human life. It was not for this that He had undertaken the work which His Father had given Him to do. It was not for this that He had called them to become His disciples, and had begun to train them also for their work. So long as that work was unfinished, they were safe. They ought to have known that God would preserve them amidst all such dangers as those which now threatened them, until it was accomplished. If their address to Him was reproachful, His reply to it was much more so, and with far better reason. Their abject terror was due to their lack of faith, not in themselves, but in Him, and in God who had sent Him. It was due to the fact that they had not yet grasped, as they ought to have done, and as they did afterward, the nature of His mission, that they did not appreciate the importance of His work, that they did not remember that no accident can ever arrest the plans of God, or imperil the lives of those to whose care they are entrusted. It was early in their intercourse with Jesus that this inci-

dent occurred, and it is not perhaps surprising that they had not yet learned to trust Him with that entire confidence which they afterward acquired, or to trust in God with that entire self-surrender and composure of which He gave them so sublime an example. But it was of the utmost importance that they should learn this lesson, and that was, no doubt, the simple reason why this fierce storm was let loose upon them, and they were made to feel that there was nothing else for them to do but trust in God. Then the stars shone out once more, and all was safe and quiet. When the thrilling experience had done its work, the winds might be locked up again in the caverns of the hills by the word of His power, and a great calm be spread over land and sea.

And yet you will observe that the anxious and toil-worn disciples were not wholly without faith. They had faith enough to go to Christ and ask His help. And it is a striking evidence of the extent to which they had already learned to confide in His supernatural power. So far as the narrative shows, they had yet seen no miracle like that which they were soon to witness. They had seen Him change the water into wine, they had seen Him heal with a word or a touch many forms of disease ; but they had as yet had no proof of His power over the mighty energies of nature, so that even the winds and the waves were obedient to Him. And yet when they found themselves in this des-

perate peril, they not only woke Him with their cry of distress, but their language, as it is recorded for us, shows their faith that He had the power to save them if He would. How He would manifest that power, of course they did not know, but they had already seen so much of Him that they had come apparently to feel that He could do anything that He might choose to do. And so they went to Him and awoke Him and appealed to Him for help. Faith enough for that they had ! And it was not disappointed. He rose from the pillow on which He had been sleeping, and with a majesty which we can perhaps imagine but cannot describe, He rebuked the winds ; the waves subsided, and in a few moments the little boat had reached the land.

Now the lessons which we may learn from this most picturesque and striking incident are obvious enough, but it is good for us to set them frequently and distinctly before our minds. What then took place on the sea of Tiberias, has often been repeated in the history of Christ's people. Life is not all plain sailing, over smooth waters, under cloudless skies. Far from it. There are none of us over whom storms do not sometimes gather, none of us who do not sometimes find ourselves rudely tossed on troubled waves. We are battling, perhaps, against what we call adverse circumstances. The outward conditions of our life are such as to hinder us from doing what we would, as to con-

denn us to exhausting and apparently vain exertions, as to imperil our success and perhaps our safety. We have to struggle against poverty, for example, against the disadvantages of early life, against repeated disappointment, against ill health, against bereavement and sorrow, against the opposition or the indifference or the treachery of our fellow-men. Year by year, it may be, we have kept up the strenuous but ill-rewarded struggle, and whichever way we have turned we have found ourselves baffled and beaten back, until heart and hope have almost gone out of us. The mighty and un-governed forces of life seem to have us at their mercy; and it looks as if the waves would close over us before very long, and we should simply disappear and be forgotten. On the broad and stormy sea of life how many little boats, freighted with eager hopes and high ambitions and vast possibilities of activity and happiness, are driving or drifting helplessly along, out of their true course, under no firm control, at the mercy of the waves, and ready to perish!

Or again, the turmoil and the peril are not without but within. They do not arise from the circumstances in which we are placed, or the conditions in which we are living; but we are buffeted by doubts and fears; we are driven on by uncontrollable passions; our own consciences have made cowards of us and robbed us of our moral strength. Truths which once shone like clear stars upon our

minds, are now hidden by clouds of uncertainty or unbelief. We have lost our reckoning. We have been driven out of our course. Chart and compass have been lost, or have become useless. We are staggering on blindly and helplessly, and nothing short of a miracle can save us from making shipwreck of our faith, perhaps even of our characters and lives. You know what I mean. You have yourselves, very likely, passed through such experiences. Some of you may perhaps be in this sad case to-day, or, if you are not, many other people are. It is not an unusual thing, even in these days of light and peace and prosperity and progress, for a human soul, even for a Christian soul, to be in as desperate a plight as the disciples in that little Galilean fishing-boat in which Jesus lay asleep.

And so too it often has been with the Church. The Christian Church, which has since grown to such vast proportions, which has accomplished such a marvelous work, with which the hopes of humanity for the future are so closely identified—it was all in that boat, on that critical night, with Jesus and His friends. We sometimes say, and say truly, that the destinies of half the human race were in the little caravel which brought Columbus to the shores of the new world. We say that the germs of the great republic, which seems, whether we will or not, likely to expand into a great empire, not merely controlling this continent, but making its influence felt all over the world, were in the little

cabin of the *Mayflower*, as it lay, after its rough wintry voyage, in the ice-bound harbor of Plymouth. If so, what vastly greater interests were at stake when the little bark that carried the Christ and His chosen disciples was caught in the sudden storm, half-way across the lake of Galilee! And if the Church of God, freighted with such incalculable blessings for the human race, escaped that peril, it was only to meet many another not less critical, from which only the power of God Himself has seemed able to save it. It has been threatened by the ever-repeated assaults of unbelief in a thousand different forms. It has seemed more than once on the point of being crushed by a hostile secular power. It has been the prey of internal corruption; it has been disturbed and rent asunder by the dissensions of its own members, who instead of joining hands in the endeavor to advance its influence in the world, have turned upon each other in the spirit of jealousy and hatred. And more than all, it has in every age, and never more than at the present moment, been in danger of becoming engulfed in the swelling floods of worldliness, by which it is surrounded. And it is no new thing for those who love the Church of Christ, who believe that the truth is committed to its keeping, that the most precious interests, not of individual souls only but of human civilization, depend upon its purity and permanence and progress, that God has designed it and intends to use

it for the final and complete redemption of mankind—I say it is not an unusual thing for us to be from time to time discouraged and dismayed in view of the perils by which the Church is threatened. It does not seem possible for it to stand up against its external and its internal enemies. It seems as if it must be, if not shattered by the assaults of unbelief, at least weakened and disintegrated by the insidious power of error and of worldliness, until at last it goes to pieces like some stout ship which the sea has finally conquered and carried down into its dark and silent depths.

Now if ever we find ourselves in such a case, or if we are troubled by anxieties like these in regard to the future of the Church, it is well for us to remember two or three things which the incident before us distinctly and forcibly suggests. One of them is that every life is safe which has Jesus in it. And it is your privilege and mine so to associate ourselves with Him that His life and ours are really one life, and that each of us may say, as St. Paul said, “I live, yet not I, but Christ is living in me.” We cannot invite Him as a visible presence into our homes, we cannot take Him as a companion with us on our journeys, but we may make a home for Him in our hearts, so that wherever we may be, He shall truly and always be with us.

No one can read, I think, this story, without understanding what He meant when He said to His disciples, “It is expedient for you that I should

go away ; ”—without realizing the gain to them, and to us also, which comes from the fact that He is with His people now as a spiritual presence in their thoughts and hearts and lives. Such a dreadful possibility as that which then presented itself to their minds—that they and He might perish together—is no longer even conceivable. Our companionship with Him is not affected by the accidents of life. It is no more a question, whether or not He will go before us or with us, or whether we shall go with Him or without Him, along our earthly journey. He has come to be, if I may so express it, a part of us, and we can no more be separated from Him than we can be separated from ourselves. He it is whose thought is moulding and inspiring ours, whose spirit is animating and governing ours, who, as a divine energy within us, is directing our conduct, and forming our characters, and controlling our lives. And out of the great and blessed fact that because we have given ourselves to Him He has taken such possession of us, comes our assurance of safety amidst all the emergencies and perils of life. No real evil can befall us if we abide in this relation to Him. For He has the power, as He has certainly the will, to turn all apparent evil into good. We may have to toil and suffer, we may be almost overwhelmed by disappointment, our plans may be shattered, our hopes may be quenched, we may feel that we are accomplishing nothing, it may seem as if the battle

of life were going against us, and as if neither our own best aspirations nor the promises of God were to be fulfilled. But it is not so. If Christ is in our hearts and in our lives, ruling them, moulding them, and working in and through them His own will, then we are perfectly safe. Let the storm rage, let the sea toss us in its mighty arms, let the cloud-rack blot the sun and stars out of the sky, we will not complain, we will not fear! We are Christ's and He is ours. He is with us, and nothing can harm us. What are winds and waves to Him who made them, who holds them as in the hollow of His hand, who rouses them as He listeth, and who says to them, "Peace, be still!"

Here too is the safety of the Church. Not in its numbers or its wealth or its social prestige; not in the antiquity or the accuracy of its symbols; not in the friendship or the honor of the world; it is in the fact that the Spirit of Jesus Christ is in it. It is bearing Him, so to speak, across the floods of time. Not as a lovely memory, not as a rare ideal, not as a form once living but now dead, embalmed in the fragrance of a loving but vain devotion; not thus, but as a vital, vivifying, energizing power, is Christ present in His Church. He has been in it from the beginning. He is in it still. And that is what has saved it in all the stormy scenes through which it has passed. That is what will save it in all the time to come. Where is your faith, O you who think that the Church is decaying, that the

gospel is losing its power, that the time is coming when Christianity will be thrown up with other wrecked religions on the shore, while men go sailing proudly forth into new and vaster seas of thought? Where is your faith in Him who said, "Lo! I am with you always, therefore go and teach the nations"? Not until that promise fails, not until the power which subdued the angry sea is itself conquered by some greater power, can the gospel lose its vitality, or the Church be arrested in its mighty career.

And Jesus is not now asleep. It sometimes seems as if He were. No doubt it has often seemed so to us, when the waves and billows of some terrible experience were rolling over us, when our prayers seemed to be unheard, when the help we needed did not come, when all was dark within as well as round about us, and our faith in God and man was on the point of giving way. It has seemed to us, possibly, as if Jesus must be asleep, when His Church has been rent by warring factions, or dishonored by the scandalous conduct of its members, or transformed into a haughty and ambitious hierarchy, or invaded and benumbed by the spirit of the world. We have remembered the bitter taunt flung by Elijah at the priests of Baal, and have felt as if the enemies of our divine Lord might almost address it to us: "Cry aloud! for he is a god. Either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he

sleepeth and must be awakened!" It is hard to believe that He is calmly looking on while some things that we observe from day to day are taking place on earth; that He knows what His people are suffering; that He knows to what His Church is exposed. And there are those who honestly think that He is asleep. There are those who do not hesitate to say that He has never wakened out of that deep slumber into which He fell, when the noonday darkness gathered over Him and He ceased to speak and move. In musical but mournful verse they sing:

Now He is dead! Far hence He lies
In the lorn Syrian town;
And on His grave, with shining eyes,
The Syrian stars look down.

No, He is neither dead nor sleeping! In spite of everything which may cast a momentary doubt upon His power to do anything now for the Church or for the world, Christendom still bears witness to the fact that He is living; the Church itself bears witness to the fact of His continuing union with it. The inmost consciousness of millions of believing and adoring hearts bears witness to His indwelling presence. He is living, not in heaven only, but here in the midst of us on earth. And He is ever ready to work, He is ever actually working, for the defence, the deliverance, and the consolation of those who trust and serve Him, and for the ad-

vancement of His kingdom toward its final triumph.

It is never possible, in any given emergency, either in our personal experience or in the life of the Church, to know when or how He will manifest His power. But we may always be sure of this, that the more critical the emergency, the more imminent the peril, so much the more certain is He to make it an occasion for some signal revelation of His glory. So it has been a thousand times since He rose from His sleep at the cry of His disciples and hushed the tempest with a word. What they expected Him to do when they awoke Him, we cannot imagine. They could not probably themselves have said. Doubtless the very last thing which they looked for, was the thing that happened. Never since the world began had the waters and the winds listened to a human voice and ceased their raging because it commanded them to be still. But so it was that He who showed His need of sleep after a day of toil, showed also His possession of a power to which nothing, absolutely, was impossible. And we have a perfect right to believe that when we are in the very direst straits and the very deadliest peril, we have then most reason to expect the pity and the help of Christ. We ought long ago to have learned that what is not only improbable but impossible for us, is perfectly easy for Him. There is no danger from which He cannot rescue us, there is no sor-

row in which He cannot comfort us, there is no burden which He cannot enable us to bear, there is no duty which we cannot do with His aid. It does not make the slightest difference how great our need is, He can supply it; it does not make the slightest difference how great our prayer is, He can answer it. "All power," He said, "in heaven and on earth, is given unto Me," and therefore we may trust Him absolutely and always.

And so it follows that no Christian should ever be afraid of anything. I do not mean, of course, that there are any of us to whom trial and suffering will not come. I do not mean that we shall not meet with many a loss, with many a disaster, or that we shall not by and by be called to part with life itself. Christ does not always rebuke the storm. He sometimes lets it rage in all its fury. But He enables us to ride it out in safety. Or if, as sometimes happens, He lets us go down under it, He transforms even that mysterious experience into a blessing. He leads us, not merely under the cloud, but through it, not merely over the sea, but through it, very often; but He brings us, or will bring us by and by, in safety to the heavenly land. Dropping all figures of speech: nothing can harm any one who is a true follower of Christ. No evil, however great, however real, can befall him, which will not prove a source of good. That is His promise, and those who have believed it, have always found it fulfilled. Not here on earth, neces-

sarily, but somewhere in the vast realms of life appointed for us, His discipline of our characters will bear its golden fruit. Defeat will be turned into triumph, sorrow into joy, disappointment and disaster into an eternal weight of glory.

So, then, if any of us are in trouble, we may well do as the disciples did—go to Jesus for help. Stand up bravely to your work, as they did, however laborious and perilous it may be, as long as you can. Do not give up the ship, though it may seem as if you must soon be washed out of it, or as if you and it must ere long go down together. Work and pray at the same time, but never give up your faith in God, in Christ, in the divine wisdom, power, and love. It is not very much to be wondered at that our faith sometimes fails us in the crises of life, yet these are the times when we need it most, and these are the times that it is meant for. I am almost tempted to say that we can get along without it when everything goes well with us; but when everything is going against us, and when nothing else is left to us, then it is that faith, blind, unreasoning, if you will have it so, but unwavering and unconquerable, is an unspeakable solace and support.

And lastly, if you have faith enough at such a time to lead you to go to Christ, you have faith enough; not all that you desire, perhaps, nor all that you have prayed for, nor all that you have expected God to give you. But you have enough to

save you from your troubles, from your fears, from your perils, from your sins even, because it is not your faith, it is always Christ that saves; and if you will only go to Him and ask His pity, pardon, and help, you will have a clearer, stronger and more jubilant faith in Him as time goes on. For He will surely strengthen as well as reward it. All that we need is simply to trust Him, and then to let Him do with us and for us what He will. "Carest Thou not that we perish?" cried the alarmed disciples. O who in all the universe cares so much that we should *not* perish, as He who so loved us that He died for us, who watches over us unceasingly, who is always seeking to bind us more closely to Himself, and who, when the voyage of this life is over, will surely land us on the celestial shore?

THE LEADERSHIP OF LITTLE CHILDREN

And a little child shall lead them.—ISA. xi. 6.

XI

THE LEADERSHIP OF LITTLE CHILDREN

ALMOST every people has had its dream of a golden age. In most of the ancient mythologies there is found a tradition of a better time, when the earth was the common property of man, and produced of itself whatever he needed. The land then flowed with milk and honey. Beasts of prey lived peaceably with other animals, and men were free from selfishness and pride and the other passions and vices which now mar their happiness. The Greeks and Romans placed this golden age under the rule of Saturn, and cherished the hope that it would some day return. There is a famous passage in one of the eclogues of Virgil, which may possibly have been suggested by that prophecy of Isaiah from which the text is taken, "Now," he says, "the reign of Saturn begins again. Everywhere the earth pours forth her fruits without culture. The fields grow yellow with soft ears of corn. Blushing grapes hang on rude brambles, and hard oaks distill honey. The ground shall not endure the harrow, nor the vineyard the pruning-hook. The serpent also shall die, poisonous plants disappear, and the Assyrian spikenard shall grow in every soil."

A similar picture of the golden age that is to come is given in Pope's stately ode on the Messiah :

On rifted rocks, the dragon's late abode,
The green reed trembles and the bulrush nods ;
Waste sandy valleys, once perplexed with thorn,
The spiry fir and shapely box adorn ;
To leafless shrubs the flowery palms succeed,
And odorous myrtle to the noisome weed ;
The lambs with wolves shall graze the verdant mead,
And boys in flowery bands the tiger lead ;
The steer and lion at one crib shall meet,
And harmless serpents lick the pilgrim's feet ;
The smiling infant in his hand shall take
The crested basilisk and speckled snake,—
Pleased the green lustre of the scales survey,
And with their forked tongues shall innocently play.

But neither the Latin nor the English poet has equaled the simplicity and beauty of the ancient Hebrew prophecy by which the latter at least was certainly inspired: "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid ; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together ; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed, their young ones shall lie down together ; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the basilisk's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain ; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

In this splendid language the blessedness of the reign of Messiah is foretold. It is to be an age of universal peace, when even wild beasts will lose their ferocity, and men hardly less savage will dwell together in harmony and love. The vision has not yet been fulfilled. But the forces which tend to accomplish it entered into human life with the coming of the Lord Jesus to the earth, and day by day and year by year the world is steadily moving toward it. The whole creation, according to the great thought of the apostle Paul, shares in the redemption which He came to work out, and the time is certainly approaching when the prophecy of the angels' song will be fulfilled, and there shall be peace on earth as there is glory and praise in heaven.

One part of the prophet's glowing picture is worthy to be separated from the rest and considered by itself. "A little child shall lead them." It suggests as a topic which is peculiarly appropriate to the Christmas season, the Leadership of Little Children.

We do not commonly associate the idea of leadership with childhood. It seems rather to require mental and moral as well as physical qualities which belong only to maturer years. To be a leader of men one must have what a child does not possess, a clear and trained intelligence, a strong and well regulated will, a firm but gentle hand. Leadership implies a certain large experience of life, or at all

events a natural energy and a power of self-control, which are rare even in men, and are not to be looked for in children. And yet there are many senses in which children are really the leaders of those who far surpass them in knowledge and in power. The fact is a sign that the kingdom of heaven has already come in some measure; it is a prophecy that it is yet to come completely and everywhere.

A little child is not a safe leader in matters which require wise judgment and a varied experience. Obvious however as this is, it is very often lost sight of, in this country especially, and at the present day. It is sometimes said with some truth that we are reversing the ancient command, and are reading it thus: Parents, obey your children. Some of us at least imagine that we discern both in our own children and in those of other people a spirit of self-confidence, self-will and independence of authority, which is not altogether prophetic of good. It may be, perhaps, in the eager American blood. It may be strengthened and stimulated by the keen American air. It is, at all events, fostered by certain usages and influences that are prominent in American life. Not a few parents in our day are not merely led but ruled by their children. And children sometimes have a way of putting forward their opinions, of delivering their judgments, of insisting that their tastes shall be gratified and their will be obeyed, which is, to say the least, a wide

departure from the practice of former times. There is no doubt a tendency in elderly people to resent and resist what appears to them to be the intrusion of the younger generation upon the stage of life, where they themselves have hitherto played the leading parts. But not old people alone, all thoughtful observers remark in our American life a certain uppishness and forwardness, a rude self-assertion, on the part of the young, which is hardly in keeping with the fitness of things, and which does not tend to elevate the tone of society. The ancient form of the command was much better. It is more in accord with the constitution of society, as that was ordained by its divine Author, and both parents and children are likely to be happier if it is left as it was written by the finger of God on the tables of stone and on human nature as well. There is great beauty, certainly, in the eager enthusiasm of childhood and youth, in its dash and its fire, its self-confidence and its energy. And yet, after all, experience too is worth something in the practical conduct of life. There are certain lessons to be learned from the past which childhood has not yet had time to gather up, and the mature and practiced judgment is a safer guide than an active but undisciplined brain and a fervid but ungoverned temper. It is better to place a pyramid on its base than on its apex. A ship is more likely to come safely into port if it is under the control of experienced sailors than of novices who are

going to sea for the first time. Raw recruits have their place and their value in an army, but the battle is more likely to be won if they have trained and tried officers over them. Life is not altogether an experiment. Men have been living a long time. Some things have been found out. Some principles are settled. And life is most likely to be successful when these principles govern it, and when it is shaped in accordance with the wisdom of the past. If there is to be law, authority, obedience, it seems natural that the sources of it should be at the top and not at the bottom. If the judgment of the aged comes into collision with that of the young, it would seem to be proper that the young should give way. The simple fact is that children need guidance, and are not competent to be the guides of those who are older and wiser than they. It is no infringement of their rights, no restriction of their independence, that they should follow while others lead. The duty of patient forbearance on the part of the parent ought not to need insisting upon. Not only the rights but the weaknesses of childhood are to be taken into account. "I do not beat my child," said a wise man once, "the world will beat him fast enough." Children are more easily led than driven. And yet the child that has never learned to submit to authority and yield to control, is likely never to learn to govern and control himself. The world will not be better managed than it is at present, if the authority which hitherto has

belonged to the parent is usurped by the child. The precept of the apostle Paul, "Children, obey your parents," is still sound, though somewhat old-fashioned.

But that leadership of children of which I would especially speak is not a deliberate but an unconscious leadership. They lead us, for one thing, into a deeper knowledge of love. We do not, indeed, get from them our first lessons in love, for we bring great capacities of loving with us into the world, and these find their objects very early in life. The first thing almost which we learn is to love. Our power to love grows stronger as the years advance. We love our friends, we love our homes, we love our country, we love the natural world around us, we love God and truth and virtue, without perhaps any distinct help from our children. And there is a love which binds human hearts together, though they may have long lived as strangers to each other, in a relation which is the most intimate and sacred in life. And yet every little child brings to its parents a new revelation of the nature and depth and power of love. There is certainly a difference between parental love and any other. There are in it elements of unselfishness, of patience, of watchful care, of hope and fear, of pride and grief, for which we look elsewhere in vain. No other form of human affection is so pure. No other is so utterly incomprehensible to one who has not felt it. The little child, whose

presence awakens it, is utterly ignorant of its intensity, and often holds it in slight esteem. It is a love which asks for very little, but which cannot possibly give too much; a love which seeks the highest welfare of its object, and is as free from jealousy as it is from self-seeking. It is of all sentiments the most generous and elastic, giving itself forth to each one of many children as if that were the only child. And so it is the best earthly type of the unmeasured love of God. The Saviour Himself could find no better image than that of a father under which to reveal to us the great Being who had sent Him, and He even appealed, in His instruction, to our love for our children as a proof of God's love for us. "If ye then," He said, "being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father in heaven give you everything you need." It is certainly a most striking thought which the late Professor Drummond has so brilliantly urged, that the whole progress of the creation, from the first appearance of life on earth, has tended toward the development of love. He has pointed out to us in the slow evolutions of the past not merely a struggle for life, but a struggle for the life of others, which culminates at last in the affection of a mother for her child. "The idea of mothers," he says, "has from the beginning been in Nature's mind, and she has always been trying to draw closer and closer the bonds which unite the children of men." If it

is love which gives to the world the little child, the child amply repays the debt by the love which it awakens in the heart of the parent ; and as there is nothing in us which is nobler than this parental affection, our highest development is, in a sense, in the hands of our children. It is theirs to lead us to heights of experience from which we obtain the clearest visions, and on which we breathe the purest airs.

Unconsciously also do little children lead us to realize the charm and beauty of certain traits of personal character. We do not, of course, look to them as examples of qualities which are the product of training and experience, which, if not originated, are developed and made prominent by collision with the world, and by the responsibility and suffering of which this is the cause. We frequently speak of the character of a child as unformed, and so in one sense it is. It is not hammered into shape by the influences of society, nor hardened by habit into unalterable forms. It is still docile and pliant, waiting to be moulded, as it may be, by wise training on the one hand, or by the accidental influence of circumstances on the other. But just for this reason it shows us what human nature is in its essence and at its best. It has a freshness, a purity, which may afterward be lost, like that of the early morning air before it is clouded and stained by volumes of smoke from factory chimneys. As Dr. Guthrie says, "The

morning, with every flower glistening in dews, the fresh air loaded with perfumes, the hills bathed in golden light, the skies ringing with the song of larks, is beautiful ; and beautiful as the morning of day is that of life."

There is in childhood a sweet simplicity, for example, which has an infinite charm for one who turns to it from the artificiality and deceitfulness of later life. Concealment and cunning are the vices at once of the lowest and of the highest civilization. The savage exhibits them at one extreme, the highly trained man of affairs at the other. To hide what we do not want to have known, to put the best possible appearance upon what we do, to try to make other people think that we are a little richer, wiser or better than we are, how common all this is among us ! How rare is absolute honesty, truthfulness, sincerity, in word and deed ! But this, in its absolute perfection, is shown by the little child, whose nature is as transparent as the waters of a mountain lake, or as the cloudless summer sky. Every thought and feeling is instantly expressed in word and look, with a frankness that is as free from suspicion as from fear. The child does not feel the need of concealment, until driven to it, perhaps, by unkindness or injustice, and all pretence is foreign to its nature. Herein is the secret of its singular power even over coarse and hardened minds ; and few things are sadder than to see the frank simplicity of childhood giving

place to the reserve and caution, perhaps the cunning and hypocrisy, which are so early learned from contact with the world. As long as it lasts, it not only attracts and fascinates others, but it tends to make them also genuine and true. But once lost, it can seldom be recovered, except as sometimes, at the other extreme of life, the truth and the Spirit of God may develop in old age a simplicity of character which is like that of childhood.

Then, for another thing, little children are the world's best teachers of faith. It is perfectly natural to a child to believe. It undoubtingly accepts what is told it as the truth, and it relies with a confidence which sometimes makes one tremble, on the power, wisdom and love of older people. Doubt and distrust come later, casting their icy chill upon the heart. The child believes not only everything but everybody. It has, of course, to learn that not every statement is true, not every man or woman worthy of confidence, but the sweet and simple trustfulness of little children not only touches the heart of every one who observes it, but tends to make those toward whom it is shown worthy of the confidence which is thus reposed in them. Few things reveal a brutal and vicious nature more clearly than willingness to deceive a little child. No one in this world is wise or strong or good enough to be worthy of such implicit trust, but there is One above us on whom we can thus

rely with an absolute faith. And this surely must have been one of the things which the Lord had in mind, when He said that except we become as little children we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.

Another element in the beauty of childhood is its still unsullied purity. It is hard to look into the face of a child and retain one's faith in original sin. Of course, there are in all children capacities of evil and tendencies toward it, which will not be slow in revealing themselves, as there are forces of destruction slumbering in the softest summer air. But, as a lover of little children has said, "Fallen though we are, there remains a purity, modesty, ingenuousness, and tenderness of conscience about childhood, that looks as if the glory of Eden yet lingered over it, like the light of even on the hilltops when the sun is down." Innocent, at all events, a little child still is, of the evil which is around it in the world. Alas, that it must ever come to know how great and how dark it is! What a responsibility rests upon a parent for keeping, so far as human power can, the mind and soul of a child from contact with what is base and vile! What a responsibility rests upon society at large, for the preservation, not merely of the physical, but of the moral health of children! It is not only one of the most sacred things on earth, it is also a purifying influence in the sphere of life in which it is observed. It tends to keep those around

it pure. How many a man has been restrained by it from evil deeds that he was tempted to commit! There is a sentence in Juvenal which expresses a thought which was rare in antiquity, but is common enough now. "The greatest reverence," he says, "is due to a boy. If you are making ready for anything base, do not despise the years of the child, but let your infant son stand in the way of the sin about to be committed." The purity of children not only hinders the commission of sin, it has a thousand times led to the reformation of those already hardened by it. Thankful indeed ought we to be for the moral influence which they unconsciously exert. "God sends them to us," says Mary Howitt, "for another purpose than merely to keep up the race. He sends them to enlarge our hearts, to make us unselfish and full of kindly affections and sympathies, to give our souls higher aims, to call out all our faculties, to extend enterprise and exertion, to bring around our fire-sides bright faces and happy smiles and loving, tender hearts. My soul praises the great Father every day that He has gladdened the earth with little children."

These last words remind us, for another thing, that it is the little child who leads the household and who makes the home. There are, indeed, beautiful homes which are not brightened by the presence of children. Yet there is truth in the quaint sentence of Southey, who says that "a

house is never perfectly furnished for enjoyment unless there is a child in it rising three years old, and a kitten rising three weeks." "Tell me not," says another writer, "of the trim, precisely arranged homes, where there are no children, where, as the Germans say, 'the fly-traps always hang straight on the wall.' Tell me not of the never-disturbed nights and days, of the tranquil, un-anxious hearts where children are not." These are not the homes in which the truest happiness is found. It is a simple matter of history that houses were first built for the shelter of children. Men and women can bear exposure and hardship which would be fatal to a child. But the tender child-life makes necessary the hut in which the savage lives, and out of which has grown, by natural evolution, every building that man has erected on the earth. Palaces, castles, stately and splendid cathedrals are but later developments of the thought which found its first expression in a roof of boughs and a wall of mud. The necessities of childhood have thus led to all the various architecture of the world. But it is true also that morally even more than physically, it is the little child who makes the home. In him the home-life centres. It is adjusted to his physical and intellectual wants, to his protection and care, and to his preparation for the activities of future years. The little life which cannot provide for itself, which cannot prepare itself for the career which is before it, not merely

awakens love, but compels and directs the activity of those to whose loving care it is entrusted. And all this directly affects and even determines the character of the parent as well as that of the child. It is not merely true, as Lord Bacon says, that "he that hath wife and children hath given hostages to fortune"; but the various needs and claims of our children determine in great measure what we shall do, and so decide what we shall be. It is the little child that leads the household.

In some measure also it leads the state. We all know in what manner the ancient state regarded and treated the child; how it placed in the hands of the parent absolute power of life and death; how it ruthlessly exposed the sickly and deformed; how it left the others to be educated among slaves, and to adopt the ideas and manners and vices of slaves; how it regarded even their death as a matter of unconcern. Contrast with all this the provisions made in modern communities for the welfare of the little child. Think of the care which the state gives to its mental training as well as its physical life; how it protects the child by stringent laws against cruelty and neglect on the part of the parent; how it provides asylums for the destitute and the orphan, and hospitals for the care of children exclusively, from the very earliest moments of life. Of course the power which has wrought this immense change in the temper and attitude of the state toward the child is chiefly the

Christian religion; and if that religion had accomplished nothing else in the world, it would for this alone deserve our honor and gratitude. "Institutions of beneficence," as Dr. Storrs has said, "for the shelter and nurture of children, such as had not been known in the world till the power of Christianity began to be felt, are now common in the countries which Christianity has blessed; while the Church, inspired by the words and the action of Him whom it accepts as Master, regulates its worship, constructs its buildings, invents or applies new forms of art, creates a new literature, to minister to children." The ancient prophecy is thus again fulfilled, and the little child leads the state as well as the household. And all this is done not merely from motives of self-preservation. The state is prompted by a more humane and a more spiritual purpose, in thus assuming and extending the office of the parent. One of the highest functions which modern governments exercise is that of opening to every child within their limits the avenues of knowledge and of that power which knowledge gives.

These thoughts spring naturally and freshly to mind at each recurring Christmas season. For the influence of childhood on the thought and life of the world is largely due to the teachings of Jesus. He was, as has been justly said, "the first great teacher of men who showed a genuine sympathy for childhood. He was perhaps the only teacher

of antiquity who cared for childhood, as such. Plato treats of children and their games, but he treats them as elements not to be left out in constructing society. They are not to be neglected because they will inevitably come to be men and women. But Jesus was the first who loved childhood for the sake of childhood. The ancients esteemed it their first duty to put away childish things, but Jesus in seeking to bring about a new and higher development of character, perceived that there were elements of character in childhood which were to be preserved in the highest manhood. He saw that a man must indeed set back again toward the simplicity and innocence of childhood, if he would be truly a man. Until Jesus Christ, the world had little place for childhood in its thoughts. When He said, 'Of such is the kingdom of heaven,' it was a revelation."

And yet it is not merely in this general way that Isaiah's prophecy has been fulfilled. There has been on earth one little child toward whom the thoughts of the world turn as they do not to any other, and who has led it to the highest and most precious things which it has yet attained. It is a fact as glorious as it is full of mystery, that God, becoming incarnate in the world, should have entered human life in the person of the Babe of Bethlehem, and the Boy of Nazareth. That little child around whose rude bed the shepherds gathered, while over it the angels sang their Christmas hymn, leads us

at once to new thoughts of God. How wonderful was His condescension, in thus taking upon Him our nature, not in its greatness but in its weakness, not in the maturity of its powers but in the utter helplessness of infancy! How thoroughly did He thus identify Himself with humanity, passing through all the stages of human growth and experience, from infancy to manhood, from the manger to the cross! What consecration is given to all our homes by the presence of the Son of God in the humble home of the Nazarene carpenter! What a supreme benediction has come upon motherhood from her to whom this priceless gift of God was sent! How all infancy is set hereafter in a sacredness, which makes forever impossible the indifference and cruelty which were shown toward it in the centuries which preceded the advent of Christ! If the Lord had come from heaven to earth in a chariot of cloud or fire, and had first appeared as a man moving about among men, He would not have so glorified our human nature, as when He assumed it in the unconsciousness and helplessness of infancy, and carried it forward through childhood to youth, and through youth to manhood, coming thus into closest relation with every successive period of life. The old church-father Irenæus shows that the spirit of Christmas-day was not unknown even in the second century, when he says of the Lord that "He sanctified every age by that period corresponding to it which

belonged to Himself. For He came to save all by means of Himself,—all, I say, who through Him are born again to God,—infants and children, and boys, and young men and old men. He therefore passed through every age, becoming an infant for infants, thus sanctifying infancy; a child for children, thus sanctifying this age; being at the same time made to all an example of piety, righteousness and submission.”

And so, for another thing, the childhood of Jesus leads us to see what childhood should always be. We have indeed no record of the boyhood and youth that were passed in the rude and perhaps squalid village among the mountains of Galilee, where Jesus grew up. And yet we are hardly more sure of what His manhood was, than of what His childhood must have been. It must have been pure, it must have been gentle, it must have been loving and helpful. It cannot have been lacking in courage. It was certainly marked by filial obedience. There was in it the same firm resistance of evil which was manifest in later years. It did not disdain or shirk the humblest duties belonging to a life of toil. It won the love of brothers and sisters, of neighbors and friends; and with the growing sense of the great career appointed for Him by His Father in heaven, for thirty years this young man of Nazareth was willing to be known only as the carpenter's son. All beautiful traits of boyhood and youth were certainly collected and

embodied in Him. And so the silent years of obscurity and of growth become not less suggestive to us than the years of public activity which followed them. He who has given to the world its only type of a perfect manhood, has reminded us as well of what childhood may be.

Another thing which instantly follows from this, as a practical lesson of the childhood of Jesus, is that no little child is too young to be a Christian. It may perhaps seem to those of you who are children, as if you could not copy the example of the great Teacher and Prophet, who wrought so many miracles and said so many wonderful things. But think of Him as He was in the home of Joseph and Mary; a little child, a growing boy, a youth engaged in His earthly father's business, as well as in that of His Father in heaven; diligent, truthful, loving and faithful; pure in thought and feeling and purpose; and remember that He was once at precisely the same age at which you now are, and if you follow the child Jesus, you too will deserve to be called His disciple. Put yourself, as it were, even now in His company; grow up with Him as the years add themselves to one another in your life, and it may be that you will never know when you became a Christian, because you will always have been His companion and friend.

Another thing which is suggested to us by this train of reflection, and which each return of the Christmas time should impress on us anew, is the

duty of looking after and saving the children. The work that we do, or try to do, for the moral and spiritual reformation of men and women around us, is often discouraging and apparently fruitless ; but work done for the young never fails of its reward. And here is our hope, our one hope, of reforming society and bringing the world under the power of Christian truth. An impression for good or for evil made on the mind of a little child, is never effaced. "In our great museums," as a well-known English writer says, "you see stone slabs with the marks of rain that fell hundreds of years before Adam lived, and the footprint of some wild bird that passed over the beach in those old, old times. The passing shower and the light foot left their prints on the soft sediment. Then ages went on and it has hardened into stone. And there they remain and will remain forevermore. That is like a man's spirit ; in the childish days so soft, so susceptible to all impressions, so joyous to receive new ideas, treasuring them up, gathering them all into itself, retaining them all forever. And then as years go on, habit, the growth of the soul into steadiness and power, and many other reasons beside, gradually make us less and less capable of being profoundly and permanently influenced by anything outside of us, so that the process from childhood to manhood is a process of getting less impressible." "There is little hope," says an old writer, "of children who are educated wickedly.

If the dye have been in the wool, it is hard to get it out of the cloth." This lesson is certainly too obvious to be mistaken. If we are to extend the kingdom of the Master in the world, we must seek first of all to bring the children under its light and power.

And finally, there comes to us from the manger at Bethlehem and from the home at Nazareth, the clearest possible revelation of the true spirit of the Christian religion. It seems as if Jesus Himself had become a little child in order to give emphasis to His own later teaching concerning the absolute necessity of the childlike spirit in those who would become members of His kingdom. He came at an age in the life of the world which appears in some respects childish in comparison with that in which we live. But His words and His influence were not for that day only, they were for all time. Now, as of old, he who would see the kingdom of God, must be born again and enter it as a little child. He who would do the work of God in the world, must do it with the singleness of faith and of purpose which are characteristic of childhood. The highest attainment which can be made in Christian character on earth, under the training of God's truth and His Spirit, is the recovery, as life draws near its end, of the purity which marked its beginning. And when we enter the kingdom overhead, if we ever do enter it, it will be as when a little child is born into an earthly home. It will be the entrance

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upon a life full of wonder and mystery, a life of growth, a life of ever-advancing knowledge, a life unfolding beneath the Father's eye, in the safe and loving shelter of the Father's house.

THE NECESSITY OF IMMORTALITY

This mortal must put on immortality.—I COR.
xv. 53.

XII

THE NECESSITY OF IMMORTALITY

IT is not altogether easy to follow the apostle's argument in this magnificent chapter. We do not even commonly feel its force as an argument, so powerful is it as a revelation of things which the human mind had never before conceived. And yet it is an argument, designed to prove that the life of man must be continued under new conditions, in other spheres, beyond the grave.

Our belief in such a life awaiting us rests on various considerations. We find it, for one thing, an almost universal belief among mankind; and we justly argue that what men have always and everywhere accepted as true, cannot be a total illusion. We find within ourselves a more or less distinct anticipation of a life that is to follow death. It is contrary, indeed, to all the testimony which comes to us through our senses. No clear evidence of it may ever have been presented to our minds. It is often extremely difficult to make it real to our thought, and we feel the force of the arguments which tend to disprove it. Yet there are very few of us who would be ready to say that they do not believe in it. The expectation of it does not seem to be due to inheritance and early training, or to the influence of the faith of those around us on

ourselves. It seems rather to be innate within us, to be instinctive in our souls ; and we cannot think that there is actually nothing which corresponds to it,—that it is a deceptive dream.

On the contrary, if our deepest and most persistent feelings will not permit us to accept annihilation as our destiny, our reason also seems to demand another life, by which the evident incompleteness of the present shall be rounded out, its mysteries solved, and its contradictions reconciled. There would seem to be no order or intelligence in the course of earthly affairs ; it would appear reasonable to question the wisdom and goodness and the moral government of God, if processes that are here begun are not elsewhere carried forward, and if evil which is so often triumphant in this world is not in another conquered by good. And then, receiving the Bible, as we do, as the word of God, intended to reveal to us what we cannot discover for ourselves, we find the truth of immortality shining, faintly indeed but really, from the pages of the Old Testament, and giving a celestial splendor to the pages of the New. A future life is not only implied in the teaching of the Lord and His apostles, it is distinctly asserted by them. Some things are told us in regard to it which, if we respect their authority, we must accept as true. No one who believes the Christian Scriptures can doubt that the life begun in this world is continued in the world unseen.

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But in this wonderful chapter of St. Paul's epistle, which is so often read in that solemn moment in which we bid farewell to those whom death has taken from us, to which we so often turn for consolation and for light in the hour of sore bereavement, and which was so evidently written under an inspiration from above,—in this most remarkable passage of all his writings, a very different reason is given for the belief in a life beyond the grave. "This mortal must put on immortality," he says. And why "must"? Because another life is necessary to the completion of the work of Christ. The relation of every believer to his Saviour, St. Paul declares, implies development; the work of Christ within him is not completed when he has given himself to Christ and has accepted Christ as his Redeemer and Lord. It is then only begun. The germ of a new life is implanted in his soul, and that life is destined to develop, until finally his whole nature shall be renewed and his assimilation to Christ be perfect. But this does not take place, it cannot take place, within the limits of the present life. It requires another life beyond the grave. It involves a change in the conditions and mode of existence, by which the fetters of the flesh shall be cast off, and a larger career be opened to the emancipated spirit. With the beginnings of this great change we are all familiar. We are conscious of them as they take place within ourselves. It is followed by a gradual and steady growth toward the

image of Him whose name we bear and whose Spirit is at work within us. And now the apostle says that this development is not arrested by death. It goes forward forever. But its future progress is determined by its present tendency. It is like the growths of the natural world,—a development within the limits of kind. And for its completion it requires not merely that the soul should be immortal, but that the whole man—body, soul, and spirit—should be translated from this world to another, where his progress may be unhindered and unending. When this is realized, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, “Death is swallowed up in victory.” The work for the sake of which the Son of God became incarnate will be fully accomplished. For this reason it is that “this corruptible must put on incorruption and this mortal must put on immortality”; not because the life of the human soul is indestructible, or because it is fragmentary and imperfect within the limits of the present world, but because that which Christ has undertaken to do for it cannot be done except as its existence is continued into the long ages of the future.

I have no intention of attempting to follow out into its details this great argument of the apostle. It is certainly worthy, as an argument, to be most thoughtfully pondered, and I am persuaded that its force is often missed even by those who are most familiar with his words and who have derived the

greatest comfort from them. But there are certainly one or two thoughts suggested by his course of reasoning which might well find a permanent place in all our minds.

The first of them is this: that in order to gain any true understanding of our own nature, of the purposes and experiences of the present life, and of the destiny awaiting us hereafter, it is necessary that we should clearly apprehend the nature and the office of the Lord Jesus Christ. The tendency of Christian thought at the present day is to dwell largely on His humanity. Christ as a teacher, as an example, as a sympathizing friend, as a patient sufferer, as the greatest, wisest, and most lovely of mankind,—so it is that we perhaps most often regard Him. It is most comforting and helpful thus to be able to see Jesus as He was seen by those who walked at His side and sat at His feet and wept in helpless sorrow under the shadow of His cross. It has no doubt done much to bring Christian theology out of the realm of abstract speculation, and to make it a living reality. It has made us feel afresh the surpassing beauty of a holy life. It has taught us priceless lessons of sympathy with one another, while it has encouraged us to go to Him for forgiveness and for help, with the same trustful confidence which He awakened among the suffering and the sinful whom He healed and pardoned. We cannot possibly get too near to the Christ of the gospels. We cannot possibly lay too

strong an emphasis on the fact that He took our nature upon Him, and that He was in all points tempted as we ourselves are tempted now. Never again, as long as time lasts, can the world lose sight of the man Christ Jesus.

And yet it is a very striking fact that the greatest of the apostles, the chief interpreter and exponent and champion of the Christian religion, says very little about the earthly life and about the human nature of our Lord. What he saw in Him chiefly was the fulness of the godhead. He was to him the Son of God sent down from heaven. He came in all the glory of His divine nature and dwelt for a little while among us. He came to reveal the Father's heart; He came to do the Father's will; He came to recover and restore the lost children of His Father, and to reëstablish in their obedient souls His Father's just authority. His life and death were the expression of the self-sacrificing love of God. And by giving Himself for the redemption of the world, He made Himself the King of the world. His presence among men was not an incident in their history, it was the fulfilment of God's eternal purpose. And His departure from the world was not the end of His connection with it. It was His exaltation to the throne of sovereign authority and power. King of the world, Lord of angels and men,—by virtue of His essential oneness with His Father and of His atoning life and death,—such was Christ as St. Paul con-

ceived of Him, or rather, as He had revealed Himself to His apostle. And that conception of Christ was the central fact in St. Paul's philosophy of history. It was the key which unlocked for him the secrets of the future. When he wrote, "Of Him and through Him and unto Him are all things," he showed us plainly in what relation Christ stood before his mind to the history of the past, and to the still unenacted history of the ages to come. Everything in heaven and on earth revolved about and centred in the Lord Jesus Christ. If apart from Him nothing could be accomplished, apart from Him nothing could be understood.

Now it hardly needs to be said that this is a much grander and truer way than the other to think of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is undoubtedly the way in which He thought of Himself. It is the way in which He was believed in and worshiped and trusted by those to whom the founding of His church on earth was committed. And it is the way in which He has made Himself known to the noblest and most truly inspired souls in every age. He who has this exalted thought of the character, person, and office of the Lord, can alone understand what was done on earth in anticipation of His coming, and what He has Himself been doing through the continuing activity of His Spirit among men. The history of the past is a hopeless tangle except as you see one increasing purpose running through it, and recognize that purpose as

the redemption of the world from the power of evil by the cross and the Spirit of Christ. The tumultuous movements of mankind at the present hour have no more meaning than the tossing of an angry sea, except as you recognize the working out by means of them of the same mighty and gracious plan. Here is the solution of the mysteries by which we are so often baffled in our own personal experience,—the disappointments and sorrows which sometimes take the joy and hope out of our souls. And here is the only possible clue to the unsolved problems that confront us, and the only sure basis of hope for the future welfare of mankind. Christ over all, everywhere active, everywhere working for the gracious end which brought Him from the heavens to the earth,—this is the one transcendent fact in the history of mankind, as it is now going forward and is to go forward forever. Small events as well as great ones are explained by it. Humble lives as well as splendid ones are rich or poor according to their relation to it. And he only is competent to judge of what has taken place in the past and is taking place to-day, or to forecast the yet unrealized future, who sees that the supreme force by which the life of the race has hitherto been guided and its future destiny is yet to be determined is the sovereign will of Him who was once suspended on the cross and to whom now all authority both in heaven and on earth is given.

Another thought suggested by the apostle's words

is this : that the spiritual life of men is one of continuous development, and that that development, begun here on earth, is to go on forever. It is not very many years since the Christian world was startled and alarmed by the proclamation of the theory of evolution. Men looked at one another in dismay, and said, "If it is true, then the authority of the Bible is destroyed, the Christian religion must be given up." And with the utmost vehemence they maintained that it could not be true. A calmer temper and a more just discernment in regard to the matter now prevail among us. Scientific thinkers with few exceptions have adopted the theory, and Christian thinkers have discovered that it not only does not contradict the teachings of the Bible, but furnishes new evidence of the power, wisdom, and goodness of God. And yet while all this hot discussion was going on, we had, and were reading every day, in this fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians the most impressive and the most daring statement of the law of evolution which has ever been put into words. "That which thou sowest is not quickened except it die ; and that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body which shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat or of some other grain ; but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him, and to every seed his own body." This is the process of development in nature—the evolution of the plant and the flower from the seed, within the limit of

species, under the operation of the ever-present energy of God. The apostle might have gone on to point out other applications of the same principle, in the development of higher types of life from lower ones, in the animal and vegetable world, within similar limits and under the same vivifying power. He might have applied it to society, and then we should have had from him a statement of the great principle of social evolution, by which the race has been gradually elevated and the civilization of mankind advanced. He does not do this, but he does more than this. He applies it to the moral and spiritual life of men. He asserts that this is the law under which each of us is living, and by virtue of which each of us is to come at last to the fulness of his destiny. Out of the germ implanted by God's Spirit in your soul and mine a new life springs, which cannot attain its full completeness until the bonds by which it is now imprisoned have been burst by death and it gains the freedom of higher spheres for its unlimited and endless progress. As clearly as anything can be stated, this is what St. Paul maintains in this most sublime passage of his writings. It is not merely that this world is too small and time too short for the activity of such a being as the incarnate Son of God. It is that the earth is too small and time too short for the full development of the spiritual nature which every man possesses. If Christ needs eternity for the accomplishment of His work,

we too need eternity for the attainment of all that we are designed to reach. Like the seed which bursts its hard envelope, that the life within it may unfold itself in a new and nobler form, so these bodies of ours must be cast off that the life in us may come to completer exhibition and to a more glorious development. And all this reveals the operation of the same divine Spirit from which all life proceeds. This is the method of God's working in nature, in society, and in the personal experience of every one of us. One great divine law is over the whole creation. It is this law, the mere name of which sometimes alarms us, of the development of the higher from the lower, until the highest possibility shall be at last attained. And the death of the lower is incidental to this—an essential condition of it. It is not the end of life, it is the opening of the door into a larger, nobler life. The apostle Paul was of course a stranger to the scientific knowledge, as well as to the scientific theories, of modern days; but this great truth he clearly saw, and in this wonderful passage he states it with equal boldness and power.

One other thing, which I have already hinted at, is plainly taught us in these words. It is that the development of the human spirit in the life awaiting it hereafter is along the lines which it has been pursuing during its career on earth. We often think of death as changing everything, not only the outward conditions of life but its essential char-

acter. We expect it to have a sort of magical effect upon us, transforming what was low and base into something pure and perfect. It cannot be so, if this doctrine of development is true. "There is a natural body," says St. Paul, "and there is a spiritual body. That was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterward that which is spiritual. As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. The dead shall be raised, incorruptible, and we shall be changed." Yes, but we shall still be ourselves. It is *this* corruptible which must put on incorruption, and *this* mortal which must put on immortality. "To every seed its own body." The life of the world to come is the same life that is in us now, expanded, exalted, made immortal. The character which we are to manifest forever is that which is formed within us and revealed by us here on earth. If it were not so, then this present life would stand in no relation to the life beyond the grave. If it were not so, there would have been no reason why the Lord Jesus Christ should come to this world and should suffer and die here. The cross might as well have been set up on the other side of the river of death. If it were not so, there would be no reason why the gospel should be preached to living men. It might just as well be preached to disembodied spirits, if it is not the life we are now living which determines the condition and the character of the life which is to come. It

is a tremendous fact, but it is a fact, that we are in eternity already. We are already started on that career which is to have no end. As our faces are now set, so we are forever to travel,—upward or downward, toward God or away from Him, toward ever loftier heights of purity and happiness, or ever deeper depths of sin and shame. This mortal must put on immortality; and such as this mortal now is, such will its immortality be. There is no promise of any moral reformation in death. For death only touches the body. It cannot change the immortal spirit. Not when we have passed out of earthly conditions, but here and now, is the question of our eternal destiny decided.

It sometimes seems as if the fact that this mortal must put on immortality, sooner or later, and perhaps very soon, made our present life a thing of little consequence. Why should we care very much what we do or do not do, what we gain or lose, what we enjoy or suffer, when at any moment we are liable to pass out of this brief existence into that which will never end? Yes, it is true that this earthly life is of little consequence compared with the life everlasting. If you are straining every nerve to make money, to obtain power over your fellow-men, to secure new opportunities of enjoyment, to gain a social position which you can keep only for a few years at the utmost, it is not worth while, in view of the fact that your true life is not on this side of the grave but on the other. It is

not worth while to suffer yourself to be tormented by envy of those who are more fortunate than you are ; or to be filled with anger and hatred toward those who have treated you ill ; or to be discouraged by difficulties, or restive under restraints, or morose or petulant under disappointment, or heart-broken under great affliction. Remember that this mortal must soon put on immortality, and that then all these things will be forever left behind. What do you care now for the trials which seemed so intolerable when you were a child ? When you become an immortal, you will think and care still less about a thousand things which now engross your mind and oppress your spirit. In this sense the present life is of small account compared with that which is to come.

But on the other hand, it is of inconceivable consequence in view of its relation to the future life, when you remember that what you are now doing determines your character, and that your character determines your destiny. Even trifling acts thus acquire immense significance. It is because we so constantly forget that we are laying the foundations on which we are to build forever ; that we are sowing the seeds of a harvest which we are to reap in the centuries to come,—it is because we forget this that we suffer ourselves to be so absorbed with things that do not profit, and so indifferent to the claims of duty and of God. O that we might remember, as our life goes on from day to day, as we

move about among our fellow-men, as we go to our business and return to our homes, as one by one we meet the temptations and the opportunities which come crowding upon us hour by hour,—O that we might say to ourselves from time to time: “I too must put on immortality. This is not life; it is only the preparation for life. I am a child at school. The career assigned me, the work I am to do, lies all before me. How soon I must take it up I do not know. But I do know that I am soon to put on immortality. I am to stand with those who have passed over their earthly course before me and have now entered into life. I am to see God. I am to appear in the presence of Christ. I am to be admitted to the society of the pure and blessed spirits who are already living the immortal life. How may I fit myself to join them? How may I become worthy to share in the service in which they are engaged? God help me to do this day’s work aright! God shield me from the temptations to evil by which I shall otherwise be surely overcome, so that when the hour strikes for my entrance upon the life awaiting me, I may be ready for the summons, and be prepared to leave what is mortal behind me, and to go forth to an immortality of peace and joy!”

Then, if the truth which is brought before us in these words of the apostle is fitted to impress us with the sense of the solemnity and sacredness of life, it also enables us to understand the reason

why the Lord Jesus Christ should come into this world and here lay down His life for its redemption. The gospel sometimes seems to us so mysterious and wonderful as to be beyond belief. It is, indeed, quite impossible that men should have invented such a story and have wrought out for themselves upon the basis of it a religion of such scope and grandeur and spiritual power. And yet we sometimes say to ourselves, "Do I really believe, can I really believe, that Jesus of Nazareth was in truth the Son of God; that God Himself was willing to take my nature on Him, and to suffer and die for my salvation?" We could not believe it if this life were all. It would be incredible if the only result to be accomplished by it were the deliverance of men from the evils by which they are now afflicted, or even the establishment of a purer and happier social life among them while the earth continues to be their home. But when you remember that each and every one of them is an immortal being with an endless existence before him, with possibilities of an unlimited development into the likeness of the Son of God, then it is easy to understand how the heart of God should have longed to rescue and save them, and how Christ should have been willing to leave His place amidst the heavenly glory and submit to the agony and shame of Calvary. If the grandeur of Christ's nature and office was the ground of the apostle's firm assurance concerning the life beyond the

grave, on the other hand the fact of the life beyond the grave makes it possible for us to receive, with believing and adoring hearts, the revelation of divine love and mercy which is made to us in His cross.

There is surely no little comfort and encouragement in this great truth for those who are conscious of the weakness and imperfectness of the character which they at present show. How many of us are there who are not often burdened by the fact that we come so far short of the standard at which we are aiming, and that our progress toward it is so fitful and so slow? "Is it worth while," we sometimes ask ourselves, "to struggle on, when we have thus far made so little progress and when the goal of our hearts' desires is still so distant?" Ah! but let us remember that we have yet to put on immortality. The work which Christ has undertaken to do for us, is not to be accomplished here. For its fulfilment we must wait till He shall summon us to the spheres of life into which He Himself has passed. There, by and by, we shall receive the answer to our prayers, we shall attain the fulfilment of our hopes. As we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. Not only all sin, but all imperfection, will be left behind. We shall see Him, we shall be like Him, and we shall be satisfied.

And here is the motive for unwearied, self-denying, lifelong labor for the salvation of our fellow-

men,—the motive of all missionary work, the motive of all humane and Christian activity. Not merely is it a blessed thing to relieve the present misery of those who are in need; to teach them and help them to make life purer, brighter, and richer in enjoyment; not merely does he deserve well of mankind, who does anything to promote the progress of the world in knowledge, happiness, and virtue. The great motive which appeals to us as Christians, as disciples of the one divine Master, as those who hold the faith which was so splendidly maintained by the apostle Paul,—the great motive of Christian fidelity and zeal is in the fact that our fellow-men, as well as we, are immortal beings, for whom the life of this world is to be followed by an endless life in worlds beyond. It is well to have a care for men's bodies, but the soul is of infinitely greater value than the body. And the greatest need of men to-day, in our own land and in heathen lands, is such a knowledge of God as will renew their souls and awaken in them a true spiritual life. It is on moral and religious truth that all civilization rests, and we are trying to erect a building without a foundation, when we undertake to civilize or elevate our fellow-men without imparting to them the truth, as it has come to us by the lips and life of Jesus Christ. Let us not forget this in our work among the needy and ignorant at our own doors. Let us not forget it when the call comes to help in sending the gospel to the other

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side of the globe. We are dealing with immortal beings who, even while we are speaking of them and praying for them, are swiftly passing to the judgment-seat of God. We cannot be too prompt, we cannot be too earnest, in our efforts to carry or to send to them the message of God's grace in Jesus Christ. In that lies the secret of life in the best and highest sense,—a noble, useful, happy life on earth, and a life of glory, honor, and immortality beyond the grave.

THE PLACE AND THE WAY

And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto Him, Lord, we know not whither Thou goest, and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way . . . no man cometh unto the Father but by Me.—JOHN xiv. 4-6.

XIII

THE PLACE AND THE WAY

WE are naturally jealous of many of the changes which have been made in the Revised Version of the New Testament, especially in those passages which, like this chapter and the following chapters of St. John's gospel, are peculiarly familiar and dear to all Christian hearts. It seems almost a sacrilege to touch a letter, to disturb the rhythmic cadence of a phrase, even in our English translation of them, which has come to have a sacredness of its own, in addition to that which belongs to the original words, from the tender and hallowed associations with which it is invested through the reverent use of centuries.

And yet even in these most precious portions of God's word, a change in the rendering cannot but be accepted and welcomed when it brings out more clearly an important thought which the former version had obscured, or represents a truer reading of the original text, where it has in some way become corrupted. Thus in beginning His last discourse to His disciples, it is almost certain that our Lord did not say, "Ye believe in God; believe also in Me," as if their confidence in Him were to be added to or derived from that reverence for

Jehovah which was felt by every Jew. It was the want of a true belief in God, as their Father and His own, that had caused the sorrow with which their hearts were filled. And therefore His command is, "Believe in God, and believe in Me, as the manifestation of God, and let not your hearts be troubled."

In the words which almost immediately follow these, the error lies not in the translation but in two words which have crept into the text and which in the judgment of the best modern authorities should be removed from it. Their removal gives a new force and beauty to the passage, and as it now stands, it suggests an important and practical train of thought. As it appears in our Bibles it shows us one of the disciples flatly contradicting the Lord. Jesus says, "Whither I go ye know," and Thomas answers, "We know not whither Thou goest." He had supposed that the Messiah, when He came, was to abide forever on the earth, to restore the kingdom to Israel, to re-establish the throne of David at Jerusalem, and to extend His sway over all the nations. But Christ had told them that He must go away, and that they could not follow Him at once. He had spoken to them of a home, which He had called His Father's house, in which were many dwelling-places, where He would prepare a place for them and into which by and by He would receive them. And He adds, "Whither I go ye know

the way." He does not say "Ye know whither I am going," for that, as Thomas testifies, they did not know. But the way was plain to them, though the point to which it led was still beyond their sight. Then it is that the slow and cautious mind of the disciple, lingering bewildered over the picture of a royal palace far away, so different from that which his fancy had painted as the future home of the Messiah, replies, "But Lord, we do not even know whither Thou art going; how then do we know the way? First tell us plainly where Thy future abode shall be, and then perchance we may discover the path which will lead us also to it." There is at once instruction and reproof in our Lord's reply, "O thou honest but narrow soul, hast thou not learned that I am the way? I came forth from the Father, and I am going again to the Father. That is all ye need to know, and ye would have known it, if ye had known Me for what I am. To be with the Father is heaven for Me, for you, for every human soul, and no man cometh unto the Father but by Me. The fulness of meaning that My words contain, it is not in human power to conceive. No mortal eye hath seen or can see the glories that are reserved for the children of God. Not upon any earthly hills, shadowed by clouds and swept by storms, do the walls and towers of the New Jerusalem stand in their divine strength and beauty. And not even in thought can ye follow Me now to

that realm of joy and peace which is so soon to open its gates of pearl to My ascending spirit. It is enough for you to know that it is My Father's house. He is its light and life and glory, and wherever He is, there is heaven. To Him even now ye may draw near through Me, and through Me alone. Cease then from your idle and vain inquiry, 'Whither goest thou?' and let not your hearts be troubled, because though ye know not whither I am going, ye know that I am the way."

The question of Thomas is one which it is natural for us all to ask. Our lips shape themselves more easily to the word "Whither?" than to the word "How?" We too are apt to ask it, as he did, concerning what we call the future world, the world beyond the grave. We carry the idea of space, which is so inwrought into all our thinking, and the material conditions with which we are now so familiar, into our reveries and our speculations concerning the life of the soul hereafter. We are accustomed to think of heaven as a place far above us and far before us, and our curious minds vex themselves with the endeavor to bring it near and make it real to our thought. We strive to form some definite image of the spiritual body, which is appropriate to it, and of the activities and enjoyments which belong to that higher realm of being. We try to follow the vanished forms of those who have gone from us into the eternal silence, and to imagine the scenes amid which they are now mov-

ing. How often, as we have stood by the bedside of one who was dying, while the winter storm was beating against the windows of the hushed and darkened room, have we thought with a shudder of the long and lonely journey that lay before the gentle soul, which was, as we are wont to say, about to take its flight. Somewhere in the vague realms of air above us, beyond the clouds, beyond the stars, but O, how far from our aching hearts, is the city that hath imperishable foundations, the ever-blooming Paradise of God. There, we are sure, they are at rest, whose earthly toil and strife are over; their feet have touched the golden threshold, their eyes have seen the King in His beauty, their voices are chiming in the seraphic song. But O, if the mists that surround us could be parted for an instant, so that we might once more behold them and know whither they have gone! And so when we think of that last hour, which is so certainly and so swiftly drawing near to each of us, when we too must leave the places and the friends that we have known so well, and go forth into the silent land, how eagerly we long for some more precise knowledge of that which we are there to find! Shall we pass at once to the house not made with hands, when this frail earthly tent is broken up? Or shall the departing spirit wander off, like some lonely bird, higher and higher through the cold and empty spaces of the universe, till at last it sees in the distance above it the far-shining

splendors of its celestial mansion, and folds its weary wings in the safe shelter of the immortal home! The fear of death by which many Christian hearts are haunted, is not the fear that they shall fall under the displeasure of God and be banished from His presence; they are confident of His forgiving mercy and love. It is the natural dread of the mystery which involves the beginning of the future life; the dread of the passage from one world to the other; the timidity which springs from the belief that there is a vast interval between them, and that the soul at death must traverse this, not knowing whither it is going.

But all such fears arise, it seems to me, from a false conception of the spiritual world. We forget that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" and that the familiar imagery which we use in describing it, which pictures it to us as a new earth, and not something wholly different from the earth, is only misleading if it is literally understood. There can hardly be an error more complete than when men fix upon some distant star and say, "There is heaven," or imagine that in the ages of the future this rocky ball on which we now are living is to be purified by fire and made the eternal home of the spirits of the blessed. If the spiritual world is composed of material elements, like the visible universe which now surrounds us, then there is a sharply defined boundary between them, and the one ends at least where the other

begins. Two material bodies or systems of bodies certainly cannot occupy the same space, and heaven cannot encroach upon earth. Then we must pass beyond the orbits of Saturn and of Sirius, beyond the faintest fleck of light that shines in the misty nebula of Orion, before we can reach the sapphire walls and enter through the pearly gates to the glory that no mortal eye hath seen. Then there is before our souls an inconceivably long and desolate journey, and the spirits of those whom we have lost are removed to an immeasurable distance from us.

But did it never occur to you, when you have had such views of heaven, when you have shrunk back in dismay from the shore of that dim and unknown sea on which you also must by and by launch out into the darkness,—did it never occur to you that if these thoughts are true, you have shut out God from the universe in which His children are now dwelling? “Heaven is,” said Jesus, “My Father’s house; I am going to the Father.” Its glory and its joy are in the manifested presence of God, in the unclouded vision of His face, in perfect and immortal sympathy with Him. It is not a region of sensuous delights, a garden whose flowers never fade, a temple whose worship never ceases. The sea of glass that is mingled with fire, the song of the hundred and forty-four thousand, the tree of life whose leaves are for the healing of the nations—it is all a magnificent, inspired sym-

bolism, to lift our thought to a higher state of being, in which the glorified human spirit shall come into a new and near relation to the Divine Spirit. But that, and that alone, is heaven. To be with God, in constant, vivid, joyful fellowship, to lose our separate wills in His will, to be so mastered and possessed by Him that our life shall be consciously a part of His life, that He shall be in us and we in Him, so that whether we are in the body or out of the body we shall neither know nor care, because God shall be to us all in all,—that is, if we may trust the Scriptures, the essence of the heavenly felicity. It is for the human soul to enter into immediate and immortal communion with the Divine Spirit. It is to “go to the Father.”

But now with this, time and space and the laws of matter have nothing to do. It may be realized, partially at least, wherever God and the soul are found, wherever God manifests Himself to the human soul. Heaven is not a locality, to be sought somewhere beyond the boundaries of the sensible universe; it is a character, an experience, a life. And it may as well be here as anywhere,—among us and around us as well as millions of miles away. It is not a foreign country; it is a new condition. Among the material objects of which the universe is made up, whose constitutions we can analyze and whose movements we can trace, we find an invisible, impalpable, spiritual being, with capacities that are not limited by its

sensible environment, and powers whose action is not governed by physical laws. It is the immortal soul of man. And over it there is another spirit, of whose existence it alone has knowledge, to which it feels itself akin, a spirit of infinite power and purity, of light and truth, of life and grace. It cannot be discerned by the organs of sense; the eye does not behold its glory, the human ear does not hear its voice. The soul alone can apprehend it; but to the soul it is real and near. And now it is when these two spiritual beings, God and the soul, come together, in harmony and love, that the heavenly experience begins. The soul is then like a wandering star that has found its true orbit, like a wayward child that has returned to its home. It forgets, for the time, the physical conditions in which it is imprisoned, as the artist in communion even with the ideal images which are only the creatures of his fancy, may forget his hunger and poverty and pain. It has escaped from the lower and material world into the higher, spiritual sphere which is the realm in which it is fitted to dwell. The claims of the body, the exigencies of the temporal, material, visible, soon bring it back within the earthly limitations, but in such an hour it has had a foretaste of the heavenly experience. For a little time, at least, it has been "with the Father."

Now the higher and purer the character becomes, the more frequent and the more perfect becomes

this experience. The soul may gain—as some human souls have gained it—a constant sense of God's presence and love, an abiding peace, a continual communion. It must always still be incomplete, so long as the earthly prison-house detains us, so long as the earthly temptations hedge us round. Yet even here it is possible for us to live a life which is truly described as a life "in God." And the joy and peace and victory of such a life is more than the pledge, it is the literal beginning of heaven. And this, it seems to me, is what the Saviour meant when He said, "I am in the Father and the Father in Me." He was still in the world, when He uttered these words, compassed by its infirmities, burdened by its sorrows, in contact with its sin; but already, in the perfect accord of His own will with the will of God, in the free and uninterrupted communion of His spirit with the spirit of God, He was ever in "His Father's house." What then was death to Him? It was not the beginning of a long journey, in which His soul was to be borne beyond the rim of the material universe. It was merely the falling away of everything that had hindered and hampered His intercourse with God. "I am going away," He said, "because My body, through which alone I am visible to you, will soon pass from among you. But I am with the Father already, and then I shall only be more perfectly and forever with Him. Nothing will be changed to Me, except that My

soul will have shaken off the fetters of the flesh. Nothing will be changed to you, except that for a little while ye shall not see Me with your eyes or touch Me with your hands. But I am with you always, in a spiritual fellowship, and I shall by and by receive you to Myself, when the death of the body shall at last set free your souls."

And that, and nothing more, my Christian friends, is what death means to you and me. The spiritual world is not far from us, it is all around us. It is not separated by a deep abyss from the world of material objects and of physical energies; it pervades and permeates this, as the sunlight fills the air. We are in it now; it is the realm in which our souls are living. It is in it that we are brought into contact and communion with God, and become aware of His presence, as He manifests Himself not to the outward eye but to the spiritual sense. But meanwhile we are also living another life under physical conditions, in common with the beasts that perish. From this, death sets us free, and then the life of the soul goes on forever. The transition from a sphere in which sense and spirit are blended, to one which is spiritual only,—from one in which our perception of God is dim and partial to one in which it is complete,—that is what it is to die. If our souls are now in friendship and harmony with God, so that to come into perfect communion with Him is the consummation of our highest human experience, it will be to us to pass from earth to

heaven. If our souls are now at enmity with Him, so that they will shrink from Him in terror when they are no longer sheltered from Him by the barriers which now enclose them, it will be to pass from earth to hell. If there are no real walls of sapphire above the firmament, there is also no literal lake of fire. But to go thus to the Father, is heaven for one soul, and to meet God, face to face, spirit to spirit, is hell for another.

I have dwelt thus at length on this part of our Lord's teaching, because it seems to bring His doctrine of the future life into striking accord with our best thought concerning the nature of the soul. We cannot spare His figurative description of the condition of the glorified spirit hereafter. The mansions of the Father's house, the city of God, whose length and breadth and height are equal, the streets of gold, the gates that are never shut, the praising company whose robes are washed white in the blood of the Lamb,—no physical imagery is too striking or beautiful to set forth the transcendent spiritual fact. But if we ask for a clearer and more exact statement of the truth that is behind the symbol, we have it here. "I am now in the Father. My spiritual nature is even now in constant communion with Him. Yet I am going to the Father, for that which here on earth makes this communion imperfect is to pass away, and My soul will then live its own life, unhampered by the flesh. Heaven is not a place to which My emancipated spirit shall ascend ; it is

the condition in which My spirit will be found, when it is emancipated from the body; it is the purest and best of all earthly experiences consummated and made immortal; it is to be consciously and uninterruptedly and forever with God."

But if this is so, then two or three things are made very plain. The first is that the Christian soul, which already knows what it is to hold such communion with God, need have no more fear of death than it has of prayer. Not that it is in prayer only that we realize God's presence and come into sympathy with Him, but it is in prayer usually that He draws nearest us, and that our sense of His being and His love is most vivid and most joyful. It is especially in prayer that the soul seems to break away from all its earthly limitations, and stand in awe, perhaps in rapture, before the very face of the Most High. And that is why prayer is the loftiest experience which is possible for the human soul. But it is an experience which death only intensifies and perpetuates. That which is on earth occasional and partial, becomes constant and complete, and we call it heaven. It is the celestial felicity; it is the beatific vision. And if you are not afraid to lose yourself, as we say, that is to lose the consciousness of your physical surroundings, in such an overwhelming sense of God's presence, you need not be afraid to die. If such moments have been to you the moments of deepest and purest happiness, if it is then that you have seemed to live the

largest and truest life, let not your heart be troubled, for you have already stood on the threshold of your heavenly mansion, and for you to die will only be to enter in.

So too, if this is what is meant by heaven, the supreme importance of character is plain. The chief end of life is not to gain admittance, when we die, to an abode of endless happiness, to pass a certain line and feel ourselves secure. It is to acquire such a character that we shall rejoice to go to the Father, that we shall be in sympathy with Him, and find in fellowship with Him our heaven. Men sometimes say, "The descriptions of heaven which are given in the Scriptures do not attract me. The popular Christian conception of it, as a place where happy saints are forever singing hymns of praise, has no charm, no reality for me." Ah, but think a moment, and you will see that that is not it. The time will come when your body will perish and all your earthly interests will vanish away. And the great question for you is, What is the character of that spiritual nature within you which does not die—your thoughts, your affections, your will—in a single word, your soul? You live a double life at present, partly physical, partly spiritual; take the physical away—death will soon do it for you—and what have you left? Is your heart in sympathy with God, or at enmity with Him? Or is He not in all your thoughts? Remember that nothing but what you are can go over with you from the phys-

ical to the spiritual realm of being, not because you must leave it all behind you and wander off to some remote planet, but because you are already living a life with which all this has nothing to do. Your houses and lands, your books and friends, are not a part of you; you move among them, the body is the bond which unites you to them. But you are a spirit, and the spiritual world is that to which you rightfully belong. Now then, not with what earthly associates, but with what spiritual beings are you in sympathy? What friends will receive you, and find you fitted for their society, when you are lost sight of by your earthly friends? Will you meet the great Spirit, into whose presence you pass, as one whom you have already known and loved, or one whom you have disregarded or defied? If you are dissatisfied with what you call the childish pictures which the Bible paints of the Judgment Day and that which follows it, take the subject up out of the region of metaphor into the most abstract realm of thought that you can reach; let us use words with the utmost precision, and tell me, when your spiritual nature is brought by death into immediate contact with the infinite Spirit, will it be as when a child rushes to the embrace of a father, or as when a criminal stands trembling before his judge? That, I think, is what, in its simplest terms, it is to be saved or to be lost.

And finally, how clear, in the light of what has now been said, is the meaning of the Saviour's

words, "I am the way." He is the way to heaven because He is the way to God; no man cometh unto the Father but by Him, and to come to the Father is to go whither He has gone. In language that is simpler still, it is by Christ that we are brought into harmony with God,—by His life, by His teachings, by His death, by His indwelling presence in our souls. It is in Him that God has come near to us, making His voice audible to our ears, making His glory visible before our eyes. He that hath seen Him hath seen the Father, full of grace and full of truth. Out of that spiritual realm in which He is always near us He has come forth into the material world, and under mortal conditions has manifested Himself to the actual perception of the senses. It was in order that we might be without excuse, if we do not know and trust and love Him. In the historic, human Jesus, He has shown Himself to the incarnate human soul; and He has shown us also how such a soul may live in fellowship with the spiritual world. He removed in His atoning death, the great barrier of unforgiven sin which hindered the free approach of the soul of man to God. And now in this twofold sense He says, "I am the way! Make My sacrifice your own, and God will receive you. Live as I have lived, follow Me, and you may have a conscious, continuing fellowship with Him. Believe Me that I am in the Father, and come to the Father through Me. So shall you gain that knowledge of

God which is life eternal, that spiritual communion with Him which is the foretaste of heaven. And by and by I will come 'again, and receive you into that richer experience, that clearer vision, which is its consummation.'"

We have learned that in the kingdom of nature there are no sudden leaps or breaks, but only steady and continuous development. It will be well for us when we learn that the same thing is true of the kingdom of God. No man will be suddenly thrust into heaven through the open door of death. We must enter heaven here on earth, if we are to enter it at all.



