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Man's need of God

MAN'S NEED OF GOD

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MAN'S NEED OF GOD

AND OTHER SERMONS PREACHED
AT BLAIRGOWRIE

BY THE REV.

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HODDER AND STOUGHTON
NEW YORK AND LONDON

TO MY OLD PEOPLE, THE CONGREGATION OF ST.
ANDREW'S CHURCH, BLAIRGOWRIE, IN REMEMBRANCE
OF A MINISTRY WHICH THEIR LOVE MADE GLAD,
AND TO MY NEW PEOPLE, THE PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH OF IRELAND, IN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF
A KINDNESS WHICH I CAN NEVER REPAY.

GOODBYE

*The old town will sleep on the mountain-side
Where the laughing wind blows free ;
And over the strath the river will glide
To its home in the distant sea ;
And the birds will sing and the bells will ring
On the dear Lord's blessed Day ;
And the folk will repair to the House of Prayer :
But I shall be far away.*

*Sweet are the odours wafted down
From the glens and the heathery braes ;
But sweeter the memories of the old town
That will cling to my heart always.
O my people, mine evermore ! I would
That the dear Lord to you may be,
Till we meet again, as kind and good
As you have been to me.*

PREFACE

IT seems to me that, if a sermon be suitable for publication, it can hardly be a good sermon ; and the justification of this volume is that, when I was called to my present office, such a memorial of my ministry was desired not only by members of my own congregation and friends who had worshipped with us, but by others far and near who had heard me preach or read my writings.

My thanks are due to my friend, Mr. D. G. Monair, of the Blairgowrie *Advertiser*, a member of the Kirk-session and the Choir of St. Andrew's Church, who stenographed my sermons as they were delivered.

D. S.

4, THE COLLEGE,
LONDONDERRY.

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MAN'S NEED OF GOD

“All the labour of man is for his mouth, and yet the soul is not filled.”

“Also He hath set Eternity in their heart.”

ECCLESIASTES vi. 7, iii. 11 (literally rendered).

I

MAN'S NEED OF GOD

EVERY creature has its own nature, which craves satisfaction, its own needs, instincts, and affinities. Remove it from its proper environment, and you may give it what you will, you may surround it with all that another sort of creature would relish, but so long as you deny it what its own nature craves, it will not, it cannot, thrive.

When I was a lad, there was a rich man in our neighbourhood, and once he went travelling abroad and brought home with him a llama—a South American camel—to adorn his estate. He put it into a beautiful field, clothed with rich grass, bespangled with daisies and buttercups, and skirted by a fine shrubbery. It was a lovely pasture. A horse would have revelled in it. And a horse would have starved on the barren slopes of the Andes where the llama had

formerly its home. It seemed a happy change for the creature, yet it pined away and died. And wherefore? Simply because it had been removed from its proper environment and deprived of its natural necessities.

And we, too, have a nature of our own, with its peculiar need, its hungry craving, its unquenchable desire. We carry within our breasts immortal souls which yearn for God like exiles for their native air. "Lord," says St. Augustine, "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our heart is restless until it find rest in Thee." Religion is no mere accessory, a sort of accomplishment, like music or painting, which we may have or lack, which, perhaps, we are the better for having, but none the less men for lacking. It is an abiding necessity, an ineradicable and indestructible instinct, and it will not be suppressed. There is a legend that long ago, far beyond memory, there lay on the romantic coast of Brittany a fair city called Is, glittering in the sunshine and exulting in the free breezes. She has been engulfed in the hungry sea, and has vanished out of human ken. But she has not perished. She continues even to this hour in the quiet depths, and still as of old the people

through her streets and pursue their avocations. And sometimes, when the winds are high, the fishermen see the tips of the church-spires in the hollow of the waves, and in calm weather catch far off the music of the bells and the voice of praise. And in every human soul there is a City of God. The flood may have overwhelmed it, and the tangle and wreckage be floating over it, yet it is there imperishable in the still depth, and ever and anon, in the storm and in the stillness, its presence is revealed and its sound is heard.

God is the supreme and universal necessity of the children of men. "Lord, Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our heart is restless until it find rest in Thee." And it is this that makes all the tragedy of human life—that so many are leaving God out of account and seeking elsewhere the satisfaction which their souls crave and which He alone can give.

1. There are some who seek it in sinful indulgence, feeding their souls on the swine's husks. I need not stay to demonstrate the futility and misery of this attempt. You remember the story of that brilliant worldling Lord Byron. He feasted on the apples of Sodom and drank deep

of the cup of earth's pleasures, and what was his confession at the last? Near the close of his brief career, only thirty-six years of age, yet sick of life and bitter in heart, he wrote these poignant lines :

“My days are in the yellow leaf ;
The flowers and fruits of love are gone ;
The worm, the canker, and the grief
Are mine alone !”

What makes the pathos of such a confession? To my thinking it is this—that here is a human soul, under the pressure of the hungry craving which is the evidence of its immortality, batten- ing on earth's garbage, when nothing else than the heavenly manna, the bread of God, will suffice it.

2. There are others who seek satisfaction in idle frivolity. Pray do not misunderstand me. I am not condemning amusement or suggesting that it is irreligious. On the contrary, it is, in its own place and in its proper use, a necessary factor in a well-ordered life. It seems to me that every man should have some resource, some outlet, some escape—a relaxation from toil, a solace in infirmity. There is wisdom in Talleyrand's jesting remonstrance with a friend

who had never learned the game of whist : "What an unhappy old age you are preparing for yourself !" And you remember St. John's answer to the young huntsman who took him to task for playing with his pet partridge. "Why," asked the venerable Apostle, "do you carry your bow unstrung?" "Because," was the answer, "if I kept it always strung, it would lose its spring." "Even so," said St. John, "my brief relaxation prevents my spirit from waxing faint."

Amusement is not the least of life's blessings, but, like every blessing, it is capable of abuse, and the question is : What place does it occupy in the programme of one's life? There are two words which express two ideals of amusement—the right ideal and the wrong. One is "recreation." Is our amusement a recreation—something which recreates us, makes new men of us, reinforces our mental and physical energies and sends us back with fresh zest to the strenuous business of life? Then it is a good thing. The other word is "pastime," and it is a word which I would wish to have blotted out of our language if only the thing could thereby be swept from our life. If it be

a mere pastime, something to pass the time and while away the weary and unprofitable hours, then amusement is a futile and ruinous employment, surely unworthy of immortals travelling, in old Abraham Cowley's phrase, across this "weak-built isthmus between two eternities"—the eternity whence we have come, and the eternity whither we are going, and whither, with every breath, every pulse-beat, every tick of the clock, we are drawing nearer.

And is it not one of the saddest features of the modern world that so many, and so many especially of our younger men, are so greedy of pleasure and so heedless of life's high and solemn ends? Yet it always seems to me that the dominant characteristic of our age is not its love of pleasure but its profound sadness, and I think it is just because it is so sad that it pursues pleasure so eagerly. The hearts of men are hungering for satisfaction, and they are seeking it where they will never find it. "Lord, Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our heart is restless until it find rest in Thee."

"And thus a not unkindly world
Hath done its best for me ;
Yet have I found, O God ! no rest,
No harbour short of Thee.

For thou hast made this wondrous soul
All for Thyself alone ;
Ah ! send Thy sweet transforming grace
To make it more Thine own."

3. Neither is there satisfaction for the heart in the nobler pursuits of the intellect. In that delightful book "The House of Quiet" there is a striking passage where "The Life of Charles Darwin" is thus characterised: "What a wonderful book this is—it is from end to end nothing but a cry for the Nicene Creed. The man walks along, doing his duty so splendidly and nobly, with such single-heartedness and simplicity, and just misses the way all the time; the gospel he wanted is just the other side of the wall." And it seems to me that this is true of all the unbelieving literature of our day. There is a wistful yearning in every sentence; there is sadness in its very mirth, telling of a heart unsatisfied. Even while he is setting the Gospel at naught, the unbeliever is unwittingly confessing his sore need of it. And no wonder; for as man is more than mouth, he is more also than head, and whether it be for his mouth or for his head that all his labour is, his heart is unsatisfied. That is a true and profound

thought of Clement of Alexandria that the Philosophy of Greece no less than the Law of Israel was a schoolmaster to bring men to Christ. And the ancient Philosophy is termed by another of the Fathers, with exquisite felicity, "a sigh for Christ." All the striving of humanity from age to age is, if we rightly interpret it, nothing else than the crying of the soul for rest, her blind groping after Him who is her Life and her Home.

"This," said the Rabbi Levi, "may be likened in a parable to a simple citizen who married a princess of the royal blood. Even if he made her to eat of all the delicacies of the world, and gave her every delight, he could never fulfil all his obligations to her. Why? Because she is the daughter of a line of kings. Thus also, whatever a man may do for his own soul, he can never do all that is required of him, because the soul of man is from on high."

Truly our souls are as exiles while they tarry here. This world is not their home, and they are ever yearning for their native air. And this divine discontent, this craving, which we all know so well and are all seeking to satisfy in one way or another, for a blessedness which

earth can never afford, is the witness of our immortality. And what is its satisfaction? Browning has told us :

“Our life, with all it yields of joy and woe,
And hope and fear—believe the aged friend—
Is just our chance o’ the prize of learning love.”

Yes, this is our need, and it is the gift of God in Christ Jesus our Lord—Love, rich and full and free, that Love of which our human affections are faint echoes and dim reflections, and which, when it comes into the soul, reveals in them a new value and invests them with a fresh sanctity ; the eternal Love which thought of us and planned for us ere ever we had our being, which created us children of God, and which, when we wandered away from our Father, pursued us with its gracious importunities and would not let us go and died for desire of us on the Cross of Calvary.

There is rest for the soul in Jesus—in knowing Him, in trusting Him, in believing all that He has told us, in catching His spirit, and getting into His attitude toward God and man and life and death and eternity. “Come unto Me,” He said, “and I will give you rest”—

rest and peace full and overflowing, the satisfaction of our deep desire, the completion of our manhood and womanhood. Do you tell me that you have trusted Him and have never experienced a blessedness like this? Ah! keep on trusting Him; trust Him more bravely, more unreservedly. "Eighty and six years," said the martyr Polycarp, "have I been His slave, and He has never wronged me." Make the venture which has never miscarried. Respond to the ancient and eternal Love of Jesus, and keep on responding to it day by day. Surrender yourself to His benignant dominion, and keep on renewing the surrender and letting Him shape your destiny according to "the good pleasure of His goodness." And thus you will continually discover more and more how good He is and how blessed is the man that trusteth in Him. Conversion is only the beginning, and it is followed by an ever fuller initiation into the life which is life indeed, which never disappoints, but gets always richer and more satisfying.

THE GEOMETRY OF LIFE

“And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three ; but the greatest of these is charity.”

I CORINTHIANS xiii. 13.

II

THE GEOMETRY OF LIFE

IT is a deep saying of the Greek philosopher Plato that "God geometrises." And this means that God is the grand Geometrician of the Universe and has constructed it on geometrical principles.

Look around you, and you will see instances of this on every side. The rays of light stream in straight lines from the central orb. Throw a stone into the air, and it describes a curve. Throw it into a still sheet of water, and immediately there arises an ever-widening series of concentric circles. Examine a snowflake under the microscope, and observe the exquisite circles, squares, parallelograms, triangles, and prisms, more exact and delicate than the deftest hand could trace them with the finest instruments. And the mountains in their strength

stand fast for ever, held in their places by the parallelogram of forces. All this is the geometry of Creation. The Creator geometrises.

And now come nearer home, and observe our moral and spiritual life. Here too God geometrises. I daresay you have seen that famous picture of the Belgian artist Millet, "The Angelus." You remember the scene which it depicts—a very homely and, at the first glance, prosaic scene: a potato-field and two figures, a man and a woman, surrounded by the implements of their toil. It is a dull, bleak landscape, and away across the level tract you see a village with the church-spire rising above the lowly roofs. It is evening, and the bell has rung out its call to prayer. Its silvery chime has reached the ears of the two labourers, and after the devout manner of their country they have hearkened to its call. They have dropped their tools, and they are standing erect, with bowed heads and folded hands, in the attitude of prayer.

I once heard an interpretation of this picture from my old teacher, the late Professor Henry Drummond. There, he said, are the three elements of a complete life—Work, God, and

Love. The field, the spade, the basket, and the barrow—there is Work ; the bowed heads and the folded hands—there is Religion ; the two, a man and a woman, whatever be their relationship—there is Love.

And this is precisely the idea of the saying of St. Paul which I have chosen for my text. Faith is Religion—the reaching out of the soul to God and its laying hold of Him. And what is Hope but Work? For where there is nothing to work for, there is nothing to hope for, nothing to strive after, nothing to look forward to. And Charity is just the Latin for Love. And so we may paraphrase our text and say : “ Now abideth Religion, Work, Love, these three ; but the greatest of these is Love.”

And this means, according to that saying of Plato, that a complete life is geometrical. It is a triangle, and its three sides are Work, Love, and Religion. They must all be there, and if one of them be lacking, the triangle is broken, the life is incomplete.

1. *Work*.—This is the base of the triangle. It is the foundation of life. Work is a necessity, and it is a sacred thing. Here I would specially address you young men, and I would

say to you : Recognise the sacredness of your work, whatever it may be, and accept it as God's appointment, as the work which He has given you to do. I know that you are often discouraged because it seems so trivial and commonplace, because it has so little outcome and offers so little prospect of promotion. But recognise it as the will of God concerning you, and you will find it transfigured and invested with a new significance.

It is related of Dr. Patrick Fairbairn, whose name is illustrious in the annals of the Scottish Church, that he began his ministry on a wind-swept island in the Orkneys. It seemed as though he were an exile there like St. John in Patmos, and it was not the sunlit waves of the blue 'Ægean that severed him from the large world, but the storm-tossed waters of the cold northern sea. Yet he found there a golden opportunity. He gave himself to his books and spent the long, dark hours in the pursuit of sacred learning, laying broad and deep the foundations of a massive erudition. His fame went abroad, and presently his Church had need of him, and he was called to a professorship and then to the principalship in one of her Colleges.

And this is the counsel which he was wont to give to his students : “ Wherever you may be called in the providence of God, settle down there, and work away as though you were never to be anywhere else all your days.”

This is the secret of contentment, and it is also the pathway to promotion. Good workmen are never too numerous ; the world cannot afford to overlook them ; and if a man prove faithful in little things, he will inevitably sooner or later be entrusted with greater things. There is a charming Jewish story which tells how, when Moses was an exile in Midian, keeping the herds of Jethro in the wilderness, he one day missed a lamb out of the flock, and went in quest of the wanderer. He sought it long and wearily, and at length he found it, torn and bleeding, “ sick and helpless and ready to die.” He lifted it on his shoulders and caressed it tenderly, and carried it home to the fold and dressed its wounds. And that night the Lord appeared to Moses and said to him : “ Because thou hast had pity on a man’s beast, I will make thee Shepherd of Israel My flock.”

Yes, quiet acceptance of the lot which God in His providence has appointed to us, and faithful

performance of the work, often so hard and distasteful, which He has given us to do—that is the way to a larger heritage and a loftier service.

2. *Love*.—Work alone is not enough. Even if it be not mere drudgery, it is a selfish thing, so we must bring in Love. Love carries us out of ourselves; it redeems our lives from “miserable aims that end with self,” and makes our work a gracious ministry. It lifts our horizon and broadens our world.

In the far north of the Holy Land lies the Lake of Galilee, and in the far south the Dead Sea, and between them flows the River Jordan. The waters of the lake are sweet and swarm with fishes, and they pour southward along the river-bed, a refreshing and fertilising stream, and at last they discharge into the basin of the Dead Sea. And the Dead Sea deserves its name. There is no life in its bitter waters or on its barren shores. And the reason is that it has no outlet, and the water which pours into it fresh and sweet stagnates and corrupts and absorbs the poison of that bituminous region. It is ever taking in and never giving out. If only it had an outlet, it would be as sweet as the Lake of

Galilee, and it would be a harbour of life and a fountain of refreshment. Where lies the Desert of Arabia would stretch a fair and smiling garden.

And this is a parable. Life needs an outlet. There must be giving as well as receiving. There must be Love as well as Work.

3. *Religion*.—This completes the triangle. If Work without Love be drudgery, Love without Religion is tragedy. What is the use of loving if it must end with a green mound in the churchyard, with a tender memory and a vain regret?

There comes to my remembrance here an incident of my own ministry. Death had suddenly visited a home and carried off a little child. It was a cruel blow to the poor mother. She was a widow, and the little maiden had been the light of her eyes and the gladness of her heart. I feared that the sorrow would crush her, but she bore up bravely; and afterwards she said to me: "I am sure that I would have lost my reason but for the promise of meeting my wee lassie again in the Father's House."

This is the supreme blessing of Religion. It gives Love permanence. It teaches us that Death is, in St. Bernard's phrase, "the Gate

of Life." It draws aside the veil and discovers to us the broad and beautiful world of Eternity, and the Holy City where the inhabitant never says, "I am sick," and no mourners go about the streets, and the Father's House where there are many mansions and where, by the mercy of Jesus, we shall all meet again on the eternal Sabbath morning.

These are the three sides of the triangle—Work, Love, Religion; and if one of them be lacking, the triangle is broken. You observe how they imply one another, and how each leads on to the next. They are, if I may vary the figure, steps of a ladder which carries us up from earth to Heaven. Work is the lowest rung, and when we have set foot on it, there is but a step, and that an inevitable step, to the second, which is Love. And thence it is but one step more, and we reach

"the shining table-lands
To which our God Himself is moon and sun."

Work is the beginning, and God is the end, the consummation.

Yet St. Paul says: "The greatest of these is Love." And he is right, for Love implies

the others. If we have Love, we have all. Where Love is, life cannot be aimless or selfish. It is a constant ministry of beneficence and self-forgetfulness. Neither can it be irreligious. "Where Love is, there God is also." It awakens a yearning in the soul which God alone can satisfy. "God," says St. John, "is Love, and he that abideth in Love abideth in God, and God abideth in him."

Yes, Love is all we need. The question at the last will not be what creed we professed, or what theories we held regarding the Lord's Work or Person, but how much we had of His gentleness and patience and pity. And this is the surest and indeed the only way of commending Him to the unbelieving world and winning it to faith. Oliver Wendell Holmes was once asked if he did not think that Christianity was a failure, and he answered: "I rather think it has never really been tried." And he was right. We have tried orthodoxy, we have tried controversy, we have tried persecution, but we have never whole-heartedly ventured on the Lord's sovereign method of loving one another, loving all our fellow-creatures, with the love wherewith He has loved us. The historian

Gibbon has discussed the reason of the wonderful expansion of Christianity at the outset of its career, and he has alleged five causes: the zeal of the primitive Christians, their doctrine of immortality, the miraculous powers of the Apostolic Church, her pure morality, and the union and discipline of the Christian republic. And these, no doubt, were efficient causes, but Gibbon has overlooked the strongest of all. The reason why Christianity spread over the world and won the nations, was that the Christians understood the blessed secret of Love as the Lord had taught it. It is said by Tertullian that in those early days the heathen would often exclaim: "See how they love one another!" All this changed, and during the days of bitter controversy over the doctrine of the Person of Christ, when the Christians were wrangling and excommunicating and persecuting one another, it was said by a Latin historian that their hatred of each other exceeded the fury of savage beasts against mankind. It was then that Christianity lost its power, and if we would recover the ancient power, we must rediscover and practise the ancient secret.

It is Love that makes all things new. It is

not a new world that we need, but a new atmosphere. One spring day I drove out into the country. A bitter east wind was blowing and everything was bleak and cheerless. The birds were silent; the lambs were shivering in the fields and nestling close to their mothers for shelter and comfort. A few days later I went the same road, and ah, the difference! It was the same landscape, but it was all transfigured. The leaves were green, the flowers were sweet, the birds were singing, and the lambs were frisking over the soft grass and bleating in their gladness. What made the difference? The east wind was gone; it was blowing, gentle and sweet, from the West, and the sunshine was on wood and mountain. And that made the difference.

**THE BLESSING OF
A FRUSTRATED AMBITION**

“ They said unto Him, Grant unto us that we may sit,
one on Thy right hand, and the other on Thy left hand, in
Thy glory.”

“ And with Him they crucify two thieves ; the one on His
right hand, and the other on His left.”

ST. MARK X. 37, XV. 27.

I dreamed of a heritage of ease ;
And my poor heart was fain
That bliss to know, that prize to seize,
That golden crown to gain.

I set me to win it, and eagerly
I planned and toiled and strove ;
And I asked the Lord to grant it me
Of His exceeding love.

Was He cruel to say me nay? Behold,
He said it in love for me.
For what I took for a throne of gold
Was a cross of misery.

III

THE BLESSING OF A FRUSTRATED AMBITION;

WOULD it always be well for us if we got our prayers?

Jesus was the Messiah, the Saviour whom the Prophets had foretold, and whom Israel had for centuries been expecting with eager desire. And it is a striking and melancholy fact that there was nothing which so hindered the recognition of the Saviour when at length He appeared as that expectation of His advent. One might think that it must have ensured Him a welcome; and so it should, but the nation had conceived a false ideal and was cherishing an impossible hope. For some six centuries her history had been a succession of heavy calamities—the Babylonian Captivity, the Greek Conquest, and the Roman Domination. She was crushed and humiliated,

and the deliverance which she craved was emancipation from her bondage to the heathen conqueror ; and when she thought of the coming Saviour, she pictured Him as a mighty King of the royal lineage of David, who would arise and smite the oppressor, strike the yoke from His people's neck, and reign in majesty over a free and triumphant Israel.

Such was the prevailing expectation, and it is no marvel that, when the Saviour appeared, "meek and lowly in heart," "not striving nor crying nor causing His voice to be heard in the street," He was rejected save by a few who recognised His hidden glory.

The Twelve shared the common delusion, and they reconciled themselves to their Master's lowliness by the theory that it was only a temporary concealment of His glory, and He would presently fling off His disguise and, flashing forth in regal splendour, take unto Him His great power and reign. It reconciled them to their sacrifices and privations as followers of the Man of Sorrows that they were confident of an abundant recompense. He would one day be King of Israel, and they would share the glory of His exaltation, and they were continually disputing

among themselves " which of them should be the greatest in the Kingdom "—which of them should have the chief honour and the highest office.

The longer His humiliation lasted, the more expectant were they of the inevitable consummation. Observe what happened when He was going up to Jerusalem to keep the Passover and die. He was on the road to the sacred capital, and they were sure that the grand *dénouement* was at hand. At length He was about to throw off His disguise and claim His throne. The shadow of death was on His soul, but a dream of earthly triumph was in theirs. Their selfish ambition asserted itself, and James and John plotted to steal a march on their comrades and secure for themselves the coveted prize. They approached Jesus in the course of the journey and proffered a petition. They asked Him to pledge Himself after the manner of an Oriental despot (*cf.* Esth. v. 6) and promise them beforehand whatever they might desire ; and when He would not be ensnared, they unfolded their ambition. It was that, when He reached the capital and ascended His throne, they should be set one on His right hand and the other on His left as the chief of His courtiers.

Their petition was very painful to Jesus, revealing, as it did, what a gulf lay between Him and the men whom He had so loved and trusted, and whose sympathy He craved in the dread ordeal which lay before Him. It were no wonder had He been wroth with them and upbraided them for their dulness of heart and their inveterate unspirituality ; but His anger was swallowed up by a great compassion. Ah, the pity of it ! The actual issue lay clear in His view, and He knew what a tragic disillusionment awaited them. A week later, and they would discover the tragic reality. They would see Him crowned—yes, but with a crown of thorns ; they would see Him lifted up, but on a cross, not on a throne ; and on His right hand and on His left—the stations which they were coveting for themselves—not purple-clad courtiers, but two bleeding wretches, writhing in agony and moaning out their lives. “ They said unto Him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on Thy right hand, and the other on Thy left hand, in Thy glory. But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask.”

Would it always be well for us if we got our prayers?

It is truly amazing that the disciples should have clung so tenaciously to that fond hope. All the days of His fellowship with them their Master had been protesting against it and labouring to intrude into their minds a truer conception of His Messianic work and glory. You remember how once, when the tide of His popularity was running strong, a scribe, persuaded that He was certainly the Messiah and would presently be King of Israel, came to Him and proposed to join His company. "Master," he said, "I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest." And how did Jesus answer? He told the man what following Him really meant—not ease and dignity, but weariness and shame. "The foxes have holes," He said, "and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." And He was continually apprising His disciples of the truth and seeking to dispel their secular dream. "If any man," He would say, "will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me." And once, when their vain hope had leaped up at the sight of one of His miracles, He said to them with pathetic emphasis: "Let these words sink into your ears: for the Son of Man

shall be delivered up into the hands of men." But His insistence was unavailing: "They understood not this saying, and it was concealed from them that they should not perceive it, and they were afraid to ask Him about this saying." So obstinately do men cling to their prejudices! There is no dead lift like the raising of their ideals.

It is told how after the siege of Rome in 1849 the patriot Garibaldi addressed this challenge to his followers: "Soldiers! your efforts against overwhelming odds have been unavailing. What I have to offer you is fatigue, danger, struggle, and death, the chill of the cold night in the free air and heat under the burning sun, no lodgings, no munitions, no provisions, but forced marches, dangerous watch-posts, and continual struggle with the bayonet against batteries. Those who love freedom and their country—let them follow me!" And the chivalry of young Italy responded to the challenge and rallied to the hero's standard.

And it was thus that Jesus dealt with men. He never allured them with flattering hopes and specious promises. He told them plainly what were the terms of His service and bade them

count the cost of following Him; and He appealed to their manhood, to the instinct of heroism which is strong in every true heart. His service was a stern warfare, and it claimed a high devotion. "There," He said, "lies the field! Have you the heart for it? Have you the courage to follow Me and share My conflict and My ultimate triumph?" When the disciples responded to His call, they did not realise how stern the conflict would be. They dreamed their worldly dream of a brief struggle and a little sacrifice, a swift triumph and an abundant recompense. Yet the issue proved how deep was their loyalty and how splendid their devotion. Even in the midst of their worldly dreaming their love for Jesus was their strongest passion, and in their hour of seeming defeat they discovered that His Cross was their glory and the fellowship of His sufferings their exceeding great reward.

When St. John stood by the Cross a week later and saw the two thieves hanging on the right hand and on the left, I wonder if he recalled his petition on the road to Jerusalem and realised how blind and foolish it had been. And there is a lesson here for you and me.

Think of this story when you are troubled about your "unanswered prayers." You set your heart on something which you think very good, and you labour for it and pray for it, and when it seems just within your grasp, it is swept away. And you cry out in the bitterness of your heart and reproach the Lord for dealing so hardly with you. Ah! believe me, you will one day understand that disappointment and confess that the Lord's seeming refusal of your prayer was in truth a gracious answer. He knew better. What you pictured as a coronation would have proved a crucifixion. This is the philosophy of "unanswered prayer."

"We, ignorant of ourselves,
Beg often our own harms, which the wise powers
Deny us for our good; so find we profit,
By losing of our prayers."

The Lord gives His faithful people not what they desire, but what is good, what they would desire were they wiser; and there is no less love in His withholdings than in His bestowals; indeed, there is often more.

When the Prince of Orange came over to

deliver our fathers from the tyranny of King James, he designed to land at one point of the coast, but was driven past it by stress of weather. It seemed as though his plan had miscarried. And so indeed it had, but the reason was that God had His plan, and He would carry it out. Had the Prince come to land where he had purposed, he would have found the royal troops waiting to receive him, and his enterprise would have been frustrated ere it was well begun. And therefore a watchful Providence interposed and conveyed him to another place where he encountered no opposition. God knows best, and when He overrules our purposes and disappoints our desires, it becomes us to acquiesce reverently and trustfully and take the way which He opens before us. His is ever the right way. In every hour of disappointment fall back on God and stay your heart on His good providence. Sometimes, indeed, it is difficult to recognise His hand. So many of our hard experiences are the inflictions of human malice, and it seems as though the Will of God had nothing to do with them. Ah! look deeper. If "not a sparrow falleth on the ground without your Father," if His Will directs the stone

that strikes it and the hand that hurls the stone, can it be that His Will has nothing to do with the stroke which has wounded you? His instruments may be strange, but they are His instruments still, and it is His hand that wields them. Remember how it is written that, when the King of Israel was fleeing from his capital, a base caitiff came forth and cursed him and cast stones at him. "Then said Abishai the son of Zeruiah unto the king, Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head. And the king said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah? so let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. Let him alone, and let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him."

Recognise that nothing happens without God, and go on your way with a gentle, quiet heart after the manner of Him who, "when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously." This is the secret of peace. Learn it, and practise it, and you will bear without bitterness the hardest experience and discover by and by its hidden mercy.

When God denies His people any good thing, it is because He has prepared some better thing for them. I gratefully confess that it has proved thus in my own experience. More and more as the years pass, I discover how my breakings and maimings have enriched my life. There are indeed some things in my lot which remain dark, and it may be that I shall never understand them here ; but the love which has been revealed to me emboldens me to believe in the love which I cannot see, and I have faith that I shall see it when the day breaks and the shadows flee away.

“I'll bless the hand that guided,
I'll bless the heart that plann'd,
When throned where glory dwelleth
In Immanuel's land.”

**A BELIEVER'S LOVE FOR THE
BIBLE**

“O how love I Thy law ! it is my meditation all the day.”
PSALM cxix. 97.

IV.

A BELIEVER'S LOVE FOR THE BIBLE

IT is characteristic of a truly Christian man that he loves the Bible. It is his rich treasure-house, and he searches it with constant wonder and ever fresh appreciation. And it is one of the miracles of grace that so soon as it takes possession of a man's soul, it makes the Bible a new book to him and reveals in it a hitherto undreamed-of glory.

There is a striking instance of this in the experience of Dr. Thomas Chalmers. He had been minister of the Fifeshire parish of Kilmany for some eight years ere he attained to a vital knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and when at length the light broke into his soul, it revealed much that had been hidden from him. It gave him new thoughts about God and religion and

therewith a new sense of the value of the Bible. One of his elders was an old saint named John Bonthron, who lived close to the Manse and was a frequent visitor there; and it is told how it grieved him during the dark years to find the young minister continually engrossed in all manner of secular employments—experiments in chemistry, studies in philosophy, the cultivation of his garden. And once he said: “I find you aye busy, sir, with one thing or another, but come when I may, I never find you at your studies for the Sabbath.” “Oh,” was the reply, “an hour or two on the Saturday evening is quite enough for that.” Then came the heavenly vision, and all was changed. “I never come in now, sir,” said the old man, “but I find you aye at your Bible.” “All too little, John,” was the answer, “all too little.”

And it is ever thus. When the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ comes home to a man in its power and glory, it transfigures the Bible in his eyes, and reveals in it a new worth and a fresh interest. It is a mark of a man of God that he loves God's Book. See how it was with the Psalmist. His Psalm is one long rapture, and its theme is the excellence and glory of the

Holy Scriptures. Hear how he speaks : “ My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto Thy judgments at all times. Thy testimonies are my delight and my counsellors. Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage. The law of Thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver. Unless Thy law had been my delight, I should have perished in mine affliction. O how love I Thy law ! it is my meditation all the day. How sweet are Thy words unto my taste ! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth ! Thy statutes have I taken as an heritage for ever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart.”

And it is remarkable that the Psalmist's Bible was much less than ours. It was merely the Law, the five Books of Moses ; for the rest of the Old Testament was only in the making then, and the days of the Gospel lay still in the far future. His Bible, in comparison with ours, was very narrow and very meagre. It contained no Books of the Prophets with their passionate declarations of the lovingkindness and tender mercy of the Lord and their visions of the coming Saviour, and no New Testament, no blessed Gospels, no story of Jesus the Friend

of sinners'; only the story of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, Moses and Aaron, the Red Sea, the Wilderness and Mount Sinai, and the Tabernacle and its sacrifices. That is all the Bible that he had, yet it was very dear and precious to him, and he wrote this long Psalm in its praise, in grateful confession of the peace and gladness which it had brought him. If his Bible meant so much for him, what should ours mean for us?

My subject, then, is the Believer's Love for the Bible, and you will observe, first of all, that it is a love such as no other book inspires. It is more, far more, than a mere literary interest.

Yet even on this score, I may remark in passing, the Bible is incomparable. I know of no study so fascinating, so exhilarating, as the investigation of the intricate and far-reaching problems of sacred criticism. And I venture to affirm that there is no literature in the world so rich and wonderful as the Holy Scriptures. We speak of the Bible as a book, but it is more than a book. It is, in St. Jerome's phrase, "a Divine Library." It is the accumulated literature of some fifteen hundred stirring and romantic years, and there is no literature which

has exerted so extensive and beneficent an influence. What modern literature is there which is not coloured by its imagery, moulded by its thought, and pervaded by its spirit?

It is the most wonderful literature in the world, and a knowledge of it, even in our English Version, is in itself a liberal education. I suppose it is recognised that in all the rich storehouse of English literature there is no more precious gem than "The Pilgrim's Progress," and the wonder of it is that its author was a rude and unlettered man. Except for that other favourite of his, Foxe's "Book of Martyrs," Bunyan was a man of one book. The Bible was his only school, and it sufficed. He wrote his immortal allegory while he lay in Bedford Gaol, and he tells us whence he derived it. Ere he "was had home to prison" he "was never out of the Bible," and it was the companion of his captivity. "I never had," he says, "in all my life so great an inlet into the Word of God as now. Those Scriptures that I saw nothing in before were made in this place and state to shine upon me; Jesus Christ also was never more real and apparent than now: here have I seen and felt him indeed." The Bible was his

inspiration, and its spirit played over the field of his intellect like the quickening breath of Spring, and made it as a garden of the Lord, fragrant and beautiful.

“Intense study of the Bible,” says Coleridge, “will keep any man from being vulgar in point of style.” It is always an exceeding wonder to me when I listen to the prayer of a plain, uneducated man who has the grace of the Lord Jesus in his heart. His conversation bristles with grammatical blunders and linguistic improprieties, and if he attempted to address an audience on politics or any other mundane matter, he would be laughed to scorn. But listen to him when he stands before the Throne of Grace and addresses God! His language is perfect—pure and warm and sweet. His very accent is refined. And what is the secret? Whence his inspiration? He is breathing the atmosphere of the Bible; he is thinking its thoughts, speaking its language, using its imagery. There is a wellspring of grace in his soul, and his prayer is its outflowing. “Religion,” says Coleridge again most truly, “is, in its essence, the most gentlemanly thing in the world.” The Bible may not make its

scholars learned, but it makes them wise. It refines their natures and elevates their minds. Its spirit comes into their souls like the breath of eternity laden with the fragrance of the far-off Hills of God.

But it is something else that makes the Bible so dear and precious to the believer. It is this, that it brings him into fellowship with God. It tells him of Jesus, and when a man knows Jesus, he is done with sorrow and fear.

“What lover of Him shall be sad again
 Seeing the Father through Him, touching hands
 Of that large love which reaches out from Heaven,
 In His pierced palms? . . .
 . . . Oh, good Friend! that soul
 Hath done with sadness which knows Christ aright.”

This is the supreme value of the Bible, that we owe to it our knowledge of Jesus. What would have happened if, after He had sojourned with the children of men in the days of His flesh, He had gone home again to the Father's House and left no record of His redeeming ministry? The memory of it would have continued in the minds and mouths of the men who had companied with Him, but it would quickly have faded. Even they, His eye-witnesses, would have forgotten or misremembered much,

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and when they were gone, nothing would have remained but a tradition, and it would have suffered continual distortion and corruption. It would soon have been mingled with all manner of foolish legends, and ere many generations had elapsed all knowledge of the true Jesus would have disappeared, and He might as well never have come at all. But it pleased God that this calamity should be averted and that the memory of Jesus should never fade among the children of men. His story has been written, and His precious image has been preserved imperishable, as in a golden casket, from generation to generation.

And this is the Bible's unique distinction, its peerless service to the souls of men. It is the shrine where Jesus abides evermore in His ancient glory, that we may still repair to His blessed feet and see His kind face and hear His gracious voice.

And thus we reach the practical issue. You see what use we must make of the Bible. It has no value in itself. It has value only as it leads us to Jesus. It is a shrine, and what avails it to admire the shrine unless we see the glory of Him who inhabits it?

I fear we sometimes make much the same mistake which they made in the Middle Ages when they treated the Bible as a sort of magical talisman. You remember what they used to do. When a man was in any manner of perplexity, he would seek counsel and guidance from the Bible. He would open it at random, put his finger on the sacred page, and then look and see what word his finger had lighted upon, and whatever the word might be, he took it as a God-sent message.

And do we not too often treat the Bible very much after this fashion? It is a sort of talisman to us. We read it and think that the mere reading of its blessed words will do us good in some miraculous way. But, ah! if this be our manner, we might as profitably read a paragraph in any common book as a chapter of the Bible. When we read another book, it is enough that we understand what we have read. That is all, and there is no more to be had. But when we have read a passage of the Scriptures, ay, and have explored its meaning with all the aids of wise scholarship, there is something still lacking; and if we rest there, we have gained no more than we might have gained from another

old-world book. If we would find the hid treasure and win the priceless benediction, we must pass beyond the sacred page to Him who stands behind it, and enter into believing, loving, personal fellowship with Him, the Living Lord of whom the Scriptures testify.

And so, when we open the Bible, it is not merely of it that we should think. It is not the end ; it is not the goal. It is a road, a pathway ; and it is designed to conduct us to Jesus. Go to the Bible believing in Him, desiring Him, seeking Him, and you will see its glory ; for its glory is the reflection of His face. It is said of St. Francis of Sales that " he studied as much at the foot of the crucifix as in books, being persuaded that the essential quality of a preacher is to be a man of prayer." And you remember how it is told of St. Bonaventura that St. Thomas Aquinas once visited him and asked from what books he had derived all his sacred learning, and the saint raised his head and pointed silently to his crucifix. That was the source of his learning : he studied only Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Go to the Bible seeking Jesus, and remember that it is the office of the Holy Spirit to reveal

Jesus to the soul, according to His own word :
“ He shall glorify Me : for He shall take of Mine, and shall declare it unto you.” What does it mean when we open the Bible and no glory shines on its page? It is not that there is no glory there, but that our eyes are dim and need the anointing of the Spirit. And therefore never open the Bible without first acknowledging your dependence on His heavenly aids, without first lifting up your heart and imploring His presence, His inspiration, His enlightenment. The Bible is “a fire with God,” but to a prayerless soul it is, in the language of Jeremy Taylor, “insipid and flat,” as “mathematics to a Scythian boor or music to a camel.”

“ Oh then wish more for God, burn more with desire,
Covet more the dear sight of His Marvellous Face ;
Pray louder, pray longer, for the sweet gift of fire
To come down on thy heart with its whirlwinds of grace.”

At the outset of his exposition of the miracle at Cana of Galilee St. Chrysostom gives a wise counsel. “ Let us,” he says, “ invoke the aid of this very Jesus who wrought the miracle, and thus approach the interpretation.”

**THE YOUNG MAN WITH
A LINEN CLOTH ABOUT HIM**

“And a certain young man followed with Him, having a linen cloth cast about him, over his naked body (rather ‘over his undress’); and they lay hold on him; but he left the linen cloth, and fled naked (rather ‘undressed’).”

ST. MARK xiv. 51, 52 (R.V.).

V.

THE YOUNG MAN WITH A LINEN CLOTH ABOUT HIM

Is not this an odd story? It is told by St. Mark alone, and he introduces it so abruptly and mysteriously. Who was that young man? Whence had he come? What was he doing there? And why was he thus strangely attired? Surely if the incident was worth recording, the Evangelist might have done more justice to it. It is a puzzling story, and indeed it comes near being offensive, intruding, as it seems, an almost ludicrous episode into the tragic narrative of the Lord's Arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane.

I wish to consider the incident with you for a little this morning and see if we cannot discover what lies behind it, if we cannot fill in the scanty outline and reconstruct the situation. And I shall take for my starting-point an ancient

tradition that the young man had come from the house where, a few hours previously, the Lord had celebrated the Passover with His disciples.

And this carries us a long way forward. There is reason to believe that the scene of the Last Supper was the house of Mary, that generous lady who appears in the Book of Acts as the hostess of the Apostles. She resided in Jerusalem with her son, John Mark, who afterwards attended St. Peter on his missionary journeys and, it is said, constructed the Gospel which bears his name from his memoranda and reminiscences of St. Peter's teaching.

Now you see light breaking on the situation. It was from Mary's house that the young man had come, and who would he be but her son Mark? For months past there had been trouble in the air—mutterings among the rulers against Jesus and plottings to put Him out of the way. And the clouds had thickened during the Passover week. That had been an anxious night for Mary and her son. They knew that the dear Master was in danger, and they had a vague foreboding of imminent disaster. They kept the feast with their household in their own

apartment, and their celebration would be over betimes; but Jesus and the Eleven continued in the Upper Room until midnight; for it was the close of their earthly fellowship, and He had much to say to them ere His departure. Mark had gone to rest, and as he lay sleepless, fearing he knew not what, he heard Jesus and the Eleven descend and quit the house, and in his anxiety he rose and followed after them. He did not stay to dress, but hastily wrapped himself in the linen sheet which served in Eastern fashion as bed-cloth and cloak both. And thus attired he followed the little company through the city, across the ravine of the Kedron, up the slope of Olivet and into the Garden of Gethsemane.

And there, lurking in the covert of the orchard, he watched all that passed. He witnessed the whole scene—the disciples asleep, the Master at prayer, His sweat like great drops of blood, the visitation of the angel.

And presently the alarm was raised. The soldiers appeared, guided by the traitor, and surrounded Jesus; and Mark, forgetful of danger in his anxiety, emerged from his concealment and hovered in his ghostly attire on

the outskirts of the throng. Then came Peter's frenzied attack on Malchus and the tumultuous flight of the disciples; and the incensed soldiers, espying Mark, evidently a friend of the Prisoner, seized him and would have wreaked their vengeance upon him; but he struggled free, leaving his linen sheet in their hands.

Of course this reconstruction of the situation, partly traditional, partly conjectural, is more or less precarious; yet it seems to me by no means unreasonable. And I may remark in passing that it suggests a consideration which has perhaps been somewhat overlooked in discussions of the historicity of the Gospels. There is a test which infallibly determines whether a narrative be history or fiction. It is this: Has the scene a background? Look beyond the foreground, and do you discover life and movement and far distances? Then you know that the scene is real. It is not a painting that is before you, but a landscape. And the Gospels stand this test. Their every incident has its setting, its distant outlook, its living and moving background; and occasionally, as here, the incident is a mere fragment, and if you would understand

it, you must peer behind it and discover its background. And the background is never lacking.

Look then at this incident against the background which I have tried to show you, and do you not perceive a wealth of significance and beauty in it?

1. The young man was Mark the Evangelist, and this accounts for the abruptness of the story. It was the manner of the sacred writers, especially the Evangelists, to conceal themselves. There is none of our Gospels which bears the signature of its author; for the titles which stand over them were inscribed by later hands. It has to be gathered in each case from incidental evidences who the author was; and St. John has gone so far in self-effacement that, largely as he figures in the narrative, he never mentions his own name, but always styles himself "another disciple" or "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Here and there, however, it would appear as though they had been tempted to cast off the restraint; and as an artist traces his initials on a corner of his picture, invisible save to the eye that searches for it, so they have inserted in their narratives little touches personal and revealing. Such is the significance of this mysterious story

which St. Mark has inserted in his narrative of the Arrest, this cryptic touch which he has added to his picture of the Man of Sorrows. It is the painter's monogram.

2. It may have occurred to you in reading the story of our Lord's Agony in the Garden to wonder how it came to be known. Who witnessed what befell? Peter and James and John were there "about a stone's cast" away, but they saw nothing and heard nothing, for "their eyes were heavy," and they were "sleeping for sorrow." Yes, but there were other eyes that saw and other ears that heard all. Mark was there, lurking among the trees; and, while the disciples slept, he witnessed the moving scene. He saw the Master kneeling and falling on His face, and heard Him pray: "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me." And thus his story of the Agony is the testimony of an eye-witness; and here perhaps lies the reason why, after relating all that happened in the Garden, he added this curious note which, though it seems so mysterious and incongruous to us, would no doubt be intelligible to his contemporaries. It is his certification, his personal attestation, that the narrative is true. It is like the comment

which St. John appends to his story of the spear-thrust and the blood and water which flowed from the Lord's riven side: "And he that hath seen hath borne witness, and his witness is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye also may believe" (St. John xix. 35).

3. It appears on patristic evidence that our Evangelist went by a curious designation. He was called "Mark the Stump-fingered." And I wonder if this may not be the explanation of the epithet. When Peter drew his sword and struck off the ear of Malchus, Mark was there, eager to see what would befall his dear Master and to succour Him if he could; and may it not be that in the scuffle which ensued his fingers were shorn off by the slash of a sword-blade? He escaped with his life, bleeding and mutilated, and his acquaintances, with that fondness for nicknames which is a Jewish characteristic, styled him ever afterwards "Mark the Stump-fingered."

It was a nickname, but he would bear it proudly and count it a sacred distinction. There are scars which a man would gladly hide. In one of his epigrams the Latin poet Martial describes a wealthy citizen of Rome sitting

bedecked and bejewelled in the theatre, and wearing on his forehead a graceful network. It seemed an adornment, but it was really a concealment of his shame. He was a freedman, and when he was a slave, he had been caught pilfering from his master, and had been branded on the brow with the letter "F," the initial of the Latin word for "thief." And that elegant network was a plaster covering his disgrace.

That man would fain have concealed his scars, but our Evangelist would glory in his. He would never shamefacedly wrap his mutilated hand in his mantle to hide it from the gaze of curious eyes. It was his decoration, and he would display it proudly, after the manner of St. Paul when he pointed to the scars of his warfare—the weals of the scourge and the galling of the fetters, and bade his detractors hold their peace: "From henceforth let no man trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus" (Gal. vi. 17).

I suppose there is no life which has not its scars; and there is nothing so precious and glorious if they be "marks of the Lord Jesus." You remember yon sacrifice which cut into your very heart. You were called in the providence

of God to choose betwixt loss and honour, betwixt your own happiness and the duty which you owed to others. And you chose the nobler part. It cost you cruel anguish at the moment, and your life is maimed to this hour. But have you ever regretted that you made the sacrifice? that, when you stood at the parting of the ways, you had the courage to take the steep and painful road, and shoulder your heavy cross? That was the crisis of your life, and there is never a day but you bless God for the choice you made. Your mutilation is your gladness and your glory. More and more as life goes on, one learns where its true values lie.

“Measure thy life by loss instead of gain ;
 Not by the wine drunk, but the wine poured forth ;
 For love’s strength standeth in love’s sacrifice ;
 And whoso suffers most hath most to give.”

Brave Jeanie Deans was right when she said: “It is not when we sleep soft and wake merrily ourselves, that we think on other people’s sufferings. Our hearts are waxed light within us then, and we are for righting our ain wrangs and fighting our ain battles. But when the hour of trouble comes to the mind or to the body, and when the hour of death comes, that comes to

high and low, then it isna what we hae dune for ourselfs, but what we hae dune for others, that we think on maist pleasantly.”

St. Mark won a title from his m̄tilation—a new name which commemorated his devotion and proclaimed to the world how he had stood by the dear Master in His hour of need when even the Apostles forsook Him and fled. And I wonder if it may not be that, when the Lord gives us the white stones and the new names written upon them (Rev. ñ. 17), we shall find that our new names too are m̄morials of the service which we have done Him here. Ah, let us see to it that we earn honourable names, names which we shall be proud to bear in the City of God! And there is nothing that we shall be so proud of when we see His blessed face, as the sufferings we have endured for His dear sake who suffered so much for us.

**THE
PERSEVERANCE OF BELIEVERS**

“ I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish,
neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand.”

ST. JOHN x. 28.

“ The gifts and calling of God are without repentance.”

ROMANS xi. 29.

VI

THE PERSEVERANCE OF BELIEVERS

I WISH to speak to you this morning of a question which touches the very roots of our Christian life and which, I find, exercises many minds and costs them no little concern—the question whether it is possible for a believer, after he has once put his trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, to fall from grace and finally perish.

If you know the history of theological thought, you will remember that there are two answers which have been given to the question and which stand in direct opposition. First, there is the Calvinistic answer: Once we truly believe, our final salvation is assured; we are as certain of reaching Heaven as though we were already there, had already passed “through the gate into the City” and were already walking

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the golden street. Then there is the Arminian answer : We may fall from grace ; we may be saved to-day and lost to-morrow ; we can never be sure of Heaven until we are there.

You see how one's attitude towards this question is determined by one's starting-point, one's initial position. The Calvinist starts from Divine Sovereignty, and he believes in Perseverance ; the Arminian starts from human freedom, and he believes in the possibility of falling from grace. In the one case salvation is God's purpose from first to last, and God's purpose is immutable and invincible ; in the other it depends on man's will, and man's will is fickle and weak. And here is an example of the two attitudes. Anglican theology is Arminian, and you remember this verse in the Anglican Keble's poem " The Disobedient Prophet " :

" The grey-hair'd saint may fail at last,
The surest guide a wanderer prove ;
Death only binds us fast
To the bright shore of love."

Contrast that with this stanza of the Calvinistic John Kent's hymn beginning, " Sovereign grace o'er sin abounding " :

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“What from Christ that soul shall sever
Bound by everlasting bands?
Once in Him, in Him for ever—
Thus the eternal covenant stands—
None shall pluck thee
From the Strength of Israel’s hands.”

I believe in Perseverance because I believe in the Sovereignty of God, and I believe in the Sovereignty of God because I see it in history and experience. And thus I am persuaded that it is impossible for a true believer, since he is in the grip of God’s purpose of grace, ever to fall away and at last be lost. It is Sovereign Grace that first moves us to repent and believe, and it will carry us invincibly through all weakness and disloyalty to the final consummation.

This faith is a splendid encouragement, yet it is open to serious criticism, and I wish now to consider the main objections which have been urged against it and to show you that, as it seems to me, they spring from misunderstanding of the doctrine.

1. The doctrine, it is alleged, is contradicted by experience. Have we not all known men who lost their early faith and relapsed into irreligion?

Yes, and it would be a poor evasion to suggest

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that there never was any reality in their faith, and that they did not fall from grace inasmuch as they had never been in it. My answer is that we must distinguish between *falling from grace* and *backsliding*. A believer, by reason of indwelling sin, is liable to the latter—witness David and Peter and all the saints in every generation ; but, by reason of the faithfulness of God, he is ensured against the former.

You have seen a log floating down the river in the Spring-time when the stream was full. Presently the stream abated and shrank to a mere trickle, and the log lay blistering in the sun, high and dry. But it did not remain there for ever. By and by a spate came roaring down from the mountains and replenished the river and flooded the dry bed, and the log floated and resumed its progress towards the distant sea. Ere long, perhaps, it got stranded again when the flood was spent and the stream ran low ; but there was always a fresh flood, and, because the log was in the river-bed and not on the bank, it always floated again and was borne on its way. It was in the river-bed, and therefore it was as sure of reaching the sea as though it were already there.

And this is a parable of grace. The stream runs low and we get stranded, but the flood comes down from the Hills of God, and lifts us and bears us onward—if only we be in the river-bed. Commit yourself to the grace of God, and rest with a quiet heart upon His faithfulness in every time of weakness. When Cromwell was dying, he was troubled. “Tell me,” he said to a minister who stood by his bed, “is it possible to fall from grace?” “No,” was the reply, “it is not possible.” “Then,” said the dying man, “I am safe, for I know that I was once in grace.”

Yes, “once in Him, in Him for ever—thus the eternal covenant stands.” This is theology, but it is poetry too, as all true theology is, since, as Boccaccio says, “theology is nothing else than the poetry of God.” You remember Browning’s lines :

“What began best, can’t end worst,
Nor what God blessed once, prove accurst.”

But, it may be said, have we not known cases where men wandered away and were never brought back? Is not this something worse than backsliding? Is it not falling from grace?

Yes, it is true, it is true ; and I recognise the sorrow and the mystery of it. But I still hope and still cling to the assurance that the grace of God proves ever ultimately victorious beyond our short ken. You remember Shakespeare's story of the death of that old reprobate, Sir John Falstaff, in an ale-house with only a loose woman in attendance. "'A made a finer end," said Dame Quickly, "and went away, an it had been any christom child ; 'a parted even just between twelve and one, e'en at the turning o' the tide : for after I saw him fumble with the sheets, and play with flowers, and smile upon his finger ends, I knew there was but one way ; for his nose was as sharp as a pen, and 'a babbled of green fields." "'A babbled of green fields" : what have we here? That hoary sinner had once been an innocent child and had been nurtured in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. And ah, the sorrow of it when he turned out so ill ! Nevertheless the grace which had blessed his early days pursued him through the years of his shame ; and when he was lying on his death-bed, the hallowed lore which he had learned at his mother's knee came into his remembrance. "'A babbled of green fields"—

“ He maketh me to lie down in green pastures ; He leadeth me beside the still waters ” : this is what Dame Quickly heard. As the shadows of evening gathered about him, the mind of the old sinner wandered back to the sweet morning-time ; his heart became as the heart of a little child, and he was carried home in the arms of the Good Shepherd. His mother had gone down to her grave sorrowing for her lost son, never thinking that her prayers would be answered at the long last.

And I cannot, I will not believe that any soul that has been pursued with importunate prayers and carried in faith's loving arms to the feet of Jesus, will at the last be an outcast from the Father's House. “ Go thy way,” said the man of God to Monica as she wept for her erring Augustine ; “ it cannot be that the son of those tears should perish.”

2. It is objected that it is a perilous doctrine, fostering a spirit of security. What need to watch and strive if our salvation be assured?

This is a perversion of the doctrine, and it is nothing new. When St. Paul preached Justification by Faith apart from Works, there were some who said : “ Let us continue in sin that

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grace may abound ; let us do evil that good may come." "What does it matter," says the monk in Pascal's "Provincial Letters," "by what way we enter Paradise? As our famous Father Binet remarks : 'Be it by hook or by crook, what need we care if we reach at last the Celestial City?'" And there is a sort of logic in this argument, but it does not stand the test of experience.

For one thing, if this be our conscious and deliberate attitude, it proves that we have never truly believed. Behind faith there always lies a deep exercise of the soul—the discovery of one's lost condition and one's need of Christ. Once we have stood by the Cross and seen Him hanging there, "wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities," we abhor the sin that pierced Him and strive resolutely to have done with it. And so, if we be careless about sin and think it matters nothing what we do since we are certain of Heaven, it is a sure evidence that we have never had saving dealings with Christ at all. A careless soul is not on the road to the Celestial City.

And further, even if it were possible, it were a poor thing to get to Heaven after a careless

life. For life is a preparation for Eternity, and Heaven will be for every man what he is making it now by the aids of grace. What would it avail simply, if I may use the expression, to scrape into the Celestial City, ignorant of its language, unpractised in its manners, unfit for the enjoyment of its felicity? What would be the advantage of being in Heaven with no heart for its employments, of getting there only to find oneself as a stranger in a strange land? It is a solemn thought, which should stimulate us to constant zeal in the Christian life, that by continuance in sin, even if we are not excluding ourselves from Heaven, we are impoverishing our future heritage and diminishing ever more and more the exceeding and eternal weight of glory which should be ours.

In the home of my childhood I used to watch the ships passing up the beautiful Firth, laden with the merchandise of far-off lands; and it was a brave sight as they came proudly into port with their white wings spread and their flags flying in the breeze. But once I witnessed a spectacle which touched my imagination and is still vivid in my remembrance. It had blown a heavy gale, and a hapless barque had been

caught by the tempest outside the Firth. She was loaded with timber, and when the hold was full, they had piled more on the deck, making her top-heavy. The gale smote her, and she capsized. She did not sink, for the timber kept her afloat; she simply "turned turtle," and swam keel uppermost. A flotilla of tugs went to the rescue and towed her in this poor plight up the Firth. When she got into shoal water, her masts touched the bottom, and the divers went down and cut them adrift. Then she was righted, and lay a dismasted, water-logged hulk. She got into harbour, but it was a pitiable home-coming. Would the crew have been content had they foreseen it. Would they have said: "Be it by hook or by crook, what need we care if we reach at last the harbour?"

And who would be content to reach Heaven after this fashion—just saved and no more? For my part, I would rather perish outright. I want "an abundant entrance." I want to sail into the harbour with my sails spread and my flag flying. And I am sure that it thus that Christ would have it.

**WHY JESUS WEPT AT THE
GRAVE OF LAZARUS**

“Jesus wept.”

ST. JOHN xi. 35.

VII

WHY JESUS WEPT AT THE GRAVE OF LAZARUS

THIS is the shortest verse in the Bible, at all events in our English Version, and it is one of the most familiar and most affecting ; but have you ever noticed what a problem it presents?

Why did Jesus weep? It is no wonder that Martha and Mary and the friends who had come to comfort them concerning their brother, should weep as they stood beside his grave; but why should Jesus share their sorrow and mingle His tears with theirs? He knew what He had come thither to do. He had come to dry the tears of the mourners and fill their hearts with gladness by bringing their dear dead back to life. Why then should He weep, knowing what would presently come to pass?

And, moreover, had He not been teaching

His disciples all those years of His sojourning with them that there was nothing in death which should affright them? He had told them wonderful and beautiful things such as the world had never heard from the lips of its wise men, though they had said much about death that was brave and, in a manner, helpful. Far back a sage of Greece had spoken a dark word often repeated in succeeding generations—a word which betrayed the sadness that lurked in the heart of that bright land of laughter. “The best lot by far,” he said, “is never to have been born, and the next best to die as soon as may be.” He meant that life is at the best so sorrowful and painful that death is a happy release. To the Epicurean poet life was sweet, but he counted it folly to dread death, since death is extinction and there will be no suffering and no regret in the grave. And it was one of the commonplaces of Stoicism in later days that death is a law of Nature, a tribute which mortals must pay and which should be paid cheerfully—a sentiment which a modern philosopher has echoed, assuring us that “death cannot be an evil, since it is universal.”

Such are some of the consolations of

philosophy, and it may be doubted if they have ever dried a tear or cheered a single mourner in his hour of desolation. Jesus has spoken after another manner. He has opened the veil and disclosed the bright world toward which His people are travelling. He has revealed a new meaning in life, and has told us that, for all who put their trust in Him, death is the perfecting of life and the lifting of it to its highest potency. You recollect two figures under which He spoke of it. He called it a *going home*. "Let not your heart be troubled. In My Father's House are many mansions: I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." And He called it a *falling asleep*, and there is no terror here; for sleep is sweet, and waking is glad.

"Though lang the nicht may seem,
 We shall sleep without a dream
 Till we wauken on yon bricht Sabbath mornin'."

Why then did Jesus weep at the grave of Lazarus? Was it simply because His compassion was so quick and tender that He was

touched even by unreasonable sorrow? You know how a mother feels when her child awakes and sobs in the darkness. She does not scold him and tell him that there is nothing to be afraid of and he is foolish to weep. No, she takes the little thing in her arms and fondles him and soothes his alarm, and there are tears in her own eyes too. And the heart of Jesus is kinder than a mother's. "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, these may forget, yet will not I forget thee." He knows our weakness and ignorance; He pities our childishness; He is touched by our vain alarms, our unreasonable sorrows, our imaginary distresses.

It may be so, but there is a deeper reason for those tears of Jesus, and I shall try in what remains to set it before you. It is not my own idea. I owe it to a Greek saint and scholar of the fifth century, who is little known and whose very name perhaps you have never heard. It was Isidore. He was born at Alexandria and was a pupil, it is said, of the celebrated St. Chrysostom. His was not the sort of life that makes a stir in the world or bulks large in the

eyes of men. He was no ecclesiastical statesman, no eloquent preacher, but a gentle and gracious man of God who loved study and shrank from noise and strife ; and, after the fashion of his age, he had left the world and retired to a monastery near Pelusium, a town at the eastern mouth of the Delta of the River Nile. And there he passed his sweet days in prayer and meditation. In the providence of God he was entrusted with an office of rich beneficence. He had not only a furnished intellect but a sympathetic nature. He knew the mind of God and understood the human heart, and troubled souls turned to him and told him their perplexities. His fame as a spiritual counsellor spread abroad, and people would write to him from far and near about all manner of things—the conduct of their affairs, the interpretation of difficult passages of Holy Scripture, and the deep problems of life and destiny. And he spent his days in answering these.

A collection of his letters has survived, numbering over two thousand and containing many precious and beautiful things. One is from a correspondent Theodosius the Presbyter, and it propounds this very question which we are

considering : why Jesus wept for Lazarus, knowing that He would raise him from the dead. And what is Isidore's reply? It was precisely on that account, he says, that Jesus wept. Lazarus "was righteous and had gloriously finished the race of life, and had surely entered into rest and honour. Him then He was about to raise from the dead for His own glory ; for him He wept, wellnigh saying: 'One who has entered within the haven I am calling back to the billows ; one who is already crowned I am bringing back to the lists.' "

Is not this the explanation of the tears of Jesus? He knew what the eternal world is and what glory lies behind the veil ; and He did not weep because Lazarus was done with life and its gladness and sunshine ; no, but because His friend had passed "to where, beyond these voices, there is peace" and He must summon him back, must fetch the wanderer who had got home out once more into the weary wilderness. And His tears say to us : "Oh, if you only knew the glory which lies behind the veil and which I know so well since I dwelt there from everlasting ; if you only knew that radiant world of rest and peace and joy, you would

never wish your dead back in this dark world of toil and tumult and sorrow ; you would rejoice that they are at home with God."

This is the message which I have brought you this evening ; and I would have you observe that our Lord asks us to make a double venture of faith in view of the dark and solemn mystery of Death and the Hereafter.

He asks us, on the one hand, to trust in the Providence of God. You, poor mother, sitting here with your desolate heart and thinking of the fresh grave out in the cemetery and the empty crib at home, consider what might have been had your child remained with you. There are worse sorrows than death, and perhaps he has been taken away from the evil to come. It is all so dark to us, but God knows, and Jesus asks us to trust God and believe in the wisdom and goodness of His appointments.

I once heard an aged minister relate an impressive incident from his own experience, and I shall venture to repeat it. A child in his congregation was very ill—dying, as it seemed. Kneeling by the little bed, the minister prayed the Lord to spare him, if it were His holy will, and the anguished mother broke in: " O Lord,

spare him, spare him, whether it be Thy will or not!" Contrary to expectation the child recovered. An only son, he was fondly indulged; and when he went out into the world, he took to evil courses and ran his tragic career—gambling, forgery, suicide. Again the minister visited the home to comfort the mother concerning her son; but she was inconsolable. Her sorrow had a cruel aggravation. She remembered her passionate cry those twenty years ago. "Oh," she moaned, "how much better if the Lord's will and not mine had been done, and I had laid my boy in his grave, an innocent child!"

Surely her thought was a needless self-reproach and a wronging of the good Lord. It was not to punish the rebelliousness of her agonised spirit that her child was spared. Yet there is a lesson in the story, and I would have you lay it to heart. God knows, and His orderings are ever wise and gracious, and He bids us trust Him and accept them bravely and believingly. When we reach the Father's House and see our sorrows in the light of His blessed Face, we shall recognise them as the chief of all His mercies.

And there is another venture of faith which our Lord would have us make. He asks us to accept His assurance that, if we be His, there awaits us, in the undiscovered country whither we are hastening, an undreamed-of glory, "things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man— whatsoever things God prepared for them that love Him." If we only caught a glimpse of the wonder and felicity of the Unseen World, we would be glad that our dear ones have gone thither, not simply for fear of what might have befallen them here, but because they have won a heritage unspeakably better than the best that this world offers. We have the Master's word for it; and it seems to me that modern Science, after its own fashion, proclaims the same glad tidings. For does it not tell us that the Universe has a forward tendency and is continually struggling through storm and stress from a lower level to a higher, and that the present is always the germ of a richer and more beautiful development to be unfolded in the process of time? There is nothing glad and fair in our life which is not eternal. It is the darkness, the strife, and the suffering that are temporal—the travail-

pangs of the better order which is ever emerging, the painful processes whereby the invincible purpose of the Creator is being wrought out. And the best that we have yet attained is only a feeble germ and a dim prophecy of the final consummation.

Why should we sorrow for those who have won their immortality and entered upon their golden inheritance?

“Who would wish back the saints upon our rough
Wearisome road?

Wish back a breathless soul

Just at the goal?

My soul, praise God

For all dear souls which have enough.

I would not fetch one back to hope with me

A hope deferred,

To taste a cup that slips

From thirsting lips :—

Hath he not heard

And seen what was to hear and see?

How could I stand to answer the rebuke

If one should say :

‘O friend of little faith,

Good was my death,

And good my day

Of rest, and good the sleep I took’?”

Yes, surely if the blessed dead might commune with us, they would thus reprove our sorrow.

“Weep not for us,” they would say: “we are better here. Go on your way bravely and gently until you too reach the goal, and you will find us waiting to receive you and bid you welcome.”

One day I heard a beautiful thing. I was visiting at a friend's house, and I found him rejoicing in the company of his grandchild, a little maiden of ten years. Her parents had their home in a far English city, and she was on a visit to her grandfather. He told me that she was going home in a few days. “And I'll miss her when she goes,” he said. “It will be like a death in the house.” It would be “like a death in the house,” and the wee lassie was only going home! And this is what it means when the Lord's people die. They are missed here, but they have gone home—home to the Father's House; and it becomes us to rejoice in their joy, and labour that we may be found worthy to share it and see their dear faces in that blessed place.

It is told of an ancient that after reading Plato's argument for the Immortality of the Soul he had such a longing for the bright world of the philosopher's dream that he could no longer endure to tarry and cast himself headlong from

the wall of his house, impatient to depart and inherit that nobler life. Jesus does not make us thus weary and disdainful of the world. He teaches us that it too is God's domain, an outer court of His "unmeasured Temple built over earth and sea," and that our life here is a sacred ministry and a preparation for the loftier service which awaits us. He does not make us weary of the world, but He makes us well content to go away; and when we learn His secret and catch His spirit, we look on life and death with other eyes and begin to feel something of the *Heimweh* of the saints, that hunger for home which put St. Paul "in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better," and which ached in the soul of St. Bernard of Clugny when he cried:

"For thee, O dear, dear country,
Mine eyes their vigils keep;
For very love, beholding
Thy happy name, they weep."

Is it not very good to have such an assurance and such an expectation in a world like this—a world where nothing endures? And I invite you this evening to make the venture of faith

and rest with glad and quiet hearts on the word of Jesus. He came to tell us what lies behind the shadow which encloses our troubled life, and He has told us that there is nothing there that is not very good. The City of God is there, and the Father's House—in one word, Home. And death means going home, and going home means meeting again. And there is nothing so good as that.

THE THREE FOOLS

I.—THE PSALMIST'S FOOL

“The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.”

PSALM xiv. 1.

VIII

THE THREE FOOLS

I.—THE PSALMIST'S FOOL

YOU must have noticed how much the Holy Scriptures have to say about the Fool. They portray at least three distinct types of this unpleasant personage, and I propose to study these with you and try to show you what is the peculiar characteristic of each. This evening I shall speak of the Psalmist's Fool, whose folly manifests itself in atheism.

Now there is no denying that our text wears on the surface an ugly look. Faith is always a supremely difficult achievement. "Every common day," says George MacDonald, "he who would be a live child of the living has to fight the God-denying look of things, to believe that, in spite of their look, they are God's,

and God is in them, and working his saving will in them." The Universe is so vast and complex that it is no wonder if our feeble minds get bewildered and go astray ; and if we have had the happiness to win our way to the haven of faith, we shall exhibit a tender compassion for those who have missed the road, even though they seem foolish and perverse ; and the last thing we shall have the heart to do is to assail them with contumelious epithets. " Let them," says St. Augustine, " be savage against you who know not with what toil the truth is found and how hardly errors are avoided." It is a poor way of defending the Faith to call an unbeliever a fool. It proves one or other of two things—either that we are ignorant of the difficulties and have never felt their cruel pressure, or that we have been worsted in the argument and have lost our tempers ; and in either case the folly is on our own side. This disposition is cleverly hit off by Oliver Goldsmith's criticism of Dr. Johnson's controversial method : " There is no arguing with Johnson ; for when his pistol misses fire, he knocks you down with the butt-end of it."

It seems as though this were the Psalmist's

method; but if you understand the term which he employs, you will recognise that there is no such unseemliness in his language. The Hebrew word for "fool" in this instance is very interesting and instructive; and it defines the Psalmist's attitude and sheds a flood of light on the intention of the Psalm. It means properly "withered," being the word which occurs in the First Psalm, where it is said of the godly man that he is "like a tree planted by the streams of water, that bringeth forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also doth not *wither*." And so the fool here is one whose soul is withered, shrivelled, and atrophied, and if you glance over the Psalm, you will see what it is that has wrought the mischief. It is not intellectual aberration but moral depravity—the blight of uncleanness, the canker of corruption. "They are corrupt, they have done abominable works; there is none that doeth good. They are all gone aside; they are together become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." It is this that withers the soul; and it is the man whose heart has thus been eaten out of him that says and thinks that "there is no God."

You see, then, it is not intellectual unbelief

that the Psalmist is here condemning, not the attitude of one who has got bewildered in the maze and sees so many difficulties, so many arguments against a spiritual view of the Universe, that he has abandoned faith in God. To my thinking a man of this sort should not lightly be branded as an atheist; for I am more and more persuaded that there are many who are outside of all ecclesiastical organisation and could not subscribe to any creed in Christendom, and yet are recognised by the Lord as His —ay, though they may not recognise Him as their Master. It is wonderful how large the heart of Jesus is, and what diverse types of men there is room for in that hospitable shelter.

Take, for example, the man of Science. Occupied with the investigation of natural law and impressed by its magnificence, he is apt to regard it as all-sufficient, and see no need and no room for a living and personal God. But is he really an atheist? It seems to me that what he terms Nature is nothing else than God. He feels its mystery and grandeur and bows before it, and thus, in a very true sense, he is a worshipper; and a worshipper is religious.

As the author of "Natural Religion" has well said, "if we will look at things, and not merely at words, we shall soon see that the scientific man has a theology and a God, a most impressive theology, and a most awful and glorious God. I say that man believes in a God who feels himself in the presence of a Power which is not himself and is immeasurably above himself, a Power in the contemplation of which he is absorbed, in the knowledge of which he finds safety and happiness. And such now is Nature to the scientific man." Of course he makes the mistake of stopping short with Creation and failing to perceive the Creator behind it. He sees the glory of the heavens, and does not recognise it as the glory of God. Still he is a worshipper. He has the quality of reverence, and reverence is the essence of religion.

In his "Autobiography" Charles Darwin relates an incident which had greatly amused him. It happened in the days when his theory of the Universe, which has so enlarged our conceptions of God and the world we live in and revealed a nobler significance in the Christian revelation, was a startling novelty and was commonly reviled as an atheistic subversion of

religion and morality. "A few years ago," he wrote, "the secretary of a German psychological society asked me earnestly by letter for a photograph of myself, and some time afterwards I received the proceedings of one of the meetings, in which it seemed that the shape of my head had been the subject of a public discussion, and one of the speakers declared that I had the bump of reverence developed enough for ten priests." And, though it amused him, it was an accurate reading of Darwin's character. He was the most reverent of men. How could he be otherwise, continually occupied as he was in searching the works of the Creator and, in Pascal's fine phrase, "thinking God's thoughts after Him"? "I have heard," says Coleridge, "that an undevout astronomer is mad."

Be this as it may, the fact remains that it is not to men of this type that the Psalmist is here referring. His "fool" is one whose moral nature has been corrupted, whose heart has been eaten out of him, whose spiritual instincts have been slain by evil behaviour. His atheism is not "a mere speculative crochet" but "a great moral disease."

Pray observe what it is that the Psalmist says.

He does not say that atheism implies immorality, and if a man has lost his faith in God, it is an evidence that, whatever his outward life, he is practising vice in secret. That were an unjust and stupid insinuation. It by no means follows that wherever there is unbelief there must be vice; but it is true that where there is vice, there cannot be faith. Vice breeds atheism. It is the testimony of poor Robert Burns that

“it hardens a’ within,
And petrifies the feeling.”

It eats the heart out of the man, withers his soul, and destroys his very capacity for God. “Nothing,” says the late G. J. Romanes, “is so inimical to Christian belief as un-Christian conduct. This is especially the case as regards impurity; for whether the fact be explained on religious or non-religious grounds, it has more to do with unbelief than has the speculative reason.”

Will you pardon a somewhat unmannerly illustration of this grim truth? One evening, the story goes, in the course of the mess-room dinner at an Indian cantonment an officer, flushed with wine, took to quizzing the chaplain

of the regiment. "I cannot believe in the Bible, you know. There are so many things in it which nobody could accept. Jonah and the Whale, for instance: what do you make of that?" The chaplain knew his man. "Yes," he retorted, looking him straight in the face, "there are many things in the Bible which are difficult; but there are other things in it which are quite plain. The Seventh Commandment, for instance." The quizzing ceased.

There is no doubt about it: the sins of the flesh corrupt and poison the soul. "Blessed," says our Lord, "are the pure in heart; for they shall see God." But I must not leave the matter there; I must bring it nearer home. I would not for a moment seem to palliate those foul transgressions which are so loathsome to think of and so difficult to speak of, but it is well for us to consider that after all there are other sins less shocking to the moral sense yet more fatal to the soul. And these are the sins of the spirit — pride, selfishness, envy, hatred, and cruelty, which are so lightly indulged and hardly reckoned sins at all. These are the fatal canker, the deadly poison of the soul, and that for the obvious reason that they reside and operate not

in the flesh but in the spirit. They occupy not the outskirts but the citadel. They possess the heart and pollute the springs of life.

I once visited a Scottish village and observed a stream flowing through it "in the midst of the street thereof." It was hardly better than a common sewer—a receptacle of all manner of refuse, filthy, unsightly, and festering. About a year later I revisited the place, and I found that a reformation had been wrought. The authorities had cleared the bed of the stream and prohibited further pollution, and it was flowing clean and sweet, carrying health and refreshment through the village. And the reformation had been easily accomplished; for it was only the stream that had been polluted, and the spring was unpoisoned.

And so I close with the language of Holy Scripture : "Keep thy heart with all diligence ; for out of it are the issues of life." "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice ; and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

THE THREE FOOLS

II.—ST. PAUL'S FOOL

“ But some man will say, How are the dead raised up ? and with what body do they come ? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die. And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that 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.”

I CORINTHIANS xv. 35-38.

IX

THE THREE FOOLS

II.—ST. PAUL'S FOOL

ST. PAUL is here speaking of the Ressurrection of the Dead. This supreme wonder is proclaimed in the New Testament with triumphant certainty, and is in truth the very heart of the Christian revelation; yet it is an inscrutable mystery. It transcends our understanding, and unless we be led by the Holy Spirit into the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ, it must transcend our faith. Viewed from the standpoint of philosophy, it appears as a sheer irrationality, nay, a grotesque absurdity—though it must not be forgotten that Science is beginning to catch glimpses of hitherto undreamed-of possibilities; and it is not surprising that, when it was proclaimed in Corinth, that brilliant Greek city with

its long tradition of philosophic culture, it seemed a wild delusion and excited derisive incredulity even in the minds of believers.

In this immortal chapter St. Paul asserts the doctrine and reasons about it, and in the passage which I have taken for my text, he deals with a specific objection which was commonly urged against it. "Some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body—what manner of body—do they come?"

The objection, you observe, is two-fold. It states two difficulties which were felt regarding the Resurrection in those days and which are felt, perhaps no less acutely, still.

1. When these bodies of ours are laid in the grave, they are not preserved intact century after century, millennium after millennium, waiting until the resurrection-morning shall break and the touch of God shall awaken them and His voice summon them forth from their secure abode. Nay, no sooner are they committed to the bosom of the earth than they are subjected to the mysterious processes of Nature's alchemy. They decay; they crumble; they vanish away. Open a grave where a dead body was laid only the other year, and do you find it still lying

there "with meek hands folded on its breast" awaiting the Resurrection? No, it has disappeared. It has disappeared, but it has not perished. It has been transmuted. The worn-out fabric has been taken down and remade and woven by the deft hand of Nature, that skilful artificer, into new and diverse vestures. It has passed into other vital organisms—grass, flowers, trees, and animals. And how then are the dead raised up? How can the material which has undergone such dissolution and dispersion, be re-collected and re-fashioned. It belongs to the common store of matter which never increases and is never diminished through all its manifold transformations and adaptations; and the corporeal tabernacles which our souls inhabit now have served myriads before us during the long ages of the past, and will be theirs no less than ours at the Resurrection.

2. And suppose our bodies could be restored to us at the Resurrection: are they suited for the eternal world, which is so unlike the world that we inhabit now? It is a spiritual world, and shall we go thither, according to the coarse gibe of the Pagans in early days, with hair on our heads and nails on our fingers? What use will

there be for material bodies with their carnal functions in that immaterial domain? This is the difficulty which vexed the mind of that believer in the city of Corinth when he asked: "With what manner of body do they come?"

It is a hard question and a deep problem, and he was no frivolous sceptic who propounded it. He was an earnest man who would fain believe but found faith very difficult. And does it not seem as though the Apostle made a very bad beginning when he prefaced his answer to that distressed soul with an abusive epithet—"thou fool"?

No, look at the word and consider what it means. Like so many of the New Testament terms it has a world of meaning in it, and if only we perceive the idea of it, we shall recognise that it is in itself a powerful argument. Perhaps I may best show you the idea by quoting an instance of the way in which the word is used in Greek literature. It is applied to a statue in a temple. The statue stands there in its exquisite grace, and the worshippers assemble and the priests perform their sacred offices in its presence, yet it has no consciousness of aught that is passing. It has eyes, but it never sees

the reverent multitude ; it has ears, but it never hears the voice of prayer ; it has nostrils, but it never smells the fragrance of the incense. For it is only "a *foolish* statue." There is the idea of the world—"senseless," "unperceiving," seeing nothing, hearing nothing, and feeling nothing of all that is passing around it.

And now you understand what St. Paul means. He listens to that difficulty about the Resurrection, and then he turns upon his questioner, not abusively but kindly and sympathetically, and says : "Ah, you blind, unperceiving man ! Look about you and see what is going on everywhere in this great, mysterious world ; and you will never ask that question and never be troubled with that difficulty any more."

And this is the lesson which I would bring home to you this evening. Here is that transcendent mystery, the Resurrection of the Dead, the awakening of our mortal bodies to a larger, fuller, more glorious life ; and it seems a stark impossibility. But look around you, and you will see on every side innumerable prophecies, arguments, and evidences of this miraculous consummation. You observe, St. Paul points out two wonders which that troubled inquirer had never

noticed, although they were continually being enacted before his eyes; for he was like the statue in the temple—senseless, unperceiving.

The first is the law that, in St. Bernard's phrase which I have so often quoted, "Death is the Gate of Life." "That which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die." This wonder is happening on all sides of us, and St. Paul cites a very familiar instance of it—the seed which must die and decay that it may live again.

I encountered a striking example of this marvel a few years ago. A Scottish gentleman, interested in antiquities, had gone travelling in Egypt; and there he visited an ancient "city of the dead," where the bodies, embalmed against decay, had lain for thousands of years. The old Egyptians believed that the soul would one day reanimate the body, and, lest the dead should awake and find himself destitute, they were wont to place a store of provisions by his side. Inspecting a sarcophagus, the traveller found in it the customary provision and abstracted a handful of peas, all dry and withered, since they had laid there, as he reckoned, some five thousand years. And he brought them home and planted them in his

garden. It seemed a hopeless experiment; for surely the life had gone out of them. But presently green shoots appeared, and they grew and blossomed with flowers of rare beauty and sweetness; and then pods formed and ripened, and when they were plucked and opened, they were full of peas larger and richer than our cold climate produces. God had quickened the seed; and, you see, it had to die that it might be quickened. For five thousand years it had been preserved from decay; and it was only when it had been laid in the ground and rotted away, that it sprang up in newness of life.

And this is like the Resurrection. "Some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what manner of body do they come? Ah, blind, unperceiving man! That which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die."

And there is another law which is continually operating before our eyes. Death is not only the Gate of Life; it is the pathway to a larger, richer, and more beautiful life. A handful of seed cast into the earth dies; but it lives again—not a poor handful but an abundant and glorious harvest. The old body decays; it is dissolved in the alembic of Nature, and passes away for

ever; but the life is in God's keeping, and He provides it in due season a new body, like the old, and born of the old, but immeasurably grander. "That which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that 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."

St. Paul does not say that all this is identical with the high mystery of the Resurrection. He merely says that it is an analogy—"so also is the resurrection of the dead"—and that it should embolden us to believe in that supreme wonder. With such a mystery before our eyes why should we not make the venture of faith and accept, on our Lord's assurance, the loftier mystery?

It is the height of folly to make our narrow experience the limit of God's operations. It is a familiar fact, though none the less an inscrutable mystery, that if a seed be deposited in our soil, it will spring up to a richer and fuller life; but travel to the frigid North and drop a seed into a fissure of an iceberg, and it will never sprout and grow. And suppose you told a denizen of that ice-bound region what happened to a seed when sown in your happier

clime: he might laugh your story to scorn and pronounce it a wild impossibility. Yet you, with your large experience, know that it is true. And when the Lord Jesus tells us of this wonder, shall we emulate the Eskimo and make our actual the measure of God's possible?

It were surely the height of folly, and it would be the more inexcusable since we have those instructive analogies before our eyes. This is the argument of the Apostle, and I should like ere I close to point out that there is a wonderful postulate behind it. It is assumed, you observe, that those natural processes are parables, symbols, revelations; and there is here a principle which underlies Plato's doctrine of Ideas, and which runs all through the Scriptures. You remember how during his forty days on the Mount there was granted to Moses a vision of the heavenly courts, and then he was bidden to return to the camp of Israel and construct a Tabernacle; and the command was: "See thou make all things according to the pattern which was showed thee in the mount." Read the Epistle to the Hebrews, and observe how this thought dominated the mind of the writer. The earthly Tabernacle was a shadow and a type of

“the true Tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man,” and its holy things were “copies of the things in the heavens.” And the thought took a still wider range. It is written in the Book of Ecclesiasticus, the most exquisite of the apocryphal writings, that “all things are double one against another ;” and this means that the world unseen and eternal is the counterpart of the world that is seen and temporal ; as Mrs. Browning has it :

“Consummating its meaning, rounding all
To justice and perfection, line by line,
Form by form, nothing single or alone,
The great below clenched by the great above.”

The world of sense is not the real world but only its shadow ; and the real world that casts the shadow is the unseen and eternal.

And thus, if we would know the real world, we must look at the shadow which it casts, and pass from the shadow to the substance, from the symbol to the truth. Think how this thought runs through the Scriptures. Would you know what God is? Then look at a human father, and recognise the Heavenly Father's shadow. “If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your

Father which is in Heaven give good things to them that ask Him? ” Or would you know what Heaven is? Then look at your home and its tender affections, and recognise there a shadow of the Father's House. St. John had a vision of Heaven in the Isle of Patmos, and what did he see? A holy city, a transfigured and glorified Jerusalem. And is not this the thought which underlies our Lord's parabolic teaching and gives it validity and significance? He pointed to common and familiar things—the birds, the seed, the flowers, the lamp, the leaven, the net, and He said : “ Look at these, and see adumbrations of Eternity.”

And here St. Paul takes up the principle and gives it another application. “ Some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what manner of body do they come? ” “ Ah, blind, unperceiving man ! ” answers the Apostle, “ look at the seed cast into the ground, quickened, and raised up to a new and more abundant life; and recognise what this betokens. So also is the Resurrection of the Dead.”

There is an unwritten saying of Jesus : “ Wonder at the things before you,” which is much like Plato's doctrine that “ wonder is the

beginning of wisdom." And truly this is our need—the seeing eye and the understanding heart, that we may perceive and interpret the mystery of every common thing.

“Earth's crammed with heaven
And every common bush afire with God ;
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes.”

Have you ever travelled through a fair country with a man dull and heavy and insensible to the witchery of mountain and stream and field and wood? Yet the beauty was there. What was lacking was the sense of it. And this is what Jesus does for us: He opens our blind eyes and touches our dull hearts, and reveals to us the hidden glory,

“. . . the eam,
The light that never was, on sea or land,
The consecration, and the Poet's dream.”

Get to know Jesus and regard the world with His eyes and His thoughts, and it will all be transfigured. It will be an outer court of the Father's House, and everything that it contains will be sacramental.

THE THREE FOOLS

III.—OUR LORD'S FOOL

“But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee : then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided ?”

ST. LUKE xii. 20.

X

THE THREE FOOLS

III.—OUR LORD'S FOOL

CONSIDER the circumstances in which our Lord spoke this solemn parable. For some three years He had been teaching and preaching and doing all His gracious work among the folk of Galilee; and now the end is approaching, and He has bidden farewell for ever to Capernaum and is on His way through Galilee with His face set towards Jerusalem, going up to the Holy City to suffer and to die.

And you must notice as you read the story what urgency, what importunity, what tenderness are in His discourses. And no wonder. If I were sure this evening that it was the last time I would ever stand here and speak to you of the things of Eternity, would it not make a

difference? Would I not plead with you very earnestly and very kindly, knowing that it was my last message and I would never see your faces again until that day when we shall all stand side by side before the bar of God?

And as the Lord Jesus passed through the green and pleasant land of Galilee on that dread journey to Jerusalem, He knew at every village along the route that He was looking His last on the people's faces and speaking His last word to them, and they would never more see His face or hear His voice until they beheld Him on the Great White Throne and heard, not His gracious invitation: "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest," but His final verdict of welcome or condemnation. It is no wonder that there are a peculiar tenderness and an eager insistence in all that He says.

And now He has been preaching somewhere, perhaps in some wayside village, to an innumerable multitude of people who, in the graphic phrase of the Evangelist, "trode one upon another" in their anxiety to get near Him and catch His voice. He has been speaking with much solemnity, and ere His discourse is well finished a man comes up to Him with trouble

in his look and an appeal on his lips. What is the man's business? Has he come, an "anxious inquirer," to talk with Jesus about the supreme matter of salvation? Ah, no! His trouble is that his father is dead, and he has a brother, and his brother and he have fallen out over the partition of the estate. Rightly or wrongly, he thinks that his brother has been playing unfairly with him and is appropriating too much of the inheritance; and so he appeals to Jesus and craves His intervention: "Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me."

That was his trouble, and it is no wonder that his request jarred upon Jesus. Ah, there was another interest at stake infinitely more momentous than perishing gold and silver! And He surveyed the suppliant and said in a tone of mingled compassion and contempt: "Man, who appointed Me a judge or a divider over you?" That was the magistrate's office, and Jesus was the Saviour.

This is all that He has to say to the man, and herewith He turns from him as though for very shame. It is like an anticipation of the Day of Judgment. "Whosoever shall be

ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man also shall be ashamed of him, when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." He turns from him and addresses the bystanders. And He takes the incident and employs it to enforce a great lesson. He begins by giving a warning and stating a truth. "Take heed, and keep yourselves from every sort of covetousness": this is the warning. The Greek word for "covetousness" means properly *grasping at more*—the fatal temper of never being content with what one has but always seeking a little more and a little more, according to the saying that "'enough' is just a little more than one has." "Take heed, and keep yourselves from every sort of grasping greed; because it is not so that, when one has enough and to spare, his life is derived from his possessions." No, our life, our true life, springs from a deeper fountain. This is the truth, and after stating it Jesus, according to His wont, proceeds to enforce it by an illustration—the Parable of the Rich Fool.

The word for "fool" here is the same which St. Paul employs in his argument about the

Resurrection; and we saw last Sunday evening what is the idea of it. It signifies one who does not perceive what is passing before his eyes. He stands in the midst of life like a senseless statue. And when Jesus terms the man in His parable a "fool," He means that he is one who misses the proper significance of life and has no perception of its real values. He does not see the true issues. He is blind, un-perceiving.

Now look at the man and observe the justice of this characterisation of him. And, first of all, you will notice that he was not in any sense a bad man. There was no wickedness, no depravity about Him. On the contrary, he was a most estimable person. He was rich, but there was no harm in this. Of course there was none. Success is an excellent thing if it be rightly achieved, and it is the stupid or indolent man who cries out against it. It is, to my mind, a good omen when a lad is ambitious of getting on in the world, of fighting his life-battle and winning it.

"I think," said an old gentleman toward the close of his busy and successful career, "there are three questions which will be put to us on

the Day of Judgment : Did you make all you could? How did you make it? What use did you make of it?" And which of these questions would have convicted the man in the parable? He would have passed the first with the utmost credit. He had made all he could ; he had missed no chance. He was a clever farmer. He had skill in crops and herds and understood the ways of the market ; and he had prospered amazingly in his harvesting and breeding and buying and selling. And it was all to his credit.

And as for the second question : " How did you make it? " he would have passed that too. It is not suggested, you observe, that he had been guilty of any dishonesty, any sharp practice, any unfair dealing in the conduct of his affairs. He had never kept back by fraud the hire of the labourers who mowed his fields, or made " a corner " in wheat, holding it back until the people were starving and then selling out at famine prices (*cf.* Prov. xi. 26). No such wrong is laid to his charge. He was a rich man, and he deserved to be rich ; for he had worked hard, and put his mind into his work, and his work had prospered, his farm had thriven. And

it was much to his credit. He had made all he could, and he had made it blamelessly. —

But what use had he made of it? Ah! there he had failed. He had a fault, and it is one to which the successful man is ever prone. And it was this—that he was so much taken up with his farm, his crops, his cattle, his buying and selling, that he had never a thought for the higher and more momentous interests of life. He neglected the supreme concerns, made no account of them, never took them into his reckoning—the supreme concerns: Death, Judgment, Eternity, God. And this is the reason why Jesus terms him a “fool.” He had stood confronted by these transcendent and momentous facts, and he had never seen them; he had treated them as though they had no existence.

No doubt he thought himself, and certainly his neighbours would think him, a shrewd, clever man; yet see what he made of it all, what it all came to. It proved in the long run that, with all his shrewdness and cleverness, he had made a desperately bad bargain. And this is the invariable and inevitable issue of a worldly and God-forgetting life. We wake up and discover, when it is too late that it does not pay,

that we have made a fool's bargain. Look at this man, and see the pathos and irony of his situation. He had been a hard-working man all his days, toiling and moiling early and late. He would deny himself pleasure and luxury, and hoard every shekel he could. And he has got his reward. He has prospered grandly. He has amassed more than he knows what to do with. So he calls a halt and reviews his position, and he finds how much he has of worldly gear. He says to himself: "Now I have reached the goal which I set before me at the beginning of my career. It is time that I was giving over all this drudgery and enjoying a little ease; and I can well afford it. I have more than I can use, more than I know what to do with. Soul," he concludes, "thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry."

Do you perceive the significance of this speech? Observe, he addresses his soul, his immortal soul; and what does he say to it? Does he say: "Thou hast given long enough to this perishing world, and it is now high time that thou shouldest take thought of the things which belong to thine eternal peace"? Ah! no

doubt that would be his purpose long ago at the outset of his career. "Let me make my fortune," he would say, "and then I will think about eternity. I am a young man now, and I have my way to carve out through the world. My soul can wait a while. Just let me make my fortune, and then I will think about Eternity." But the years had come and gone, and they had wrought their inevitable changes in the man. They had enriched his estate, but they had impoverished his soul; and while his barns had been getting wider and fuller, it had been getting narrower and emptier. Steeped in worldliness, his heart had been corroded. His very faculty for religion had withered away; his spiritual nature, in Darwin's phrase, had been "atrophied." And now his best ambition for his soul, his immortal soul, is "eating and drinking and making merry." And he was not jesting. Twenty or thirty years ago he could hardly have spoken after this fashion: he would have felt the absurdity of it. See what a long distance he had travelled along the path of spiritual degeneration.

Was I not right when I said that he had made a bad bargain? When a man sells his soul

—and he never means to sell it—he not only pays the price but loses the purchase. And so it happened with the Rich Fool. He bartered his soul for the world; and he got the world, did he not? Yes, but he had no enjoyment of it while he had it, and he quickly found that he could not keep it. He seemed a successful man, one who had achieved his ambition. All those years he had been labouring to fill the cup of his pleasure; and now it is full to the brim and running over, and he is just putting it to his lips when it is dashed from his grasp. All those years he had been labouring to build a palace of delight; and it is just completed: he has put the last touch to it, and is surveying it with pride; and, lo! a cold breath from the Unseen blows upon it, and his glittering palace collapses like a house of cards. He had left God out of his reckoning, and now, all unexpectedly, God lays His hand upon him: “Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?” Ay, whose would they be? His heirs would quarrel over his estate, and this was the outcome of it all, all his planning and striving and toiling—a lost soul and a

disputed will. Truly it was a bad bargain, it was a desperately bad bargain; and the man who had made it was a fool—blind, unperceiving.

There is a grim Italian saying that "our last robe is made without pockets." And the supremely important question is what sort of things we are living for and setting our hearts upon—things which need pockets, or the things which the heart carries. It is well for us to pause from time to time amid our worldly employments and consider what the years have brought us and whether it be gain or loss. And it is so easy to determine. Perhaps they have brought us broader lands and fuller barns; and these are goodly things if only we have wisdom to use them. But have they brought us also more love and gentleness and patience and courage and faith and hope, more spiritual-mindedness, a deeper knowledge of God, a closer intimacy with Christ and a fuller sympathy with His mind and will? Whatever of temporal success or failure they may have brought us, the changeful years have brought us nothing but good if the world be less to us than it used to be and Christ more.

In my old parish of Tulliallan there was an ancient house which bore this inscription on its gable-wall :

GOD IS MY LYF, MY LAND AND RENT;
HIS PROMIS IS MY EVIDENT:
LAT THEM SAY.

Can we make this confession?

OTHER-WORLDLINESS

“The men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him !”

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us.”

“Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be ?”

ST MATTHEW viii. 27 ; I JOHN iii. 1 ; 2 PETER iii. 11.

XI

OTHER-WORLDLINESS

MY sermon this morning is based upon a linguistic subtlety which is hidden from us in our English Version, and I almost fear that it may seem to savour somewhat of pedantry. Yet I think that, if I am able to reveal to you this delicate touch, you will find in it a profitable and inspiring message.

It lies in that phrase which occurs in each of the verses that form my text—"what manner of," and which represents a Greek adjective rather difficult to render into English inasmuch as it has in English no precise equivalent. Let me try to explain it. It means properly "of what country?" referring not to *quality* but to *nationality*. It would have been used, for

example, by an Athenian who had gone down to the sea-port of the Piræus and met a stranger newly arrived. "Of what country are you?" he might have inquired. And it is the word which, had they spoken Greek, the Phœnician mariners would have used when the storm smote their ship, and they cast lots that they might know for whose cause this evil was upon them, and the lot fell upon the fugitive prophet, and they said unto him: "Whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people art thou?" (Jonah i. 8).

Such is the idea of the word, and I wish you now to carry it in your minds and observe how it runs through those three verses.

Look at the first. It occurs in the story of our Lord's miracle of the stilling of the tempest on the Lake of Galilee. He was in a boat with strangers, and there were other little boats in company with His. And when the wonder happened, when the high wind fell and the rough waves were smoothed, all so suddenly, at His command, the men were amazed. They knew little or nothing about Jesus, but they saw His miracle and they recognised the unearthliness of the Man who wrought it. And they exclaimed

in their astonishment : “ What unearthly personage is this? a visitant from what far shore, what heavenly region? ”

Look at the next verse. “ Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us.” It is a wonderful love, a love which is not native to this cold, bleak world. “ Behold,” says the Apostle, “ what unearthly love—love from what distant clime ! ”

In my old parish there was a little loch in the midst of the forest, and I was fond of visiting it. Its chief attraction for me was the multitude of wild birds which peopled its banks and islets; and once I observed a novelty. I had been accustomed to see there all manner of familiar water-fowl—coot, ducks, swans; but that evening I noticed others such as I had never seen before—birds of brilliant plumage, crimson, blue, and glossy green. And I recognised them as strangers from another clime than ours, from some far-off land where the air is warmer and the sun shines brighter and paints everything in gaudier hues. I said: “ These are no natives: they are foreign birds; ” and I learned by and by that they had been imported from Africa.

And this is precisely the thought in the

Apostle's mind. "That love," he says, "the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, is a love which never sprang from earth's cold soil. It is from some far-off region; it is from Heaven itself. Behold, what unearthly love the Father hath bestowed upon us !

And now look at the last verse. St. Peter has been speaking, in language which is a striking anticipation of modern astronomical and geological predictions, of the final catastrophe toward which our earth is hastening, "in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up." And now he points the moral of that dread prospect: "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons—what unearthly, what other-worldly persons—ought ye to be!" There is nothing here that is stable, nothing that shall endure; all is passing, all is perishing. What other-worldly persons ought ye to be, living not for time but for Eternity, not for the things that are seen and temporal but for the things that are unseen and eternal !

My subject then is the Unworldliness or, as I

had rather say, the Other-worldliness of the Christian Life; and I need hardly remind you how frequent this thought is in the Holy Scriptures. "We look," says St. Paul, "not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." And again he says: "Seek the things that are above; set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth." "Love not the world," says St. John, "neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the vain-glory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." And here St. Peter takes up the refrain: "Seeing that all these things shall be dissolved, what other-worldly persons ought ye to be!"

I wish then to speak to you of the spirit of other-worldliness and show you what it means and how it may be fostered. And, first of all, you will observe that it is not the teaching of the Holy Scriptures that the world is an

evil thing and we should contemn and forsake it. On the contrary, it is God's beautiful creation, and He has appointed it as the habitation of His children, and furnished it for their entertainment, and stored it with manifold tokens of His goodness and symbols of His presence; and it becomes us to bless Him for it and live in it with glad and grateful hearts. You remember how the Psalmist speaks: "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto Thy name, O Most High: to show forth Thy lovingkindness in the morning, and Thy faithfulness every night. For Thou, Lord, hast made me glad through Thy works: I will triumph in the works of Thy hands."

I do not know how I can better illustrate the scriptural attitude toward the world than by quoting a saying of Mohammed, the prophet of Arabia. "What have I to do," he said, "with the comforts of this life? The world and I—what connection is there between us? Verily, the world is no otherwise than as a tree unto me: when the traveller hath rested beneath its shade, he passeth on." Such is indeed our life: it is a pilgrimage. And the world is not our home: it is the wilderness through which we are travel-

ling. And it is often a difficult and sometimes a hostile territory, abounding in pitfalls and perils and infested by treacherous foes. Yet there is many a pleasant place in it too, many a springing well and green oasis; and as we journey, we meet many a friendly face and kindly heart. These are good gifts of God, proving that He is mindful of His weary pilgrims; and we should welcome them and rejoice in them and use them reverently and thankfully, resting gladly beneath each sheltering tree and blessing the love which planted it and spread its kindly shade, when we pass on and pursue our homeward journey.

Our temptation is to forget that it is only a wayside resting-place, and that our home lies far away beyond the distant margin of the wilderness, like the lotus-eaters in the old Greek fable. And our text provides us with a double safeguard.

1. St. Peter reminds us of the transitoriness of the world. "Seeing that all these things shall be dissolved, what other-worldly persons ought ye to be!"

There is an unwritten saying of our Lord which strikingly enforces this lesson. It has

been preserved in a curious way. Most of the unwritten sayings of Jesus are recorded on the pages of the ancient Fathers, but this one was found by the Scottish missionary Dr. Duff, inscribed in Arabic, in the gateway of the Mohammedan mosque at Futteh-pore Sikri in India. And it is in no wise strange that it should have been found there. For Christianity was introduced into India at a very early date. Tradition says that the Apostles Thomas and Bartholomew laboured there as missionaries of the Cross. And though they gave the supreme place of honour to their own prophet, the Mohammedans recognised and revered Jesus as a great and holy teacher, and not a few of His sayings are quoted in their Koran. It is therefore nothing strange that a saying of our Lord should be inscribed in the porch of an Indian mosque.

And here is the saying : " Jesus, on whom be peace, has said : ' The world is merely a bridge : you are to pass over it and not to build your dwellings upon it.' " I am not sure of its title to rank as a genuine saying of our Lord. There were no bridges in Palestine, and the word nowhere occurs in the Scriptures ; and this seems

at the first glance to militate against its authenticity. But there is a possibility which appeals to my fancy. On one occasion, and only one so far as the record goes, Jesus crossed the frontier of the Holy Land and preached among the heathen (*cf.* St. Mark vii. 31, R.V.). The scene of that gracious visitation was Phœnicia with her historic cities of Tyre and Sidon, and I wonder if this saying may not be an echo of that unique ministry. For Tyre stood on an island, connected with the mainland by a famous mole; and that imposing bridge, thronged with eager merchantmen and their caravans, might well suggest this saying to Jesus as He passed over it with His disciples on His way to that great city, "the mart of nations," "the merchant of the peoples unto many isles."

Be this as it may, the saying breathes the spirit of our Lord, and it is a precept which we should diligently regard. A bridge is the last place where one would think of making his abode. It is not for dwelling on but for passing over—over to the city on the farther side. And "the world is merely a bridge: we are to pass over it and not to build our dwellings upon it."

2. There is a still surer secret of other-world-

liness, and it lies in the words of St. John :
“ Behold, what unearthly love the Father hath
bestowed upon us.” Think of Jesus ; get to
know Him ; keep in His fellowship, and you
will breathe the atmosphere of Eternity ; for

“. . . ah ! the Master is so fair,
His smile so sweet to banished men,
That they who meet it unaware
Can never rest on earth again.

And they who see Him risen afar
At God's right hand to welcome them,
Forgetful stand of home and land,
Desiring fair Jerusalem.”

It is told how a company of Roman gentlemen were once discussing the problem of the Immortality of the Soul ; and one of them remarked that, when he was reading the argument of Plato, he was sure of it. “ When I read,” he said, “ I assent, but so soon as I lay down the book, all my assent slips away.” And Jesus is the evidence of the things unseen and eternal. Get near Him ; keep in His love ; never lose sight of His blessed face, and then the world and the things of the world will be transfigured in your eyes. You will see them “ under the aspect of Eternity.”

**THE
EMBLEMS OF THE EVANGELISTS**

“And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal : and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind. And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle. And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him ; and they were full of eyes within : and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.”

REVELATION iv. 6-8.

XII

THE EMBLEMS OF THE EVANGELISTS

PERHAPS the most sensible of all the sensible things which John Calvin ever did was this— that when he wrote his monumental commentary on the Holy Scriptures, he wrote on every book except the last. And he left the Book of Revelation uninterpreted because it is a sacred mystery, and it does not become us to peer into it.

And I am not going to weary you with any such foolishness this morning. I am not going to discuss the multitudinous theories which have been put forward, and tell you what I think or what any one else thinks about the meaning of the mystic imagery in the passage before us. I have taken it for my text because there has been associated with it all down the ages

a beautiful poetic idea ; and it is this that I wish to set before you this morning.

These four beasts—what are they? The devout fancy of the Christian Fathers regarded them as emblems of the four Evangelists—St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John—those supreme benefactors of the Christian Church who have bequeathed to all generations that priceless legacy, the story, from their several standpoints, of that Life of matchless love which was the revelation of the unseen God and Father. There is some variation in the application of the imagery, but I shall follow what seems to me the aptest and truest interpretation—that of St. Augustine.

Four beasts—the Lion, the Calf, the Man, and the Eagle ; and, according to St. Augustine, the Lion is the emblem of St. Matthew, the Man the emblem of St. Mark, the Calf the emblem of St. Luke, and, of course, the flying Eagle the emblem of St. John. I wish you to look at the thoughts which underlie these emblems. Some of those ancient fancies, though perhaps they have no real basis, are full of meaning, and cast a flood of light on the common things which we are handling daily ; and if you think of these

emblems, you will find how well they bring out the dominant thought, the true *motif*, of each of the Four Gospels.

1. *St. Matthew the Lion*.—Of course the key to this emblem is the old fancy that the lion is the King of the Beasts. And you see the appropriateness of the emblem?

St. Matthew wrote his Gospel as an appeal to unbelieving Israel in the dark days when that terrible, crushing disaster had befallen the nation—the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman general Titus and the dispersion of the people over the face of the earth. When they were broken, scattered, and despairing, St. Matthew, the Jewish Evangelist, wrote his Gospel, not to upbraid them with their unbelief, but to make a last gracious appeal to them, and to prove to them, after the manner of demonstration which the Jewish mind appreciated, that the Lord Jesus, whom their fathers in their blindness had rejected, was none other than the King of Israel—the Promised Saviour, the Holy Messiah, the Son of David's royal house, whom the prophets had foretold, and whom, generation after generation, believing men had been dreaming of and praying for and longing after.

Jesus the King of Israel—that is the thesis which St. Matthew sets out to establish. I cannot stay to show you at large how this thought runs all through the Gospel, but read the book with this thought before your mind, and you will observe innumerable converging evidences of it.

Let me mention two. (1) You remember how frequently in the course of the narrative we find, after the record of some incident, this phrase: "Thus was fulfilled that which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet." You see, St. Matthew is not content simply to tell the story. He tells it, and then he says: "Now stop a moment, and observe how this story is a fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. Jesus is the promised Saviour, the King of Israel." (2) Have you ever noticed those, apparently, most uninteresting and unprofitable passages in the First and Third Gospels—the genealogies of our Lord? Observe St. Matthew's genealogy. He sets to work very differently from St. Luke. St. Luke traces Jesus back to Adam, the head of humanity, and then goes a step farther and roots humanity in God: "the son of Adam, which was the son of God." But what does St.

Matthew do? He traces Jesus back, first, to David, the great King, and thus proves Him "great David's greater Son," the prophetic King of Israel who should come and restore the fallen throne. But he is not content with this. He traces our Lord farther back still to Abraham, and he stops there. Abraham was the Father of the Faithful, the religious head of the nation; and when St. Matthew traces our Lord's descent first to David and then to Abraham, what does this mean? It means that Jesus is not only the promised King, the Head of the New Covenant, but the heir of the ancient Covenant which God made with Abraham and his seed after him in the morning of Israel's history. And thus St. Matthew gathers up all the promises of God and all the hopes of His people, and shows how they are fulfilled and realised in the King and Saviour.

2. *St. Mark the Man.*—And how apt this emblem is! St. Mark has no theological thesis, no apologetic purpose. He simply tells the story of our Lord's ministry, and he never stops to point a moral or deduce a consequence. And there is one feature of his Gospel which, I think,

brings out its character very clearly. Have you ever noticed the quickness of the movement all through the narrative? For example, there is a word which is continually occurring and recurring—the word “immediately.” Sometimes it is rendered “forthwith” or “straightway,” but it is always the same word in the Greek. Glance over the pages and see how the word introduces every paragraph: “It came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. And *immediately* coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him.—And *immediately* the Spirit driveth Him into the wilderness.—And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after Me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. And *immediately* they forsook their nets, and followed Him.—And *immediately* he called them.—And *immediately* on the Sabbath Day he entered into the synagogue, and taught.” And so on. The words meets you continually. And you feel the effect of it. It tells you how the Worker had a great mission before Him, and He was in haste to accomplish it, according to His own word: “I must work the works of Him

that sent Me, while it is day : the night cometh, when no man can work.”

That is the characteristic of the Lord's ministry which appealed to the Evangelist, and here is an interesting circumstance : Just as Timothy was the companion of St. Paul, so St. Mark was the companion of St. Peter, and it is said that his Gospel is nothing else than his notes and reminiscences of St. Peter's preaching as he went about on his great missionary enterprise. And it breathes the spirit of St. Peter, that restless, impetuous, impulsive Apostle. He noticed—because it was congenial to his own nature and disposition—the eagerness of the Master, His constant, unresting, unwearied activity ; and this is the refrain of his Gospel. It portrays Jesus as a man with a great task on hand, always hasting to complete His day's work ere the night should fall. Or I may express it more theologically and say that, if St. Matthew depicts Jesus as the Son of David, the King of Israel, St. Mark depicts Him as the Son of Man, the prophetic Servant of the Lord : “ Behold, My servant, whom I uphold, Mine elect, in whom My soul delighteth ; I have put My Spirit upon Him : He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.”

3. *St. Luke the Calf*.—And here is something puzzling. The calf is the sacrificial victim, and if there be any book in the New Testament which has nothing to say of sacrifices—of victims and priests and altars and shedding of blood, it is the Gospel according to St. Luke. St. Luke was a Greek, a physician of Antioch, and he knew nothing about Jewish typology and symbolism, and there is nothing about sacrifices in his Gospel. And yet those ancient mystics found his emblem in the calf.

It is certainly puzzling; but just consider it, and you will perceive the appropriateness of it. What is sacrifice? It is not a priest. It is not a victim. It is not a reeking altar. Oh, no! it is the giving of oneself for others. It is Love, and Love is the keynote of St. Luke's Gospel.

St. Luke was the companion of St. Paul, and went about with him on his missionary journeys. And he caught his master's spirit, and again and again in reading his Gospel you hear echoes of St. Paul's speech and see reflections of St. Paul's thought. Now what was the dominant idea of St. Paul's theology, the heart of the Gospel which he preached? It was the

thought of the universality of salvation. The Jews said: "Salvation is for us, not for the Gentiles; and if the Gentiles would share it, they must become Jews and submit to the rites and requirements of the Law." "No," said St. Paul, "Judaism has served its day. It is past and gone, and the Gospel is for all mankind. Salvation is for all who need a Saviour—Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, bond and free. And more than that: if you find one who is the blackest of sinners, one whom the rest of the world despise and count an outcast, look at that man. That is the man whom Jesus died to save first of all. The Gospel is a message of salvation for the sinful, the outcast, the despised."

That is sacrifice, and that is St. Luke's message. Just think of some of the stories which he tells us, and no one else. Is it not he that tells us all those moving things about the Lord's love for sinners—that story of the sinful woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee, and that other story, the parable of the Prodigal Son? Jesus, St. Luke is never weary of assuring us, loved sinners. More than that, He loved outcasts, and there were two conspicuous classes of outcasts in our Lord's day. There

were, first, the heathen, the Gentiles ; and you remember how Jesus took to do with them. He preached to the Samaritans, and St. Luke reports His parable of the Good Samaritan who put the holy men of Israel to shame ; and he tells us also of that other Samaritan, the only one of the ten lepers whom Jesus cleansed, that had the gratitude to come back and thank their Benefactor. And there was another outcast in His day—woman. It is said that women are more religious than men ; and it may be so, though I rather think that men and women both are more religious than is commonly supposed. But, be this as it may, it were certainly a shame to women if they did not love Jesus after all that He has done for them. It was contrary to the Law in His day for a man to be seen talking in public to a woman, even his wife or sister or daughter. And in the Morning Prayer the men blessed God that He had made them Jews and not Gentiles, freemen and not slaves, men and not women.

Such was the Jewish estimate of women while our Lord dwelt here, and you remember how St. Luke takes pains all through his narrative to show us that He had a special tenderness for

woman just because she was an outcast and despised. Read that beautiful story in St. Luke and compare it with the corresponding story in St. Matthew—the story of our Lord's birth. St. Matthew relates it from the standpoint of Joseph : Mary is nowhere ; St. Luke relates it from the standpoint of Mary, with a tenderness and sympathy which are almost womanly. And it is he that tells all those stories of women who showed kindness to the homeless Man of Sorrows—the women who “ ministered unto Him of their substance,” and all the rest.

This is ever St. Luke's manner. His Gospel reveals him as a Christian gentleman with a chivalrous compassion for every feeble and defenceless thing. And that is sacrifice—that, and not the priest or the bleeding victim or the crimson altar. And what makes the Sacrifice on Calvary is not the Cross, the nails, the spear ; it is the Love which brought Jesus to that awful doom and moved Him to bear it all for our sinful sakes. And St. Luke's is the sacrificial Gospel because it is the Gospel of the Love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

4. *St. John the Eagle.*—And this hardly needs

explanation. There is a radical difference between St. John and the other Evangelists. The latter tell us about Jesus as He appeared among the children of men, and you discover by and by, as the story proceeds, that this Man was something more than a man, and you reach at last the conviction that He was God. But St. John begins at the other end. Remember his immortal Prologue. He starts by saying: "Now here is what I am going to tell you about—not the story of a human life but the story of a divine manifestation. The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us; and we beheld His glory." That is St. John's starting-point; and the starting-point makes such a difference. He lifts us at once above Bethlehem. He never says a word about the inn or the manger: he carries us away up to the Throne of God and brings us down thence in company with the Incarnate Saviour.

It is like an eagle's flight. I saw an eagle once in the Western Highlands. It had alighted in the neighbourhood of a shepherd's flock, and he scared it away lest it should plunder his lambs, and it took wing and soared up into the blue sky, growing less and less until it seemed but a dim

speck, scarce as big as a skylark. The old fable says that the eagle is the only creature whose eye can look undazzled on the blazing sun; and there could be no fitter emblem of St. John. He lifts us above the noise and strife of earth, and sets us amid the blaze of the heavenly glory.

And now I must close. You see what the Evangelists do. They all tell us about the same Person, but each tells us a different story. St. Matthew tells us about the King of Israel; St. Mark about the Man Christ Jesus; St. Luke about the Infinite Sacrifice of Redeeming Love; and St. John about the Divine and Eternal Glory of the Incarnate Word. Each shows us what he had seen of the ineffable Wonder, what had been revealed to him, what had come home to his heart along the pathway of his personal experience.

But the glory of Jesus was greater than any of them knew, and it is well for us that we have their fourfold testimony. Each brings us his own message, and each takes up the message of his predecessor and adds something more to it. St. Matthew tells us about the King:

ah ! but it is something better than a king that we need, something nearer, more intimate, more tender. " Yes," says St. Mark, " and you have this in Jesus : He is your Brother Man." Ah ! but we are sinners, and we need salvation. " Yes," says St. Luke, " and you have this in the Love of Jesus, His Infinite Sacrifice for the sin of the world." " Ay," says St. John, " and more than that. He was God come down from Heaven to raise us out of our misery and carry us home to the Father's House." And this is all we need.

THE ETERNAL TENTS

“And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when it shall fail, they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles.”

ST. LUKE xvi. 9 (R.V.).

XIII

THE ETERNAL TENTS

MY text is that phrase "the eternal tabernacles" or, as it should rather be rendered, "the eternal tents."

It is an odd phrase, yet, I think, one of the most significant and instructive in the New Testament. It occurs nowhere else in the Holy Scriptures, nor, so far as I am aware, has it any parallel in ancient literature. This means that it is peculiar to our Blessed Lord; and He employed it to convey a great lesson to our imaginations and hearts. And it seems to me that the thought which it expresses is one of the most helpful in all His teaching, one which bears consideration and richly rewards it. It is a thought which sheds light on the dim mystery of the Hereafter, and affords us a glimpse of that future life whither our hearts keep turning so constantly and so wistfully, and

brings home to us certain truths which, I fear, we are apt to miss.

“The Eternal Tents”: This is our Lord’s description of Heaven ; and if we would feel the force of it and catch its true interpretation, we must remember the history of ancient Israel. That history, so long, so troublous, began far back with the call of Abraham to leave his pleasant home in the land of Haran. Linked with the call was a promise, which came to him we know not how, that of his descendants God would make a great nation and give them a goodly land for their heritage.

That was the beginning of Israel’s national history—the call of Abraham and the promise to his seed after him. And you remember how nobly he made the heroic venture of faith and, at the call of God, abandoned all that he had—all that, in the worldly judgment, was worth having—and set out in pursuit of a far-off hope and a transcendent ideal. He went forth with his tent and his family and his flocks and herds, and journeyed to and fro ; and through the discipline of his homeless life the revelation grew ever clearer and the hope more sure. He died

ere the promise was fulfilled, but he left his children a heritage of tents and flocks and herds, and a heritage more precious still—a faith and an example.

And thus the nation grew, and as they increased in numbers, they increased also in courage and expectancy. They were, as the phrase is, a nomadic tribe, wanderers over the trackless East with no city, no abiding rest, no settled home, dwelling in tents, which is the scriptural emblem of uncertainty and instability—pitching their tents as each evening fell, and striking them again at break of day and travelling on in quest of new pastures for their cattle.

Thus they fared on their aimless way, and troubles befell them. They were driven hither and thither, harassed and oppressed, yet ever cherishing a great hope in their hearts. They were homeless, but a home awaited them. They were not mere wanderers: they were pilgrims. They were dwellers in tents, but that was not their final condition: they were looking for something better than tents—a city with foundations and walls and bulwarks. “By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed to go

out unto a place which he was to receive for an inheritance ; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he became a sojourner in the land of promise, as in a land not his own, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise : for he looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

For four hundred years they wandered, dwelling in tents ; and then at length their hope was realised, and they reached the Promised Land and Jerusalem, the stablished city.

Such was the ancient history of Israel, and it was never forgotten. The Jews in after generations looked back to it with wonder and pride, and it served them as an emblem of human life. They recognised in that long and weary wandering a parable of the hungry-hearted life of the children of men. "We are strangers before Thee," they said, "and sojourners, as were all our fathers" ; "Here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come." And the entrance into the Promised Land and the winning of the Holy City—that prefigured to them the glad consummation when they should

be gathered home to the City of God and the Father's House.

And this, you observe, is the thought which underlies the curious phrase of our text—"the Eternal Tents." Its peculiarity is that it is what is called a contradiction in terms ; for, if there be one thing which less than any other can be predicated of a tent, it is that it is eternal. This is precisely what a tent is not. It is a frail and fleeting thing, pitched to-day and struck to-morrow, a fitting image of life's transience : " Mine age is departed, and is removed from me as a shepherd's tent." Yet Jesus says "the Eternal Tents." Had He followed the line of thought familiar to the Jewish imagination, He would have said : " Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness ; that, when it shall fail, they may receive you into the Eternal City, the City which hath the foundations." But no, He gives the phrase this odd turn and says " into the Eternal Tents," combining two contradictory ideas—on the one hand, stability, endurance, and, on the other, unsettlement, uncertainty.

What would He teach us by this description of Heaven. I think He means, in the first place,

to disabuse our minds of an idea to which they are prone. He would have us understand that, while there will be rest in Heaven, it will not be the rest of inactivity. There will be rest, but our strivings will not cease, nor our yearnings and our achievements. Of course there will be no more sinning; for we shall see the Lord's face, and we shall be like Him when we see Him as He is. There will be an end of sinning, but not of service nor of discovery of the inexhaustible wonder, the unfathomable mystery of the love and wisdom of God.

This is a lesson which we have need to learn, for are we not wont to entertain a far different conception of Heaven? You remember that verse of our sweet poet F. W. Faber :

“Father of Jesus, love's Reward!
What rapture will it be,
Prostrate before Thy Throne to lie,
And gaze and gaze on Thee!”

Ah, no! that will never be our employment. That were Nirvana, not Heaven. God is not idle. “My Father,” says Jesus, “worketh even until now.” He “fainteth not, neither is weary.” The Universe is the Eternal Creator's “sounding labour-house vast,” and this world is its lowest room; and when we are summoned

to a higher room, it is for a better work and a nobler service, for a life of unwearied activity, upward aspiration, and ever fresh achievement.

That is in truth an impossible ideal which Faber expresses. It too is a contradiction in terms ; for the rest which it speaks of is the rest of idleness, and in idleness there is no rest but intolerable weariness. Is not this a lesson of our common experience? You know how perilous it is for a man who has led an active life to retire from business while his faculties are still unimpaired. Dr. Samuel Johnson once told a curious anecdote of an eminent tallow-chandler in London who had acquired a considerable fortune and gave up the trade in favour of his foreman. He soon grew weary, and paid frequent visits to his old shop, and he desired that they would let him know their "melting-days," and he would come and assist them ; which, says Johnson, he accordingly did. The man, you see, had retired from business, thinking to enjoy his well-earned repose ; but he found that idleness is not rest, and because he had no work to do, he had to make work and do other men's work for them. There is nothing so intolerable as unemployment. It is impossible to do

nothing, and most of the mischief in the world is done by idle people who have nothing better to do.

And the Lord loves us too well to doom us to the misery of eternal inactivity. Think what the Bible teaches. Look at the blessed angels : do they lie prostrate before the Throne of God and gaze and gaze on Him? No. " Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to do service for the sake of them that shall inherit salvation? " They are ever pursuing their unwearied and invisible offices, and every breeze that kisses our faces is the stirring of their wings : for is it not written that He " maketh the winds His messengers " ? And surely in that broad world there will be room and work for you and me. We shall have our appointed tasks ; and in the doing of them we shall find our exceeding gladness. For there will be no weakness and no weariness in that land of enlargement. Our faculties, which are here so bounded and so dim, will there be emancipated and purified, and we shall know the ecstasy of a full, unfettered life.

And there is another lesson in our text. It was not for nothing that the Israelites endured that long ordeal of homeless wandering ere they

reached their "city of habitation." It was their discipline in faith and courage, their preparation for the heritage which God had appointed for them. And so our earthly life, with all its unrest and weariness and disappointment, is our discipline for the service which awaits us in the City of God.

I am sure there is none of us who is not oftentimes visited by a poignant sense of the transitoriness of life, and a wistful yearning to accomplish some work which will live after he is dead. Ah, there is nothing which I would not sacrifice for that ! I love you, my dear people, more than I can express, and it would go near to the breaking of my heart to leave you ; yet I would do it, I would do it, if thereby I might turn my life to better account and do some more enduring work, some work which would serve not only the present but the future too.

Yet it seems to me at times that there is something of short-sightedness in this ambition, and it is apt to breed a spirit of discontent which covets larger opportunities and frets when they are withheld. It becomes us rather to recognise that this life is only a preparation, and it is far less what we may be able to accomplish here that

counts than what we are fitting ourselves to attain hereafter. Our supreme ambition should be to get ready for that transcendent service which awaits us when we pass out of these mortal shadows into the light of the Eternal Day, to profit daily by the discipline of God's providence, and to learn the lessons which He is seeking to teach us. Those sorrows of ours, those sufferings and frailties of our feeble flesh which exclude us from so much of the sunshine and gladness of this beautiful world, those reverses in business, and all the other things which make our hearts sore and our burdens heavy—think what they are. They are God's discipline, and they are designed to work in us faith and courage and patience and hope. And, after all, these are the things which count. It is not the man who achieves the most tangible success or builds himself the highest monument in the sight of the world, that has got the most out of life. No, it is the man whose heart has been softened, whose soul has been purified, whose imagination has been touched and elevated. The purpose of all God's dealings with us is to make us brave and gentle and kind ; and these qualities are the prize of life and the indispensable equipment for the Eternal Tents.

THE PERIL OF DEFEAT

“So Tibni died, and Omri reigned.”

I KINGS xvi. 22.

XIV.

THE PERIL OF DEFEAT

THIS brief sentence means very much more than it expresses. It is nothing else than the record of a tragedy, all the more significant by reason of its reserve. It says so much because it says so little.

That was a wild, lawless time in the history of Israel. Conspiracy, violence, and bloodshed were the order of the day. It happened that the king had been assassinated, and there was a struggle for the vacant throne. Two candidates came forward or were put forward—Omri, the captain of the host, who, like a Roman Emperor in the later period, had been elected king by the acclamation of his army ; and Tibni, the son of Ginath, a quiet civilian, who was probably more fit to rule than Omri, at all events had there been law and order in the land. The

nation was equally divided between the two, and the quarrel was brought to the brutal arbitrament of battle. Omri's faction, being men of war, prevailed, and "Omri reigned." Omri reigned, and what of Tibni? "Tibni died." He was not slain in the battle. He escaped from the field, a defeated man, and his spirit was broken. His soul was embittered. He had played his game, and he had lost it, and he had no more to live for. "So Tibni died"—died, as we say, of a broken heart.

This sort of tragedy is continually being enacted in our troublous and tangled world. Take up to-morrow's newspaper, and look over its columns, and let your imagination loose as you read some of its curt notices. Here you come upon a pleasant surprise: a friend of yours has got an appointment. You know what his ambitions have been, and now he has won the prize; and you sit down and write him a letter of congratulation and wish him well in his new career. But ah! consider what lies behind your friend's success. There were, let us say, a score of other candidates. One is successful; twenty are defeated. And what becomes of the twenty?

Here is one of them : that appointment involved so much for him. It meant his future career ; perhaps it meant his daily bread. And he has lost his chance. Ay, what becomes of the unsuccessful twenty? They slip out of sight. Could you follow them, what would you find? You would find chagrin and bitterness in their hearts. Perhaps you would find that they never lift their heads again and go through the remainder of their lives defeated, broken men.

It is always thus. Every success has its corresponding and outweighing failure ; and if only we have the imagination to perceive it, there is hardly a paragraph in the newspaper which does not throb with pathos and heart-breaking. These tragedies are occurring every day, and behind every triumph lies a dark background of defeat and disappointment.

And here is what I would say this evening : Failure happens to us all, and it is one of the supreme tests of a man's character. The hour of defeat is a momentous crisis, and his bearing then determines what the man's future shall be in life and in Eternity. And so I wish to speak to you of the peril of defeat and how we may escape it.

And, first of all, I would counsel you to assume at the outset and steadfastly maintain the right attitude toward life and toward your fellow-men. "Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not." It is indeed good to cherish ambition, and we are poor creatures if we be not bent on making the utmost of that splendid opportunity which is called life. But remember, that the best things ever come unsought to the man who thinks not of life's prizes but of its duties, and takes them day by day gently and bravely and believingly.

What is life? We speak of it as a voyage, and so it is. But what sort of voyage is it? It is not one where the mariner has his course mapped out on the chart. No, it is a voyage over a trackless and unexplored ocean. It is a voyage of discovery, and we set out on it not knowing what lies before us ; and it is vain to picture to ourselves a pleasant and prosperous passage amid glittering isles and over laughing seas. Such may be our fortune, but we cannot tell. We never know where our course lies. It is a voyage of discovery, and we must shape our course from day to day, from hour to hour, as it is revealed to us, ambitious only to approve

ourselves brave mariners and resolute to meet with stout hearts whatever may befall us.

It is foolish to covet what we deem the prizes of life, and then, when we lose them, lose heart too and relinquish the adventure ; for, as life goes on, are we not continually discovering how futile and unsatisfying are the things which we once coveted, and how little they would have availed us had we attained them? The child would keep his toys all his life ; but he quickly ceases to be a child, and outgrows his childish affections, and desires his toys no longer. And the ambitions of youth are not the ambitions of manhood. Ay, and the ambitions of manhood are ever changing. Which of us is dreaming to-day the dreams which charmed him ten years, yes, one short year ago? Our thoughts are ever changing, and we are constantly discovering deeper meanings and new values in life.

I do not mean that life is a continual process of disillusionment, and that everything which we set our hearts upon is vain and foolish, and no dream ever comes true. Far from it, very far from it ! It is one of the glad surprises of life that, if only we maintain the right attitude

toward it, thinking not of its prizes but of the good part which we are called to play, there is no ambition which is not ultimately realised—not indeed in the way which we imagined, but in some other immeasurably better. I remember—if I may venture on so personal an illustration—that my ambition, when I was a lad at College, was to write a book ; and my fancy was to edit a Greek play. I had decided on the play, and my book was to be dedicated to the dear people of my home. I never wrote that book, and I never shall ; yet my ambition has been realised, and in a far better form. I have written my book and given it its dedication. And it is ever thus. Dream your dreams ; see your ideals, cherish them, cling to them, strive after them, and they will yet be splendidly realised. Only do not insist on their literal realisation. Let them take shape ; let them be modified ; and accept the issue which God appoints. It is ever the best, better than the best you have imagined.

And so, I repeat, take up the right attitude toward life. It is a voyage of discovery, and the right attitude is one of constant expectancy. Never lay plans and insist on carrying them

through. Never map out your course, for you know not whither God is leading you. Take life as it comes day by day, always with the wondering question: "What has God in store for me this new day?" Wait and see; and when it comes, accept it loyally, and use it for His glory, and get the good out of it, whatever it may be. And never get bitter-hearted when your plans miscarry; for you have no right to have plans at all: the plan is God's.

And then, when reverse comes, bear yourself bravely. This is the test of a man. When misfortune overtakes him, how does he take it? And there are two counsels which I would offer you here:

First, if misfortune comes, if reverse overtakes you, never own defeat. Play the man. Do not give up the struggle. There is a fine story of that splendid Greek statesman, Pericles of Athens. When he was striving for the mastery in the Athenian Senate, he had an outstanding rival, Thucydides; and once, when the latter visited the Court of Sparta, King Archidamus questioned him. "You are always," he said, "having wrestling-bouts in

your Senate with Pericles: which of you is the better wrestler?" And Thucydides answered: "Whenever I throw him, he says that he never was down; and he persuades the very spectators to believe it." That is the secret of ultimate victory. Never accept defeat. Always come up again and renew the conflict. And come up with the experience of your defeat to help you in the fresh struggle. And never let the canker of bitterness eat into your soul. That, and that alone, is fatal. There is nothing lost while the heart remains strong and sweet.

And another counsel. When misfortune comes, as come it must, fall back on the stern yet inspiring truth of Predestination. It is God's will; it is His purpose; it is according to His plan, else it would not be there. Your reverse is simply His overruling of your blind and foolish desire in order that His purpose may prevail and His will be accomplished. As I have said already, we have no right to form plans of our own; for there is only one true plan, and it is God's. And there is an end alike of discouragement and of rebelliousness when we attain to the grand assurance that there is a

divine plan for every human life, and nothing is amiss if it be the will of God.

“Ill that He blesses is our good,
And unblest good is ill;
And all is right that seems most wrong,
If it be His sweet will!”

Believe in God. Trust His providence, and day by day accept the things which happen to you, whatever they may be, as His wise and beneficent dispensations. And thus you will find out more and more, as life goes on, what a blessed use there is in your adversities, what good has come out of them, what strength and peace. And though much may remain dark, there is time enough in Eternity for His purposes to work out and reveal themselves to you. It is the old story of the piece of tapestry. It seems a confusion of broken threads, but it is the wrong side that we are looking at just now. By and by it will be turned round, and then, on the right side, we shall see the fair pattern.

The secret lies in bravely trusting the loving-kindness and tender mercy of our God, the Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who

is over all, and going through life with a quiet heart, and taking everything gently and patiently. This is the whole philosophy of life ; and it is because it is so simple that we are apt to miss it.

THE LIFE OF PRAYER

“Pray without ceasing.”

I THESSALONIANS v. 17.

XV

THE LIFE OF PRAYER

THIS seems an unreasonable requirement, an impossible achievement. Life is more than prayer. It is a ministry, and to every man there is appointed a work which he must do and which he dare not neglect. The Lord Jesus is our Exemplar, and did He not spend eighteen years of His blessed life in a carpenter's shop at Nazareth, handling hammer and saw and fashioning, says St. Justin Martyr, ploughs and yokes for the husbandmen of Galilee? And even during the days of His ministry He did much more than pray. He was indeed a man of prayer. It was His custom on the eve of every crisis, every fresh departure, to go apart and take counsel with God. And you remember what He was wont to do while He sojourned at Capernaum. There was no seclusion in the busy city, no leisure amid the

importunate multitude ; but up on the hillside there was a quiet nook which served as the Saviour's oratory, and He would rise from His couch very early in the morning, a great while before day, and steal out thither while men slept and hold communion with His Father. He had His seasons of prayer, frequent and protracted ; but they were only breathing-spaces in His strenuous life, and His days were spent, not in the offices of devotion, but in the ministries of teaching and healing.

And we too have our appointed tasks, and it is the will of God that we should perform them faithfully and diligently. Yet St. Paul here bids us "pray without ceasing." It seems an impossible requirement, and it is well that we should consider it ; for it is hurtful to us to regard any precept of the Holy Scriptures as impracticable. Either it creates within us a sense of discouragement, a suspicion that the Lord is an unreasonable task-master, like that ancient tyrant who was accustomed to promulgate laws which his subjects could not keep, that he might have the pleasure of punishing their transgressions ; or it fosters a spirit of fatal acquiescence by suggesting that the Bible

sets up an extraordinary standard which only the saints can reach and which the mass of Christians cannot attain and need not strive after. In truth, however, the Lord never requires impossibilities. The Scriptures impose no command which we cannot all obey, and promise no blessedness which we may not all realise ; and if only we understand it, we shall recognise that in this precept there is no unreasonableness, no impossibility.

The precept is “ Pray *without ceasing*,” and it must not be interpreted as meaning merely “ pray *much*,” “ pray *earnestly*.” This is not explaining it but explaining it away. “ Pray without ceasing,” says the Apostle, and he means precisely what he says ; and I wish to show you that, if we pray at all, it must be after this fashion.

Observe a familiar distinction—the distinction between power and action, a faculty and its exercise, a condition and its manifestation. Take several examples.

1. That mystery which Science has never penetrated and which is called Life. Life is the condition, and its principal manifestations are movement and sound. You go out to the forest

on a Winter morning when Nature is bound by the fetters of the frost, and you see a bird perched on a bough. It is motionless, and you think it has perished during the bitter night. You approach it, and still it never stirs. You reach out your hand to grasp it, and suddenly it flutters and flies away, twittering in alarm. Then you know that it is alive.

Movement and sound are manifestations of life, yet there may be movement and sound where there is no life. Think of the automata which deft hands fashion and which counterfeit life so cleverly. There came into my possession lately a cuckoo clock, and the other day a friend visited me, and when he entered my Study, he smilingly remarked that it seemed to be always Spring-time at the Manse. He had heard the cuckoo's note as he came up the garden, and for a moment he had been deceived and fancied that the "messenger of Spring" had tarried into Autumn.

And, conversely, there may be life without its manifestations. Think of the mystery of sleep, "death's twin-brother." The sleeper lies motionless and voiceless. It seems as though his life had departed; but touch him, and the

dormant life awakes and manifests its presence by a sudden start and an exclamation.

“Prayer,” says Montgomery, “is the Christian’s vital breath.” Do we breathe only when we are conscious of it? No, we do it instinctively. Breathing is a constant and necessary function of every living thing ; and if it required an effort, one would be out of health, suffering from asthma. And prayer, being the breath of the soul, must go on without ceasing. A healthy believer always prays.

2. Wealth. A man may be rich, yet have no money in his hand. And if you found one with a pile of gold before him, would it follow that he was rich? It might be that he was a miser gloating over his hoard or a robber reckoning his booty. A rich man does not carry his wealth about with him. He may have nothing in his purse, but he has a store in the Bank and may draw upon it when he pleases ; and this constitutes his wealth.

You remember the fine passage where Bunyan gives this a spiritual turn : “ ’Twas glorious to me to see his exaltation, and the worth and prevalency of all his benefits, and that because now I could look from myself to him, and would

reckon that all those graces of God that now were green on me were yet like those cracked groats and fourpence-halfpennies that rich men carry in their purses when their gold is in their trunks at home. Oh, I saw my gold was in my trunk at home—in Christ my Lord and Saviour ! For Christ was all—all my righteousness, all my sanctification, and all my redemption.”

3. Love. There may be love where there is no manifestation of it. A mother loves her child without ceasing. Even when she is not caressing him or so much as thinking of him, the fountain of love is in her heart, and at the sound of his footstep or the mention of his name it leaps up and overflows. Speak of him, and you see a soft light glistening in her eyes. She is loving him all the time even when he is not in her thoughts.

And now you perceive the meaning of our text. As a loving heart loves “without ceasing,” so a praying soul prays “without ceasing.” And the test lies in our attitude toward the Lord Jesus and the emotion which the thought of Him stirs within us. Is He “all our salvation and all our desire”? Can we say, in the language of the Psalmist: “Whom have

I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee"? Do we understand what John Newton meant when he cried?—

“How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
In a believer's ear!
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,
And drives away his fear.

Dear Name! the rock on which I build,
My shield and hiding-place,
My never-failing treasury, filled
With boundless stores of grace.”

How are we affected when we hear that blessed Name amid our common employments? Do our eyes moisten and our hearts leap up in joyful recognition and wistful desire? It is related of St. Francis of Sales that he was once playing a game of chess with a child when a morose brother came on the scene and upbraided him for engaging in so vain an employment. “What would you do,” he asked, “if it were told you that the Lord will presently appear?” And the gentle saint replied: “I would finish the game. It was for His glory that I began it.” This is the test. How would we feel if the Lord suddenly appeared and we met the gaze of His calm, sweet Face? It would

be a surprise, but would it be a glad surprise? Would we arise and bid Him welcome without shame or confusion?

“The life of prayer,” said St. Teresa, “is love to God and the custom of being ever with Him.” And it is thus, and only thus, that we “pray without ceasing.” Prayer is not kneeling before the Throne of Grace and uttering the desires of our hearts. It is an attitude, an abiding attitude, of the soul; and if we ever cease praying, we never pray at all.

There is a story of Johann Albrecht Bengel, the German scholar and saint of the eighteenth century. A friend was once staying at his house; and, impressed by his piety, he wondered how the man of God would close the day and what manner of prayer he would offer ere he went to rest. Bengel sat long over his books, and his guest waited and listened. He waited and waited, until at length the scholar laid down his pen and pushed back his chair. The listener strained his ears, and what did he hear? One simple sentence: “Lord Jesus, things are just the same between us.” And thus the scholar laid himself to rest in the peace of God.

And this is the life of prayer—a constant fellowship with Christ, a relation which is never interrupted, a bond which we can take up at any moment and find it still unbroken. “When,” says Erskine of Linlathen, “we have learned to offer up every duty connected with our situation in life as a sacrifice to God, a settled employment becomes just a settled habit of prayer.” We “pray without ceasing”; and each special office of devotion is a recollection and a reaffirmation of our constant and abiding attitude.

Of course this is no depreciation of the offices of devotion. The spirit of prayer is created and fostered by frequent and deliberate approaches to the Throne of Grace. I read lately a medical advice to students who sit much at their desks, contracting their chests by bending over their books: “Rise from time to time, throw back your head and shoulders, and draw a deep, full breath.” This is what we do when we definitely and consciously pray: we draw a deep, full breath. And it is a habit which it were well for us to acquire and practise. We need our still hours, our stated seasons of communion, morning by morning, evening by even-

ing ; but these are not enough. It would rid us of many a vexation and deliver us from many a temptation if, amid our toil and fret, we would ever and anon remember Jesus and tighten our grip upon Him, escaping for one refreshing moment from the noise and dust and getting our heads into Eternity.

**TRANSFORMATION INTO THE
LORD'S IMAGE**

“We all with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit.”

“Now we look into a mirror puzzlingly (literally “in a riddle”), but then face to face.”

2 CORINTHIANS iii. 18 ; 1 CORINTHIANS xiii. 12.

XVI

TRANSFORMATION INTO THE LORD'S IMAGE

So, it seems to me, these verses should be rendered.

The end of all God's gracious dealings with us, St. Paul has told us elsewhere (Rom. viii. 29), is that we may be "conformed to the image of His Son"; and here, by a beautiful and expressive image, he shows us how it may be achieved—how we may attain to the likeness of Jesus.

In order that we may be like Jesus we must know Him; and in order that we may know Him we must see Him. But He is no longer among us as in the days of His flesh; He is far away in the Father's House; and how then can we see Him? how can we know Him? how can we become like Him?

Observe the Apostle's answer. We can no longer see the Lord's face, but we can see His reflection : we can " behold His glory as in a mirror." And I think there are two mirrors which reflect Him.

One is His Word, the Gospel-story which tells

" How He walked here, the shadow of Him Love,
The speech of Him soft Music, and His step
A Benediction."

This is the precious service which the Evangelists rendered to succeeding ages : they preserved the image of Jesus, painting His sacred form in imperishable colours as He appeared to the men who dwelt beside Him and saw His blessed face and heard His gracious voice. There are no Scriptures comparable to the holy Gospels. They are the shrine of the Incarnate Son of God, and we should be ever searching them, ever returning to them with fresh wonder and expectation, ever breathing their atmosphere and catching their spirit. They are the mirror of the Saviour's face. The other Scriptures speak of Him ; these reflect Him.

And there is another mirror which reflects

Him no less truly and, in a manner, more effectively, forasmuch as it is constantly before our eyes and we cannot help looking into it—the mirror of redeemed lives that wear His likeness and have been fashioned by the Holy Spirit after His image. “I am surprised,” said St. Francis of Sales to the Bishop of Bellay during a visit which he paid to Paris, “that the people in this great city flock so eagerly to my sermons : for my tongue is slow and heavy, my conceptions low, and my discourses flat, as you yourself are witness.” “Do you imagine,” answered the Bishop, “that eloquence is what they seek in your discourses? It is enough for them to see you in the pulpit. Your heart speaks to them by your countenance and by your eyes, were you only to say the ‘Our Father’ with them. The most common words in your mouth, burning with the fire of charity, pierce and melt all hearts. There is I know not what so extraordinary in what you say that every word is of weight, every word strikes deep into the heart. You have said everything even when you seem to have said nothing. You are possessed of a kind of eloquence which is of Heaven : the power of this is astonishing.” Have you not known

such shining souls, such mirrors of the glory of the Lord? An aged saint was talking to me recently of the minister ¹ who nigh seventy years ago led her to Jesus, and she told me how gracious he was, how gentle, how winsome, how his face shone as though illumined by a light within. "I always thought," she said, "that it was the sort of face that our Saviour would have." When I heard this, I prayed the Lord to put His love into my heart, that my face too might be a mirror of His glory.

And now observe the principle which St. Paul enunciates. The mirror is before you : look into it, look steadfastly, believingly, and lovingly ; and a miracle will be wrought. The glory of the Lord reflected there will be photographed upon you, and you will be transformed into the same image.

And this is no mere fancy. It is a spiritual law which, like every spiritual law, is just a natural law at its farthest reach. It is ever thus with the doctrines of Christianity. You find, when you consider those high mysteries and

¹ Dr. Robert Macdonald, the first of my predecessors at Blairgowrie.

penetrate into the heart of them, that they are not mysteries at all, but familiar principles of daily experience operating beyond the domain of experience. And this, it seems to me, is not the least of the evidences of Christianity. It is rooted in the soil of earth ; it is in line with the natural order, following its laws and carrying them to loftier issues.

Look at the principle which St. Paul here lays down, and do you not recognise it as a law of common experience? You know, for example, how one personality impresses itself upon another, if there be mutual trust and affection and admiration. Think of a revered teacher and his students—how they catch his spirit, assimilate his thought, and reproduce his teaching. He creates “a school,” and you recognise its adherents by their likeness to the master. It is told of the later disciples of Pythagoras that they were accustomed to publish their books under his name, thereby confessing, with generous self-effacement, that they owed all to him. His teaching was the source of their wisdom. They simply reflected his glory. And you know how love transfigures, putting its imprint not simply on the soul but on the very

flesh. Have you never noticed the miracle which is wrought upon a husband and wife who "have lived and loved together through many changing years"—how they come to resemble each other, not merely in their habits and ways of thinking, but in their very look, as though a gentle hand had kept smoothing their faces day by day and transforming them into the same image? There is no kinship between them; it is Love that has wrought the miracle; and it almost startles you. It is all so much alike—the tone of the voice, the light in the eyes, the play of expression.

Or take an illustration from the domain of Nature. See how in the glad Spring-time the sun shines day by day on the bleak, barren earth after the dreary Winter, and little by little a transformation is wrought. The slumbering germs awake, and presently the face of the world is transfigured into smiling beauty. And how is the transformation wrought? Put a veil over the earth's face; mantle it with a dark cloud, and the operation is arrested. It must look steadily day by day with unveiled face on the mirror of the blue heaven, and then it catches the reflection and is lit with the glory.

I have taken this illustration because it leads us more deeply into the truth. What is the reason why the earth is thus transfigured by the touch of the sunshine? It is because there is life in its breast. The sunshine does not create the life. No, it is slumbering there already in the bosom of the earth, and the touch of the sunshine only awakens it. The sunshine plays upon the rocks, and there is no responsive flush on their hard faces ; for there is no life in their breasts. And this is a parable of a profound religious truth. Our souls are not like dead stones. There is within them a slumbering germ of the divine life, and at the touch of Jesus it awakens and springs up and grows from glory to glory beneath the fostering influences of His grace.

I would have you notice this ere we pass on. In every human soul, however degraded, however unlikely in outward seeming, there lies a divine possibility, and it only needs to be elicited. I have heard that the city of London is built over a bed of chalk, and if a shaft be sunk anywhere within its wide area, there will spring up a fountain of clear, cool water. Sink the shaft amid the mansions of Belgravia, and

the spring will rise. Sink it amid the squalor and crime of Whitechapel, and there too it will gush up, clean and sparkling. Ah ! that is like human nature. Deep down in the foulest soul there is the living water. "Look within," says the philosophic Emperor. "Within is the fountain of good, and it can always well up if thou always dig." Sin may have choked and concealed it, but it is there. Only sink a shaft, and the stream will rise. And this is what Jesus does. He touches the soul, and at His touch "waters break out in the wilderness, and streams in the desert."

Our transformation into the Lord's image, St. Paul is careful to explain, is a gradual process ; and I pray you to consider what he says ; for it will save you from much discouragement and many a misgiving in your Christian life. It will keep you from losing heart because your progress is so slow, and despairing when you stumble and fall. We are "transformed from glory to glory"—first a little glory, then more, and at last the perfect likeness of our blessed Saviour. This is the final consummation, and we shall never attain it here ; we shall never attain it until we get home and see His face.

It is not His face that we see here, but only His reflection. The mirror is before us, and He is standing, as it were, behind us, and we see His image in the glass. But the mirror is often dim and uncertain, and the reflection obscure and broken, and we have to guess what He is like. "Now we look in a mirror puzzlingly." But one day we shall turn round and see Him "face to face"; and then the transformation will be complete. "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him even as He is."

Such is St. Paul's doctrine of Sanctification, and it is fraught with splendid encouragement. See how he emphasises a truth which we are apt to forget, thereby missing the way and disquieting our hearts—the truth that our transformation into the Lord's image is not our own work but the operation of the Holy Spirit. "We are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit." There is a crucifix known as the *Volto Santo* in the Cathedral of Lucca, and the story of it is a parable. It is said that Nicodemus was charged by an angel to fashion an image of the Lord; and he went to the forest and, hewing down a

cedar, addressed himself to the task. It baffled his skill, and, wearied with his ineffectual labour, he fell asleep. And, when he awoke, behold, the work was done. The crucifix was before him, carved by angel hands.

And thus we are "transformed into the Lord's image from glory to glory." It is not our own work ; it is the Holy Spirit's, and we do not further it by striving and fretting. Is it by its own effort that the earth is clothed with verdure? Ah, no ! it is by the sweet influence of the sunshine and the rain and the dew from heaven, and the earth has only to spread its breast and receive the benediction.

Is it troubling you that, despite all your striving, you have still so little likeness to the Lord Jesus, so little of His sweetness and purity and gentleness? It may be perhaps that you have been trusting too much to your own efforts and too little to the grace of the Holy Spirit. Have you honoured Him as you ought? Have you recognised His sanctifying office, surrendered yourself to His operation, and implored His aid? I would not bid you strive less, but were it not well for you to trust more?

And ah ! do not despair. Whatever your

failures, keep looking unto Jesus and hoping for His appearing. Have you heard the ancient fable of the statue of Memnon, King of Ethiopia? It was a colossal figure of black stone seated on a throne. The feet were together and the hands pressed on the arms of the throne, as though in the act of starting up, and the face was looking wistfully with parted lips toward the West, the place of the sunrise. It was the attitude of one who watches for the morning ; and, says the fable, whenever the first glimmer of the dawn flushed across the horizon and lit the eager face, a strain of glad music came rippling from the parted lips.

This is the Christian attitude. Amid the darkness keep your face toward the place of sunrise. The morning will break, and you will be transformed in one glad moment into the full glory of the Lord's image.

**THE BETTER HERITAGE
FARTHER ON**

“And I gave unto Isaac Jacob and Esau : and I gave unto Esau mount Seir, to possess it ; but Jacob and his children went down into Egypt.”

JOSHUA xxiv. 4.

XVII

THE BETTER HERITAGE FARTHER ON

IT is good for us at every crisis in our lives, whenever our hearts are troubled and afraid, to remember the past and look back over the road by which we have travelled, by which the Lord our God has led us, and see how, though it seemed often so dark and difficult at the moment, goodness and mercy have followed us all the way. Yes, it is good to look back and consider what God has wrought.

And this is precisely what Joshua does here. He was the leader of Israel, the successor of Moses but very unlike the great lawgiver. He had no shining gifts. He was no prophet, no statesman, but a brave-hearted, strong-handed man of war raised up in the providence of God to do the work which his generation demanded. And now his work is done. Israel has fought

her battles and won her heritage. She is established in the Land of Promise. Joshua's work is done. He is "old and stricken in age," and the shadows of evening are closing round him. He must soon pass to his rest ; and ere he takes his departure he assembles the people, that he may bid them farewell and give them his last counsels. He would have them face the future with brave hearts ; and that they may be emboldened thereto, he reminds them of all that the Lord has done for them in bygone generations.

And he does it after his own blunt fashion. There is no poetry, no imagination, no eloquence in his address. It is a bare recital, in simple, homely language, of the national history. He goes back to the beginning, to that event, so far-reaching though it seemed so trivial at the moment—the call not of a nation but of one man, a shepherd in the land of Haran. No doubt it would come about very simply : perhaps it was nothing more at the outset than dissatisfaction with the surrounding heathenism ; and the Spirit, who stirs in men's souls like the wind that bloweth where it listeth, awoke in Abraham's breast a longing for a purer life

and a nobler faith, and moved him to quit the land where he dwelt at ease amid his tents and flocks, and go in quest of a home where he might breathe a sweeter and larger air. With the Call came the Promise, the hope that ever follows obedience. Abraham went forth, not knowing whither he went, but trusting in God and believing that his courage would be splendidly rewarded and that his offspring would be a great nation and inherit a goodly land.

And here Joshua reminds the people how that faith had been honoured and that hope fulfilled. God had given a son to Abraham—Isaac, the heir of the Promise. And to Isaac he had given two sons—Jacob and Esau ; and in the progress of events Esau had proved unworthy and had fallen out of the line of God's purpose, and Jacob had inherited the Promise.

Now what might have been expected after that? Jacob was the heir of the Promise, the hope which was glimmering on the horizon like the dawn of a better day. The future not of Israel alone but of humanity lay with him, and his brother was a common man with no high destiny. We would have expected that Esau should drift out of sight and be forgotten, and

Jacob be loaded with every blessing which the heart of man could desire and the hand of God bestow. But what came to pass? To Esau, the man of naught, the Lord granted an immediate and abundant heritage. He gave him Mount Seir, with its pleasant slopes, its fertile valleys, and its smiling plains on the southern border of Canaan, that heathen land where, unrecognised, unsuspected, were slumbering the destinies of the world. Esau got that for his heritage, and he and his children settled there in peace and never from that hour suffered a day's want or weariness. They prospered, they multiplied, they became, not indeed a great, but a strong and fierce nation—the people of Edom.

And what of Jacob, the heir of the Promise, the hope of humanity, the depository of God's undying purpose? He remained a homeless wanderer. Esau found his pleasant heritage; but Jacob and his children must go down into Egypt and toil and suffer for four hundred years. Do you not think that, when they saw all this, the Israelites would have sore misgivings and searchings of heart? "If this," they would reason, "be all that has come of the Promise, what is it worth? Is our hope better than a

dream? Are we the dupes of a foolish fancy, a fond delusion? Surely it were well to settle down with our flocks and herds and abandon the wild and profitless adventure."

No doubt they would talk thus, but now at the end of the long and bitter ordeal Joshua assembles the people and summons them to reflection. And this is the argument which underlies his retrospect: "Look back, and how does it appear to you now? Our wanderings are over; the end, so long sought, so eagerly desired, so often despaired of, has been reached at last. Remember the past, and consider what it means. Here we are with those centuries behind us, centuries of suffering, of heart-searching and heart-sinking, of doubt and fear; and behold, it has all been a precious discipline. It has formed us to courage and endurance. It has made us the people of God and revealed to us His purposes; and we are here with a high destiny before us and the qualities which that destiny demands. And look across our border and see the children of Esau. They got their heritage at the moment; they never knew the weariness of delay, the bitterness of disappointment. And what are they? Heathen. See

the smoke of their unhallowed sacrifices ; hear the shouting of their priests of Baal. They are called Edom—Red, and their hands are crimson with blood and their sins are as scarlet. Look at Edom ; look at Israel : would you have history reversed? Would you wish that the Lord had given your father Jacob Mount Seir to possess it, and that Esau and his children had gone down into Egypt in your stead? Would you have missed the discipline, so long and sore, which has made you what you are—men with a splendid destiny and capacity to achieve it? Would you have it otherwise? ”

Such was the message which their history preached to the Israelites, and it is a message also for you and me this evening. The true and abiding heritage is always farther on, and every day there comes to us the stern challenge : Which is your choice? Which will you live for and strive after—Mount Seir or the goodly Land of Promise beyond Egypt and the Wilderness?

It may seem a poor and dispiriting ideal which thus relegates the prizes of life to a distant and perhaps visionary future. But stay a moment ! Consider it, and you will recognise

that this is no morbid fantasy of an other-worldly Christianity ; it is the ideal which every man who would live to purpose, cherishes and practises.

Look at the student—the sort of student that frequented our Scottish Universities a generation ago, when the pathway to learning was harder than it is now. See him “scorning delights and living laborious days,” stinting himself of food and raiment that he may purchase his books, denying himself rest and recreation that he may win knowledge. He cares nothing for the present ; he flings it from him with contempt, and dreams of the future. His heritage is farther on. What is he striving after? That prize, that medal, that scholarship ; and he fancies that he will be content if only he wins it. Yes, but when it is his, it loses its charm, and he finds that there is a nobler goal beyond. Each achievement is but a fresh incentive, a new starting-point ; and he goes on still pursuing his ideal, never resting, ever reaching forward.

Or take the artist. Among the treasures of the School of Fine Arts at Paris there is a bronze statue of Mercury—the masterpiece of

the sculptor Briants. Dreaming of fame, Briants tenanted a bare garret, at once his lodging and his studio. Miserably poor, he lacked food and fuel, and one bitter night he went shivering to bed. That evening he had put the finishing touches to the model of his statue, and he suddenly bethought himself that if the damp clay froze, it would warp and crack and his labour would be lost. He sprang up and wrapped all his scanty clothing about it. In the morning a friend visited the garret and found the model unharmed, but the artist was lying stiff and stark, frozen to death. He had given his life for his work. And he had his reward—the heritage of an immortal name.

And if a man will do this for ambition, what will he not do for love? The other evening I chanced upon an ancient book—Xenophon's story of the heroic Retreat of the Ten Thousand through the wilds of central Asia. I had never opened it since my school days, and I read it with a new interest and a deeper understanding, observing much that had escaped my boyish mind. One incident especially appealed to me. In the course of their march, harassed by the watchful enemy, the Greeks found themselves

confronted by a rampart of mountains. They must cross it or perish, and the pass was occupied by the enemy. Two peasants had been captured, and they were brought before the commander. He questioned the first whether there was another pass, but the man held his peace. They threatened him, but still he would not speak ; and they butchered him. Then they turned to the other, and he told them frankly of another pass, and undertook to conduct them through it. And he explained the reason of his comrade's reticence. He had a daughter living with her husband in the pass, and he would not expose her to the violence of the lawless soldiery. He gave his life for love.

And our hearts approve the sacrifice. It is the part that we would all play. Yes, there is no true man amongst us who is not continually scorning Mount Seir and going down into Egypt. And the Lord Jesus asks us to carry the principle farther and make a bolder venture of faith. He tells us that beyond this little life there is a life which is "better than all the golden fancies of all our golden dreams." It is the heritage of the brave and true, and He says to us : "Have you the courage to choose

it and to face suffering and sacrifice that you may attain it and be fit for its enjoyment?"

This is His appeal. It is indeed a venture, but it is a reasonable venture. It is precisely the sort of venture which we are continually making for lesser prizes, and His assurance is our guarantee. There is a Land of Promise, a blessed home beyond the wilderness in the far-off City of God. "Take My word for it," says Jesus. "If it were not so, I would have told you." The choice is continually being presented to us, and if we take the easy way, we are doubly the losers. We miss the Land of Promise, and when we have got Mount Seir, we find it a polluted place. The better heritage lies always farther on; and we can attain it only by following Jesus, entering ever more closely into His fellowship, and sharing ever more fully His patience, His gentleness, His sacrifice, His unconquerable trust in the love of God and the transcendence of the things unseen and eternal.

**THE BOUNDLESS POSSIBILITIES
OF GRACE**

“I lifted up mine eyes again, and looked, and behold a man with a measuring line in his hand. Then said I, Whither goest thou? And he said unto me, To measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth thereof, and what is the length thereof. And, behold, the angel that talked with me went forth, and another angel went out to meet him, and said unto him, Run, speak to this young man, saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein : for I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her.”

ZECHARIAH ii. 1-5.

XVIII

THE BOUNDLESS POSSIBILITIES OF GRACE

“EXPECT great things from God: attempt great things for God,” said William Carey; and this is the message of our text.

The days of the prophet Zechariah were a time of discouragement and distress. It was that pathetic yet heroic crisis in the national history when a remnant of Israel had returned from the long captivity in Babylon. Few if any of them had ever seen Jerusalem. They had been born in exile; but their fathers had told them of the dear Homeland, and they had been dreaming of it and yearning for it all their days; and now at length in the providence of God they were brought back. They had travelled across the desert in high hope, eager to see the land of their dreams and the Holy City.

and the encircling mountains ; but their arrival was a cruel disillusionment. They found Jerusalem a desolation and her Temple a ruin ; and they had to face the task of reconstruction.

At the best it would have been a heavy ordeal, but for that weak remnant it was overpowering. They had been bondsmen all their days, and the yoke had crushed them. Their spirit was broken, and their poor souls fainted in face of an ordeal which demanded not only a strong hand but even more a stout heart. It was a perilous crisis, and their supreme need, if ever they would be a nation again, was a brave leader who should rally them, inspire them with faith and hope, and nerve them to the work. And he appeared. In the providence of God the time always brings the man ; and the man at that crisis was the prophet Zechariah.

His message was a call to faith in God and courageous endeavour. " Expect great things from God : attempt great things for God." And it did not fail. The people's hearts leaped to the challenge, and they girded themselves to the work. Their purpose was to rebuild and restore Jerusalem ; but the prophet had a larger ideal. The work was begun. A sur-

veyor had gone forth with his measuring line to map out the ancient site—the circle of the walls, the lie of the streets, and the position of the houses, that the city might be rebuilt on the old scale and the old design. That was their ideal—reconstruction; but it was not Zechariah's.

He saw the surveyor at work, and a message came to him from the Lord. He says, you observe, that an angel brought it; and perhaps this troubles you. Have you never wondered what it may mean when the Bible speaks of the Word of the Lord coming to a man or an angel appearing to him at a time of perplexity and showing him what he must do? We too have our perplexities, and have you not sometimes wished that the old days would return and a bright angel visit you and show you the way that you should take?

Ah! but you must interpret what is written. The Old Testament is a Hebrew book, and its thought and speech and imagery are Hebrew. What happened then happens now, and God still speaks just as He spoke long ago. You remember how once you were sorely perplexed and knew not which way to turn. A letter came

to you, and the light streamed on your path. There was no miracle : it was only a letter ; but if you had been a Hebrew, you would have lifted up your heart in thanksgiving, and you would have gone out and said : “ The Word of the Lord came unto me, saying, This is the way : walk in it.” Or was it a friend who visited you and furnished you with the needful information? Then, if you had been a Hebrew, your account of it would have been : “ Behold, an angel of the Lord appeared unto me, and talked with me.” Such was the manner of the Hebrews. They saw God everywhere ; they recognised His hand in everything. And is not this the true interpretation of life? The angels of the Lord are continually visiting us, and what we need is a heart to recognise them though they come in drab raiment, and to hear the Word of the Lord though it be spoken through human lips.

Zechariah was a Hebrew, and he recognised his dream of the building of Jerusalem as a revelation. It was the Word of the Lord, the message of an angel. He found the surveyor at work “ measuring Jerusalem, what was the breadth thereof, and what was the length

thereof " ; and he bade him forbear. " Never mind tracing out the former site and calculating the former dimensions. That is the old Jerusalem, and it is a new Jerusalem that we have to build, a larger and more glorious city." It was useless to trace the circle of the old walls. Why? Because the new walls would have a wider circuit? No, but because the new city would have no walls at all. She would be too great to be circumscribed. The multitude of her men and cattle would overflow her boundaries, and overspread the surrounding country. Nor would she need bulwarks against the assaults of her enemies ; for she would have a better defence. Think of the shepherds in the wilderness keeping watch over their flocks by night, while the ravenous beasts are filling the hills and valleys with their howling. Round their encampment they kindle a chain of fires, and the glowing rampart keeps the beasts at bay. And such will be the defence of the new Jerusalem. " I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her."

What is this but St. John's vision of the New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation? " I

saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of Heaven. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it : for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day ; for there shall be no night there."

Yes, notice that. The fulfilment of the angel's promise is the New Jerusalem, and the New Jerusalem is still afar off. The dream of Zechariah never came to pass. Jerusalem was rebuilt, but she never attained all that greatness and glory. Her after history was a succession of disasters and humiliations. Ere many generations elapsed, she was conquered by the Greeks ; then she fell under the Roman dominion ; and finally she was devastated by the army of Titus and her citizens dispersed over the face of the earth.

It seems as though the Lord's promise had been broken and His people's trust betrayed ; but if you look deeper, you will discover here a law of the Providential Order. Think of any of the Old Testament promises ; put your finger on it, and track it down the line of history, and see if it ever found its expected fulfilment.

Take the Messianic Hope. God promised a King who should reign in righteousness and have dominion from sea to sea ; and Israel believed the promise and hoped through dark and troubled centuries for the Saviour who should raise the fallen throne of David. The Messiah came, and He was crucified on Calvary ! It seemed as though the promise had failed ; and so it had according to Israel's understanding of it but not according to God's intention, and we have learned that Jesus was indeed the King of Israel, and that His is a nobler kingdom than they were dreaming of.

And it is ever thus. The fulfilment is always larger than the promise ; and when we fear that the promise has failed, it is because we do not perceive the better thing which God is preparing for us. That prophecy of Zechariah never came true of the earthly Jerusalem, nor has it ever been fulfilled to this day. It was spoken, in God's intention, of the heavenly Jerusalem, which is still a dream, an ideal floating above our heads and finding ever fuller realisation as faith and hope and love increase and prevail among the children of men.

I have yet, however, to set forth the more direct message of this ancient prophecy ; and a very inspiring message it is. It speaks to us of the irrevocable past and the folly of dreaming of it and desiring its restoration. The dream of those poor Jews and the desire of their hearts was the old Jerusalem, the city of their fathers ; and they would have rebuilt her after the old design and the old measurement. And what was the Lord's command? " Think no more of the old Jerusalem. It is a new Jerusalem that you must build, an ampler and grander City of God."

It is ever the way of the human heart, as life goes on, to look backward and cling to the past. You dear old people, how fondly you recall the former days when the world was so much better, so much more religious than it is now ! Ah ! and I do not blame you. You were young then, and life was fresh and wonderful to you, and the love which is only a memory now was then throbbing and singing in your breasts. It is nothing strange that your hearts should keep turning back and longing for the good old days. Yet I am very sure that, if the former conditions could be restored, you would

perceive that it has not been going so ill with the world after all. God has been ordering its progress and bringing His purposes to pass during the changing years. "Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this."

And it were well for us to recognise that God never repeats His operations. I find good people everywhere longing and praying for a revival of religion ; and truly there is nothing more needful at all times than an outpouring of the influences of the Holy Spirit. I sympathise with the desire ; yet it seems to me that it is a wrong ideal that is mostly cherished. What is the revival which we are wishing and hoping for? Is it not a repetition of those movements which stirred the world so mightily a generation ago, when multitudes were awakened to their need of Christ and brought in penitence and faith to His blessed feet? And we set ourselves to excite the old enthusiasm by practising the old methods, oblivious that the world is ever changing and that to-day is not as yesterday.

“The old order changeth, yielding place to the new,
And God fulfils himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.”

It is a new age that we are living in, and the new age has its new needs, and the new needs demand new methods. God never repeats His operations, and when the revival which we are all desiring comes, it will be different from any that we have ever seen.

I am inclined to think that the revival is already here. This is not an irreligious age : to my thinking it is the most religious in history, and there was never a time when the preacher had so splendid an opportunity. It is an age of unrest and perplexity, and the souls of men are yearning for a peace which Christ alone can give ; and wherever a preacher appears who is able to interpret the unchanging Saviour to the mind of our generation and display His suitability to its manifold need, he is hailed with great gladness. The fields are white unto harvest, and there is a golden opportunity for the reaper who knows how to ply the sickle. Ah that we would cease dreaming of the old Jerusalem ! It is a new Jerusalem that we have to build, a City of God larger, nobler, and fairer than the world has ever seen.

If we be sighing for the old Jerusalem, it is because we lack faith in the Living God who continually doeth wonders, in the Saviour who is the Contemporary of each generation. Never take the old measurement. Build like Zechariah ; build like the men who cried when they were planning the Cathedral of Seville : “ Let us raise such a work that they who come after us shall take us to have been mad ! ”

“ They dreamt not of a perishable home
Who thus could build.”

God's method is never mere restoration, but enlargement and uplifting and advancement ; and He seeks for His fellow-workers men and women who have faith and courage to leave the unreturning past and go forward into the untried future and build a holier Temple in a fairer City. Reverence the past, and read its lessons ; but live for the future, and believe in the boundless possibilities which it holds for every man who hopes in God and launches out on the ever-advancing, ever-widening stream of His redeeming purpose.

**THE SOUL'S NEED OF A
SACRIFICE**

“For thou delightest not in sacrifice ; else would I give it ;
Thou hast no pleasure in burnt offering. The sacrifices of
God are a broken spirit : a broken and a contrite heart,
O God, Thou wilt not despise.

“Do good in Thy good pleasure unto Zion : build Thou the
walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt Thou delight in the sacrifices
of righteousness, in burnt offering and whole burnt offering :
then shall they offer bullocks upon Thine altar.”

PSALM li. 16-19 (R.V.).

XIX

THE SOUL'S NEED OF A SACRIFICE

THIS familiar and moving Psalm—one of the seven Penitential Psalms which during his last sickness St. Augustine had written out in large letters and hung round the walls of his room that he might read them with his dying eyes—is entitled, you observe, “a Psalm of David.” And the ancient tradition is that it is his cry of confession and penitence after his black transgression, whose enormity was not its uncleanness but its cowardice, its foul treachery to one who trusted him and had served him loyally. Hardly had he committed it when the horror of it took hold of him ; for this is the trickery of sin, that one never sees its hideousness until it is embodied in act ; else it would never be committed : one would shudder and shrink away.

And surely the tradition commends itself. The Psalm so exactly suits the situation. In every verse we hear the accents of the royal penitent and feel the throb of his passionate heart.

Yet there is a difficulty in regarding it as a Psalm of David. Look at the two closing verses. They show us Jerusalem lying in ruins—her walls broken down, her Temple desolate, her altars overthrown; and only once was she in such a plight—after the Babylonian invasion, when, in the language of the prophet, “the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in His anger, and cast down from heaven unto the earth the beauty of Israel, and remembered not His footstool in the day of His anger” (Lam. ii. 1). And this seems to fix the date of the Psalm. It would belong, not to the reign of David when Jerusalem was in her glory, but to that sad time, five centuries later, when the Jews returned from their long captivity and found their city a heap of scarred and broken ruins. It was the sin of Israel that had brought the disaster upon her, and the Psalm is a penitential confession, closing appropriately with a prayer for the restoration of the city and the

Temple : "Do good in Thy good pleasure unto Zion : build Thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt Thou delight in the sacrifices of righteousness, in burnt offering and whole burnt offering : then shall they offer bullocks upon Thine altar."

The evidence seems decisive ; and after all why should we be troubled? It is only a tradition that David wrote the Psalm, and is there any loss in abandoning it? Perhaps there is rather some gain ; for is it not good to know that there was another who had David's experience, who sinned like him, and repented like him, and found like him healing and rest in the Lord's never-failing mercy? In truth the Bible is hardly affected at all by questions of date and authorship ; for its significance lies not in any particular application but in the abiding response which its messages awaken in the human soul. It is the voice of the Eternal Spirit moving evermore over the troubled waters of our restless life.

Yet one is loath to abandon that old tradition. It lends a deeper interest to the Psalm. It furnishes a background. I have seen an ancient battle-axe, unearthed from the field of Ban-

nockburn, and I looked with keen interest at that weather-worn relic of the good fight which our fathers fought for Scotland's liberty against overwhelming odds. But would I not have surveyed it with a yet keener interest had I been assured that it was the Bruce's battle-axe, the very blade which cleft the mailed head of the braggart Sir Henry de Bohun?

I would fain believe that the Psalm is David's prayer ; and I do believe it. The fact is that the last two verses are a later addition to the Psalm. Its close, as it came from the lips of David, is that sublime declaration : " The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit : a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." There he found peace and rest, and there he ended his prayer. He said no more, and the ensuing petition for the restoration of Jerusalem is an afterthought of a far later day.

I will not weary you with a technical discussion of the evidence ; but I ask you to consider how it came about. You see, the closing verses are a flat contradiction of what precedes ; for the Bible, like the providence of God and human experience, abounds in contradictions, and its contradictions are often its most

precious things. The Psalmist has come to this—that it is useless for him to seek the Temple and offer a sacrifice on the Altar; for his sin is so foul: no sacrifice which he could offer would suffice to cleanse it. “No,” he cries, “the blood of bulls and goats is unavailing. There is no help for me at the Altar. I will let it alone and have recourse to another sacrifice—a sacrifice which God never rejects. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.” This is the Psalmist’s offering, and it procured him peace.

But five centuries later it seemed to another penitent that more was needed. The Altar was the very centre of Jewish religion. There was no other meeting-place between God and sinners, and “without shedding of blood there was no remission.” And what troubled him was that in his day there was no Altar. The Temple was lying waste, and it was impossible for penitents to carry their victims into the court of the Lord’s House and purchase reconciliation. And there was no other way of acceptance. So he sets the royal penitent right, and adds these two verses to the Psalm—a prayer for the restoration

of the Temple, that it may be possible once more to offer the old sacrifices and win the old peace. "Do good in Thy good pleasure unto Zion : build Thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt Thou delight in the sacrifices of righteousness, in burnt offering and whole burnt offering : then shall they offer bullocks upon Thine altar."

Now what shall we make of this? Which was right—David or his critic? It is said that there is here an instance of that tendency which is termed in the domain of Science "reversion to type." It is so hard for the human intellect to maintain the heights which it has won. The tide ebbs ; the vision fades. Through much searching of heart and travail of spirit David had attained to a larger view of the relations between God and the souls of men. He had got away from the ghastly ritual of bleeding victims and reeking altars, and passed into the serene atmosphere of spiritual worship. And here five centuries later, in a degenerate age, when there was no vision of God and no breath of His Spirit, when the prophet was no more and the priest had usurped his place, the old ritual comes crowding back.

I am not sure that this is the whole truth. There is no doubt that when we reach the eighteenth verse, we descend to a lower level and pass into a less spiritual atmosphere ; yet I am grateful to the priestly dogmatist who wrote this dull comment. I find in the Psalm, as it lies before us, two discoveries and two mistakes. There is a discovery which David made. He had been nurtured in the religion of the Mosaic Law, and hitherto its ordinances had sufficed him. He had made his approaches to God by the way which it prescribed, and had always gained a blessed sense of pardon and acceptance by standing at the altar and laying his hand on his victim's head. But oh ! there is nothing like a great sin or a great sorrow for shattering traditional orthodoxy ; and when the storm of guilt smote David's soul, it swept away the poor trappings of ritual and discovered the underlying realities. His heart was broken, and there is nothing that can heal a broken heart but the touch of God. And so he turned away from the altar, and cast himself at the feet of God, confessing his sin and imploring mercy. And God heard his prayer.

He had sought peace at the altar, and had

sought it in vain ; and he found it when he went to God with a broken and a contrite heart. So he made his discovery—that penitence is the way to peace ; and in the gladness of his heart he cried : “ There is no need of sacrifices—of the altar and the shedding of blood. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit : a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.”

That was his mistake ; and five centuries later another troubled soul discovered that, while penitence is the way to peace, there is need for a sacrifice too. That was his discovery ; and what was his mistake? It was this—that he thought the old sacrifices were sufficient, and he desired nothing better than the restoration of the Temple and the rebuilding of the Altar. “ Do good in Thy good pleasure unto Zion : build Thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt Thou delight in the sacrifices of righteousness, in burnt offering and whole burnt offering : then shall they offer bullocks upon Thine altar.”

What have we in this contradiction, this conflict, this sense, on the one hand, of the inefficacy of the blood of bulls and goats and, on the other, of the necessity of an altar, but an unconscious yearning, a blind groping after that Sacrifice

which the Jewish sacrifices, yes, and the heathen sacrifices too, dimly foreshadowed? What was the blood of bulls and goats, which could never take away sins, but a prophecy of the precious blood of the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world? And I wish to show you in what remains that the soul needs an Atonement and that its need is satisfied by the Sacrifice of Calvary.

I have frequently asked you to observe how each doctrine of Christianity is just the uplifting to its highest issues of a principle which operates in common experience ; and here is another instance. There must be an Atonement ; there must be a Sacrifice : Do you doubt it? Then look into your own heart, and you will find the evidence.

In one of his immortal dialogues Plato has shown that there is no escaping the penalty of sin and no possibility of peace until it be faced. The wrongdoer, he says, who is convicted and punished is happier than one who gets off scot-free. And this is terribly true. A sinner may shun detection and never be brought before an earthly tribunal ; but there is a more awful

tribunal which he cannot escape. His sin grips him, and it never lets him go. It racks him ruthlessly, remorselessly, with a slow, dragging, bitter and ever more bitter torture. And there is no deliverance for him until he faces his sin and confesses it and accepts the consequences. You remember that grim imagination of Greek mythology, that no sooner was a crime wrought than the Furies, the bloodhounds of Hell, got on the sinner's track and hunted him day and night until he atoned with his own blood for the blood which he had shed. And what is this but a picturesque rendering of the stern law of moral retribution? Examples abound. Coleridge tells of an Italian assassin who fled from the scene of his crime and gained a secure refuge in Germany. The law could not reach him, but conscience arrested him. He was haunted by his victim's phantom, until at length he could endure it no longer, and resolved to return to Rome and surrender himself to justice and expiate his crime on the scaffold.

And there is no other way of peace. There must be atonement. This is the truth which David missed. He was right when he felt that there was no efficacy in the blood of bulls and

goats ; but ah ! he was wrong when he concluded that no other sacrifice was needed but a broken spirit, a heart which turns to God in sorrow and penitence. There is need of an altar and a victim and the shedding of blood ; and our hymn teaches the truth which the Psalmists were groping after all the time :

‘Not all the blood of beasts,
 On Jewish altars slain,
 Could give the guilty conscience peace,
 Or wash away the stain.

But Christ, the heavenly Lamb,
 Takes all our sins away,
 A sacrifice of nobler name
 And richer blood than they.”

This is the Sacrifice of God, and a broken heart is only the sinner's response to its appeal.

Now what does the Sacrifice of Christ mean? Oh, it is so easy to misinterpret it and drive men away from the blessed Cross ! It seems to me that there is no true understanding of the Atonement apart from our Lord's revelation of God—of His nature, His character, His thoughts. Theologians have told us that God is the Moral Governor of the Universe, and sin is an affront to His majesty, a violation of His law ; and

His honour must be satisfied and His law vindicated. And the Atonement means that Christ paid our debt and bore our punishment. But, ah ! that is not the teaching of Jesus. He never spoke of God as the Moral Governor and of sinners as rebels against His authority ; He never spoke of Him as an inexorable Judge and of sinners as bankrupt debtors. He has told us that God is our Father, and we are His children—His erring children, but His children still, and He has evermore a father's heart and a father's patience and pity.

Realise this, and you will understand the Atonement. I have heard of an old Yorkshireman who had trouble with his son ; and once a friend asked him how the lad was doing. " Oh, very badly ! " was the reply. " He has been drinking again and behaving very rough." " Dear, dear ! if he was my son, I would turn him out." " Yes," said the father, " and so would I, if he was yours. But, you see, he's not yours : he's mine." Was there no sacrifice, no suffering there? Ay, and the sacrifice was vicarious. It was the father that suffered ; it was his heart that broke.

And it is thus that God feels toward His

foolish children. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, and My compassions are kindled together." Love is ever vicarious.

"Love seeketh not itself to please,
Nor for itself hath any care,
But for another gives its ease,
And builds a heaven in hell's despair."

And this is the Atonement. Jesus was the eternal Son of God incarnate, one with the Father in His nature and character and thoughts and purposes ; and all that He was and said and did was a revelation of the Father's heart. Was not this His word : " He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father " ? When we see Him weeping for Jerusalem and going to the Cross in the greatness of His compassion, it is a revelation of the sorrow which our sin costs God, and the sacrifice which He endured to satisfy the longing of His heart for His lost children.

And this is our peace. When we see what our sin has cost God, we know that it has been

adequately dealt with. It is no facile amnesty which He proclaims when He tells us that there is an open door for every poor sinner who will come home. It is the testimony of our own hearts that there is no peace for us until our sin has been reckoned with ; and the Cross of Christ is God's reckoning with sin and His " blotting out of the hand-writing of ordinances that was against us." And this is our peace. " Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities : the chastisement of our peace was upon Him ; and with His stripes we are healed."

God knows our undeserving. He knows it better than we do ourselves ; yet He bids us come. And when we see what our sin has cost Him, we can venture home. The door of our Father's House stands open, and there is nothing that can keep us out. This is the Gospel, and is it not glad tidings? A broken and a contrite heart is all that we need to bring. Ay, but there is more than that in the Atonement, more than your broken heart and mine. There is the Heart that broke on Calvary.

**THE NEVER-FAILING LOVE
OF GOD**

“I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

ROMANS viii. 38, 39.

XX

THE NEVER-FAILING LOVE OF GOD

“I AM persuaded,” says the Apostle, and this is one of his great phrases. You will notice, wherever it occurs, that it expresses, not merely an assured faith, a strong conviction, but a faith in something which is not obvious or indisputable, and a conviction which has been reached after many a doubt and many a struggle, after much questioning and long groping in the darkness. The Apostle has had to feel his way through the tangle, and at length he has got out into the open. And thus, when he says “I am persuaded,” let us listen ; for he is about to tell us of something not easy to believe but infinitely worth believing, a treasure which he has found after painful searching, a victory which he has won after hard fighting.

See how it is in this instance. He is pro-

claiming a conviction which has satisfied his deepest need, succoured him in sore straits, and emboldened him to face the untried future with a brave and quiet heart—the constant faithfulness of the Love of God. He had not always this splendid assurance, but he has been “persuaded” of it; and though he does not stay to unfold it, we know the experience which lay behind his faith, the conflict through which he had won it.

It had indeed been dearly bought. If ever there was a man who knew what sacrifice and suffering meant, it was the Apostle; and he must have had many a misgiving, many a sinking of heart, as he looked back and considered what might have been, what he had given up and what he had gained.

Just think of his career. I suppose there was no lad in all the Jewish nation who had a brighter prospect in the morning of his life. Well nurtured in his home at Tarsus, he had gone to the celebrated College at Jerusalem and studied under the famous Rabbi Gamaliel. He was a brilliant student, outstripping his compeers (*cf.* Gal. i. 14) and giving promise of high distinction in sacred learning. It was a

fair prospect that lay before him, a career of honourable service and far-reaching influence. One day he would be enrolled among the Jewish Rabbis and win an abiding name in the literature and history of his nation.

But it was ordered otherwise. He had been sent by the Sanhedrin on a mission to Damascus—a high trust for one so young ; and on the way thither something happened. He had no doubt what it was. Jesus of Nazareth, that impostor who had been put to a death of shame the other year and whose deluded followers he was bent on extirpating, appeared to him and talked with him ; and the vision revolutionised his life and diverted it into a new channel. There on the road to Damascus he heard a call which he durst not disobey. He abandoned all. He turned his back on that bright and alluring prospect ; he sacrificed his career ; he avowed himself a follower of the Crucified, and stood forth in the sight of his countrymen a traitor to his fathers' God and his fathers' faith, exchanging honour and affection for scorn and hatred.

It was inevitable that he should ere long be assailed by doubts and questionings, as the

vision receded and he realised what he had sacrificed and considered what he had gained. Ay, what had he gained? A life of privation and ignominy. He had set himself to the task of winning the world for Christ. It was a gigantic enterprise, and he was so feeble—"his bodily presence weak and his speech contemptible." Is it any marvel that, as he travelled alone and weary over the wide and inhospitable world, facing hostility and persecution, there were dark hours when his spirit faltered and he was tempted to question whether his faith was not after all a wild delusion and his sacrifice a fatal blunder?

Such gloomy misgivings must have visited his soul; but something came to his rescue and steadied him and kept his feet on the road which he had chosen—something which is revealed only to troubled hearts: the Love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. He discovered that Jesus is wonderfully good to the soul that trusts Him, and that the Love of God which shone in His blessed face, is the ultimate reality, the deepest and strongest thing in the Universe; and this assurance saved him from despair and made him more than a conqueror.

It came to him, as it comes to every man who makes the glad discovery, out of his experience. He looked back along the road which he had travelled blindly with bleeding feet and a troubled heart, and he saw how an unseen hand had been guiding him and shaping his lot and making all things work together for his good. And thus he was "persuaded." This is the surest, if indeed it be not the only, evidence of God. It is not the teleological or the ontological argument that has compelled my faith. No, it is this—that I have found God in my life, and have seen there the operation of His grace and goodness, His wisdom and strength. I recognise, as I look back, that, when I thought I was wandering alone in the darkness, He was leading me all the time, and the experiences which were so painful and distressing at the moment have proved the most precious of all and have brought me enlargement and enrichment.

This is the discovery which St. Paul had made and which had rescued him from doubt and fear. See what use he makes of it. He builds an argument upon it, and he draws an inference from it. "Since," he reasons, "God never changes and there is no caprice in Him,

the goodness and mercy which have followed me in the past will follow me to the end ; the love which blessed me yesterday will bless me to-morrow and all the days of my life for evermore." That is his argument. And then he draws an inference : " Why should I doubt? Why should I fret? I will fear no evil."

And see what he does next. He conjures up all the terrors which afflict the soul, names them over, and marshals them in grim array ; and then he bids them do their worst and sets them at defiance. " I am persuaded that neither death nor life " : these come first, and we know what they are. We know death—that black cloud which is ever travelling toward us across the waste and will presently touch us with its cold shadow. St. Paul bids it come. Ay, and life too. His defiance rises from death to life; for life, did we but realise it, is a worse enemy than death—more perilous, more mysterious, more awful.

" Many there be that seek Thy face
To meet the hour of parting breath ;
But 'tis for life I need Thy grace :
Life is more solemn still than death."

What dread chances it holds ! what appalling

possibilities of disaster, of suffering, of shame ! Who can forecast what may be on the morrow? Perchance poverty, or disease, or insanity, or —worse than all—disgrace. Many a man has succumbed to a sudden temptation and, in one passionate moment, has defamed the honour of his blameless years. Oh, surely life is more terrible than death, and it is nothing less than a deliverance and a triumph when a wayfarer arrives at his journey's end and is laid to rest without reproach.

“Nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers” : this is a Jewish phrase for the spiritual hierarchy ; and the modern equivalent, I suppose, is the unseen forces which encompass us, those mysterious powers and operations which act upon our lives and compel them to unthought of issues. They lie without us, mysterious, incalculable, uncontrollable, invading us unexpectedly, shaping our experience, and determining our destiny. We never know what they will be doing with us.

“Nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth” : this world, the next ; Heaven, Hell. And what more can St. Paul say? Has he not mustered the entire host of

terrors? Yes, so far as he knows ; but it is little that he knows after all, and so he sums up every possibility under one final and comprehensive category—"nor any other creature," or rather "any different creation." "There may yet," he means, "be some fresh transformation. I know not what new environment may yet confront me, what strange world, what undreamed-of surroundings, what play of forces more dread and solemn than I have hitherto experienced ; but I fear not even that. For there is nothing here, nothing there, nothing anywhere about which I need to fret or trouble ; because, wherever I may be and whatever may happen, I shall have the Love of God for my comrade and my portion. I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any different creation, shall be able to separate us from the Love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Such was St. Paul's splendid assurance, and it is our strength and hope and consolation still. And how greatly we need it amid the changes and chances of our troublous life ! Oh, it is

hard when God breaks up our pleasant homes and drives us forth into the world to face new tasks and dwell among strangers ! But never fear. Whatever may come, whatever " different creation " we may find ourselves in the midst of, His never-failing Love will still attend us. Go where we may, it will be there. Nothing shall separate us from it.

I must not close without bidding you notice what this Love is which did so much for St. Paul. He calls it, to begin with, simply " the Love of God " ; and then, I suppose, he bethinks himself how every one, Jew and Gentile, talked about the Love of God, and it was hardly more than a philosophical term. But the Love which had so blessed and gladdened the Apostle was better than that. It was " the Love of God, *which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" And this definition makes an immeasurable difference. In your days of darkness and despair think of Jesus. Turn to Calvary, and see the dear Lord hanging there—dying for love of you, breaking His heart for desire of you. That is the Love which is enfolding you, which has been taking care of you all your days and will take care of you evermore, in this world, in the next, in any different

creation, never failing. Is not this a Love worth trusting? And shall we not trust it?

It is told of Robert Bruce—not the Scottish king but the old Scottish minister in the generation succeeding the Reformation—that, as he lay a-dying, attended by his daughter, he suddenly exclaimed: “Hold, daughter, my Master calls me”; and then he bade her fetch the Bible. “Cast me up,” he said, “the eighth chapter of Romans, and place my finger on these words, ‘I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.’” And thus he died, with his finger there and his heart there too.

And so let us grasp this never-failing Love, the Love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Let us believe it, let us trust it; and then we may go out into the untried future with quiet hearts; for there is nothing in life or death or Eternity that can harm us, nothing that we need to fear.

A FUTURE AND A HOPE
A NEW YEAR'S DAY HOMILY

“I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end.”

JEREMIAH XXIX. 11.

XXI

A FUTURE AND A HOPE

IT is told of "Rabbi" Duncan, the quaint old Professor of Hebrew in the New College, Edinburgh, that once, when his students assembled after the Christmas vacation, he met them with this salutation: "Many will be wishing you a happy New Year at this time: Gentlemen, I wish you a happy Eternity."

That is my wish for you this New Year morning, and it is to help you to attain it that I have brought you this verse and am going to say something to you about it.

It is one of the gracious and comforting promises of the Bible, and it is a pity that our translators have missed the meaning of it, not knowing what to make of the closing words. The Authorised Version has in its text "an expected end," and in its margin "an end and

expectation." And the Revised Version is no less vacillating. It has in its text "hope in your latter end," and in its margin "a latter end and hope." I need not weary you with a technical discussion. Suffice it to say that there seems to me no doubt about the proper rendering, and it is this: "a future and a hope."

Now is not this a magnificent promise to take into our hearts and carry with us into the New Year? Let us think of it for a little.

This is what the Lord promises and gives to His believing people—a future and a hope; and the world, whatever it may promise, gives the precise opposite—a present and a regret.

The pathos of life apart from the Lord Jesus is its brevity. It passes so quickly, and death comes so soon. And what does death mean for one who is a stranger to the hope of the Gospel?

1. It is *the ending of life's employments*. Once I was sitting in my Study with a visitor, a well-known scholar who died the other year. Our talk was about books, and when it was growing late and we must stop, he sighed and exclaimed: "Oh, it is sad to be getting old!

Books are so delightful, and I shall soon be done with them." Is it any wonder that the Epicurean philosophy found wide acceptance in that ancient world which had lost the hope of immortality? Life was so sweet, and it was so short. "Let us snatch its pleasures while we may. Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

2. It is *the frustration of life's ambitions*. What a pathetic story that is of the English philosopher, Henry Thomas Buckle! He had designed a work which should make his name immortal, and had spent long and laborious years gathering the material; and he had published the first volume, which was only the introduction. He went travelling abroad to enlarge his knowledge, and in the far city of Damascus he was stricken with a fatal sickness. As he lay tossing in fever and delirium, there was one thought in his heart and one cry on his lips: "My book! my book! I shall never finish my book." Death was for him a crushing disaster. It blighted his cherished ambition and mocked his fond hope. It stopped the loom and cut the threads ere the web was finished, ere it was well begun.

Yes, the world gives a present and a regret, but the Lord gives a future and a hope. If we be Christ's, there is always something to live for, something to look forward to ; the future is always better than the best we have ever known.

For one thing, the Lord's people never grow old. " Though the outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day." Have we not known many an old man whose head was white and whose step was feeble, but whose heart, because the love of Jesus was shed abroad in it like the sunshine, was fresh and green and sweet as the heart of a little child? What are three score years and ten but as a drop in the ocean in comparison with the endless years at God's right hand? The oldest of the Lord's people is only on the threshold of life, in the morning of his days. He is and shall ever be one of the Father's little children.

And if we be Christ's, our work does not cease when we die. It is rather only beginning then. We leave behind us the implements of our toil, but we carry with us into the Unseen World the faculties which have been disciplined and strengthened here, and find for them there a

fuller and freer exercise on broader and nobler fields.

And thus the good Lord gives to His faithful people a future and a hope ; and amid all life's changes and desolations we can lift up our heads and sing, in the brave words of Robert Browning :

“Grow old along with me !
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made.”

If we be Christ's, there lies before us something better and more wonderful than we have ever experienced or imagined—“ things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man, whatsoever things God prepared for them that love Him.”

**OUR LORD'S DESIRE FOR THE
COMMUNION**

A SACRAMENTAL SERMON

“And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the Passover, His disciples said unto Him, Where wilt Thou that we go and prepare that Thou mayest eat the Passover? And He sendeth forth two of His disciples, and saith unto them, Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water; follow him. And wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the goodman of the house, The Master saith, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the Passover with My disciples? And he will shew you a large upper room furnished and prepared; there make ready for us.”

ST. MARK xiv. 12-15.

XXII

OUR LORD'S DESIRE FOR THE COMMUNION

YOU remember the situation. Jesus had come up from Galilee to Jerusalem with His disciples to keep the ancient feast of the Passover—to keep it for the last time and then to die, the true Paschal Lamb, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. The feast was celebrated in every Jewish home, but all the days of His earthly ministry Jesus was a homeless man. The foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests ; but the Son of Man had not where to lay His head. His abode at Capernaum was another man's house, the poor house of Simon Peter the Galilean fisherman ; and when He visited Jerusalem, He was accustomed to spend the day teaching and preaching in the Court of the Temple, and at eventide He would go out across the ravine of the Kedron

and betake Himself to the Garden of Gethsemane, an olive-orchard on the slope of Mount Olivet ; and there He would pass the night with no couch but the grass, no shelter but the clustering boughs, no roof but the deep blue Syrian sky.

He had no dwelling in Jerusalem, and when the Day of Preparation arrived, the disciples came and asked Him : "Where wilt Thou that we go and prepare that Thou mayest eat the Passover?" He had said nothing about it to them, but He had it all arranged, and He told them what they should do. He entrusted the task of preparation, as St. Luke informs us, to Peter and John, the most trusted and best beloved of His disciples, and said to them : "Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water : follow him. And wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the goodman of the house, The Master saith, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the Passover with My disciples? And he will show you a large upper room furnished, and prepared : there make ready for us."

There is nothing supernatural here, no miracle of prescience. The fact is that Jesus had a

friend in the city and had arranged it all with him. It is said, you remember, that the friend was John Mark, afterwards St. Mark the Evangelist, who resided in Jerusalem with his mother Mary—that widow lady who in after days, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, showed the disciples such generous hospitality for the Master's sake. Jesus had told Mark of His need, and Mark had bidden Him and the disciples to his house and promised to have a goodly apartment in readiness where they might keep the feast.

Such was the arrangement which Jesus had made, and you observe this curious circumstance, that He concealed it from the disciples and took pains that they should know nothing of it until the hour arrived. On the morning of the feast day He entrusted the office of preparation to Peter and John and sent them by themselves into the city; and He sent them, so to say, "with sealed orders." He did not tell them openly to go and make the Supper ready at the house of John Mark. "Go ye," He said, "into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him."

What does this mean? It is a stratagem

which Jesus had devised and put in operation. Mark was to send one of his slaves that morning to draw water from the well at the gate of the city (*cf.* St. Luke xxii. 10). It was a homely and common errand, but there were in this instance two unusual circumstances. One was the hour. It was morning, and it was the custom then, as it is now, in the East, that the water-drawers should go to the well at eventide (*cf.* Gen. xxiv. 2). And the other is that the slave who was sent to the well was a man, and the Eastern water-drawers were always women.

And I may mention in passing a little matter which is instructive as well as interesting. The water-drawers carry their pitchers on their heads, and it is said that this is the reason why those Eastern women have such beautiful figures—so straight and lithe and shapely. They carry their burdens on their heads and, to balance them, they must hold themselves erect and walk with steady steps. And thus the burden is a crown.

You see, then, the singularity of the situation. There would have been nothing remarkable about a woman going out to the well in the evening. She would have been simply one of a

long procession passing along the streets with their water-pots. But a man going to the well with a water-pot in the morning would be a solitary and unusual figure, and Peter and John would immediately observe him. "Go ye," says Jesus, "into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him."

So far all is intelligible; but, you see, there is something more. When Peter and John presented themselves at his door, how was Mark to know that they were the Master's messengers? With so much treachery in the air there was need of circumspection. "Ah," Jesus had said to him, availing Himself, as He did on at least one other occasion (*cf.* St. Matthew xxi. 2, 3), of a practice which was common in those days, "I will give them a watchword. It will be: 'The Master saith, Where is the guest-chamber?' and when they deliver the watchword, you will know that I have sent them."

And now the whole situation is plain. But the question arises: What necessity was there for all this elaborate mystification? Why should not Jesus have told the disciples forthwith that He would eat the Passover with them in the house of John Mark? The reason is that He

knew all that had been passing of late—the inveterate hostility of the rulers and their determination to arrest Him and put Him out of the way if only they could contrive it without exciting a popular insurrection, and the foul bargain which Judas had made with them the other day. The traitor had gone to them and offered to aid them in their perplexity. “Give me,” he had said, “thirty pieces of silver, and I will watch for a convenient opportunity and bring you word, and you can then arrest Him and work your will upon Him ere the multitude is aware.” He was watching for his chance, and he would find it on the Passover night. If only he knew the rendezvous, he would apprise the rulers, and they would repair thither when the citizens were all in their houses engaged in the sacred celebration, and break in and carry off their prisoner.

Jesus knew all this, and He had no fear of death. He had come into the world to die, and His life had been a progress toward Calvary. He was ready to climb the hill of shame and lay down His life on the altar of the Cross ; but there was one office which He must first perform. He must celebrate that last feast with His

disciples and be alone with them that last evening in holy communion. And therefore He devised that stratagem and took that elaborate precaution, that there might be no interruption, that it might be impossible for the traitor to go betimes to the rulers and say : " You will find Him in the house of John Mark. Go thither when the city is still, and seize Him."

Why was our Blessed Lord so desirous to be alone with His disciples that evening? Of course there is one obvious reason which appeals to you and me with peculiar poignancy at our Communion this morning, the last which we shall celebrate together in this holy and beautiful house endeared to us by so many tender associations. It was His last meeting with them. That very night He would be torn from them, and they would be left desolate and scattered abroad like a flock of sheep when the shepherd is smitten. It was the last evening He would ever spend with them on earth, and He would fain enjoy the sweetness of it and bid them a fond farewell.

But that is not all. There was more in His heart than a tender memory of those bygone

days of fellowship on the hills and the lake of Galilee. He was thinking of the future, and His purpose was to institute a sacred ordinance which should keep Him from generation to generation in the loving remembrance of His believing people and make Him evermore an abiding presence. And therefore He desired that there should be no interruption. It was not merely for Peter and John and the rest of the eleven that He was caring, but for you and me. Had His enemies broken into the Upper Room and carried Him away ere the Supper was ended, there would have been no Holy Table spread for us this morning, and we would have missed the comfort and peace wherewith it is laden.

Perhaps you may think that a memorial of Jesus was hardly necessary ; for there was little danger of His being forgotten. His disciples loved Him too well to let His memory die ; and though there was no memorial feast, have we not the imperishable record in the Holy Gospels of all that He was and did and taught, and, moreover, the continual grace of His blessed Spirit testifying of Him and bringing Him ever to our remembrance ?

Yes, but we are so apt to misunderstand Him

and misinterpret His revelation ; and He instituted this memorial, not merely that He might be remembered, but that He might be remembered aright. This is the purpose and the use of the Holy Sacrament. Suppose it had been left to the Apostles to devise a memorial of their Master : what would they have chosen to remember Him by? They would certainly have fixed upon some aspect of His ministry which had appealed to their imagination and excited their admiration. Probably they would have instituted a rite commemorative of His teaching or His miracles. I am very sure that it would never have entered into their minds to fix upon His death as the supremely memorable fact and devise a rite which should keep that before the thought and imagination of succeeding ages. His teaching and His miracles are indeed very memorable, but they do not constitute the supreme glory of our Lord. He is more than a philosopher and more, far more, than a wonder-worker. He is the Saviour, and His supreme glory is His infinite Sacrifice for the sin of the world, His life of vicarious obedience to the Father's will, and His death of suffering and shame which was the consummation of His

life, the furthest reach of His redeeming love. And therefore, when He instituted His memorial, He fixed upon His death and said : " Remember Me ; and when you remember Me, let it be for this—that I died for you. This bread is My body broken for you : take, eat. This cup is the New Covenant in My blood : drink ye all of it. This do in remembrance of Me."

This is the call which is addressed to us this morning—that we should turn our eyes to Calvary and see what a length God went in love and sacrifice, bearing our burden, grappling with our foe, and shedding His heart's blood to redeem us. It is an amazing and overwhelming demonstration of what He thinks about sin, and what He is able and willing to do, ay and has done, to rescue us from its curse. And it proclaims this blessed truth which I would in closing lay home to your hearts—that our redemption is a finished work. The Cross stands evermore on the Hill of Calvary a monument of that Sacrifice which revealed the unconquerable love of God and swept away for ever the barrier which sin had raised between the Heavenly Father and His human children. What should be the language of our hearts as we approach the

Holy Table this morning? Not the penitential cry :

“After Thy lovingkindness, Lord,
Have mercy upon me ;
For Thy compassions great, blot out
All mine iniquity.”

Ah, no ! The Lord *has* had mercy upon us ; He *has* blotted out all our iniquity. This is the glad assurance which He is sealing with His sacramental token. Shall we not receive it with a brave and unfaltering faith and go to His Table with the peace of His ransomed in our hearts and the song of His ransomed in our mouths?—

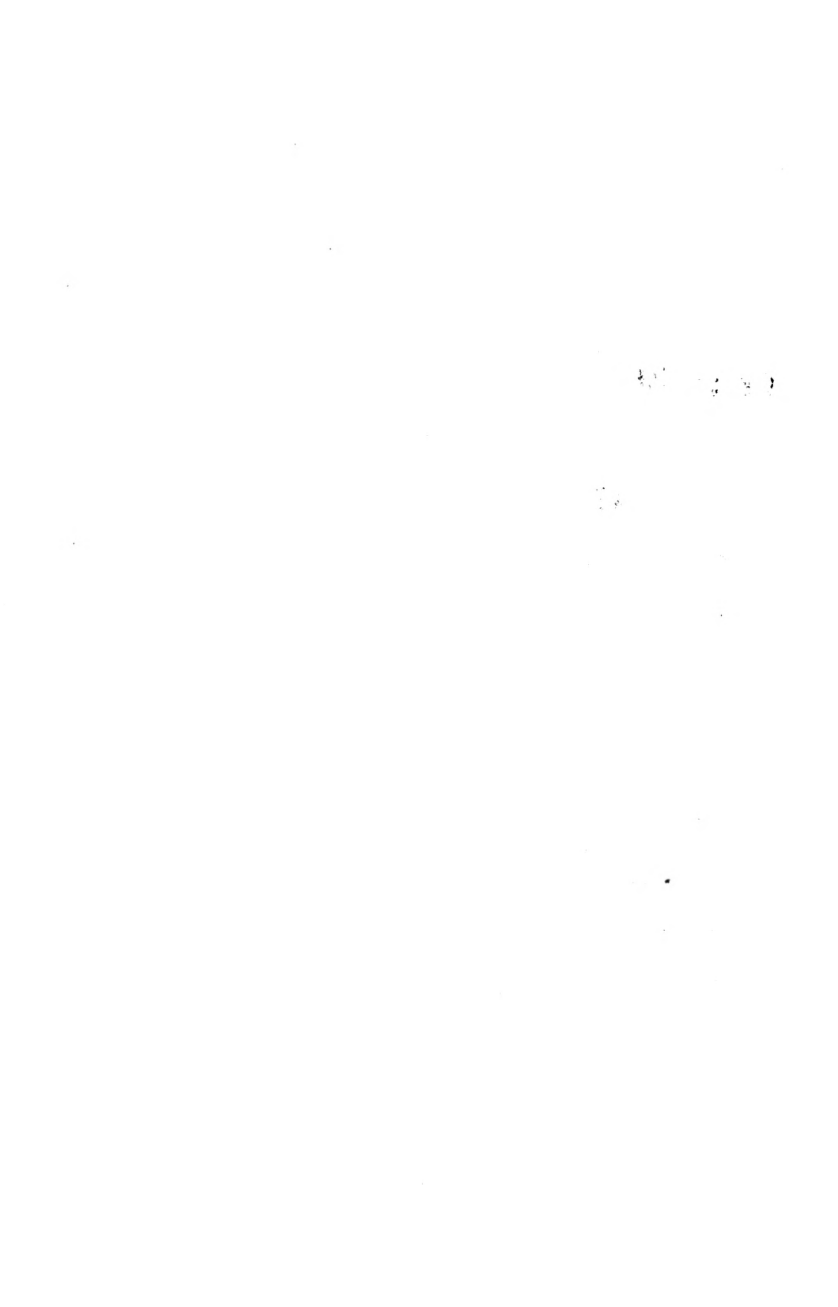
“As far as east is distant from
The west, so far hath He
From us removèd, in His love,
All our iniquity.”

May the Love of God our Heavenly Father, the Grace of Jesus Christ our Elder Brother, and the Peace of the Holy Spirit who comforteth us as one whom his mother comforteth, be with us in our going out and coming in, till we reach our Father's House to go no more out. Amen.

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