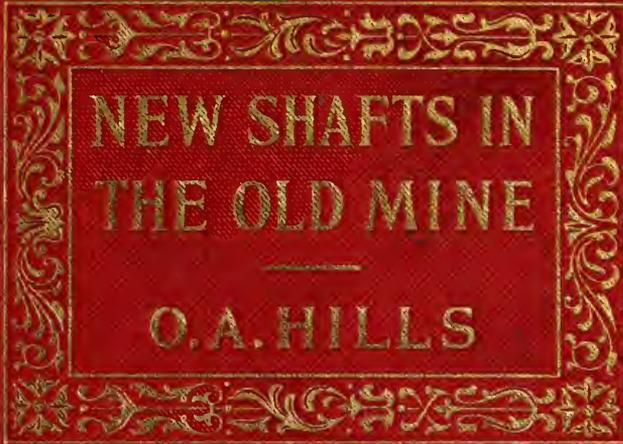


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NEW SHAFTS IN
THE OLD MINE

—
O.A. HILLS

(Hills)

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NEW SHAFTS IN THE OLD MINE

130 pp
NEW SHAFTS IN THE
OLD MINE

An Exposition of Some Classic Passages
of
HOLY SCRIPTURE

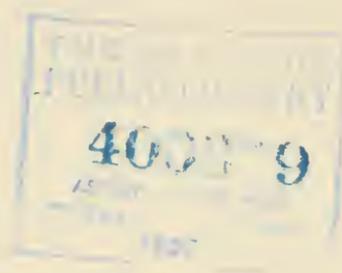
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the Sunset Sea."

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DEDICATION

To the members of the
Westminster Presbyterian Church
and
Students of the University of Wooster

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PREFATORY NOTE

ONE of the most valuable of my early lessons in homiletics had respect to the treatment of somewhat extended portions of Scripture, as the sermon ordinarily discusses a single verse. Such expositions of the word do not consist in scattering and illogical comments, however edifying in themselves, on the successive verses of a passage. They are rather, as the old Scotch Uncle expresses it, "sinking a mine doon" into some definite and segregated portion of Holy Writ, with a view to bringing up and into clearest emphasis its central teaching, and at the same time grouping all its subordinate thoughts in some living order around the leading idea. The effort to do this in a few instances explains the title of this little volume, and gives shape to the discussions herein recorded.

I have ventured to adhere to the numbered heads of discourse, though this seems just now to be a little "out of style." An experience of over forty years in the ministry has convinced

me that the large majority of plain people hear with more comfort, and recall with more ease, the sermons that have "a few pegs to hang the memory on." And, even to a reader, though less needful, they are not wholly useless. At the same time, while making them comprehensive in every case of the entire passage under consideration, I have sought to frame them in a few clear words, remembering the adage, "The less sash the more light."

It is my earnest prayer that the truths of these classic passages may prove none the less "sweet and sappie bits" to the spiritual taste, that they are here set forth in an orderly array.

THE AUTHOR.

Wooster, Ohio.

THE CHRISTIAN'S HOPE

NEW SHAFTS IN THE OLD MINE

THE CHRISTIAN'S HOPE

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who by the power of God are guarded through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”—I Peter i: 3-5.

Hope is man's fast and firmest earthly friend. When all others forsake him, she remains his steadfast companion and comforter. This, the common experience of men, is beautifully embodied in the old classic legend. As related by some, Pandora, the goddess all-gifted, as her name implies, came to bless mankind. Her box was richly freighted with mercies contributed by her numerous companion-divinities; and her advent was hailed with songs of gladness by those about to receive her benefactions. But alas for them, in an incautious moment the beautiful messenger opened her treasure chest; and all her bless-

ings, save one, escaped beyond recovery, before she could again shut down the lid. That one was Hope. Wisely and happily for man, she was not permitted to join the flight of other blessings. And so it comes about that ever since, in every heart, hope is found the earliest and the latest guest, first to enter and last to leave her human habitation.

It is only a fable, but truth lies under the drapery of the parable. Hope is one of the most powerful emotions of the soul. She makes the weak strong, and nerves the spirit to well-nigh superhuman effort. She is the spring and joy of life. With more than a painter's power she covers the dark waters with a silvery sheen. With more than a magician's skill she transforms the present wilderness into a paradise of beauty and of peace. And when she leaves the soul, it is as when one turns the key in the rusty lock and leaves the old house with shutterless windows and leaking roof and unhinged doors to degenerate into a drearier dilapidation—the home henceforth of nerveless and effortless despair.

So men cling to Hope. When she is gone, all is gone! While she remains, they cannot be entirely alone. And as to the life that now is, they seek the firmest and broadest foundations on which to plant their hopes. But how frail that

basis, and how feeble their hope as to the life which is to come! Significant and solemn are the words of Holy Scripture concerning men in this respect—"having no hope." The multitudes are forever battling with the trials of our mortal state; and as to the eternal world they are without hope. It is to them a land of darkness. No sun shines on the spirit realm. There are no loves nor joys for them beyond the sepulchre. And with a dread unspeakable they contemplate the close of life. Or should they have some brighter conception of the future state, such as Christianity gives even to the unbeliever, they have but vague and unsubstantial grounds of hope that its blessedness shall ever come to them. In all essential respects they live without any well-founded hope of heaven.

It is in contrast with this experience of men that Peter here speaks of the Christian's expectation as a "living hope." As Christ is the "living stone" chiefly, perhaps, because He imparts life to the entire edifice, so this feeling of the soul is a "living hope," because it gives that soul the inspiration of new being. It is no indefinite expectation such as that with which many delude themselves. It has the firmest foundation; and, in its object, it possesses the sweep of the eternal world.

To this Object and Ground of the Christian's Hope I invite your attention in a familiar exposition of the text.

I. THE OBJECT

All objects of hope rest, of course, in the bosom of the future. They lie below the visible horizon, for "who hopeth for that which he seeth?" This is preëminently so of the great hope of the Christian. The object of it, says Peter, in this passage, is "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven" for him. His portion is found beyond the grave. There are the joys that satisfy and sanctify the soul. There gather his believing friends in an ever-enlarging circle. There reigns his gracious Redeemer upon a throne of love. And thitherward go forward the affections of his entire nature—the daily strengthening cords which shall bind and bring him home. These are the objects on which his hope is supremely set. And in the text they are summed up in the one word—"inheritance."

It is in contrast with the vague and shadowy hopes of worldly and unbelieving men that Peter calls this of the Christian a "living" hope. The fitness of this designation is apparent from the term here used to describe the object to which

the Christian's hope looks. It is "an inheritance." It is, then, a reality. It is no shadow. It is no summer cloud, to be dissipated by the rays of the sun of truth. It is no mirage of the desert, looming up on the horizon of time, with all its appearance of fact and substance, in walls and domes, in trees and fountains, in flowers and fruits—but destined to fade into the viewless air, as the tired but expectant traveler nears the enchanting scene. It is a substantial fact. It is a veritable possession. The Christian did not, indeed, plan for it. It was not the work of his hand or the toil of his brain that gathered it. No groans nor tears of his nor wealth of his affections are represented in its great proportions. To build it up, he cannot say, as Jacob said of his years of service, "In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep fled from mine eyes." Other hands have toiled; another mind has planned. Through sweat and blood, with sighs and cries, by consuming work and corroding suffering, the vast possession has been accumulated! But the believer can claim no credit for it. It is his, but his only by inheritance. It simply descends to him according to the laws which govern the transmission of estates.

The word, therefore, indicates more than the actual existence of the possession. It shows the Christian also and especially the certainty that it shall one day become absolutely and thoroughly his own. The security of an inheritance is fundamental to the stability of society. To guard this, the wisdom and power of law have everywhere been evoked, and the sanctions of immemorial custom have been brought into requisition. As a result, possession by inheritance is one of the most certain of all things in this uncertain world. Only prove one's heirship, and the whole force of all law and custom and opinion and government will combine to give him his inheritance. He is reasonably certain of finally obtaining it. But he does not yet possess it. He lives, therefore, in hope. And his, we say, is a "living hope." This, descriptive of any earthly estate, is infinitely more true of the Christian's inheritance. It is the only and the great certainty in the way of inheritance. He has not yet entered into possession; but he will obtain it, with an absolutely infallible certainty. "They may die," you can say of other prospective heirs. So may the Christian. But this works no disappointment or forfeit. With other estates, the possessors must die, before the heirs can enjoy their advantages.

With that heavenly estate, the rule is reversed. The present possessor lives on and evermore: it is the heir who must die in order to his entrance upon his inheritance.

If, now, we turn from this general view of the object of the Christian's hope and, guided by the text, seek to examine it more particularly, we meet the difficulty which seems to have been before the mind of Peter. How can one describe that which he has not seen? And even if directed by the inspiring Spirit, how can one portray in human speech that which, because of its surpassing glory, cannot be compassed in the language of men? The attempt were vain. And Peter does not make the trial. Neither version makes plain what is so evident in the original, that the apostle, in the structure of the words he uses, describes this heavenly inheritance, not in any positive terms that fill our minds with new and otherwise unknown conceptions of it, but in simple negations. He can describe the object on which our hope is set only by denying that it is disfigured by any of the imperfections which meet us here on every hand. Literally he says of this inheritance that it is "not corruptible, not defiled, not fading." Whatever of imperfectness and perishableness exists on earth is not found

there, and does not affect the heavenly inheritance!

The descriptive words are not positive assertions, but simple negations. And yet they are significant, as a glance at them will show.

For one thing, the inheritance is "not corruptible." This object of the Christian's hope contains within itself no germs of death. Of no earthly reliance can such a statement be made. It is the most common experience of men that the things toward which they look with expectancy and longing perish before their eyes. They crumble in the grasp of their hands; they sink beneath the pressure of their feet. You have seen parental hearts bound up in a daughter's life. Full of promise, she was rapidly maturing into noble and beautiful womanhood. But the discerning eye could see that even that beauty had in it the elements of decay. Its brightest lines were only touches of the death-angel, labelling the fair form for his own possession. So, as we think of that blessed object of our hopes beyond the skies and are assured that it is beautiful beyond compare, how natural and spontaneous the inquiries: Is it incorruptible? Does it possess no germs of decay? Are its glorious hues but autumn tints, to tell of an ebbing life and to foretell a coming

winter? To meet such questions Peter seems to say, "Whatever the inheritance is—and what it is I know not—it is not this. It is not corruptible. It has within itself no seeds of death."

Again, this inheritance—object of the Christian's hope (if I may coin the word)—is "not defilable." Another negation, the term is not less suggestive than the one just referred to. The land of Canaan was the inheritance of Israel; but it had been defiled by the sins of the nations, which had filled up the measure of their iniquity, and its stains could be washed out only with blood. Again by Israel's sins it was polluted, and cleansed only by a sabbath of seventy years. The primeval world was so filled with abominations that nothing less than a deluge could wash away the awful stains. And the world that now is shall yet receive her purifying baptism of fire. Sin touches and stains everything below. It defiles our every possession. It pollutes even our inheritances. One of the early fathers of the church, with a sweeping generalization that yet is not wholly untrue, says, "The rich man is either a dishonest man himself, or the heir of a dishonest man." There are few earthly possessions or inheritances, which are not in some way defiled by the accumulator's sins, or those of his heirs. But, God be praised! that heavenly in-

heritance shall never—can never—have a stain of sin! It is “not defilable.”

I cannot forbear, also, calling your attention to the exceeding great beauty and expressiveness of this word in the original Greek. You all know what asbestos is—that singular mineral, so fibrous in structure that, like threads, its fibres can be drawn out and woven into cloth. This fabric is indestructible by fire, and will come out of the furnace, heated seven times, as pure and as white as the driven snow. The finest variety has the beauty and lustre of satin. The Greeks gave it a special and significant name. That name is the word here used by Peter to describe the inheritance beyond the skies. Bought with a price, and purified as by fire, it is the “undefiled” and “undefilable.”

Yet again, it “fadeth not away”—literally it is “not fading.” This word has special reference to the loveliness of the possession. As Alford says, “In substance it is incorruptible, in purity undefiled, in beauty unfading.” The one idea, running through all these terms, is the safety and security of the inheritance—the permanent nature of this object of our hope. This word continues that thought, and strengthens it. It is “not fading,” as much as to say, even the most delicate part of the inheritance above, its bloom

and flowering, continues in unwithering freshness. Our earthly possessions are most beautiful, when they put on the gorgeous coloring of the floral world. But just then we feel most deeply that they are transient—only of the day. Oh, could we but fasten in immortal lines the colors of their resplendent robes! The wish is realized beyond the stars, where the flowers bloom in unfading glory in the blessed light of heaven. This heavenly inheritance—object ever grand and blessed of the Christian's hope—is "not fading."

It may fix the word in memory to observe that it is the original of our English term—"amaranth." As to the faithful elders, this same Peter, himself also an elder, gives the assurance that "when the chief shepherd shall appear, they shall receive an amaranthine crown of glory," so here he speaks of the object of our hope as the "amaranthine inheritance." It is eternally abiding!

In the same line of thought, the apostle says it is "reserved in heaven for you." Passing from negative descriptions, he thus briefly indicates the place of its keeping. His language is more suggestive than at first sight appears. Let me stay a moment only to uncover the charming scene from which in all probability

Peter's word is derived. Preceding holidays, birthdays, and other anniversaries, you will see parents and friends visiting the stores and shops, and buying presents and little remembrances for their children and other relatives. These prospective gifts are carefully stowed away, concealed not only from the sight, but also from even the knowledge of those for whom they are intended. This is one of the most delightful scenes of our home life. And we all know how glad the day, how exuberant and tumultuous the joy, when these safely hidden stores are brought forth and bestowed upon the surprised and delighted little folk. The custom descends from immemorial times. It had its place, there is reason to believe, even among the ancient Greeks. And the word which they used to describe the destined but yet hidden gift is the word by which Peter here describes the object of our hope, "reserved in heaven for you," hid away for the present, but "ready to be revealed in the last time."

The word is laden with the tenderest associations. Our Father bequeathes to us, His little children, an inheritance. He has bought it, not with money, but with blood! And now it lies beyond the veil, safely stored away. As children generally do, we have got some vague inkling of

what it is even now; but it is only an inkling. Some day (how soon, who can tell?) our Father's loving hand shall put aside the curtain, and, amidst the holy joys of the grand household, shall surprise us with its glorious beauty and perennial worth. A world of thought is in the expression—certainty, for it is stored away for us; concealment, for we have as yet the most indefinite conceptions of it; surprise, for we shall awake most suddenly to a realization of its priceless value.

This, my brethren, is but a glance at the object of the Christian's hope. It is "an inheritance, not corruptible, not defilable, not fading, reserved in heaven" for him. How simple, yet how suggestive, are the Holy Spirit's words! How beautiful are the original pictures which underlie the words of inspiration!

II. THE GROUND

The leading conclusion from the topic just considered is the abiding nature of the object on which the Christian's hope is fixed. The same thought comes into great prominence in the topic now to be examined. The ground of our hope is just as certain as its object. For, speaking generally, our hope of

finally entering upon the heavenly inheritance is not grounded upon anything that we are able to accomplish, but upon divine grace alone. This is our perpetual thanksgiving, says the apostle, that the "God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" has quickened within us this "living hope," according to "His great mercy."

Then, considering this ground of our hope in a more particular analysis of the remainder of the text, we shall find its certainty to rest upon evidence of a twofold character—that which is external to ourselves and that which is found in our own souls.

First as to the outward evidence. Can we fail to remember what a shadow rests upon the minds of men who know nothing of Christianity, or who have no faith in its fundamental facts respecting a future state? This object of our hope, which we have seen to be so real and so eternal, so pure and so beautiful, to them dissolves into an unsubstantial dream. And so their darkened spirits are forever crying: "Is there any future life at all? Is it certain that this life is not the last of us? All that we see, either of ourselves or of others, does perish: is not the weight of evidence, therefore, against our living hereafter? Who can answer the question: If a man die shall he live again? Who

can give us any real information of another world? Has any one been there, and returned? Has any one brought tidings? Can he tell us that there is a world beyond the sepulchre? Can he say there is a God? Can he assure us that God hears prayer?" And so they stumble on in darkness, and doubting as to the existence of any real possessions beyond the gates of death.

To the Christian there is no such uncertainty. There is a heavenly inheritance, and he has a "living hope" of eventually being invested with its possession. That hope, says the apostle in the text, is grounded upon the great and solemnly certified fact of "the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." This one stupendous fact answers the queries of a troubled spirit, swelling with immortal aspirations. "Life and immortality are brought to light in the gospel." There is a future world. If a man die, he shall live again; for Christ died, and He lives again. He visited the world of spirits, and brought us tidings from the land that seems so far off. The object of our hope is a veritable reality. The external ground of it is in the fact of our Redeemer's resurrection.

But, admitting the existence of that blessed world, the reality of "the inheritance, not cor-

ruptible, not defilable, and not fading, reserved in heaven for us"—can we know that it is stored away beyond a doubt for us? Shall it one day become our own possession? This ground of the Christian's hope is to be sought and found in his own soul. With this thought, the analysis and exposition of the text will be complete.

The ground of hope is as certain as the object. That certainty rests upon evidence both external and internal. Passing now from the outward fact to the inward experience, suppose we join together the two great topics of the text. With the apostle's simple but mighty logic binding into one the object and ground of hope, we need once more the reminder that that object is an "inheritance." Whose then is the inheritance, but the heirs'? And who are the heirs, but the children? This is our firm foundation—the internal ground of our hope. We are children of God, "and if children, then heirs," says Paul, "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." Peter states the same truth in the text, in different words, but not less clearly. God "according to His great mercy begat us again unto a living hope." Some are born to fortune and some are born to fame; but we are "born again" to the hope of "an amaranthine inheritance." These are two of the great certainties: there is a holy,

happy, heavenly world; and we, the children, wait a little while to be invested with its complete possession.

We use the language of undoubting certainty. Is there no possible mistake? Not all who are born to earthly things do actually enter upon their inherited possessions. May we not also fail of the full fruition of our hope? The apostle seems to anticipate the question; and in a word he dissipates the doubt. Whoever else may come short, we cannot fail who "by the power of God are guarded." "By the power of God are guarded!" The world sleeps in His hands; the eternally saved rest in His bosom. Who can guard us as does God? It was God who kept Elisha, when the mountains were full of horses and chariots round about the prophet. This is the divine keeping; for Peter's word signifies "being guarded as with a military force." Children of God, as a father would guard and die for his children, so our Father, God, will guard our believing spirits, though to accomplish that keeping He must take defenders from the battlements of glory, and send the royal cohorts of angels, principalities, and powers to stand unceasing guard around the beleaguered and believing children of His love and likeness.

I say believing children, for the principle that

governs the keeping is "faith." The inheritance is reserved for those "who by the power of God are guarded through faith." God's guarding promises no immunity from temptation. The Lord prayed for this same Peter, not that Satan might not sift him, but that his faith might not fail! It is, indeed, a peculiar but a grand war. The guard does not keep out the enemy—no need of that—but it does keep in the faith. And, while faith fails not, there can be no doubt that her sister, hope—grounded upon the resurrection of Christ, and the new birth of the soul—shall realize her object in "the inheritance, not corruptible, not defilable, not fading, reserved in heaven." For this guarding, says Peter, who speaks whereof he knew by a painful but blessed experience, is "unto salvation"—

"Where faith is sweetly lost in sight,
And hope in full supreme delight,
And everlasting love."

There is one obvious conclusion from this exposition. It leaves us where the apostle began. In a world that indulges in delusive expectations or is stricken with hopelessness, if to us has been given such a hope, with such an end and such a foundation, shall we not heartily join the apostle's anthem of praise? "Blessed

be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!" It was a grand outburst of sacred joy as it came from Peter's lips—a noble and fitting doxology, with which to begin his loving letter to the strangers who were scattered abroad.

As fittingly may we renew the song from day to day, an ever blessed prelude to our blessed work of giving hope to hopeless men. We are the children of hope! It is the God of hope who sends us forth! It is the Almighty Saviour, who has risen from the dead, and gone to the right hand of God the Father, who says to you and me, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

Saviour Divine! endow us with faith and hope in Thy blessed work.

THE AWAKENING OF A SOUL

THE AWAKENING OF A SOUL

I that speak unto thee am He.—John iv : 26.

A passing interview, with consequences stretching over many years! Two strangers meeting by the way, to separate as lifelong friends! The young student's coveted conference with a master, whether in religion, science, or literature, whence proceed subtle and powerful influences, which shall mold the young life and shape the forming character! Who cannot recall illustrations of all these, in the circle of his observation—possibly in the sphere of his own experience?

Who does not find in these momentary, and, as men call them, accidental encounters in life, a fruitful subject for speculation and inquiry,—concerning the long chain of occult causes by which they were brought about, or the far-reaching, pregnant, and inter-bound results? Greater than any of these, in suggestiveness of thought and marvel, both as to its character and its consequences, is the illustration furnished by this wayside interview between a sinner and her Saviour—the culminating words of which are given in the text.

The place was historic ground. It was between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim—the ancient peaks of alternate cursing and blessing. At the intersection of the beautiful vale of Shechem with the larger plain of Moreh, is found the well of the patriarch Jacob. Here rested on the well-curb, in that noontide hour, a foot-sore pilgrim,

“Strange and Kingly,
Never such was seen before.”

A weary Saviour, He was about to give rest to a weary soul! Thirsty Himself, He was yet a living fountain to this thirsty spirit! Hungry, He fed upon invisible and heavenly food!

Thither went the woman, who was a sinner of Samaria. Here, as never before, she is to meet that “true, poor, and tender man, Jesus of Nazareth.” She came in blindness to receive her sight! All unconscious of her destiny, she came asleep—enshrouded in the darkness of the night—to be thoroughly awaked, and to enter upon a new and glorious day! This is the aspect of the narrative, which deserves our thoughtful consideration. The awakening of a soul is here described by the evangelist in language of inimitable simplicity and power. The story dwells upon four steps in the process. We have,

I. THE AWAKENING OF ATTENTION

A most difficult thing to do, as all who have tried it will admit—the Lord does it in the most simple and natural, yet effective manner, by asking for a drink of water. The woman knew Him to be a Jew. She had reason to believe that He knew her to be a Samaritan. His request, therefore, excited her surprise and arrested her attention.

The alienation between the Jews and Samaritans had spanned the changing centuries, an unchanging, and irreconcilable controversy. They were neighbors only in geographical location; in all community of interests and closeness of fellowship they might better have been at the ends of the earth. Theirs was one of many implacable religious quarrels—the most tenacious and venomous of all controversies, next to the family feud, in which men can suffer themselves to become involved. But the gracious Lord here breaks over all the barriers built up by the quarrels of race, extracting the sweetest honey from the bitterest flowers of religious prejudice and national alienation, and so wins the attention of the woman whose soul He came to save.

The Lord's wise manner of introducing the subject of religion is well illustrated in this incident. How difficult a thing it is for us to do in any fruitful way! And how blunderingly we accomplish it! Our tongues run on lubricated pinions as we talk to our fellow-men of our mutual earthly interests; but how falteringly they voice the desires of our hearts when we come to plead for Christ and the eternal verities, in which they and we should have abiding interest. As the sun opens the rose, so Christ opened this sealed spirit. We pluck and lacerate the tender petals as we seek to bring the bud to fullest flowering; but under the benign beams of the sun it swells and bursts into glory, adorning the world with its matchless coloring and filling the air with the "odors of Eden," a creature of beauty and fragrance inimitable.

Oh, that in this we might imitate our blessed Lord, with gentle and persuasive insinuation leading our loved ones to the consideration of spiritual things, and the opening of their ears to the voices of grace! With our Lord's example before us, shall we not often find an open heart by asking a favor? Is there not such a wise thing as a sincere ministering to one's—self-love, shall I call it?—giving him the advantage in the conversation, putting it into his power to

refuse the overture, and yet so presenting it that his heart shall incline him to accept it?

The topic through which our Lord brought up the subject of religion was eminently fitting. He might have spoken of Ebal and Gerizim, with the blessings and curses of the law, received in common by His people and hers, contrasting with it her sinful life, and pointing her to the inevitable and disastrous end of disobedience. He might have spoken, as afterwards He did to His disciples, of the whitening fields, and the garnering time of the soul, when she must certainly reap the harvest of her sinful sowing. These would have been pertinent, timely, and fruitful themes for the Prophet of Galilee; and under His divine leading their application to this woman's heart and conscience would have been cogent and powerful—even overwhelming.

But the Lord chose, and wisely chose, to speak of the water. The well was there between them; and He was weary and thirsty. The noonday scorching heat made it a welcome object to both of them. And the woman's present thought and errand had respect to the water.

So, drawing His opportunity from the religious quarrels of their respective nations, and

from the woman's desire and purpose in coming to the well, our Saviour begins the conversation. He has already, do you not see, gained her interested attention. Her mind is open now and ready to respond to anything this stranger has to say. If only now he may get her to think!

The divine Teacher's experience is repeated in that of His followers. The story of the gospel comes ever to minds that are heavy, and eyes that are closed. The song of the angels resounded over a sleeping world. The world is wide-awake to every earthly interest. The great, obtrusive and crowding life around us forbids our slumber. But in spiritual things men sleep. To these higher things they need to be awaked. To rouse their sluggish energies, and to gain the eager attention of our fellow-men, is one of the most trying duties of those who would lead men to the Saviour. There is, indeed, but one more difficult than this; that is,

II. THE AWAKENING OF REFLECTION

To secure attention to the subject of religion, in any aspect of it, is no easy matter. To induce reflection and inquiry on the subject of personal religion is vastly more difficult. There

is, indeed, no little consideration of it in a vague, transient, and resultless way; but to get men to think seriously and to any purpose about their spiritual and eternal welfare is well-nigh impossible. It is to be observed that our Saviour awakens this woman to thoughtfulness by putting a new meaning into an old word.

So Christianity did for the Greek language in the days of its early triumphs. It poured into its weightiest words a profounder meaning than they are found to possess in classic literature. So the Christian religion is doing to-day in her vitalizing work in mission lands, regenerating not alone the hearts of lost men, but their tongues as well—pouring into the decaying literatures of the world the sweet, and high and holy ideas of our heaven-born faith.

Thus did the Lord stir this woman's mind to thoughtfulness and inquiry. She might have gotten good, sweet water at some of the many fountains nearer the city of Sychar. But she came to Jacob's well, possibly because of its superior water, or probably on account of its historic associations, or more likely to get away from the tumult of the town and all the scenes and associations of her sinful life. At any rate, whatever the motive, she came for this water. And here is a man who talks of "living water"

better than this of the well! What does He mean? The Lord has gained another point! Not only is the woman's attention arrested, but she begins now to think! She questions! She doubts! And these are antecedent steps to any fruitful progress. Doubting and inquiry are wrong only when one lingers in doubt, and loves uncertainty! Let us observe now the process of her thought.

First, she begins about the person. "Who are You, that You should make such claims? Are You greater than our father Jacob?" Her pride of race immediately comes to the front. Jacob was only the woman's stepfather, and two thousand years removed at that. But she is quite disposed to make a good deal of the fact that she had such a notable man for an ancestor. Many are like her! Their characters and lives are such as will not bear investigation; but they are quick, especially when driven to bay by a faithful friend or an accusing conscience, to take refuge in the piety of their forefathers.

Second, her unspiritual and groveling conceptions of truth must be noticed. She could not for a moment think this Jewish stranger meant anything but literal water. And yet figures and symbols were not strange to the oriental mind. But so Nicodemus, a ruler of

the Jews, and councilor of the great synagogue, blundered in a far plainer matter, "How can a man be born when he is old?" So, everywhere and always, is it true, as the Scripture saith, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged."

Third, the mixture of motives by which the woman was actuated deserves consideration. Some faint and fluctuating desires of her heart are here disclosed. Some feeble upreachings of the soul emerge from the abyss of sensualism in which her nature had been submerged. But her low aim in seeking a high end is plainly seen in her words, "Sir, give me this water (not that I may have everlasting life, as her Lord had said, but), that I thirst not, neither come all the way hither to draw." Oh, the pity of it! With a spirit perishing with thirst, and dimly conscious of the fact, the boundaries of her desires are relief from the drudgery of drawing water from Jacob's well!

Her course is often repeated by men beginning to think of spiritual things and the welfare of their immortal souls. Sometimes they are influenced by the fear of the wrath and curse of God; sometimes by the temporal advantages attending a Christian course; sometimes by the

moral beauty of the Christian virtues as exemplified in the lives of believing friends; and underneath it all a vague but powerful sense of unrest and longing, which at last rises above all other considerations and constrains the heart to cry out for God.

The woman is thinking now! No longer careless and indifferent, bent on the gratification of a bodily appetite and minded to return to the groveling life from which she had come, she is just entering upon an unwonted line of serious thought. Every power and faculty of her nature is now awake and intensely active! Every one, do I say? Alas! no; there is one exception. And so we come to the next step, viz. :—

III. THE AWAKENING OF CONSCIENCE

The woman did not understand the “living water,” because she had no thirst—no clear and dominating sense of sin and need. The Lord had given her spiritual food; He must now give her a spiritual appetite. How will He do it? How will He quicken this slumbering conscience?

Observe the simple and natural transition in the Lord’s conduct of the conversation, “Go, call thy husband, and come hither.” As much

as to say, "If you are earnest and sincere in asking this gift, you will surely wish to have your husband share in the blessing." The Lord knew who this woman was. But there is no rebuke and denunciation of her sinful life; infinite gentleness in faithfulness marks His course. With an inimitable touch our Lord opens a little window in the fading memory of this sinful woman, through which she glances upon the past of her career. Far yonder on life's threshold she sees herself a happy bride before the altar standing for the priestly benediction with the man of her choice and love. My husband! Ah! What was I then? An honored bride crowned with the blessing of a holy wedded love! What am I now? Ah! How miserable I am! An abandoned woman of the town!

That slumbering conscience starts into intensest activity in view of these contrasted pictures, and begins to upbraid the now consciously guilty soul. But she is not willing yet to bow before its power. And so she changes the subject. "Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet. Our fathers worshiped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." With such an opportunity to obtain an authoritative settlement of the vexed question of the place of

worship, she is suddenly interested in its final determination.

What was the woman's object in thus seeking to change the subject of their conversation? There are two explanations of her purpose, which yet may coalesce into one:—

First, she would turn away from the consideration of personal to public religion. To her awakened conscience the conversation was getting altogether too close and personal. She would still the voice of the monitor within, not by abandoning the subject of religion entirely, but by turning to some more general aspect of it. And what more pressing and important than the proper place in which to worship God? This is a common evasion of personal duty; and the woman has many followers even in modern times in this respect. Many people there are who are quite ready to spend hours in the discussion of church questions, who cannot spare five minutes for an earnest heart-talk on the subject of personal religion. Not now, but some day, when they have more time, they will hear.

Second, she finds here a real difficulty. When, under the stirrings of conscience, she begins to think about her spiritual state, there comes up the old trouble about the place of

worship: what shall be done about it? I will ask this stranger-prophet—is her thought—to settle the perplexity. The settlement of that question was not essential; but to the woman it became a stumbling-block.

So, in our day, many are perplexed about questions which, however important, are not essential to salvation. Their difficulties arise, not while they are perfectly careless and unconcerned. They emerge when they begin to think seriously on the subject of personal religion. The first and great effort of the enemy of souls is to prevent men from thinking of their salvation. So long as they are careless about this he is not likely to trouble them with anything else. But so surely as they get interested, and begin to think of their spiritual state, their relations to Christ, and their eternal destiny; and he finds they are determined to think on the subject of religion, he will shove in some important but not just now essential topic, such as the doctrine of election, or the proper mode of baptism, and will say to them, "There, if you must think about spiritual things, give your attention to these questions." Alas, too many fall into the snare; and, deluding themselves with the idea that they are religiously thoughtful, while they are simply beaten about by the perplexities of non-

essential questions, they leave still undetermined the great and solemn question of their acceptance of Christ as a personal Saviour!

The whole spiritual nature of this woman of Samaria is now thoroughly aroused; and every moment she is advancing. At first, she seems anxious to evade the question of her personal spiritual condition, and so flies from her persecutor, and seeks to occupy his attention with a more public concern. Then, as her conscience wakes up and she begins to realize her sin and need of some way of getting back to God, she begins to be really perplexed about the proper place in which to draw nigh to Him.

The Lord does not charge her with evasion, nor does He seek to bring her back to the point of the conversation, which she seems anxious to escape. On the contrary, He follows her up; and answering her question, brings out three solemn truths, as important now as then—to us as to her.

First, many things, now seemingly important, will soon pass away. “You are troubling yourself about the place of worship, as if it were the most vital of all concerns. But the whole question will soon pass away; and you will wonder that it could ever have had so important a place in your mind. Woman, believe Me, the hour cometh,

when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father.”

Second, “salvation is from the Jews.” We shall greatly misinterpret our Lord’s words if we shall believe them to be the mere triumphing of a Jew over his traditional enemy. Rather are His words the solemn setting forth of the great truth, as applicable to us as to the woman of Samaria, that salvation “is not a thing to be reached by any one who may vaguely desire it of a God of mercy, but something that has been prepared and revealed” in a particular way, and to be received just as it is offered.

Third, the spirit of worship is more than the form. “The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth: for such doth the Father seek to be His worshipers. God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” And this is ever true.

These three were, as they still are, most searching truths. And as the woman heard and pondered her Saviour’s solemn words, her conscience, now thoroughly aroused, must have been putting the question home—Do I so worship the Father? And she must have said to herself, “Have I not utterly failed in all true and real spiritual worship, while I have been lost in petty squabbles with these

Jews as to the place, attitude and material functions of a formal approach to the mighty God?"

Thus the tender and gracious Lord led her to feel her sin and her need of a Saviour. And so we come to the last step, viz. :—

IV. THE AWAKENING OF FAITH

We must not be deceived by the serenity of the narrative. We are in danger of it. Just so are we liable to overlook the intense earnestness and directness of the short petitions of the Lord's Prayer, because of the ineffable calm which pervades the entire prayer. An intense and mighty revolution is in progress in this woman's mind—that greatest moral revolution this world can ever witness, the mighty and effectual turning of a dead soul to life!

She came to the well careless, indifferent, and "dead in trespasses and sins." The Lord's words were searching and troubling her. They had pierced the surface of that pleasure-seeking life, and had revealed to her the sense of unrest. Perhaps she realized now, as not before, why she came away from the city and its sins and sorrows. It was the ordering of a wise, holy, and tender providence that she should here cross the path

of the Saviour, Son of God. But in her consciousness it was an overpowering desire to get away, and be alone.

There are many tired places in every careless and sinful life. Oh, for skill to find them out, and to apply the only balm that can rest, and heal, and save!

The Saviour's kind and faithful words penetrated the armor of vice and formalism in which this woman had encased herself, and brought to the surface her soul's longing for peace. She could not escape from Him, and she was sorely troubled. Convicted of her sins, and perplexed about the place of worship, she flies to the refuge—"I know that Messiah cometh (He that is called Christ): when He is come, He will declare unto us all things." And this was true! Mistaken as to many things, the woman was right about this one thing. It is still and ever a glorious truth, that when once the Saviour comes, and finds us, and teaches us, all our difficulties will then vanish away!

What a world of meaning in her words, that does not come to the surface in a superficial reading! A thousand times I have tried, and in vain, to read her words, putting into them all that I believe she meant by them. She seems to me to say, "I have put religion away from my life, or

have made it only a form, and largely an unholy and unsanctifying dispute as to the place of worship. But I see it differently now, as this stranger's words come to my heart. Yet I feel that these things are too high for me. I cannot understand them. I am an ignorant and blinded woman. I need a teacher. And such is promised! Our prophets all foretell the coming Prince of Peace! When will He come? Oh, that He might come in my day! I am a poor, guilty, lost soul! If He does not soon appear, I shall be forever undone! Defiled by sin, and justly condemned by my own conscience and God's law, I sink beneath the waves! But if the Messiah comes, all will yet be well. Oh, that the blessed Christ would at this moment come!"

And immediately to the penitent soul, thus truly awakened to the attitude and expression of faith, there came the instantaneous and glorious revelation—"I that speak unto thee am He!"

Such was the blessed result of this memorable interview at the well-curb. The woman, who was "a sinner" of Samaria, with attention arrested, and thoughtfulness stimulated, and conscience aroused, and faith quickened, awakes from the sleep of death! She enters into life, rejoicing in the rest and peace of a new-found Redeemer! Let us note, in closing, the striking evidences

her conduct affords of the radical change her soul had undergone in the great awakening.

1. She straightway left her waterpot and returned to the city. She had come for water; she wanted it no more. Others may drink of Jacob's well who wish; she will henceforth quaff the water of life. The desires and aims of the renewed soul are entirely changed.

2. She becomes a messenger of life to her neighbors and friends. No tarrying to ask herself the question, "Will they listen to anything a woman like me will say?" She realizes only one thing, "I am saved; I must have others saved as well."

3. She carried to them a strange yet true message—"Come, see a man, who told me all things that ever I did!" In any literal sense, of course, this was far from true. Yet to the woman's consciousness it was only too inadequate a statement of what had taken place. She had entered into a new world. She saw everything with new eyes. The Lord had told her but a few things; but it seemed to her as if He had uncovered all her past, illuminated the present, and unveiled the future. In her the Scripture was fulfilled—"If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, they are become new."

CHILDREN OF GOD

CHILDREN OF GOD

Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are. For this cause the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not. Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him even as He is. And every one that hath this hope set on Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.
—I John iii: 1-3.

A common practice among men is that of giving good names to bad things. A dishonest business transaction, for example, is not called stealing, as it ought to be; it is “an irregularity.” Lottery schemes are dignified with the name of “Gift Enterprises;” the ostensible meaning of which is that they present you with some valuable gift, but, in point of fact, it signifies that you give away your money to them. By this and such like ingenious “jugglery of words,” we disguise even to ourselves the real and repulsive character of ways and doings of which in our hearts and consciences we are ashamed. And thus it comes about that it by no means follows, because we call a thing so and so, that as a matter of fact it is so and so.

Differing from this practice of the sinful heart, and utterly contrary to it, as the Bible everywhere makes plain, what God calls a thing, that it is. The name and nature are the same. The Lord told Zacharias that his son's name should be John; and a John indeed he was—"the gift of God." The Messiah was "Jesus," by name and nature, too. He was both to be, and to be called, "the Saviour of His people from their sins." With God names are things.

To be "called children of God," therefore, as in the text, means to be "made children of God"—to be adopted into this divine household. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God," and, by a gracious and sublime adoption, become the happy sons and daughters of His love and likeness! This, then, is the first thing worthy of notice in this passage, viz. :—

I. THE NATURE OF THIS DIVINE SONSHIP

How do we become God's children? We describe the process in different ways, and in the use of old and familiar terms, such as regeneration, justification, and repentance unto life. Adoption is only another aspect of the same com-

plex process. Dr. A. A. Hodge says, "It presents the new creature in his new relations; his new relations entered upon with a congenial heart, and his new life developing in a congenial home, and surrounded with those circumstances which foster its growth and crown it with blessedness." "This adoption," says the Catechism, "is an act of God's free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges, of the sons of God."

But the definition does not enter into detail; and we may, perhaps, get the clearest idea of this divine adoption by looking upon its human counterpart. Old John Flavel thus quaintly states the relation: "Betwixt civil and sacred adoption there is a twofold agreement and disagreement. They agree in this, that both flow from the pleasure and good will of the adoptant; and in this, that both confer a privilege which we have not by nature. But in this they differ: one is an act imitating nature, the other transcends nature; the one was found out for the comfort of them that had no children, the other for the comfort of them that had no father."

What, then, are the elements of that process by which you adopt, as your own, the child of another. They are four, viz. :—

1. You give him your name. Under the sol-

em sanctions of law he lays aside forever the name by which he has been known and henceforth, by your permission and direction, is called by the name you bear.

2. You accord to him of right a place in your home. He may have been a homeless beggar on the street, or an orphan waif from the asylum. But now you take him into your own house; and his place there is no longer that of either a stranger or a servant. Wherever in that home your own children may go, and whatever do, so also may he. His is the place of a child.

3. You bind yourself to give him the care and training of a child. You give him food and raiment and the instruction and discipline which are best for him. Your ability may limit your action, as to the first, and your judgment may err in the second. But you never deliberately plan and provide for the disadvantage of your children. Nor will you for the child of your adoption.

4. You make him your heir. He bears your name, has shared your home, and carries the impress of your teaching, and finally enters upon the inheritance of your estate.

These four things characterize also the divine adoption of the text. God puts upon us His own name. He admits us into the household of faith. He binds Himself always to provide for us the

sustenance temporal and spiritual which is needful, and the training which is best. And He invests us with the heirship of all His possessions.

But, besides these four, there is one other peculiar and crowning element of the heavenly adoption, of which the earthly furnishes no counterpart. I mean the derivation of nature from the adopting Father. You may give your adopted son your name, home, training, and fortune; but your nature and character you cannot impart. These he derives from another source. And they largely make the man. "Blood will tell," they say, and they say well. Certainly inherited tastes and family peculiarities may baffle and thwart all your efforts to mold the child of your adoption into the character of your own spirit. But when God adopts us into His family He makes us "partakers of the divine nature." He gives us "the right to become children of God" by being born, "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

This is the nature of this divine sonship with which the beloved disciple here arrests our attention. It is no figment of the fancy, but abundantly set forth in the Holy Scriptures. We find it in the eternal purpose—"Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before Him in

love: having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved." We find it in the accomplishment of redemption—"When the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that He might redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father. So that thou art no longer a bondservant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God." We find it also in the experience of the believer: "Ye received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified with Him." So also in the text: "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God."

But, as you see, the nature of adoption is not the main thought of this passage. Another view of the great subject calls forth the apostle's admiration. That is, viz.:—

II. THE GRACE OF THIS DIVINE SONSHIP

“Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God!” That He should set His love upon us, all so unworthy—this is the marvel and grace of this divine sonship! This excites John’s wonder; and it may well awaken ours, dear friends!

Go with that bereaved and childless woman to the orphan asylum and watch the opening steps as she seeks to replace, in some faint measure, her great loss, and to find among those poor lone waifs some object on which to pour her wasting love. Do you not see that some beauty of face or form, some color of hair or eyes, some likeness of feature or disposition to the loved and lost, that these are the secret springs of her choice as she folds the motherless bairnie to her bosom and, with tears of memory, comfort and hope, takes it henceforth to her own home?

Then come with me to the brow of that hill which slopes away into the valley of Elah, and see the crown-prince, Jonathan, setting his love upon the youthful David. How noble is the son of Saul, who crowns the acclamations of the people by doffing his own royal robe to put it on the shoulders of the champion of Israel! How brave

and true the love that instinctively knits him to the unknown warrior! But how noble also was the shepherd of Bethlehem! How modest, unassuming, and unconscious of the splendor of his victory! He was worthy the love of even Jonathan.

Yet again, come with me to the fields of Bethlehem and to the times that were primitive, even in David's day. There goes the wise, good master of the farm, the pious Boaz. His eyes alight upon the sun-browned, widowed gleaner from the hills of Moab. Wherefore the unwonted tenderness of his address and the voluntary grant of unusual privileges in the gleaning of his fields? And why the aside direction to his workingmen, "Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not. And also pull out some for her from the bundles, and leave it, and let her glean, and rebuke her not"? What is it that troubles Boaz? Do you not know? It is plainly a case of love at first sight. The great, rich, and honorable Boaz has set his love upon the lorn and portionless Ruth. But Ruth was worthy of even his love. Hers was, indeed, an alien people, but not an alien faith.

Do you not see, dear friends, that all these are examples of setting and centering the love upon the lovely? But "behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us," the unworthy

and unlovely! Can we find any illustration that shall even distantly approach this? Look at David's love for Absalom. Ah, what hopes he had in his name, "the father's peace"! Tired of war and commotion in Israel, this son, thought David, shall bring peace. So Lamech, you remember, thought Noah was the harbinger of rest. You know how both were bitterly disappointed. And you remember how David's heart went out for Absalom. It was, indeed, a setting of love upon the unlovely and the unworthy. But all of David's love could not make the wayward, rebel prince worthy his high destiny. Yet this is the wondrous, gracious end of God's adopting love, "that we should be called children of God." Marvelous grace! We do not wonder that a convert from heathenism, translating the words, "To them gave He the right to become children of God," should suddenly lay down his pen to cry out, "It is too much! Let me rather translate it, 'They shall be permitted to kiss His feet!'" It is too much! That we should be permitted to become children of God! At such cost and sacrifice shall we be gifted with this nature and this destiny? What wondrous grace is this! And what shall be the end of all such amazing love?

Most natural, then, is the apostle's transition to another topic, viz. :—

III. THE DESTINY OF THIS DIVINE SONSHIP

“Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him even as He is.” We have some little conception of the privileges given to us for the present; but what the future has in store for us, who can tell? There are to be found the “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.”

Near the beginning of the second quarter of the last century, Jeremiah Jones Colbath, with the permission of the Legislature, exchanged his own name for that of his benefactor; and a half century later the nation buried him in the person of her poor but pure Vice-President. Jeremiah Jones Colbath was the cobbler of Natick; but Henry Wilson was a ruler among millions, and was second to but one in the land. Who that witnessed the adoption of the new name could have foreseen the honorable place of its future inscription! Possibly some who knew the obscure young shoemaker could have predicted for him a famous career. For, certain elements being known, it is

possible to forecast with tolerable accuracy an earthly destiny. The vaulting ambition and military knowledge and magnetic power of the young Corsican foreshadowed an imperial crown for the great Napoleon. The colossal fortune of Andrew Carnegie lay, in embryo, in the qualities and habits of the shrewd and watchful, bold and cautious, "canny" Scotchman. But who, save by a happy guess, could have predicted the future of these two men?

All prophecies of an earthly future must fail, for the elements may change or lose their power to direct the chariot of life. Who, then, shall cast the horoscope of the children of God? "It is not yet made manifest what we shall be." True, indeed, there are no uncertainties in this case. Combine, therefore, the most commanding powers, and ascribe to them a uniformly elevating tendency, and we may well ask, "Where shall the end be?" But what that end shall be, who can tell?

Does the Bible, then, throw no light upon our destiny as the children of God? Only this—We shall be like our Lord. "It is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that if He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him even as He is." A veil, indeed, covers the glorious face of our destiny; but this we know.

and this is all we need to know, "We shall be like Him." Long and wearily have we sought for this; and oftentimes our hearts are sore and faint because, for all our wearisome endeavors, we are still so unlike our gracious, loving Lord. But the blessed goal shall then have been attained. Whatever be dark in our destiny this is sure—all traces of the defiling and destroying monster, Sin, will then have been effaced; and, waking in His likeness, we shall evermore be satisfied.

"We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him even as He is"—not as we, with faltering powers and conceptions all unworthy, have tried to picture Him; but "as He is"—in His own unclouded purity and glory. And the beatific vision shall beautify and bless our henceforth pure and happy spirits. So thought I, as once I watched the sunrise on Lake Michigan. The morning was silent and gray. The air was misty. And the sky was sombre and clouded. But soon a marvelous change came over the face of the world. The sun, with beams of yellow and gold, burst through the wasting clouds and scattered the mists of the morning; and while all the land, transformed by the light, awoke to music and song in praise of the Lord of life, it was his mantle of purple and green that lay broadcast in folds of varying beauty upon the rippling waters. The earth, thought I, has

caught the glory of the sun because she sees him as he is. So shall it be with us, dear friends. In that matchless destiny we know but little what shall be; but this we know—"We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him even as He is." Then shall be fulfilled that Scripture of seraphic Paul: "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."

One other thought claims our notice in the exposition of this passage, viz. :—

IV. THE DUTIES OF THIS DIVINE SONSHIP

In the text these are set forth as of a twofold character, viz. :—

I. *Patience*—the cheerful endurance of the trials and misapprehensions of our lot. If we are children of God, we need not expect the unbelieving world to understand us. This is John's thought—"Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are. For this cause the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not." Just because we are God's children, the unfilial, unloving, un-

believing world does not understand us. But shall we complain, when it did not understand God's well beloved Son, our blessed Lord? Is it not enough for the disciple that he be as his Master, and the servant as his Lord? We must expect to be misunderstood. The early Christians were. To the world about them they were a perverse and rebellious generation. And we, too, if we are loyal to Christ, may expect to be misapprehended in principles, motives, and conduct.

You know the restfulness of fellowship with one who intuitively understands us, to whom we do not need to explain—who, as if by instinct, divines our feelings and the motives, frequently intangible and indefinable, by which we are governed. What a refuge is the society of such a person from an uncomprehending world! And, if it be a husband or wife or mother or father, how it glorifies the home! But alas, dear friends, there is no perfect realization of this fellowship on earth! We should and do find it, measurably, in the communion of saints. But only in our Father above is it perfected. He understands us thoroughly. He knows his children's hearts and lives. Let this, then, suffice us; and, in the midst of men who do not understand us, let us be patient. "For this

cause the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not.”

2. Preparation—making ready for the destiny before us. “And every one,” says John, “that hath this hope set on Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.” Two thoughts upon these words will fittingly close our examination of this wonderful Scripture.

For one thing, every person who cherishes the hope that he belongs to God’s family, and has received this divine sonship, will endeavor to walk worthily of the calling wherewith he was called. Diligent and untiring will be his search for personal holiness and meetness for his royal destiny as a child of God. He will purify himself, even as his Lord is pure.

For another thing, there is hopefulness in the endeavor. We may fail often, but not forever. The process may be slow and halting; but the end is sure. We shall get both the meetness and the destiny. And the joyous hope of soon beholding the face of our Immanuel gives new energy for all endeavor. You have seen the household prepare for the homecoming of the absent father and head. The entire house is set in order. The children are clad in holiday attire; and climbing some the fence, while others crowd the walk or rush to the curb, their

tumultuous shoutings, upon the first far view of the coming loved one, break into the cadences of a happy song,

Papa is coming! Hurrah! Hurrah!
Papa is coming! Hurrah!

Oh, the joy and gladness of that happy day! Dear friends, suffer the question in closing: Is such the joy of your hearts as you await the coming of Him "who is the glory of yon heaven," and the life and light of your expectant spirits?

THE SCHOOL OF GRACE

THE SCHOOL OF GRACE

For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us, to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world; looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a people for His own possession, zealous of good works.—Titus ii: 11-14.

The gospel binds together the lofty and the lowly. Its highest and brightest visions are vouchsafed to men of humblest mind. In keeping with this characteristic of "The Glad Tidings," Paul here links together the grandest doctrines of the scheme of salvation and the faithful service of the lowliest believer. He is giving Titus directions concerning his relations to various classes of men, and his duties growing out of those relations. Among others, he reminds him of the bond-slaves who had become Christians. Them also he was to exhort to a life in conformity with their profession. Especially must he remind them that, though lowliest of the lowly, they had it in their power to "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things." From this consideration of the

humble duty of the humblest, the apostle passes to a rapid view of the highest and holiest doctrines of the Christian revelation in connection with the school of grace. "For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us, to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world; looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." The text is a description of Christian living under the tutelage of grace divine, and looking to the glory that is to follow. It is a lowly life; but it lies between two glorious appearings of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The lofty and the lowly are united here; and the one sheds light upon the other—the grace and the glory combining to ennoble and dignify the humble life of faith.

This, then, is the deeply interesting theme of the text so fittingly introduced to Titus by the great apostle, viz. :—

THE FUNCTIONS AND RELATIONS OF THE SCHOOL OF GRACE

The development of this theme will be best accomplished in an orderly exposition of the

entire passage. We are in danger of embarrassment on account of the marvelous riches here disclosed. The scope of the text is majestic, while its comprehension of details is not less wonderful. The central thought, however, around which cluster all others, as I shall hope to show, is that of the school of grace—the origin, progress, and consummation of a consistent, believing life, under the instruction of grace divine. Two views will bring the whole subject under consideration:—

I. THE FUNCTIONS OF THE SCHOOL OF GRACE

The figures of Holy Scripture describing the life of faith are numerous and varied and affluent. It is a “race,” a “warfare,” a “buying and selling,” all rich in significance and instruction. Not less so is the illustration of the text. The grace of God, says Paul, has made its appearance in this way, “instructing us,” or “teaching and training us, as does a teacher of children.” This, then, is the characteristic of the life of faith as exhibited in the figure of the text. It is a school, where grace is the teacher and the converted spirit is the learner. The world too often looks upon the Christian as one who professes to have reached the standard of perfection; and because

they do not see a life in full agreement with such a high profession they are ready to condemn him as a hypocrite, or self-deceived. But no Christian makes such a profession. We are only learners—it may be have just entered the school, glad to sit on the lowest form and rank in the lowest grade. We have not been graduated. We do not expect to receive our diplomas until the great examination day.

In the meantime, it is our joy that we are in the school of such a teacher. Grace divine sits at the desk, hears us recite, clears up our difficulties, relieves our perplexities, bears our burdens, trains us in habits of holiness, and, with infinite patience and long-suffering, bears with our waywardness and dullness of hearing and slowness of comprehension. Under such a teacher we cannot but make progress, for we obtain what every good school professes to give, both study and discipline. Grace not only teaches, but also trains, her pupils. We are at school.

And, as in other schools, there are some things which we must unlearn, as the first step in the acquisition of heavenly wisdom. So Paul says, grace teaches and trains us to deny "ungodliness and worldly lusts." This process of unlearning is generally the more difficult of the

two steps to knowledge. It is so here. No more difficult task is set before us than the practical denial of ungodliness. By this term the apostle seems to mean the spirit of separation from God and forgetfulness of Him, leading to alienation from Him—the condition of those whom elsewhere he describes as living “without God in the world.” It is the spirit that dwells in the hearts of multitudes. They are not out-breaking sinners—transgressors of human laws. They are not, it may be, grossly immoral or even profanely irreligious. They may be regular attendants upon some ministration of divine worship. But God is not in all their thoughts. They have practically ruled Him out of their lives. They do not consciously hate Him; they simply have nothing to do with Him. Their minds are full of thought; but, beyond a passing gleam now and then, they never recognize the presence of the Lord. They are not vicious nor impious; they are simply and only ungodly, “without God in the world.”

What is true of the impenitent in this respect is partially true of the Christian believer. For years it may be, we have been forming the habit of ungodliness; and the first thing grace does in her school is to teach and train us to break up that habit. How to bring God into the heart

and life? This is one of the lessons we must learn. Or, in its negative form, it meets us first: How can we banish from our hearts and lives this continual tendency to forget God and to live without Him in the world? In the experience of every Christian this is found to be the most difficult lesson, but it is fundamental. It bears the same relation to other studies and lessons that, in other schools, forming the habit of attention does to subsequent progress. No child can advance in learning until the habit of inattention is overcome; nor can we grow in heavenly knowledge until we have unlearned this terrible and ruinous habit of ungodliness. Grace teaches us to "deny ungodliness."

She teaches also the denying of "worldly lusts." "Ye are not under law, but under grace." But even grace brings us face to face with the law, as a rule of life. "Ungodliness" may be the summing up of breaches of the first table of the law, the duties we owe to God; while "worldly lusts" may refer especially to sins against the second table of that law—the duties we owe to our fellow-men. And the second, as truly as the first, we must unlearn, learn to deny. The two are wisely coupled together. This inordinate and sinful craving after the things of the world is both a cause and an effect of un-

godliness. "For all that is in the world," says John, "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vainglory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." And, as we give ourselves up to their power, we forget the Father, and in our lives "increase unto more and more ungodliness." The pressure and seductive power of temptation, the growth of evil passions, and the excessive indulgence of even lawful propensities gradually exclude God from the heart. We have no loving thought of Him. Our affections do not enkindle toward Him. Communion with Him is not a delight, but a drudgery.

The reactionary influence of such a life also is equally great. Wanting the governing, restraining, and moderating power of a supreme love for God, there is no brake upon the wheels of life; and down the hill we plunge, with a rapidity ever increasing until, in the bitterness of an unavailing, because too late, repentance, we learn the folly of unbridled passions and a life given up to "worldly lusts."

Just here grace takes us in hand, as the teacher the unlettered child; and first of all seeks to break up the pernicious habits formed while we were yet living in impenitency and sin. She gives us to understand that the opening duty of a believ-

ing life is a denial of "ungodliness and worldly lusts."

Then, having unlearned these things, we are prepared for positive advancement; and the studies in the school of grace proceed. She teaches us also to "live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world." We cannot but notice the comprehensiveness of the course of instruction. All conceivable duties of the Christian life are summed up in these three great departments of her curriculum. What we owe to ourselves, to our fellow-men, and to God, makes up the account. And these are the duties in which we are instructed by divine grace. She teaches us to live soberly or temperately as to ourselves, having self-command in all the appetites of the body and passions of the soul, so that we shall be habitually and symmetrically men and women of self-control. She teaches us also to live righteously as to others. Beginning at home, her lessons do not stop there. Her instructions reach forth and rest upon all our relations to our fellow-men. Nor do they stop there. Ascending in the scale they terminate only in God. With self-command and upright living must be combined piety toward God. This is both the root and fruit of Christian living. It is the highest lesson of the course. When we shall have learned it thor-

oughly our tutelage to grace will have ended ; and, in a higher sphere, we shall enter upon a life of holy fellowship with God. The graduation day will have come !

After this glance into the school of divine grace, we may profitably pause upon some obvious conclusions.

We see how the learning is set over against the unlearning. It is not a school of negations. We unlearn the destructive habits of ungodliness and worldly lusts ; but our souls are not left in vacancy and gaping emptiness. We learn also sobriety of life, righteousness of conduct, and fervor of devotion. And the latter are substituted for the former. That reckless, headstrong, career of worldly lusts that overrides our own and our neighbor's rights is laid aside ; and we learn to live both soberly and righteously. That ungodliness that marks the lives of multitudes and characterized our own in time past is given up ; and henceforth we walk with God. The throne of self and worldly lusts is overturned ; and henceforth God sways a rightful sceptre in the realm of our spiritual nature. We have found the true astronomy. The sun, and not the earth, is now the center. God, and not the soul, is the central pivot of a holy life.

We see, also, how unreasonable the charge that

grace tempts to sin, that faith tends to looseness of living. We might as well say that the teacher invites disorder in the schoolroom. All the arrangements of the plan of salvation conduce to holiness. The eternal choice was "to sanctification." The divine will is that men shall not merely reach heaven, but "shall come to repentance." With all the motives that can be gathered from both worlds, the saved and the lost, the gospel presses upon us the necessity of holy living. If professedly Christian men, therefore, live in sin, it is from no influence of Christianity, but from the want of it. Habitual and willful continuance in wrongdoing on the part of its adherents is no proof of the falsity of religion. It demonstrates only that they have none of it. If they were learners in the school of grace, they would be growing in sobriety, righteousness, and piety of life.

Yet this must not be forgotten—they are only learners. They have not attained perfection. They may miss this question, and fail in that lesson, yet are your children not expelled from school. On the contrary, they are assisted and trained and disciplined all the more carefully and thoroughly. This also grace does for the Christian; for this is the meaning of the word here used by Paul. The teaching of grace means also

training and discipline. So, tenderly and mightily, does grace divine educate all who are truly her pupils. They are consciously imperfect, ever learning, often missing, failing, falling, yet lifted up again by the friendly teacher, and strengthened by their falls, and evermore enabled to hold on in their upward, heavenward way.

These, my friends, are some of the functions of the school of grace divine. Our view of them, of course, has been of the most cursory and general charcter. The text is a gospel in itself—every word and expression instinct with the merciful voices of salvation. I have chosen to present the subject, thus far, under the figure of a school of learning; because this seems to have been the emblem in the apostle's mind, when portraying the characteristics of the believing life. The same language of parable will fittingly introduce us to the second great topic of the passage, viz. :—

II. THE RELATIONS OF THIS SCHOOL OF GRACE

We will suppose a ragged urchin of the street, poverty-stricken, houseless, homeless, and friendless. He shall be a forsaken, lone, and wretched beggar, an incarnate misery, the walking voice of woe. To him, in all his forlorn and hopeless sorrow, a stranger appears with words

of cheer. With commanding mien, benignant face, and benevolent heart, he wins the wandering boy's affection. He binds him to himself with bands of love, and can do with him as he will. He puts him to school; and, leaving him with a promise to come again at the termination of his school days he disappears. It is with this portion of the child's life that we have especially to do. The long years roll on. His one great business is to learn wisdom and to acquire the needful discipline of all his powers. Yet is it not manifest that, all the time, there will be filling his mind and giving coloring to the thoughts and hopes of his soul, two scenes? He will be ever recurring to that memorable day when the stranger appeared and took him in. And from that scene he will turn, with eager and loving expectancy, to that coming day when his benefactor shall come again, bringing the promised reward.

If we turn now to the text, we shall see that this picture portrays the relations of the life of holiness on earth. Our Christian life is in the schoolroom. Here lies our great work, learning and discipline. But we can never cease to revert to that blessed day when Christ appeared in mercy to lift us up and put us in training for His heavenly kingdom. And thence we look forward and live in waiting for His appearing in glory,

bringing the amaranthine crown for every faithful servant. These are the glorious appearings referred to in the text. Grace divine hath appeared bringing salvation to all men: and, in her school, we wait for the other appearing—"the appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." It is only a lowly school-life; but it is bordered on this side and on that by the manifestation of grace and of glory.

Let us now examine, in further analysis of this passage, these relations of the school of grace.

Grace is one of the precious words of our language. To a race of sinners, it may be doubted whether any word possesses sweeter meaning. It speaks of favor undeserved. In tones of penetrating power it reaches the consciously unworthy, and spreads a quiet, solid comfort through the spirit. It appears in robes of mercy to the careless, hardened soul, and the vision is entrancing. Beneath her loving eyes, that sin-cased spirit opens in ever-adoring wonder as the sinner comes to know yet more and more this gentle messenger of saving peace. She tells of an open door and a waiting welcome. She shows the sceptre extended and invites the suppliant's near approach. Her face is radiant with tenderest benediction, as she lifts the footsore wanderer across the threshold of the house of mercy. And from every

voice of rescued spirits shall rise the grateful song
of thanksgiving—

“Grace! ’tis a charming sound,
Harmonious to mine ear!
Heaven with the echo shall resound,
And all the earth shall hear!”

In grace divine originates all genuine Christian living. The God of mercy must take the first step. The shepherd must seek the wandering sheep. The father must go after the wayward child. “God commendeth His own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” This is the view of grace presented in the text. It is no passive and inoperative feeling of compassion. As you stand upon the bank of yonder river, while your causeless enemy is vainly endeavoring to escape the destruction that seems imminent from the turbulent flood, you may feel a true compassion for him, though others and not yourself may be engaged in active efforts to relieve and save him. But your mercy to the undeserving will shine out most of all in the earnest endeavor you make to rescue him from a watery grave. This is God’s mercy! The grace is not simply divine compassion. It is “grace bringing salvation!” It is divine love hastening to rescue the perishing! It is the angel of mercy flying

through the heavens, bearing and proclaiming the sovereign remedy for the sins and woes of the human race. She "that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men," or, as the Revised Version reads, she has "appeared, bringing salvation to all men." It matters little which reading be preferred. Paul has just spoken of the Christian duties of different classes of men; and this is the grand motive to fidelity among all of them, that divine grace has appeared bringing salvation, not in saving power to every one, but within the reach of all.

Or, if the other reading be preferred, the truth is not less precious and blessed. Grace has appeared to all men. The word here used means literally, "shining forth," and is borrowed from the sun-rising. If now we gather into one the scattered fragments of truth underlying these words, what a picture we shall have! Darkness enshrouds the entire world. The stars themselves have gone out in the gathering gloom, and hope seems almost expiring in all faithful hearts, as ever and anon they turn their wistful eyes to the distant eastern sky. But now, when expectation is well-nigh dead, "rosy-fingered aurora" swings open the gates of the morning, and the first faint bands of light foretell the coming day. The sun is in the ascendant. The darkness flies before his face,

while joy and gladness beam now upon the ransomed world. This is the glorious vision of grace, as she appears to all men, bringing salvation. The light does shine and grow; and life reigns beneath its gladdening beams. No doubt there are many hearts that grace has never touched and many minds that have no eyes to see the light. So there are many spots on the earth where men may hide and never see the sun. Blind men there are, for all its glory. But the sun does shine; and, in the text, rises higher and higher, until on every heart his beams shall fall, and every eye shall open to his gladdening, glorifying rays.

So to the ragged, homeless boy, the unexpected and undeserved appearing of the kind stranger seemed a marvelous shining forth of mercy. Ever after he would look upon that hour as the watcher looks upon the dawn of the morning. So the Lord appeared to you, my friend, in the hour of your conversion. Then on your darkened soul grace divine arose, like the sun, and turned your heart from darkness unto light. Such also was the coming of our Saviour to take away iniquity, and to bring in an everlasting righteousness. To a lost world divine grace then appeared like the sun breaking from the gates of dawn, to give life and light to a sinful and benighted race.

Passing, with this thought, from the general

view, we reach a particular aspect of the relations of grace and Christian living. The grace that shines forth like the sun with salvation in its beams is seen especially in this that Christ "gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a people for His own possession, zealous of good works." The time fails for a minute examination of these words. I confine myself to two remarks:—

First, We notice the appropriateness and felicity of the apostle's language. We recall the fact that he is speaking of the duty of servants, or bond-slaves, to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour—ours and theirs! Could there have been a happier turn of the thought than to speak of that Saviour as a Redeemer, giving Himself as a ransom to buy us out of captivity, the bondage of iniquity?

Second, We cannot fail to observe the close connection between this gracious work of Christ and the teaching of divine grace. We learn to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, because we have been ransomed from the servitude of sin for this very purpose. We are redeemed from all iniquity that we may become a people "for His own possession," purified and zealous of good works. Can we then live in sin? Dare we? Does grace teach looseness and im-

morality of life in her school? No more than the sun scatters darkness around the world! The beggar boy is taken from the street to be taught and trained in upright living. And this is the relation of Christian living to grace divine: it originates in grace and grows out of grace. The life of faith stands between the grace and the glory: it springs forth from the one and it looks forward to the other.

The consideration of this last thought will complete the exposition of the text, viz. :—

The relations of the school of grace to the glory that is to follow. Recurring to the parable figure that underlies the passage, the schoolboy's life is bordered by two grand events. One is the unexpected appearance of the compassionate stranger. The other is his promised return—expected, waited for, longed for, prayed for. For that return he diligently prepares. The delight of that day he vainly endeavors to conceive. Then he shall receive graduation from the school of grace. Then he shall have his reward. And more than all, then he shall know more of that compassionate spirit who befriended him in the day of his need.

Need I interpret the parable? We are the children. Our Christian living is in the schoolroom. Grace divine is the teacher. We remember how

she came to us at first, enrobed in mercy, in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Her appearance, as we recall the sacred hour, was like the rising of the sun. And in her school since that day she has instructed us, taught, and trained us, as ransomed souls, to abandon all ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. We have not learned these lessons thoroughly as yet; but we are making progress. It is a stimulus to us to recall the day when grace first appeared.

But our eyes are oftener toward the front. We study and learn, ever waiting for the blessed object of our hope, even the "appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." When He returns, "school will let out," the books will be put up, the examinations will have been passed, and the diplomas given. And then the old schoolhouse will be shut up; and we shall pass from the days of preparation to the grand destinies and soul-inspiring visions and activities of the heavenly world.

A final thought connects this school of grace with our nearest relationships to our dear heavenly Father. Paul would have Titus tell the slaves that God, in His tender mercy, was keeping them in grace's school of sore discipline and teaching and training to fit them, though lowliest of the

lowly, to be "His own possession." How comforting and precious the thought! We send our children to school; we build up great institutions at vast cost for their adequate training; we do it because they are our own, and that they may develop characters, and come to live lives worthy of their fathers. Because they are our own we do all this. They are in our homes, inherit our blood, and share our aspirations and our hopes. We would not do this for servants.

But just this is what God does. He takes the bond-slave and puts him into grace's school that he may be fitted to be "His very own." Oh, the wonder of it! His own! His own! His very own!

WORLDLINESS.

WORLDLINESS *

Love not the world, 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 vainglory 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 forever.—I John ii: 15-17.

God made the world, and God wrote the word. His Spirit moved upon the face of chaos, and its confusion turned to order. The same divine influence pervaded human minds; and holy “men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit.” And God has brought all of us who are His children into closest intimacy with both world and word. We live in the one, and the other lives in us. The world is intertwined with all our outer life; the word is intermingled with the springs and sources of our inner being. The Christian is bound to both by ties which no mortal power can sever. He can neither leave the world nor forget the word.

*For some of the outline of this discourse, especially the obvious order of the second part, and for a single paragraph of the same, the author has drawn upon the gifted Robertson of Brighton.

But suppose they come in conflict, the one with the other? What then? Is such a result possible? Is God's mind divided, so that what He says in the one revelation is contradicted by what He says in the other? Will God have the minds of His people divided, so that a regard for the world shall be inconsistent with a regard for the word? Is there any such contradiction between these two factors of our earthly life? There certainly seems to be in the passage now before us. Is it a real contradiction? How shall we reconcile the discrepancy? Does it need any reconciliation?

These are questions that spontaneously suggest themselves, as we read these words of the beloved disciple and ponder such statements as have just been made. And we may say they are all summed up in the one inquiry, so often propounded in our day, and often, too, by professed followers of Christ, "What is worldliness?" The whole subject will fittingly come before us in an exposition of the text. And the exposition will cover these two lines of thought, viz.: The meaning of the command, and the reasonable character of it.

I. THE MEANING OF THE COMMAND

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." To the Christian the will of

God is the supreme law. A divine command is to him an end of all controversy. He is nothing if he be not obedient. The life, more than the profession, and deeds, rather than words, must demonstrate the genuineness of the Christian character. The Lord Jesus Himself insists upon this: "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" His command is the final authority. But we must understand what His commands mean so far as is necessary to our intelligent obedience. This is the first object of our inquiry respecting the command of the text, "What does it mean?"

The most obvious reflection concerning it is in reference to its sweeping prohibitory character. It is not the sorrowful advice of an old and now penitent sinner who, like Solomon, having tried every form of earthly delight and found it only vanity and vexation of spirit, warns a younger generation against such an unhappy and unsatisfying life. John indeed was old when he wrote these words; but his was eminently a green and happy old age. And even if this were not so, it would make no difference. These are not John's words, but his Lord's, spoken through him. They bear the clear-cut, decisive lines of a divine command. Without hesitation, equivocation, or qualification the prohibition meets us, "Love not

the world." And its scope is as wide as its meaning is unqualified. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." The general covers the particulars; the parts are summed up in the whole. But here we have both. All the world, and everything in the world: these are prohibited objects of our affection.

To many, doubtless, this is a hard saying; and you are thinking, If obedience here be the test of Christian discipleship, then we can never become Christians. I agree with you that this part of the text has an uncompromising aspect, unrelieved, possibly, by anything yet to be mentioned. But let us nevertheless give a patient and thoughtful attention to the subject to the end of the exposition.

Further reflection upon the command will bring out another fact concerning it, viz.: Its substantial accord with the teaching of other Scriptures. It is no solitary and isolated requirement. On the contrary, it is so thoroughly imbedded in the instructions of the New Testament governing Christian living that a surrender of it is a practical denial of much that is of unquestionable and absolute authority. A few quotations will be sufficient to confirm what has been said. Paul writes to the Romans in this way: "Be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye trans-

formed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." James also writes to his scattered kindred: "The friendship of the world is enmity with God. Whosoever therefore would be a friend of the world maketh himself an enemy of God." And Christ's own words are not less explicit than these of His inspired followers—"If ye were of the world, the world would love its own: but because ye are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."

There is here no room for us to doubt that these passages point in the same direction with the text. What it forbids they forbid. If it seems uncompromising and severe, much more are they. And with the accordant teaching of such Scriptures before us we cannot, without taking leave of our common sense, fail to see that there is a world which Christians are forbidden to love. However much we might wish it were otherwise, the things that are in that world are prohibited as objects of our affection. What, then, is that world, and what are these things? This is the pressing question. And it brings us to the necessity of a more accurate definition. Of what world does John speak?

The first thought suggested by the term is about the realm of nature. We think of fields and flowers, of trees and temples, of mountains and the main. It is the world God made, and in the beginning pronounced very good. The world it is that, though cursed for man's sake, is yet full of beauty and of grandeur, a world where the sun shines and the clouds rain, a world that, through unceasing and ever-grateful changes, marches round the circuit of the year. Is this the world that God forbids us to love, a world that in all the opening glories of the spring-time fills our every sense with great delight, and in the season of falling leaves and fading flowers reminds us of human frailty: is the love of such a world forbidden? No, my brethren! The command has no reference to the realm of nature.

Then does it refer to human society? For, from nature, our thoughts turn next to the world of living men. May we not set our affection upon our fellow-beings? Does not God Himself command us to love our neighbor as ourselves? I need not stop to answer the question. God's mind is not divided, and this is the second of the only two supreme commands. "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, cannot love God whom he hath not seen."

Is the forbidden world, then, our business or social life? May we not rejoice in the happiness and comfort of society and participate in its pleasures, as we share its burdens and bear its sorrows? May we not love our respective callings, the mechanic his trade, the merchant his merchandise, the sailor his ship, the lawyer his brief, and the professor his books? May we not love these? Must we not love them? Is not success born of this love for them and of enthusiasm in them? Every one will answer affirmatively, and the Scriptures seal the reply. Diligence in business is as truly a divine requirement as fervency of spirit.

But, if not these things, where is that world the love of which is here forbidden? Is it so intangible that it cannot be touched, so shadowy that it cannot be described, so ethereal that it evermore eludes the fastening down of human speech? We shall see presently. The process is slow, and our steps may seem paradoxes, but better this than that any doubt should rest upon our conclusion. I have said the forbidden world is not nature, nor men, nor pleasure, nor work. But mark the word, that world lies underneath and embraces all of them. You know there is a church within the church. The church of God does not consist in splendid

sanctuaries, elaborate services, and an eloquent ministry. It may be in these, but its essence is not of them. They may be where it is not. The crowd may be there. The church register may be full of names and the pews full of people; but these do not make a church of the Lord Jesus. It may be sought in them, but it must be found beneath them. It consists not in the form, but in the spirit; and its source and ever-faithful preserver is the omnipotent Spirit of God.

Now what God does for His church, Satan does in the world. Underneath and within its outer, bounding lines, he interjects his spirit, and builds up a world the love of which is fatal to the soul. It is an exceedingly plausible counterfeit, but terrible in its plausibility. He who trades with it as genuine must be speedily overwhelmed with spiritual bankruptcy. We see this spurious currency in the very affection of which I am speaking, love. There is a love that is outgoing, unselfish, self-sacrificing. Such is your love for your child. But, my friends, have you failed to notice that there is also an appropriating love that is intensely selfish? The miser loves gold, and he grasps it as with the grip of death. The libertine loves sensual pleasure, and he follows it with the remorseless fury of a fiend. Love here is lust.

And this brings us back once more to the question, What is the world of which John speaks? It is the world of inordinate and selfish desire. It has its essence not in the object, but in the affection. This is the definition of the apostle. The forbidden world is not nature, nor men, nor pleasure, nor business, nor honor, nor any earthly calling; but it is the spirit with which we regard them. This is the forbidden realm. This is worldliness. It is not the flesh, nor the eye, nor the life, but it is the "lust of the flesh," and the "lust of the eyes," and the "vainglory of life." These are not of the Father, but are of the world.

And they are mentioned by John as if they constituted the sum total of Satan's riches, the great aggregate of this counterfeit world: "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vainglory of life." And the unbroken uniformity with which they are offered to men would seem to confirm his statement. For example, is Eve to be tempted? She is made to believe that the tree is good for food, the "lust of the flesh;" and pleasant to the eye, the "lust of the eyes;" and to be desired to make one wise, "the vainglory of life." Is Sodom to be ruined? "Pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness," but other names for the same

things, shall be her sins. Is Christ to be tempted? The stones to be made bread shall mark the "lust of the flesh," the miracle-averted fall from the temple-pinnacle, the "lust of the eyes," and the world-wide dominion the "vain-glory of life." And may we not trace the same forms, under other names, in the wayside, stony, and thorny, ground hearers, in the parable, and scarcely less, in the honors, riches, and pleasures of the present life?

This is the great anti-trinity. They sum the aggregate of that world the love of which is forbidden to the Christian. Can we be in any doubt, then, as to the meaning of the command? The prohibited realm is marked by these three things: "the lust of the flesh," the gratification of the lower to the neglect of the higher nature; "the lust of the eyes," a regard for the seen, the obtrusive, surrounding present to the neglect of the unseen and the eternal; "the vain-glory of life," a reference to the opinions of men rather than to the mind of God, a measuring of life by its accidents rather than by its essence, by wealth, and rank, and culture, not by character, regarding a man for what he has rather than for what he is. These things make up the forbidden world, and such like things as these. And worldliness is the surrender of the

heart to the rule of this great trinity of evil powers.

It is not difficult, therefore, to determine who are the worldly. Worldliness does not consist in any separate and isolated act, but in the spirit that prompts the act. It is not so much the life in the world as it is the world in the heart—the world absorbing the affections. To settle the question, therefore, whether I am worldly or not, it is not necessary for me to decide whether any one specified act is inconsistent with my Christian character or not, though the same act often and deliberately repeated, or a multitude of similar acts, would settle it, because they would indicate the spirit that prompted them: but the great question is, How stands my heart toward all these things? Are my thoughts centered upon the sensual, or the transient, or the factitious? Do I think most of dress, furniture, display, position, wealth, and enjoyment? Is my life a struggle for these things? Is it filled with strifes and envies and heart-burnings, because I cannot get them in the measure of my acquaintances? And, while thus lusting after worldly things, do I forget my soul, my sanctuary, my Saviour, my salvation? Then I am worldly. In name a Christian, in the life and power a stranger to God and the voice of His grace.

And on my heart comes down, with solemn emphasis, the weighty interdict of the text, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." Is the command a grievous one, my brethren? The question starts the other line of thought, viz. :—

II. THE REASONABLE CHARACTER OF THE COMMAND

It does not seem so. It appears to strike a blow at the very root of all enjoyment in our earthly life. We do not question God's right to command, nor our obligation to obey; but we instinctively reach out in search of the justifying reasons for a command so sweeping and so emphatic. Our search is rewarded in the text. Three reasons for such a requirement are here given us.

I. The love of the world is incompatible with the love of the Father. "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." The words imply what we all know, that we must love somebody or something. "No man," says a gifted preacher, "is sufficient for himself. Every man must go out of himself for enjoyment. Something in this universe besides himself there must be to bind the affections of every

man. There is that within us which compels us to attach ourselves to something outward. The choice is not this, love, or be without love. You cannot give the pent-up steam its choice of moving or not moving. It must move one way or the other; the right way or the wrong way. . . . There is a pent-up energy of love, gigantic for good or evil. Its right way is in the direction of our eternal Father." Its wrong way is in the direction of the world. And you must choose between the two. Can you be in doubt, my brethren, which it would be best for you to choose? God is the home of the soul. His love is rest eternal. It is the only unalloyed satisfaction. If you be without it, what shall compensate you for its loss when the world has passed away? This suggests another reason for the command, viz. :—

2. The transitory character of all worldly things. "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof." Two widely different things are referred to in these words. One is that the world is passing away. There is, indeed, no novelty in such a statement; but it should be nevertheless solemnly impressive. That impression comes to us most vividly, perhaps, as we mark the passage of epochs and generations. A visit to the great battlefields of the civil war reminds us how fast its

lines are fading into the dim vistas of the past. Great earthworks are well-nigh obliterated by the leveling plowshare, and the mightiest battlements are going down under the tread of an advancing age. And so with the great names of the gigantic contest: how speedily they are dying away, the heroes who bore them having nearly all crossed "the bourne whence no traveler returns." For a little while we may strew flowers on their graves, but in a little while their very names will be forgotten by the multitudes of men.

So you and I are passing away in like manner. Churches have a more stable life, and abide, it may be, for generations; but the people who worship in them are perpetually changing. In a few more years you will be gone, I will be gone. New voices will join the holy services of the sanctuary. The world is changing. Will you fasten your love upon such unstable and fleeting things?

But faster than all this are the lusts of the world passing away. The world's power to excite desire is disappearing more rapidly than is the world itself. You can recall multiplied illustrations of this truth. The rich man sits at his window and overlooks a grand estate, but failing sight shuts out the prospect, and aching bones confine him to his own room. He is a prisoner in a palace. Desire has failed. The sensualist

dreams of joys for which all capacity has wasted. The miser sits on his money-bags and starves. The faded beauty, wasting with disease, puts on her gorgeous robes and sits languidly toying with her jewels. But they are soon put aside as unsatisfying. And the weary soul gathers herself up for the last great dreaded journey. Desire has failed! The world is passing away and the lusts thereof. Will you, my friends, choose and love these things? Is there nothing higher and better?

This brings up the last reason for the command, viz. :—

3. The only enduring thing is Christian activity. "He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." Here, also, two things deserve attention. First, it is to be observed that the thing spoken of is not feeling, but doing. Right feelings, generous impulses, and highly-wrought emotions are not to be despised; but they are of little worth if they are permitted to find their chief end in themselves. Action is ever the justly expected end of right feeling. "He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

Second, it must be observed that it is the doer, and not the thing done, that abideth forever. We work with perishable materials, and they soon pass away. Churches and institutions burn up and disappear. The tides of population drift away

from the places of worship. They stand on lonely hilltops in country places, or on city streets are transformed into business houses, places of amusement, or even devil's dens. Representing years of toil they cannot abide. The labor and time and prayer spent upon them seem often but wasted powers. They pass away. With unceasing diligence and patience the man of God may spend a lifetime in gathering a congregation of Christian people; and before his mortal remains have moldered back to dust, they are scattered to the four winds, and the holy and beautiful house where they worshiped has perished from among men. The faithful teacher has collected a company of scholars, and taught them the right way, and been permitted to rejoice in seeing many of them profess their faith in Jesus Christ; but even while she has prayed and wrought, disintegrating elements have been at work, and all her labor seems to go for nought. Even the noblest work we do among men has no permanence here below. There is nothing here abiding. Nothing? Yes! There is something that can never perish. "He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

THE TWO PRAYERS

THE TWO PRAYERS

Simon, Simon, behold, Satan asked to have you, that he might sift you as wheat: but I made supplication for thee, that thy faith fail not.—Luke xxii: 31, 32.

In one of the visions of Zechariah a scene is unfolded of great interest and comfort to the tried and tempted believer. Joshua, the son of Josedech, the high priest of Israel upon their return from Babylon, is represented as standing before the angel of the Lord, the subject of controversy between the powers of light and of darkness.

On the one hand Satan appears, as he ever is, “the accuser of the brethren,” to “resist him” or, as from the context it evidently signifies, to discourage him in the discharge of his duties, by an overwhelming view of his great sinfulness, if so by any means he may drive him into despair.

But, in opposition to the insinuations of the great adversary, the Lord Himself stands forth as the advocate of His servant, saying, “Jehovah rebuke thee, O Satan; Yea, Jehovah that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?” And then, in the exercise of His free and sovereign grace, He directs those that stand before Him to take away from Joshua

the filthy garments and to clothe him with change of raiment, a typical representation of that which the Lord immediately adds: "Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee."

Thus the controversy is ended; the "accuser of the brethren" is discomfited. And the vision closes with a view of the angel of the Lord standing by the triumphant advocate of His servant.

The text introduces us to a similar scene. Immediately upon their coming together in the "upper room" the disciples engage in an unseemly strife, beginning, perhaps, in their choices of places at the table, concerning the leadership—who of them should be accounted the greatest. It is probable that Peter, with his usual impetuosity, was most prominent in the wrangle. The occasion, therefore, led our Lord to give all of them, and especially Peter, this final and solemn warning against the wiles of the Devil.

The language He uses is peculiar and notable. As the Authorized Version has it, the Lord says, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you." The Revision reads, "Satan asked to have you, that he might sift you as wheat."

The scene, then, reveals these three prominent characters. First of all, we see Peter standing forth in the midst, as Joshua in the vision of the prophet. On the one hand is Satan, the adver-

sary, praying for the opportunity to sift him as wheat. On the other hand we see Jesus, the great advocate, praying for him, that his faith fail not. The examination of these two prayers is our present theme.

I. THE PRAYER OF SATAN

“Satan asked to have you, that he might sift you as wheat.” As the margin of the Revised Version reads, “Obtained you by asking,” that you might be put into his hands, to be tossed to and fro and disturbed by all his malicious persecutions.

1. The spirit prompting such a prayer deserves attention. The Old Testament furnishes a parallel case that will throw light upon the text. “Jehovah said unto Satan, Hast thou considered My servant Job? for there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and turneth away from evil. Then Satan answered Jehovah, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not Thou made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath, on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth Thy hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will renounce Thee to Thy face.”

The spirit of this charge of the Devil is evident. Satan would say: "Job has no true religion. He is only a hypocrite. He serves God, not because he loves Him, but because he sees that it is profitable to do so. But put him to the test. Take away his property and reduce him to poverty. And the result will show that with the loss of his wealth his pretended piety will vanish in like manner."

It is just such a spirit as this that prompts the prayer of the Devil in the text. There seems to underlie the words that are spoken this thought: "These disciples are only acting the hypocrite. They are not serving God from pure motives, but sinful ones; it may be ambition, of which their recent strife at the paschal feast is an evidence. But let me have possession of them, to sift them, and the issue will show that what seems to be wheat is only the worthless chaff."

This is probably the real animus of this satanic prayer. And it is a prayer worthy its origin. Satan is a liar from the beginning, and the truth is not in him. He is always bringing charges against the people of God. Having no pure motives himself, he is ever impugning the motives and questioning the sincerity of those who do serve God and follow Christ. And it is one of the saddest proofs of human depravity that in this

respect he has only too many followers among men.

2. Again, the object of this prayer of the Devil deserves examination. A faithful God Himself oftentimes puts His people into purifying processes, called sometimes the washing of water, sometimes the burning of fire, and sometimes the sifting or winnowing of the threshing-floor. In every such case, however, whatever be the figure used, the object to be gained is the same; that is, the refining of the gold, or the separating of the wheat from the chaff.

This is not the object for which the Devil prays. His crafty design is threefold: (1) As has been said already, he sometimes seeks to call in question the existence of true piety—to show that all the apparent wheat is chaff and nothing else. (2) At other times, he desires to subject the believer to such a state of painful doubt and perplexity, “to so toss him to and fro, as wheat is tossed in the sieve, that anything like settled faith may become an impossibility.” (3) And then at all times he seeks the complete destruction of the faith of God’s people. That this is the great end aimed at by the enemy of souls is evident from the counter prayer of our blessed Saviour. He says to Peter: “I made supplication for thee, that thy faith fail not.”

This is the form of attack that has always been resorted to by the great adversary. With all his great experience, and almost infinite subtlety and cunning, all the assaults of Satan do evermore show this cloven foot, that he seeks a destruction of our faith. In the Garden of Eden, and no less in the temptation of Christ, this unconcealed and unconcealable mark of the Tempter's presence is to be found. He seeks to overturn the foundations of our faith in God.

May we not pause here a moment to note into what dark shadows this view of the subject throws that sin which, it may be, some of us esteem a trifling thing; that is, the sin of unbelief? We are possibly not conscious of any great ill-desert, because we live in the daily commission of it. And yet the story of Eden, and the temptation of Christ, the fall of the believer, and the ruin of the soul, are standing memorials of the fact that unbelief is the damning sin. Through it Satan ruined the human family in Adam; and it remains to this day, and ever shall remain, the corner stone of the kingdom of darkness. But with some of us being guilty of it gives us no special concern. On the contrary, it may be we are building ourselves up in a complacent pride, because, forsooth, we have not committed some of the sins which in their most aggravated

character are only outgrowths of the sin of unbelief.

3. Again, the manner in which Satan seeks to have his prayer accomplished deserves attention. When we remember that these words were uttered by our Lord immediately after the dispute about the supreme place, we shall wisely look to that controversy for the fulfillment of the prayer of Satan.

He desired to have all the disciples that he might sift them as wheat. And the way in which he proposed to do this was by awakening in their hearts that pride which always goes before destruction. So, therefore, blinding their minds to the spiritual nature of the Messiah's kingdom, and fixing their attention upon a carnal conception of that kingdom as an earthly and temporal sovereignty, he endeavored to arouse among them a fierce contention as to which of them should have the highest place in that kingdom.

We should be indeed ignorant of Satan's devices if we did not recognize in this process the footprints of the old serpent, the Devil, and enemy of our souls. The same course was pursued by him in the three great instances of temptation, of which the word of God gives us any knowledge—the cases of Adam and Job and Christ. In the first, there was an appeal to the pride of knowledge: "Ye shall be as God, knowing good and

evil." In the second, the appeal was to the pride of position and prosperity: "Touch all that he hath, and he will renounce Thee to Thy face." In the third, it was an appeal to the pride of dominion: "All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me."

In the same way is the Devil always seeking to compass the overthrow of the souls of men. It is because of the pride of his countenance that the wicked will not seek after God. The rock of offense over which multitudes of unconverted men are stumbling into hell is the pride of an unsubdued heart. Hence it is that they will not submit themselves unto the righteousness of God, and are evermore going about to establish a righteousness of their own, which can never hide their shame.

The same temptation also besets the people of God. The greater part of our spiritual darkness and soul troubles, as well as declensions and backslidings, arises from a pride of heart that does not rest satisfied with Christ and His finished work, or that leads to self-confidence and self-sufficiency. Humility is the chief adornment of the Christian character; and well does this Peter, foremost now in the strife for greatness, exhort us to "be clothed with humility." As a garment let it cover all the other graces of

the divine life, while it ever adds new lustre to each of them.

This is the prayer of Satan. This is the spirit that prompted it, the object for which it was offered, and the manner in which the desired end was to be obtained. In all its features the prayer bears the unmistakable marks of its infernal origin. It is a petition in the very line of that course which he always pursues in compassing the ruin of men. It was a prayer worthy the one who prays, and inevitably leading, if fully answered, to the spiritual ruin of the chosen twelve. And the prayer was answered in the letter, but the disastrous results aimed at by its spirit were averted and overruled by Him, who spoiled principalities and powers, making a show of them openly, and triumphing over them in His cross!

II. THE PRAYER OF CHRIST

“I made supplication for thee, that thy faith fail not.” In this petition of our blessed Lord the veil is partially lifted that covers the unseen world; and we obtain a momentary view of the great spiritual conflict going on between the Lord of Life and Glory, and the Prince of Darkness.

1. In this prayer of Christ we recognize the peculiarly tender and gracious love of our great Advocate. We specially note this characteristic of it, that it is always most displayed to those who need it most. The Lord Jesus was about finishing His work of humiliation and atonement. The shadows of the Garden and the Cross were rapidly gathering around Him. He foresaw the powerful temptations about to assail His chosen disciples. He knew how complete would be their disappointment, and overwhelming their sorrow when they should see their Master, not riding in triumph, the acknowledged Prince and Saviour of Israel, but led as a malefactor to the shameful death of the cross.

He foresaw the special danger about to assail that beloved Peter, bold, impetuous, and unstable, and yet warm-hearted,—a true friend and genuine disciple with all his faults and shortcomings. And while he was protesting against the imputation of a possible forsaking of Christ and declaring his readiness to go with his Lord to prison and even to death, all the sad steps of his declension and denial were before the mind of Jesus who loved him still.

Doubtless while Peter was proclaiming his devotion to His person and service the Lord foresaw the pathetic scenes of that thrice-repeated denial,

His own look of compassion, and the going out to weep bitterly over the hasty sin. He saw it all, and yet He did not withdraw His love from one who needed it now more than ever. In all fidelity He warned the impulsive apostle, but in infinite tenderness He gave him also this sweet assurance that He was praying for him to be a precious comfort in the time of darkness which before another morning's light should settle down upon his spirit. "I made supplication for thee." "I, the King of Glory, the appointed Mediator, the glorious and ever prevalent Intercessor, I have prayed for thee."

2. Again, let us observe the personal character of this prayer of Christ. He says, "Satan asked to have you." A reference to the original, shows that the term "you" is in the plural number. It is evident, therefore, that while the remark was addressed particularly to Simon, our Lord would warn all of them that they were all aimed at by their sworn enemy and accuser.

Then, having given this general admonition, He immediately turns to Peter, and knowing his special danger He gives him this special assurance: "I made supplication for thee." The personal character of the prayer, then, is noteworthy. They were all in danger, but Peter most of all. Therefore does the Saviour mention him with a special and exceedingly tender emphasis—"for thee."

In like manner our Advocate with the Father, with an omniscient eye, surveys His wide dominion and sees always the countless malicious plottings of the Adversary. No less faithful now than in His humiliation He warns all His believing children against the wiles of the devil. And with equal tenderness He remembers in special intercession all His tried and tempted children. It is then our peculiar comfort that if we have unusual temptations we are blessed above the common lot of our brethren, seeing our cases are more frequently and in prevailing power ever examined and cared for by our great Advocate. No wonder then that the apostle James says, "Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into manifold temptations." For whether they be the seductions of Satan, or the trials of life, they secure for us a peculiar interest in the loving and mighty intercessions of our Lord.

3. There is yet another feature of this prayer of Christ that is worthy our examination. I have said that here are two great opposing forces, but you will observe they do not come squarely and directly into collision. No doubt our Lord could have met and conquered the enemy in this way or in any way. But just because He is master of the situation the Captain of our salvation has chosen to meet the Adversary in an indirect way that

shall only the more clearly illustrate His power and glory—in this spiritual warfare a sort of divine strategy—out-flanking the enemy, and driving him in an inglorious defeat from the field.

Satan prays, "Let me have these disciples that I may sift them as wheat." The Saviour assures Peter, "I made supplication for thee, that thy faith fail not." You will mark the point—He prays not that they might not be sifted, but that their faith should not fail. The very point at which Satan aims, as we have seen, is the destruction of faith. The way in which this is to be accomplished is by the tossing and sifting.

But our Redeemer understands His enemy. Like a skillful military commander He guards with unceasing vigilance just that point which with divers feints and countermarches the wily Adversary seeks to possess. With our short-sightedness and weakness, like the private in the ranks, we long most of all to be free from the sifting—the harassments of the enemy. But the Commander, though tenderly alive to the comfort of His men, cares more for their welfare than for their comfort.

But if faith be gone the cause is lost and our great Captain is defeated. And so long as faith fails not, the Devil may rage and rave as he please, but after all he is only a conquered foe.

Well may our Lord say, then, of the Accuser—
Let his prayer be granted so far. Let him sift
My people. He will not prove them to be only
chaff. But he will, through My overruling
providence, separate the chaff from the wheat.
So, even while seeking to overcome Me, he shall
furnish the most incontestible evidence that he is
My servant, and is unwilling, and even unwittingly
doing My will—for all things are put
under My feet.

This is Satan's desire, to overthrow the confidence of the Saviour's disciples. His petition is granted so far as the making trial of them. They are often sifted as wheat. But the "Devil's sieve and the Lord's fan," says an old and quaint writer, "work in the same way." The Lord's "fan is in His hand, and He thoroughly purges His floor." The chaff is blown away, while the plump ripe grain lies on the garner floor. In the other case the Devil shakes the sieve and gets the chaff for his pains; the wheat falls through, and is safely gathered on the garner floor. But the sifting is not pleasant. Believers are often sorely tried and tempted; and sometimes they may think themselves that the foundations are gone. Satan so tosses them about that they often for long seasons together have no peace; and in the turmoil of the hour everything appears shifting and changeful.

Even the unchanging love of Christ seems for the time as fluctuating as their own experiences. But faith fails not. Like an anchor it still holds; and, though the waves run mountain high, the vessel rides securely in the storm.

The best commentary upon this passage is the experience of Job. We are expressly told that the object of Satan was to destroy the confidence of the patriarch in God. His request for an opportunity to sift him was granted; and the wearisome days and nights appointed Job, are a proof that the most was made of the opportunity. But though the very citadel of strength was assailed, the faith of the patriarch was not entirely eclipsed. In the very furnace of purifying he cries, "When He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

And such was the blessed result. He maintained his integrity because his faith in God did not utterly fail: and his latter end was better than the beginning, and exceedingly rich in blessing.

To a similar blessed result as being the direct consequence of the Saviour's prayer, we are introduced in the sequel of the text. As we glance forward from this Thursday night, when the text was spoken to the resurrection Sabbath, we see the terrible sifting process going on,

and faith as well, almost hopelessly eclipsed, still clinging to that Saviour soon and evermore to be known as The Crucified!

First we see Peter, the now bold confessor, cowering in base and vehement denial of that dear Lord, Whose mournful and reproachful look sends him to the bitter weeping of the outer darkness beyond the palace. Then our imagination may not improperly picture the peculiar dejection of the fallen disciple as he passed the long and dreary hours, pondering the special aggravations of his sin, and doubtless wondering if it were not a sin beyond the hope of forgiveness.

And now his recovery begins! The risen Lord sends by the mouth of the angel and the faithful women, that remarkable message: "Go, tell My disciples and Peter! Be sure you tell Peter that I am risen again for his justification." The fallen and despondent apostle receives the message no doubt with gladness. The day-spring from on high revisits him. And his faith, never wholly destroyed, henceforth shines out like the burnished gold, brilliant evermore for the purifying of the fires.

Thus the prayer of the Adversary, for a time apparently answered, is really and forever denied; and the Saviour's request, at the first

seemingly overborne by the solicitations of the enemy, is at last fully heard and granted. The Advocate is victor over the Accuser; and the child of God is saved. This is the true perseverance of the saints. We hold on our way, not because of our inherent strength, but because we "by the power of God are guarded through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

THE VICTORY OF FAITH

THE VICTORY OF FAITH

O woman, great is thy faith: be it done unto thee even as thou wilt.—Matthew xv:28.

Nations celebrate with rejoicing the victories which attend their arms. Especially do men take delight in successes which are gained in the face of apparently insuperable difficulties. Where the cause we love is contending with superior forces and new obstacles spring up in the crisis of the conflict, we are tortured with suspense, and filled with forebodings respecting the issue; and relief comes to us only when the result is known, and gladness thrills our entire being when we see victory perching upon our banners.

We have the same feeling of rejoicing as we mark the less observed but more important struggles and triumphs which are ever taking place in the realms of spiritual being. It is impossible for a Christian not to rejoice in the success of his brethren in the vicissitudes of religious experience. When we see a soul engaged in earnest combat, environed with difficulties, with the tide of battle setting strongly against his prospects, yet in the moment of decision

snatching victory from the jaws of defeat and unexpectedly carrying off the laurel wreath, we cannot but join his song of rejoicing.

It is from this point of view that we are to study the story of the woman of Canaan, the crowning words of which are given in the text. The incident here recorded of her is a grand contest upon the high grounds of the life of faith. It was a struggle between vastly unequal forces. On the one side is arrayed the omnipotence of the God-man, and on the other the simple faith of the woman of Syrophœnicia. And the result is preëminently the victory of faith. Very few such contests resulting in such a triumph are written in the records of the spiritual life. For our sakes is this one written.

I do not need to remind you of that other contest, far back in the shadows of the patriarchal age, in which Jacob wrestled with the angel at Peniel, and, disabled in the strife, still clung to his divine opponent with the watchword of victory upon his failing lips, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." The points of similarity in the two cases are not many but striking. We think of the one in reading of the other. They were both contests between human and divine forces. The current of battle seemed to be running against the weaker

side. And yet, in both cases, on the turn of the crisis, defeat is changed to victory and the bugle that was prepared to sound the dirge of the fallen, now celebrates in joyous strains the victory of the vanquished. Jacob is called "Israel" in memory of his triumph because as a prince he had had power with God and with men, and had prevailed. And the woman of Canaan by her faith exhibits the patent of nobility in the true Israel of God, though not of Israel according to the flesh.

In order to gain the most vivid conception of this victory of faith, let us mark the successive stages of the combat and dwell upon the tactics and manœuvres displayed on either side. Here we shall see generalship of the highest order.

Our attention is arrested,

I. BY THE OPENING SCENE—THE ENTREATY AND ITS INDIFFERENT RECEPTION

The Lord Jesus, being driven from among His own countrymen, traveled northward and came into the region of Tyre and Sidon. It was probably the only time He visited that part of the country, and the tour seems to have been undertaken mainly to escape from the enmity and persecution of the unbelieving Jews. This

woman of Canaan was greatly afflicted. Her daughter was grievously vexed with a demon. Hearing of the approach of the Christ, she resolved to do what every burdened soul ought and is welcome to do, to go to Jesus with her trouble in the undoubting confidence that He could and would help her.

It did not matter to her that she belonged to the alien race of Canaanites, or that the ministry of Jesus had been confined to Israel; still she would go to Him, believing that He would not turn her empty away. So she came, with the language of urgent entreaty, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou son of David." She identifies herself with her daughter. Healing power to the child is mercy to the anxious mother—"Have mercy on ME."

She recognizes also, in the lowly person before her "the hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in the time of trouble." The expectations of the Jews respecting the Messiah were widely known among neighboring nations. In the common and familiar language of that time He was called "The son of David." In the very address of the woman, therefore, we discover the germ of that faith which is soon to be so sorely tried and which is to come forth at last as the burnished gold.

Her hopes of assistance do not rest upon her confidence in Christ Jesus as a man, merciful and powerful to help the helpless, but upon His character and position as the long-promised Redeemer, who was to comfort those that mourned, and to loosen those that were bound. Her home was not among the people blessed with the Messianic promise. She had had no opportunity of accompanying the Lord, and of hearing His words of wondrous wisdom, and of witnessing His matchless miracles of power and grace. But in some way she had come to believe in Him, to believe in His divine character, in His mission of redemption, and in His sovereignty over all the ills of life. She had faith in Him; and therefore came in the time of extremity, the hour of gracious visitation, and cried, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou son of David."

But He "answered her not a word." And now the contest begins. On the one side is the urgency of a great need pressing on to decisive action, and on the other an apparently cold and chilling indifference. Can this be the Saviour Who, more kind than the multitude, would stop on the way to heal the blind Bartimæus; Who, more tender and regardful of a parent's heart than His own disciples, would bid the children

come to His knees for His benediction? Is this the Saviour, Who now passes by the cry of the needy, with ears entirely deaf to the urgent entreaty for the help which He can render and has rendered before in cases far less distressing than this of the woman of Canaan? Where now is her faith? Does it waver and die away in the bitterness of this first great disappointment? The sequel will show. In the meantime, consider

II. ANOTHER STAGE OF THE CONTEST: THE PLEADING OF THE DISCIPLES, AND THE DISCOURAGING REPLY

The scene here presented is worthy the profoundest examination. The first glance seems to show the Lord's disciples more alive to the cry of the afflicted than He, whose every heart-string vibrated in keenest sympathy with the woes of men. They came to Him in her behalf and said, "Send her away; for she crieth after us." Their words are, indeed, in themselves somewhat ambiguous, as though they would not presume to dictate to the Saviour the manner in which she shall be dismissed. And an uncharitable spirit might have surmised that they desired to be rid of the annoyance. But our

Lord's reply shows how He interpreted their words, and that they united their petition with hers for mercy to the afflicted daughter.

Are they, then, more merciful than the Christ? Can the woman of Canaan believe that, having met her own entreaty with indifference, this Redeemer and "Friend of sinners" will now be outdone by His own followers, and refuse to them also their urgent request? If such thoughts occupied her mind, she gave them no utterance in her words.

She seems to have learned already that lesson apparently most difficult of all for the Christian to learn, that the heart of Jesus beats ever true and responsive to the sorrows of His children; and, while the clouds may veil to the eye of sense the guiding hand of God, it still does guide, and His counsel shall ever stand the hope of the feeble ones. He will take His own time to unravel the mysteries of His providence; but He will unfold them at the last, and show that every inscrutable dealing has been for the trial of our faith.

So the woman of Canaan, with heart of anguish and urgency, and yet serene amidst her woes, is waiting in the citadel of her unfaltering faith. It cannot be that He will turn His back upon a sorrowing wanderer simply because He has

stepped across the boundaries of His own people. It may be, too, that she gathered strength to hope even from the answer of the Saviour to His disciples. He had said, "I was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." And yet He had just been driven from the midst of the house of Israel, and this fact was probably known to the woman of Canaan. "Though driven from Israel," this was perhaps her thought, "His heart is yet true to Israel." Despised, ill-treated, and even exiled He may be, yet will He every cry, "Men of Israel . . . to you is the word of this salvation sent," even as Paul afterwards said to the dispersed among the Gentiles of Antioch.

Would it be wonderful if, under the circumstances, the woman of Syrophœnicia reasoned after this manner: "Here the son of David is rejected and persecuted by His countrymen, and yet He loves them and would give to them every advantage belonging to their day of grace. If then He yearns over them, will He spurn me from His presence, who come a broken-hearted penitent, confiding in His faithfulness and power? Then is He not the Friend of Sinners! BUT HE IS! He is the son of David, Who should come to comfort those who mourn; and I will cry for mercy still, until the benediction comes, and He say to me, 'Go thy way, be it unto thee even as thou wilt.'"

And yet how sore the trial was we may not know. Probably you know, Christian friend, something of the painful silences of Jesus. You have called upon Him in the day of trouble. You have filled your mouth with arguments. You have stated your case before the Lord and urged your great necessity. But silence has reigned around the mercy-seat, and no voice has come forth to encourage your soul. For a long season you had been left with unanswered prayers and an apparently indifferent Saviour. Suppose, then, that in some such hour of silence and suspense you were answered at last, but as were the disciples in their plea for the woman of Canaan. While waiting for a favorable response, suppose there came this answer: "I am not sent to you at all: your people are outside the pale of the covenant promise." Could your faith pierce the outward harshness and see with faith's unwavering eye the heart of a compassionate Redeemer, still intending to bless you more abundantly for the long delay? Yet this was the faith of the woman of Syro-phœnicia.

She still believes He can help her, and she is determined not to take "No" for an answer. One would think that after the failure of this second attempt to secure the desired boon she might well go away, with dark and unhappy questionings

concerning the mercy of Jesus. But the faithful woman does not suffer such thoughts. She has no intention either of giving up the contest. With more determination than ever, she renews the struggle; and the conflict now advances to another stage, viz. :—

III. THE PERSONAL APPLICATION, AND THE CONTEMPTUOUS REFUSAL

Up to this time, the woman seems to have stood afar off, as one unworthy to come into the presence of the Saviour Lord; and, like the unclean lepers, in the distance she had lifted up her voice in crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David." But now, when the intercession of the disciples has failed, she resolves to venture into the presence of her Lord and Christ. And so she came, pressing her way through the company, and, kneeling down before the King, she worshiped Him. And, doubtless from a heart wrought up to the most intense anxiety, she cries, "Lord, help me." It was the last resort. "If He now turn me away, I am undone. The next word that He shall speak will be my joy or my doom." How much she might dread to hear that word spoken! If He has refused her hitherto, the probabilities are that He will deny her again.

As we await the coming of the answer, let me ask you, my friends, if you know anything of this persistency of faith? Do you ever reach the throne of grace by pressing through great difficulties? Do you know what it is to draw near before the Lord and plead with Him, as Abraham interceding in behalf of Sodom? Are there any such experiences in your Christian life as this on the borders of Tyre and Sidon, when you have gained access to the very feet of Jesus, and have tested the power and efficacy of prayer for personal blessing?

So the woman came and fell at His feet. The combat waxes warmer and warmer, and the crisis of battle is approaching. Will the Saviour now deny her prayer? Will He turn upon her, and despise her, and spurn her? Surely, then, He will belie His character and name. Never before has He met with such an urgent petition, never before with such faith; and never before has He failed to speak the word of comfort and healing power. The multitude, therefore, confidently awaits the favorable reply. The disciples, with looks of compassion upon the prostrate suppliant, and of inquiring wonder upon their Lord, as though they would divine the fullness of the coming blessing, wait in even more confident hope. The woman herself, bowed in sorrow before her Lord, is

wrapped up in two great thoughts: Her own great need, and the immediate presence of One who controls disease, and possesses the keys of even death and the grave, and Who to His power has added the record of unnumbered mercies to the afflicted. She, therefore, waits in like manner for the answer, granting her humble and believing prayer.

And at last the answer comes: "It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs." Oh, the crushing power of such an answer! How it must have entered like the iron into her soul! How the light must have faded from her eyes, and hope died away in her heart! The heavens are hung with greater blackness now than before she made known her wants. The multitude and the disciples stand back in silent amazement. Some wondrous change has come over the Prophet of Galilee. Never before did such words proceed from His lips.

The woman of Canaan, still at the Saviour's feet, might have murmured: "I came to Jesus with my burden, as He bids the sorrowing come. He will be known as the friend of sinners, and this is His friendship! It is limited by the ties of blood. He will hear the cry of the needy only among His own people. Though they persecute and reject Him, He will have mercy upon them alone; and I am cruelly denied. My petition is scorned, and

I am spurned from the Saviour's presence! I am but a dog, in the estimation of this son of David."

Remembering now that these words are our own, and not hers, mark the strength of her lowly faith. She had broken down one barrier after another, and from one stage to another of the contest she had proved victorious. When the Lord says, "I was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel," she meets the objection by the persistency of her faith, marking her as of Israel indeed. She anticipates the time set for the calling of the Gentiles, and places herself beyond the reach of the words of the Lord. She knows not what to say in answer to these words, but she feels in the bottom of her soul something that outweighs them. It is vain to tell her, "This is not for thee." In vain even may the Lord Himself tell it to her; she will never believe herself excluded from His grace.

"She feels that there is here something mysterious that will be explained to her, something apparently contradictory that will in good season be made clear to her. Everything is possible to the Lord, except to abandon a soul that waits upon Him. And she perseveres, and she stoops more humbly, and she prays more earnestly, and she approaches nearer to that Saviour, Who attempts to escape her; and she prostrates herself before

Him, and cries out: 'Lord, help me! Sent to me or not, here Thou art, O Saviour of the unfortunate! Called, or not, here am I, a wretched mother! Thou must hear me; Thou must cure my daughter. I will not let Thee go until Thou hast delivered me.' ” (Monod.)

In like manner, she meets this additional objection of her Lord; and passes on to the final stage of this great conflict, viz. :—

IV. THE DECISIVE REPLY, AND THE VICTORY

The Saviour's words are words of great severity. It is the renewal, in stronger language, of His statement to the disciples. The children are the Jews, and the Gentiles are the dogs! “However cruel this expression may seem in our language, it was far more so in that of the Jews; for dogs never appear in Holy Writ except under the most repulsive circumstances. To the Jew, and in general to all the nations of the east, the dog was an unclean animal, the type of profane and persecuting impiety, as the swine, with which he was associated, was the type of an inordinate and sensual impiety.”

The reply of our Lord seems, therefore, to be decisive of the contest; and we can only look to see the woman retiring in defeat, and overwhelming

sorrow from the field of battle. But, instead of this, we see in astonishment the tide of battle turning, and victory crowning the faith of the suppliant.

“She cannot be overcome, because she will not doubt. ‘It is Jehovah: let Him do what seemeth Him good.’ Though He slay her, yet will she trust in Him. Far from suffering herself to be shaken, she is scarcely troubled. She triumphs over the contempt of Jesus. She preserves all her freedom of soul, and, with a presence of mind that we should admire if our attention were not absorbed by a spectacle far more beautiful, that of her faith, she arms herself against the Lord with the very weapon, with which He had just pierced her; ‘she judges Him out of His own mouth.’ This humiliating comparison, which, in our opinion, would have been so revolting to her heart, she adopts without a murmur, and from it draws a new argument to overcome the Lord’s resistance; so much does she forget herself in her anxiety to save her daughter, and to gain the favor of Jesus. ‘Truly Lord, I am satisfied with what Thou sayest. I am, in comparison with Thy people, only what a dog is in comparison with a child. But even then I am entitled to the portion of a dog. The dogs eat of the crumbs, which fall from their master’s table. I ask for nothing more.

A single crumb of that bread with which Thou satisfiest the desires of Thy chosen people, a single word, a single look, and my daughter shall be healed.' ” (Adolph Monod.)

This was the decisive reply. It was the final charge that decided the fortunes of the day. Gathering up the forces of her unfaltering faith, she hurls them forth in the critical moment with a power that sweeps everything before it. And the spectacle of a divine Redeemer overcome by the feeblest of His followers is presented for our profoundest study and admiration. It is such a victory as occurs only in the realms of faith. Indeed, only in this do puny mortal men become omnipotent. For, if it be true that “all things are possible with God,” it is also equally true that “all things are possible to him that believeth.”

It was the last reply of the woman of Canaan that gave her the victory. Then it was that Jesus answered and said, “O woman, great is thy faith: be it done unto thee even as thou wilt.” Or, as Mark has it, “For this saying go thy way; the demon is gone out of thy daughter.” She returned to her home to find that daughter for whom she had so struggled delivered from the power of the enemy. Who can tell the joy and gratitude of that mother’s heart? The sacred penman has drawn a veil over that heart and humble home.

In that privacy let them remain, while we learn the lessons of this wondrous story of the woman of Canaan:—

1. The Lord often sorely tries those whom He loves. There can be no doubt that the Saviour intended to bless her from the beginning. For this reason, among others, He had gone into the region of Tyre and Sidon. And yet, before the blessing, her confidence in Him was subjected to the severest test, that her faith might, for the comfort of others, appear the brighter and purer for the refining of this fire. “When the woman saw the result, how well did she understand that the Lord had tried her much, because He loved her much. Must there not have been, in the remembrance alone of this touching and terrible scene, enough to fortify her against the griefs of life? What this remembrance was for her, let her story be for us. If the Lord tries us, be assured He loves us. If for us He has appointed special trials, be assured that in His heart of hearts He has kept us for a special place.” Of all Christian people it may be said, “When He hath tried them, they shall come forth as the gold.” And, “The proof of your faith, being more precious than gold that perisheth though it is proved by fire, may be found unto praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

2. The true spirit of prevailing prayer for others.

There must be an identity of interest with them—so that, as we plead their need, we can sincerely say, "Have mercy upon me."

There must be the deepest humility, and perseverance even to the very last step.

There must be most of all a faith that shall triumph over every obstacle, even to the snatching of victory from the very hands of impending defeat.

THE NEW BIRTH AND THE NEW
FAITH

THE NEW BIRTH AND THE NEW FAITH

As many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.—John i: 12, 13.

One of the most notable features of the Bible is its well-balanced character. Its presentation of doctrines and its inculcation of duties are marked by a common-sense wisdom, moderation and sobriety, which commend them to our best judgment as both true and fitting. This is all the more noticeable in view of the fact that the inspired volume deals with subjects respecting which there was abundant opportunity for a different course.

A few examples in illustration of this point are worthy of notice. Take the subject of God's sovereignty. How easy to present it, and how often has it been presented, in such a way as to destroy the freedom of man and lead one into the deadliest fatalism! But this is not the Bible presentation of the subject. God is indeed the sovereign God; but the Scriptures everywhere address men as responsible. That responsibility is not affected by the divine efficiency. God is

ever working "both to will and to do;" but we are none the less to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. Take again the doctrine of election. How common such a view of it as encourages men in sin! But the word of God gives no such view. We are "chosen," indeed, but we are "chosen to holiness." We are "elect," and that too "according to the foreknowledge of God," but it is through sanctification of the Spirit and the belief of the truth. Still further, take the doctrine of justification. It is by faith alone, not works. And yet it is by a faith that works; and believers are ever bound to attest the genuineness of their faith by their good works. Once more, take the doctrine of regeneration. How clear and unmistakable the teaching of the Scriptures that we must be born again by the mighty power of the Holy Spirit! And yet with equal clearness we are taught in the same Scriptures that we become the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ.

This last example is the one presented in the text. And these remarks will have served their purpose if they inspire us with increasing confidence in the Bible as a well-balanced book and a safe guide to salvation, while they also introduce us to the particular illustration of the

fact recorded in the passage which now claims our attention.

The text furnishes two views of the way of salvation, the one emphasizing the human, and the other the divine side of the method in which a soul is to be saved. From the one point of view it is a salvation by faith: "As many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on His name." From the other point of view it is a salvation by divine renewal: "Who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." These two views are not contradictory but complementary, and it is important for us to consider them as they are here presented, in their mutual connections and relations.

Following our Lord's example in His conversation with Nicodemus, let us take the second view first, and consider for a little while,

I. THE WAY OF SALVATION FROM ITS DIVINE SIDE

The true followers of Christ are they "who are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." It is worthy of special notice that this is the first time in the

Bible that the subject of the soul's renewal is definitely mentioned under this figure of "the new birth." It is also quite remarkable with what care, definiteness, and particularity the doctrine is here stated and explained. The inspired writer tells us not only what this new birth is, but also and especially what it is not. His object in this is at once to meet and correct the abuse of it most common in his day and to forestall the misconceptions of it most likely to arise in the history of the church.

The evangelist has already described this salvation as being a divine sonship. The Lord Jesus gives us the right to become children of God; and the question being, "How do we get this sonship?" the answer from the divine side of the subject is, "We are born to it—it is ours by right of birth." Then, meeting the question, "How are we born to it?" the evangelist answers:—

1. "Not of blood." It is not by any human descent or natural generation. These words of John have a special reference to his kindred according to the flesh. And they are but the echo of the sterner words of his namesake, the shaggy-mantled John the Baptist. Above all other men of their day the Jews boasted of their lineage. They said to Christ what they had said

before to John, "We have Abraham to our Father." "In their narrow pedantic pride they felt sure of a part in the kingdom of the Messiah, simply as descendants of Abraham Israel alone could please or find favor with God, and it did so on the footing of its descent. The kingdom of heaven was to be strictly Jewish, all other nations being excluded, and it was Jewish by hereditary right." So when the fierce preacher of the wilderness thundered his denunciations of sin, they sat in unruffled complacency, and said in their hearts, "We are all right; for we are the children of Abraham."

This same pride of race our blessed Lord confronted when He said to the Jews, "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham." Paul also meets it when he says to the Galatians, "If ye are Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed." And no one knew better than Paul how to meet this pride of race, for he himself had shared it to the utmost. And nobody had a better natural right to this kind of boasting than he had. So he says to the Philip-pians, "If any other man thinketh to have confidence in the flesh, I yet more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; as touching zeal, perse-

cuting the church; as touching the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless." This is the spirit which the evangelist here meets: when describing the divine side of salvation, he says it is a being born "not of blood."

We must not fail to mark the significance of the fact also that the word he uses is in the plural number: "not of bloods" is the original. The eye of the text, therefore, ranges far beyond the one Hebrew race. It marks the folly of any trust in any merely hereditary piety. And so it is full of meaning and pertinence to our times as well as to those of the apostle's day. This disposition to trust in the piety of the fathers is the refuge of unnumbered millions of the adherents of false religions. And multitudes, even in Christian countries, rely upon this as in some sort the ground of hope for the favor of God.

Now also, as in the days of the evangelist, there is a true Israel to whom the promise comes, while Israel according to the flesh expects to receive in a carnal way, but fails to obtain, the blessings of the covenant. Those blessings are real. But they come to the children of God. It is no mean blessing to have a citizenship in this commonwealth, but it is of little value to him who is unworthy of it. To be a child of the covenant is an inestimable mercy;

but of what avail is it to one who despises his birthright? So to trust in any hereditary piety when there is no like-minded life and character is simply dealing with the counterfeit, which is infinitely different from the genuine, but which nevertheless presupposes the genuine.

There is a proper and honorable pride of lineage; but this is always marked by a life worthy of its origin. But no descent of race, however noble, is any passport to the kingdom of heaven. To enter there we are to be born, but "not of bloods." The bluest of the blue will be of no avail.

2. "Nor of the will of the flesh." Advancing now another step in his presentation of the subject, the evangelist here teaches that the children of God become such not by any efforts and exertions of their natural hearts, not by the will of the fleshly mind. Nature can never change itself. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." This expression of the text marks the futility of another common, almost universal method of seeking salvation. Convince a man of his need of salvation, show him that he has no hereditary and prescriptive right to it, and he will immediately set about trying to make himself worthy of it. By prayers and tears, by self-denial and some form of asceticism, he will seek

to win the favor of God, and a right to a place in His family. But all his efforts are vain. They are the blind and futile gropings after God of the carnal mind, the will of the flesh. They are simply and only the damaged assets of a bankrupt's estate. By them the soul can never be brought into the family of God. The new birth is never attained by "the will of the flesh."

3. "Nor of the will of man." We see how the inspired writer knocks from under us in succession the pillars of hope on which we are inclined to lean for salvation. The divine sonship we seek comes not by any hereditary right, nor by our own personal exertions, nor by anything that any man can do for us. This is the grand tripod on which we seek to climb into the family of God, and the text knocks it all over!

Let us mark the force of the last statement. We become the children of God not by the will of man. No acts or deeds of others can ever save us. No man can ever regenerate the human heart. The truth of this statement, presented in this bald form, most men will perhaps admit—certainly all men of any intelligence. And yet how common the impression that grace must come in particular channels, that it may be conferred by particular individuals! What a grand delusion the apostolical succession has

been in the history of the church! What a monstrous perversion of a sacred and precious truth is the idea of baptismal regeneration, as if the priestly application of water to the body could have any efficacy in cleansing the soul of sin! How many people have deceived themselves with the belief that only this or that method of celebrating the sacraments was of saving efficacy! With what insidious subtlety and fascinating power are men persuaded that some magic touch of a fellow-man can transform them into the children of God! Away with such shams of religion! Let it be once and forever impressed upon our minds that we are born into the family of God not by any will of man.

How then do we become God's children? The text, having corrected all false impressions about the subject, now gives the true answer to this inquiry. We are born to this exalted privilege

4. "Of God." "Believers become what they are solely and entirely by the grace of God. It is to God's free grace, preventing, calling, converting, renewing, and sanctifying, that they owe their new birth." The Scripture doctrine of the soul's renewal is that it is owing to the divine power of the Holy Spirit. "Except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter

into the kingdom of God." It is "not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." The meaning of these passages is clear and unmistakable; God only renews the sinful soul, and introduces it by the power of the divine spirit into the privileges of sonship in His spiritual household. The children of God are "born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

It is at this point that we meet the most powerful and subtle objection ever raised by the unrenewed man to the gospel. You say, "If this be true—and the Scriptures do certainly seem to teach it, and I sincerely believe that it is true—but if it be true, then I can do nothing in the matter of my salvation, and I must just sit still and wait for the divine impulse of the Holy Spirit." You say this; but the Bible does not say it. Just here we find a preëminent illustration of that well-balanced character of God's word referred to in the beginning of these reflections. The way of life, so far examined from its divine side, must be considered also from its human side be-

fore the view is complete. That other and complementary view of salvation, as by faith, is also furnished in the language of this passage.

Let us now take up this first view of the text, and consider

II. THE WAY OF SALVATION FROM ITS HUMAN SIDE

The Lord Jesus gives the right to become children of God to "as many as received Him—even to them that believe on His name." It is worth our while to observe that the evangelist here follows the example of his divine Master in thus linking together faith and regeneration. In His conversation with Nicodemus our Lord opens with the necessity of being born again. But He closes the conversation with a view of the imperative call for faith in the only begotten Son of God, lifted up even as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness. He spoke of the first in order to emphasize the second, correcting the erroneous views of the self-righteous Pharisee, and so leading him to see that the exercise of faith was the only thing he could do.

Just so, in the text, the inspired penman describes and defines the new birth, to prevent any misconception on our part; but, reversing his

Master's order to make more prominent our responsibility, he sets forth a directory of our duty in the matter of seeking salvation in the first verse of the passage under consideration. Our divine sonship and eternal salvation turn upon our faith in Christ. He gives the right to become children of God to "as many as receive Him, . . . even to them who believe on His name." Let me ask your thoughtful attention to the following points, as suggested by these words :

1. This faith is the act of your own mind. Just as truly as it belongs to God to give you the renewing of the Holy Spirit, so truly is it your part to exercise faith in the atoning Saviour. I do not forget that faith itself is the gift of God. He furnishes in unbounded profusion the motives and incitements to belief, and by the gracious influences of His Spirit, persuades and enables you to cherish this trust in the name of Jesus. But it is none the less true that faith must be the full, conscious, voluntary exercise of your own spirit. The call to faith, therefore, is everywhere imperative in the overture of the gospel.

2. This faith is here defined. That which is required of you that you may become a child of God is no mysterious thing, but as simple as taking in your hand an offered gift. Believing on the name of Christ is just receiving Him as He

is offered to you. Faith's aspect and characteristic is determined by the object with which it has to do. "Christ, ever-blessed object of faith, is presented to us in the gospel under a great many different views and aspects, in correspondence with which faith bears different forms and names. For instance, Is Christ presented under the notion of meat to the hungry soul? Then faith is expressed by eating. Is Christ held out under the notion of living waters? Then faith is called a drinking. Is He held out as a refuge? Then faith is called a fleeing to Him. Is He held out as a garment for the naked? Then faith is a putting Him on for clothing. Thus, according to the aspect in which Christ is presented, faith receives its name." And so, in the text, where the Lord Jesus is presented as a gift, faith is simply receiving Him as He is offered. "Receiving Christ" and "believing on Christ" are just two descriptions of one and the same act of the mind.

3. This faith, as thus defined, implies these four things of vast moment. First, the grace of God in proffering the unspeakable gift. You see your kind neighbor helping the needy. Is it the beggar's gaunt and hungry attitude that arrests your attention? Is it not rather the benevo-

lent aspect of the helper? God's grace in the gift is the notable feature in the offer of life. Secondly, our need is emphasized. We take the gift because we are in want. We are under the curse, and therefore seek an atonement. We do not feel satisfied in ourselves, and therefore come in conscious emptiness and barrenness to be filled with the divine fullness. Thirdly, we now submit to be saved as God would have us saved. We renounce all that stands opposed to Christ. To receive Him in sincerity is to exclude all and every one else. We take Him as the only Saviour. It is enough that we have Him. Fourthly, we now receive Him as He is offered to us. We take Him as our prophet, to instruct us in our ignorance. We welcome Him as our priest, to make atonement for our souls and to make intercession for us. We bow before Him as our King, of right the sovereign of our hearts and lives.

4. You observe there is no limitation here. The words of the evangelist are of the most universal kind: "As many as received Him!" "Whosoever!" No matter who, no matter when, no matter where: as many as receive Christ shall have the right to become the children of God! They shall be endowed with the great and precious prerogative of being not only enrolled

among the number, but also imbued with the spirit of children of God, and heirs of everlasting blessedness.

5. The responsibility then lies with you of deciding whether or no you will have these inestimable privileges of the kingdom of heaven. It can hardly be without a purpose that the sacred writer, in the text, puts first the matter of practical duty. The first view of salvation here given you is from the human side, the side of personal responsibility. You are tempted to put the matter in this light: "My safety depends upon the new birth; I cannot renew my own heart, and therefore I must wait for God." On the other hand, God puts the matter in this light: "Your eternal safety rests upon your faith: he that believeth shall receive the privileges of divine sonship in the family of God."

Let me close the exposition of this Scripture with these two practical considerations, viz. :—

I. Faith in Christ is the turning point in the sinner's salvation. This is the sole saving act. The exercise of it seals your eternal safety and opens to you the gate of heaven. This way of faith alone conducts you back to God and life. So simple a thing as this accomplishes results of such inconceivable immensity as these. "Say not in thy heart, Who shall ascend into heaven

(that is, to bring Christ down) ? or, Who shall descend into the abyss (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead) ?” No such difficult and impossible thing is required of you. “But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach: because if thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”

2. The unspeakable honor which is here conferred upon him who believes in Jesus Christ. He shall become one of the children of God. God is doubtless, in some true and fruitful sense, the Father of all men; for “We are His offspring,” the poet sang, whom the apostle quotes. But the divine sonship promised in the text brings us closer to God than this. We are “made partakers of the divine nature.” We share the throne of the divine Saviour. We join the song of the redeemed, “Thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with Thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.” The blood-bought children of God’s covenant family—such are we. Oh, the marvel of it! And yet this exalted right and privilege may be ours upon the simple exercise of faith.

God, help us all to believe in Christ!

THE GRACIOUS FAREWELL

THE GRACIOUS FAREWELL

Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.—Matthew xi: 28.

The diamond is a beautiful gem. With its flashing faces and keen and cutting angles it needs no skill of the jeweler's art to reveal its brilliance. And yet something is gained even by the diamond from the setting in which it is placed. This is a fitting illustration of the relations of each particular truth of the gospel history to its place in the narrative. The truth, separate and alone, is the radiant jewel; and most important of all things is it for us to note and appreciate its unadorned splendor and beauty. It is a subordinate and yet by no means unimportant light which we may find thrown upon the truth by its setting in the sacred story.

This that is true of so many passages in the gospels is emphatically true of the text. It is a gem of the rarest lustre. It might justly claim our earnest thought for what it is in itself. But it shines in a new light and becomes more profoundly significant when we come to note its place in the narrative, and the time of its utterance in the ministry of our Lord.

Our Saviour had finished His public work in the northern part of the Holy Land. He was now about to begin that final and leisurely journeying from Galilee to Jerusalem, the wayside words and works of which are recorded chiefly by Luke. And this passage is the Lord's last message to Galilee, spoken just when He was about to set forth on that journey. That this is the chronological order is now the almost universal judgment of learned critics. I need not tarry to set forth the reasons for their opinion. Assuming it to be correct, we cannot fail to be struck with the incomparable sweetness of this gracious invitation, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden," following as it does the solemn words of upbraiding, and standing as the final expression of the Lord's compassionate heart to the people among whom His ministry had been so largely spent and among whom He would minister no more.

As the loving message stands in a new light when we consider the time of its utterance, so also does it gather new force from the other utterances of the same parting occasion. The embassy from John and the Saviour's consequent testimony to the forerunner's character and mission was, indeed, an earlier occurrence; but even that event took place after the greater

part of the Galilæan ministry had been fulfilled. This whole chapter, therefore, has an obvious and characteristic unity; and the text comes to us as a peculiar message, and with special meaning, because it is the final word of the "Lord's farewell to Galilee."

To understand it and appreciate it we must analyze and study the portion of Scripture of which it forms the concluding invitation. About to leave the people among whom for many months He had taught and wrought, and coming to review a ministry now well-nigh ended, what were the Saviour's thoughts? To what great truths does He now give final expression? With what spirit does He emphasize the closing utterances of His brief and faithful ministry? An answer to these questions is furnished in the grouping of incidents here recorded by the spirit of inspiration. We have

I. THE REJECTION OF THE MESSAGE BECAUSE OF THE MESSENGER

The character and ministry of John the Baptist are delineated upon the sacred page in the sharpest contrast with the nature and mission of the Messiah. A lone, stern man, ascetic in disposition, an anchorite in life, possessed of a lofty

ideal of living, and with a spirit that brooked no compromise with sin, John was a man eminently fitted for his place and work. He who should be qualified to swing shut the ponderous gates of one era and open the golden portals of another needed to be a man of sterner stuff than men of the common mold. And such was John:—

“John, than which man a sadder or a greater,
Not till this day has been of woman born;
John, like some iron peak by the Creator
Fired with the red glow of the rushing morn.”

But the ministry of John was not successful in turning the people from their sin. After the first flush of excitement created by the new herald of the wilderness had disappeared, the multitudes went back from the pure and lofty morality which John had preached, to serve their own lusts and pleasures in the bondage which they loved so well. They thought of the messenger: “This strange, severe and distant man! We do not understand him. We cannot endure him. He has nothing in common with us. He stands upon a lofty pedestal, and we cannot come near him. He knows nothing of our daily life. He cannot enter into either our joys or our sorrows. We want for our leader

and teacher a man who is one of us. But this man has a devil. Away with him!"

And so they turned from the Forerunner. And so it came about that, when his headless body needed sepulture, of all the multitude who had been awakened by his preaching only a few faithful followers remained to place that mute and mutilated form in the tomb and to bear the tidings to Jesus, his Master and henceforth theirs.

Then came to this same people the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. It was a ministry of grace and mercy and peace. For the ruling class, self-righteous, hypocritical, whited sepulchres—for them He reserved the fierceness of His denunciations, the terrible explosions of His righteous wrath. But for the people His voice was a benison; His teaching came to them with the love and tenderness of a benediction. Among them the opening words of His ministry formed the first beatitude—"Blessed are the poor in spirit;" and His final promise was this one of the text—"Ye shall find rest unto your souls."

He, too, was a man among men. He was not separate from them save in sin. No asceticism marked His life. With the multitude He talked and walked. In the home life He found a con-

genial and welcome place. He was the CHRISTUS CONSOLATOR! Healing virtue for the bodies and the souls of men went forth from the lowly Nazarene. In the hearts of the stricken and afflicted, and not less of the weary and heavy-laden, His throne was built. Publicans and sinners followed in His humble train and formed the retinue of Zion's lowly King! The "woman who was a sinner" washed His feet with her tears when she heard this gracious invitation, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden."

But multitudes there were who did not like the ministry of Jesus. They deceived themselves with the thought that the trouble was with the messenger. They had found fault with John because he was not a different kind of a man. With a fastidiousness that was of the essence of cruelty they regarded not the elements of sadness and solemnity in John's life and place, and testily they said: "We do not like him. He is too gloomy. His views of life are too stern." Nor yet did Jesus of Nazareth fill their beautiful ideal. "This man," they said, "makes Himself too common. He is too accessible. He is wanting in dignity. He ought to be more exclusive, and keep the vulgar herd at a greater distance. If He were the kind of man He ought to be He

would not, as He does, receive the publicans and sinners and eat with them." And so they turned from the message again, because they did not like the messenger.

This is the truth which the Lord here emphasizes. "Whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the market-places, who call unto their fellows and say, We piped unto you, and ye did not dance; we wailed, and ye did not mourn." Or, in modern language: "You are so fastidious and hard to please, that you will not play with us in any sort of game. If we propose a make-believe wedding, you will not play; and if we speak of a make-believe funeral, there is no response." "So," says our Lord to the Galilæans, "are you acting as to the messengers of salvation. That salvation you put from you because you do not fancy the messenger by whom it is brought." "For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a demon. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold, a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinner!"

That Galilæan generation are long-lived. Possibly some of them are living yet. But "wisdom is justified by her works."

Again, we have

II. THE COÖRDINATE LIMITS OF PRIVILEGE AND RESPONSIBILITY

This is the solemn truth to which such weighty emphasis is given by the Saviour's sorrowful upbraiding of the cities "wherein most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not." They had had among them the matchless ministry of the Messiah, and it had been preceded by the stirring evangel of the new Elijah. But the one, as the other, had been a comparatively fruitless ministry. And at its close the Lord must face the fact, more sad for them than for Him, that "Galilee had rejected Him At Nazareth, the sweet mountain village of His childish days, at Nazareth, with all its idyllic memories of His boyhood and His mother's home, they had treated Him with such violence and outrage that He could not visit it again. And even at Chorazin and Capernaum and Bethsaida, on the Eden-shores of the silver lake, in the green delicious plain whose every field He had traversed with His apostles, performing deeds of mercy and uttering words of love—even there they loved the whited sepulchres of a Pharisaic sanctity and the shallow traditions of a Levitical ceremonial better than the light

and life which had been offered them by the Son of God. (Farrar's Life of Christ, Chapter XLII.)

They had been lifted to heaven in privileges, but they had failed to improve them. They had incurred a fearful responsibility and merited the woe pronounced against them. Other greater and mightier cities would have repented in sack-cloth and ashes; but they continued in their proud impenitence. So fell the curse upon them. And it rests upon them still.

One who has seen the land and the lake of Galilee thus describes the situation: "Exquisite still in its loveliness, it is now desolate and dangerous. The birds still sing in countless myriads; the water-fowl still play on the crystal mere; the brooks still flow into it from the neighboring hills, 'filling their bosoms with pearl, and scattering their path with emeralds;' the aromatic herbs are still fragrant when the foot crushes them, and the tall oleanders fill the air with delicate perfume as of old; but the vineyards and fruit-gardens have disappeared; the fleets and fishing-boats cease to traverse the lake; the hum of men is silent; the stream of prosperous commerce has ceased to flow. The very names and sites of the towns and cities are forgotten; and, where they once shone bright

and populous, flinging their shadows across the sunlit waters, there are now gray mounds where even the ruins are too ruinous to be distinguishable." (Farrar, *ut supra*.)

The homes of the Galilæans to whom Jesus ministered now lie in unknown graves, the most impressive illustration of that darkness and death to which light unimproved must ever bring the souls of men. The eyes of some who looked upon the "Prophet of Galilee" were destined to tarry and behold the storm of fire and blood that broke upon the guilty land. They had been lifted on high by their glorious, golden opportunity. No such woe ever fell upon a people as rolled like a devastating flood around the Sea of Galilee, the just penalty of their rejection of the Son of God.

The solemn lesson is still pertinent and pungent. We are encompassed by the marvelous mercies of the gospel of Jesus Christ. They raise us to heaven. We are weighted with the tremendous responsibilities of these privileges. They may sink us into hell.

The wider view reveals the distinguishing mercies showered upon us as a Christian people. As to the people of Galilee, God has given us a goodly heritage. A fairer land is ours than was theirs. Under the blessings of a benign gov-

ernment, all the arts of peace are flourishing with us as they never could with them. They had their just and righteous laws; we have them too, and more. And in all the elements and influences of our holy faith how far are we exalted above the highest point of privilege that ever was vouchsafed to them! The Sabbath dawned for them, but it was hedged about with ceremonial rigidity and severity. It called them to the synagogue, and to the pure and holy but stern, uncompromising law. Again and again their pilgrim feet were called to tread the way to Zion; and, in the feasts and sacrifices of the Holy City, they dwelt in the shadow of the better things revealed in the gospel of the Son of God. And on some rare day, once perhaps within a lifetime, their ears might be saluted with the sound of the silver trumpets that proclaimed the dawn of the year of jubilee.

But for us the Sabbath comes as the day of the Son of man. With all pervading sanctity and spiritual power it is as the days of heaven. It brings immunity from toil. It gives us present rest. It comes freighted with ever-blessed memories. It is an angel of hope pointing us to the glory and rest of the everlasting Sabbath.

And this Sabbath summons us to the sanctuary. Within these sacred walls our hearts

are broken, and then are comforted. Here our carnal hopes are slain by the law. Here we are revived by the gospel.

“Here speaks the Comforter, tenderly saying,
‘Earth has no sorrows that heaven cannot cure.’”

Here we are gathered to the feast of blessing. No holocaust or hecatomb attends our sacred festival. We sit in heavenly places, being brought nigh to God by the precious blood of the Lamb “slain from the foundation of the world.” And here upon our slavish ears there break, in sweetest tones, the silvery notes that sound the jubilee of liberty.

Far above the privileges of ancient Galilee are the mercies we enjoy. They were raised to heaven. Multitudes of men there were, noble, cultured, inquiring; but among the Galilæans only ministered He “Who spake as never man spake.” They were greatly exalted; and we are lifted higher far than they.

But we need a nearer view. It is of our individual privileges that we need specially to reflect. It is our personal responsibility that we must seek particularly to realize. And how shall I portray the one so that we may truly feel the other?

I remember the home where, it may be in the

years long gone, God gave you birth and nurture. It was not a perfect home. The beloved parents were not all they should have been; nor were the influences of the old fireside always as pure and sweet as they might have been. But nevertheless it is true that no such home has ever been found where Christianity has never shown its power. There you first heard the story of the Cross. There were you first brought in contact with Jesus of Nazareth. There you first saw the fruits of a Christian faith; and, without knowing its incomparable sweetness, you there first learned the principles of a Christian morality.

From that blessed haven of home you sailed forth upon life's ocean. Your bark was freighted with precious things and undergirded with firm and holy principles. You ride the stormy waves in safety now, because you then left a home where the Lord had been, and whither He had loved to come.

You are strong to-day, because you are encompassed by influences that come from Jesus of Nazareth. You are in a Christian community. The people of God are round about you. The institutions of our holy religion are interlocked with the well-being of your soul, your family, your society, and your life. All holy influences

move upon you. The quiet of the Sabbath, the open door of the sanctuary, the voice of the "messenger that bringeth good tidings," the song, the service, and the sacraments, all speak to your heart with a tender persuasion, with a loving urgency. The divine Spirit also speaks in "the still small voice," in the earnest entreaty of infinite desire. Aye! once more Jesus of Nazareth comes to His own. The Prophet of Galilee still walks among His people. His hands are still mighty to heal, His gracious words are yet mighty to save. The prophecy is still made good: "The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings preached to them."

This, my friends, is your place, and these are the high and holy privileges which lift you so far above the multitude of your fellows. They raise you, as Capernaum, even to heaven. If they be improved, that heaven's gates shall in due time swing wide their portals to give you blessed welcome.

But if these privileges be neglected, what then? If from such holy influences one severs himself, if to such sights, which angels desire to look into, he be blind, if to such sounds as are made by the fountain of the water of life he

stops his ears, if through such barriers of sweet persuasiveness as Infinite Love would cast around his spirit he breaks his way down to death, shall he not deserve to die, and to die forever? Oh, yes, my friends, to fail of eternal life under any circumstances is an infinite calamity! But to go down to death from a Christian land, and from the midst of a Christian congregation, and from under the blessed sound of the gospel, is, with deliberate and awful abandonment, to seek and find the nethermost regions of everlasting despair.

The Saviour's review of His ministry in Galilee brings the shadows upon His human spirit. And, while pronouncing woes upon the favored land, He takes refuge where every faithful, even though unsuccessful, Christian worker may find a similar peace and joy, while he goes his way and leaves the truth to accomplish its predetermined work. And so we come to another great topic of this farewell chapter, viz. :—

III. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD IN THE DISPENSATION OF MERCY

It was at this time that Jesus answered and said, "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from

the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes: yea, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in Thy sight."

This thanksgiving of Christ, in the survey of His ministry in Galilee, is suggestive of many lessons. Let me name here only the most important. There is

1. The Fact.—The course of the gospel, even under the preaching of Christ, was not always successful. Among lowly men, and not among men who prided themselves on their speculative and philosophical attainments, nor yet among men of worldly shrewdness, the clever and sharp-witted—not with these, but among babes—not among the wise and prudent, but among the number of the humble—the truth had won its way and gained its greatest triumphs. "The Pharisees and the lawyers rejected for themselves the counsel of God;" but "the common people heard Him gladly." The glad tidings from the Prince of Peace were welcomed only by the meek and lowly mind.

It is so still. "For behold your calling, brethren, that not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God chose the foolish things of the world, that He might put to shame them that are wise; and God chose the weak things of the world, that

He might put to shame the things that are strong; and the base things of the world, and things that are despised, did God choose, yea and the things that are not, that He might bring to nought the things that are: that no flesh should glory before God." We must become as little children, or we can never enter the kingdom of heaven. The mighty God, who fills immensity with His presence, dwells only with the humble and contrite heart. The gospel now, as in the days of Christ, can never win its way among the proud and self-righteous of the world. Its fruitful field is among the broken hearts.

2. This was and is of the ordering of God. It is of God's sovereign pleasure that the gospel succeeds or fails. Paul may plant and Apollos may water; but it is God who giveth the increase. Against this thought men often rebel, and yet with no more reason than against the appointments of their births and daily lives. As a matter of fact, some are surrounded with influences more powerfully tending to salvation than others. Multitudes are born under such conditions as make it all but absolutely certain that they will never come to the knowledge of Christ. Can we explain this? No! How, then, ought we to feel about it? As to those from whom these things are hid, perfect confidence

that the Judge of all the earth will surely do right. And as to ourselves, if to a docile spirit the Lord has revealed Himself, adoring thankfulness and praise, while we humbly bow in everything to the sovereign will of God, "Yea, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in Thy sight."

3. This does not encourage presumption, nor remove responsibility. The woes pronounced on Galilee presuppose guiltiness in the favored cities. We must never forget that the same voice that said, "I thank Thee, O Father . . . that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding," said also to proud Capernaum and haughty Bethsaida, "Woe, woe unto you . . . for it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for you." The sovereignty of God and the accountability of man here, as everywhere in the Bible, run on parallel lines. They are the two ever-present, and ever-parallel rails on which alone can move to a blessed destiny the train of life.

4. Nor does this truth with which our Lord here comforts Himself drive any one to despair. The doctrine of divine sovereignty in the dispensation of mercy is a doctrine of hope. Do you say it is revealed only in the Scriptures, this divine sovereignty? Ah! my friends, its sternest lines are to be seen in nature and life. It

is in the Bible, to be sure; but throughout the entire Scriptures the predominant aspect of divine sovereignty is an aspect of mercy. The purpose of God is there; but it is a purpose of salvation. From Genesis to Revelation run the unbroken links of a mighty chain; but it is the golden chain which binds the penitent soul to God and eternal life. The whole Bible is a grand revelation of a grand purpose of grace and eternal mercy.

So the farewell words of Christ leave the solemn subject by turning our attention to the crowning element of the mighty theme, viz. :—

IV. THE ASSURING AND GRACIOUS INVITATION

The end was now come. The Lord's last words to Galilee are to be spoken. He had already lifted the veil from their hearts and faithfully set before them the fact (which they would fain disguise to themselves) that their opposition was really to the truth of God, and that it was only the shallowest color of an excuse that they did not fancy the messengers by whom that truth had been proclaimed. He had solemnly emphasized the vast responsibilities that accompanied their extraordinary privileges. By His solemn prayer of thanksgiving He had silently

lifted them above all their petty cavils and quibblings at His ministry and methods, and pointed them to the adorable sovereignty of God in giving and withholding the measures of His grace, while He had given to them abundant persuasives to turn and live.

And thus contemplating that gracious scheme of life, marking its elements of strength and beauty, realizing its divine completeness, knowing the perfection of its agencies and instrumentalities, and now especially noting the needy, perishing condition of those among whom He had lived and labored, He had compassion upon them as sheep having no shepherd. With infinite desire His heart went forth to them. With the last utterances of His public ministry among them, He summons all the divine forces of His spirit to crowd into human speech the infinite depths of His eternal longing and the sweetest pathos of His gracious invitation. It is the last appeal of the Prince of Peace to the warring, weary world. "All things have been delivered unto Me of My Father: and no one knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him. Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

My brethren, I cannot think these words need any exposition. To set them forth in their true historic place is to put them in a blaze of light, to invest them with an incomparably sweet and tender interest. This I have sought to do. The Saviour's gracious invitation is His loving and last farewell to the Galilæans. What meaning does this fact give to the words? Let us mark

I. The fullness of the assurance. "All things have been delivered unto Me of My Father!" What blasphemy in a mere man! How fitting and needful language in the mouth of your Saviour and mine! Only on one other occasion does our Lord claim this royal investiture of supreme and universal power. It was in delivering the great commission. He was then ascending to the throne. Now He is going to Jerusalem, to be lifted up upon the Cross of Calvary. Going down to death, and rising on the heights of life to die no more, both here and there He claims to be the sovereign King. Therefore He has the power to give what here He promises. Through Him alone are all the promises of God both Yea! and Amen! "Neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him."

2. The loving invitation. "Come unto ME." We must give the words a new emphasis. Not in forms or systems of worship, not in the ministration of the priest nor in the sacrifices of the altar, not in God Himself, the vaguely-styled All-Father—in none of these shall we find the goal of hope, the end of our desire. Christ only is "the Way." Christ only is the End. "Come unto ME."

3. The invited. "All ye that labor and are heavy laden." To the toiling and the burdened alike does this sweet message come. And it is a notable fact that when these farewell words were ended and Jesus sat within the house, a heavy-laden penitent, "the woman that was a sinner," came and washed His feet with tears, and broke for them the alabaster cruse of ointment. Can we doubt that she was the first of a long line of sorrowing souls to accept the gracious invitation?

4. Last of all, the promise. "I will give you rest." Blessed words, that sound a divine benediction over the toiling, sinning, sorrow-laden world! Rest from penalty, from sin, from sorrow. Rest for the soul—a balm that touches and heals the sore and wounded part. Rest in bearing the yoke of Christ, whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light!

The words were done. With this sweet assurance the Lord's farewell was ended. He ministered in Galilee no more.

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