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THE
PREACHING OF THE CROSS

AND

OTHER SERMONS

BY

THOMAS J. CRAWFORD, D.D.

LATE PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY IN THE UNIVERSITY, AND
FORMERLY ONE OF THE MINISTERS OF ST ANDREW'S
CHURCH, IN THE CITY OF EDINBURGH

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
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PREFATORY NOTE.

THE following sermons were written by the late Dr Crawford when he was one of the ministers of St Andrew's Church, Edinburgh. With the exception of the one preached before the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge, they were not revised by him for publication ; but the others also will be found to bear undoubted marks of that ability and thoroughness which characterised all he did. They are now published at the desire of members of his former congregation, and of some of his old friends and students, who believe that they will tend to impress on the hearts of many the precious truths he so earnestly commended, and will prove an acceptable memorial of one who was not more honoured for his high talents and varied attainments, than he was beloved for his many Christian virtues and for his warm attachment to the faith "once delivered to the saints." Dr Crawford held a high place among the ablest preachers of the Gospel in our National Church. This is attested by the great and long-continued

acceptance he enjoyed in Edinburgh, and especially in the large, intelligent, and influential congregation to which he ministered, as well as by the singular estimation in which he was held by his clerical brethren of all shades of opinion in Scotland. What was said of one of the Reformers may be most truly said of him: "He was the doctor of divines, or at least of the learned, the intelligent, and the serious. He did better than descend to the level of the thoughtless and frivolous. He strove, and often with success, to raise them to his own." "Clear, direct, and compact, without oratorical show, but full of moral force, his discourses descended on his hearers like a steady, fertilising shower of rain on the ground in spring." By his grasp of intellect and warmth of heart,—by his earnest commendation of the truth as it is in Jesus, combined with careful avoidance of exaggeration and unreality,—by his powers of searching analysis, patient thought, vigorous argument, and persuasive reasoning,—he could not fail to awaken the interest, sustain the attention, and engage the hearts of those who regularly attended on his ministry. And in the course of nearly forty years, from the time when as a student he first heard Dr Crawford preach, down to the last occasion on which he had the privilege of assisting him at the communion in the little chapel in Elder Street, the writer of this notice has met with no one to whom he has felt himself so drawn alike by the beauty of his character and the ability of his ministrations.

A. F. M.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
I. THE PREACHING OF THE CROSS,	I
II. GOD'S BEST GIFT THE PLEDGE OF EVERY OTHER, .	23
III. THINGS WHICH ANGELS DESIRE TO LOOK INTO, .	38
IV. THE SON OF GOD PLEADING WITH THE SONS OF MEN,	57
V. EARNEST RELIGION NOT MADNESS,	76
VI. RETRIBUTION A LAW OF GOD'S MORAL GOVERNMENT,	98
VII. CHRIST THE GIVER OF REST,	117
VIII. FAITH'S VICTORY OVER THE WORLD,	135
IX. THE UNBELIEF OF THOMAS,	156
PART I.—CHRIST REMOVES THE UNBELIEF.	
X. THE UNBELIEF OF THOMAS,	174
PART II.—CHRIST JUDGES THE UNBELIEVER.	
XI. THE UNCHANGEABLENESS OF CHRIST,	198
XII. CHRIST'S LIVING EPISTLES,	215
XIII. PAUL'S OBTAINING MERCY A PATTERN OF CHRIST'S LONG-SUFFERING,	236
XIV. MARTHA AND MARY,	255
XV. THE CONSTRAINING LOVE OF CHRIST,	277
XVI. SELF-DEDICATION AND CHRISTIAN LIBERALITY, .	299
XVII. THE SABBATH A GIFT OF GOD,	319
XVIII. FAITH, HOPE, AND CHARITY,	342
XIX. THINGS NOT SEEN AND ETERNAL,	357

THE
PREACHING OF THE CROSS.

“The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness ; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.”—1 COR. i. 18.

THE sovereignty of God is in nothing more remarkable than in His choice of means for accomplishing His purposes. Often have we cause to say of Him in this respect, that His ways are not as our ways. Both in His works of providence and of grace, results the most wonderful are frequently brought about by means apparently the most inadequate to produce them. Thus is it made to appear that God is all in all ; and even the least reflecting minds are constrained to look beyond the machinery of second causes, and to recognise the working of that Almighty Hand by which the whole is governed and directed.

Of this we have a notable example in the early propagation of the Gospel. The means employed in this instance, to accomplish the mightiest revolution which history has ever recorded, were of all others the least likely, in man’s judgment, to be productive of any such marvellous result. The foolish things of

the world were chosen to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the mighty. The efforts of a few humble peasants of Galilee—possessed of no worldly riches, armed with no temporal power, endowed with no human learning, opposed by all the interests, passions, and prejudices of those to whom they preached, and visited everywhere with mockery and persecution—were yet, in the course of a few years, instrumental in “turning the world upside down,” in baffling its might, confounding its wisdom, humbling its pride, and subduing its enmity; in overthrowing those long-established institutions and those prevailing superstitions which had been for ages cherished and revered, and raising upon their ruins a new system utterly opposed to them alike in its spirit and its tendency.

Here assuredly, if anywhere, it may be said the “arm of the Lord has been revealed.” The marvelous change produced by agents, apparently so inadequate to its accomplishment, can be accounted for in no other manner, than by ascribing it to that Almighty Being who was pleased to accompany their preaching with the clearest displays of miraculous power, and with the mightiest demonstration of the Holy Spirit.

To this remarkable instance of the Divine power attaining its ends by means the most unpromising, the Apostle Paul makes allusion in the text. He is led to do so, in order to correct the errors which in those days were prevalent among the Corinthians. He knew that an inordinate delight in the graces of rhetoric and the speculations of philosophy, to which certain of their teachers made very high pretensions, was one great cause of those lamentable divisions by

which the Church at Corinth was torn asunder. And accordingly, he sets himself to show how little stress was to be laid on these accomplishments. *This* he illustrates by referring to the choice which God made of preachers who were altogether destitute of them, but who were yet in His providence rendered effectual in destroying the wisdom of the wise, and bringing to nothing the understanding of the prudent. "Where is the wise?" he asks; "where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" The wisdom of this world was thus shown to be vain and unprofitable, when even its highest results were compared with those which *He* is able to produce, not only *without it*, but actually *in defiance* of it. It was indeed so. For "after that in the wisdom of God"—in the midst of the brightest displays of Divine wisdom by which they were on every side surrounded—"the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the *foolishness of preaching*"—for so carnal men are ready to esteem it—it pleased God by this apparently weak and despised instrument, "to save them that believe." "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

Paul himself, it is true—differing in this respect from his fellow-labourers—was a learned man, a man of strong natural talents, expanded and cultivated by the most liberal education. But, as he here reminds the Corinthians, he made no ostentatious parade of these human endowments and accomplishments, in executing the ministry intrusted to him. He came among them, "not with the excellency of speech," but

with all simplicity, "declaring to them the testimony of God." "His preaching" was "not with the enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,"—"that their faith should not stand in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God."

Good cause, indeed, had he to adopt such a course. For he knew that a plain and simple exhibition of the truth as it is in Jesus was the means which God Himself had appointed, and which He might be expected to bless for the conviction, comfort, and edification of believers. Worldly men might despise and reject it; they might count it foolishness, and treat it with derision; but still the promise of the Lord would remain sure: "My word shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." For, as he assures us in the text, "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God."

By "the preaching of the Cross" we are here to understand not the mere statement of our Lord's crucifixion as *a matter of fact*, but the declaration of it as *a most essential point of doctrine*. This *doctrine* of the Cross, as the most essential subject of St Paul's preaching, is what I now propose more particularly to consider.

In what way those persons, who regard the death of Christ as that of a mere self-sacrificing martyr in the cause of truth, are to account for the prominence assigned to it in the text, and in other passages of a like nature, it is no very easy matter to conceive. It

is indeed true, that, when suffering upon the cross, the Author of our holy religion confirmed in the most affecting manner the truth of His testimony by the shedding of His blood. But, then, the same thing might be said of Stephen, and of James, and of many other Christian martyrs, to whose sufferings no such importance has been attached. Besides, we know that the ignominious death of Christ, instead of being regarded in primitive times as a strong confirmation of the truth of His Gospel, was for a long period one of the greatest obstacles with which the Gospel had to contend. It was "unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness." And, therefore, the frequency with which it is alluded to, the prominent manner in which it is brought forward, and the triumph of exultation with which it is regarded by the early propagators of Christianity, cannot otherwise be reasonably accounted for, than on the ground which they have themselves assigned, that the death of Jesus is in reality "the power of God unto salvation," and that "we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." Apart from the saving efficacy which belongs to it, the conduct of the Apostles, in so conspicuously setting forth this great stumbling-block of the crucifixion, could be considered in no other light than a wanton and needless provocation of their adversaries.

You see from the text how paramount is the importance which St Paul attaches to the doctrine of the Cross. He speaks of it as if it constituted the very sum and substance of the Gospel. No one would ever designate a religious system by that

which is but a secondary or immaterial part of it. And therefore, when St Paul designates his Gospel, by way of eminence, as "the preaching of the Cross," he evidently points to "salvation through the death of Christ" as the grand peculiarity which distinguished it.

In this respect the text is in perfect harmony with the general strain and spirit of the Apostle's doctrine. Thus, in speaking of the subject of his ministry, he says "we preach *Christ crucified*,"—putting the crucified Christ for the whole Gospel. And, again, he says, "I delivered unto you *first of all*, that which I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." The initiatory rite of Christian baptism, he styles in the same spirit, a baptism into the "*death*" of Christ; the adversaries of the Gospel he represents as "*enemies of the Cross of Christ*;" and the persecution with which the early believers were so cruelly visited, he calls a "*persecution for the Cross of Christ*." Nay, so strongly was he impressed with the primary importance of this article of the Christian doctrine, that he expresses in one place his determination "not to know anything save Jesus Christ and Him crucified;" and exclaims in another place, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ"!

We are not, indeed, to conclude from these passages, that no other topic than the atonement ever found admission into the discourses of the Apostle. We have only to read his epistles in order to see how careful he was "rightly to divide the word of truth," how bold in "declaring the whole counsel of God," how anxious to "keep back nothing that was profit-

able." And even in preaching salvation through the Cross, he does not overlook those circumstances in the character of God, and in the condition of fallen man, that rendered such a scheme of salvation necessary—nor those exercises of faith and of repentance by which alone its benefits were to be secured—nor those high hopes and precious consolations which it served in rich abundance to administer—nor, in fine, those obligations to a holy life, which it tended with peculiar efficacy to enforce. At the same time, it is evident from the text, that this doctrine of redemption by the death of Christ was that grand peculiarity in the Apostle's preaching and doctrine by which, more than by any other, they were characterised; and that all other topics were regarded by him chiefly in their subserviency or relation to it. Begin where he might, he ended with it; digress how he might, to it he was sure to return. The Cross of Christ pervaded all his teaching. It was the very sun and centre of his whole system. And those persons, therefore, who would either explain away this fundamental article of the Christian faith, or make but a feeble and partial exhibition of it, may rest assured that *their* Gospel (if it can be so called) is quite another Gospel than the Apostle's. Whatever be the faith which *they* contend for, it certainly has no pretensions to be called "*the faith once delivered to the saints.*"

Such, then, being the grand subject of Paul's preaching, observe the opposite receptions which it meets with.

Truly was it foretold by Simeon, when he took up the infant Jesus in his arms, that this child was set

for the "fall and rising again of many in Israel." By some He is received, while by others He is rejected. The preaching of His Gospel is to some "a savour of life unto life;" but to others it is "a savour of death unto death."

To those by whom the Gospel is rejected, and who are consequently left to perish in their unbelief, the doctrine of the Cross is a highly offensive stumbling-block. They not only disbelieve it, but they despise it. They recognise in it no wisdom, no excellency, no preciousness, no display of the attributes of God, no adaptation to the wants and circumstances of man. It is in *their* estimation "*foolishness*,"—vain and useless, unreasonable and ineffective. It was so in the days of the Apostle. Many among those to whom he preached showed the strongest repugnance to his doctrine. The Jews had been expecting, as their promised Messiah, a temporal Prince, surrounded with all the insignia of worldly greatness; one who should not only restore their national independence, but lead them on to supremacy and glory. They were sadly disappointed, when called to acknowledge him in the person of the "Man of sorrows," appearing in the form of a servant—establishing no kingdom but a spiritual kingdom, aiming at no conquests but conquests over sin, leading throughout a life of poverty and humiliation, and dying at last an ignominious and accursed death. They could not discover any marks of their expected Saviour in "Jesus Christ and Him crucified." The Gentiles, on the other hand, were scarcely less opposed to the reception of "the truth as it is in Jesus." It was a doctrine altogether hostile to their

received opinions and inveterate prejudices. It held out not the smallest toleration to those superstitious notions in which they had been educated, or those vicious practices to which they had been accustomed. It called upon them unsparingly, to renounce their creed, their worship, their habits, their besetting sins. And while the doctrine of the Cross was thus obnoxious to the mass of unenlightened idolaters, it was in no degree fitted to conciliate the learned and ingenious philosophers of the heathen world. It was characterised by none of those abstruse subtleties, nice distinctions, and specious refinements, in which they were accustomed to delight. It did not fall in with their favourite speculations. And instead of lending support to those maxims which were most commonly received among them, it gave forth against them its unqualified condemnation, denouncing the wisdom of the world as foolishness in the sight of God. There was nothing in the simple preaching of the Cross to please their taste or gratify their pride of intellect. Nay, there was much to mortify and offend them. To look for salvation to one who had not saved Himself—to hope for life from one who had succumbed to death—to expect justification from one who was Himself condemned,—appeared to *them* the grossest inconsistency and extravagance.

Such was the reception which the Gospel often met with, when preached in all simplicity by the Apostle; and such, alas! is the reception which it still meets with, from many of those who hear it at the present day. The offence of the Cross has by no means been removed. There are but too many even now, to whom it is a stumbling-block.

The doctrine of "the Cross" is truly, in some respects, a *mysterious* doctrine. It has in it heights too lofty to be scanned, and depths too profound to be fathomed. And those men, accordingly, whose pride will not acknowledge the limited compass of their own faculties, or admit that there can be anything even in the dispensations of the unsearchable God but what is fully level to their comprehension, are not disposed to the reception of a doctrine which is beyond all controversy a "great mystery of godliness," and does not profess to be anything else. The doctrine of the Cross, too, is eminently a *humbling* doctrine,—humbling not only to our intellectual but to our spiritual pride. It takes its stand on the universal and thorough depravity of the natural heart of man. It proclaims the utter emptiness of human merit. It leaves no room for boasting. It wounds our pride by the humiliating discovery, that all our fancied excellences and attainments are less than nothing and vanity in the sight of God. And those men, accordingly, who would fain go about to establish a righteousness of their own, and who cannot brook the mortifying thought of being wholly indebted to the grace of God and to the merits of Christ for their acceptance, are ever ready to stumble at this rock of offence.

Nor must it be forgotten, that the doctrine of the Cross constitutes in the highest degree a "doctrine *according to godliness.*" It proclaims in the most impressive manner the exceeding sinfulness of sin. It inculcates the necessity of holiness, in terms the most uncompromising, and by motives of the most unquestionable force. It gives us, not only a cross

to trust to, but *a cross to carry*,—requiring of us the crucifying of the flesh with all its evil appetites and affections. And, hence it is not to be wondered at, that sinful men should regard a doctrine so eminently holy and mortifying in its practical tendency, with extreme aversion. On all these accounts “the preaching of the Cross” is still esteemed as “foolishness by them that perish.” And the statement in the context is no less applicable *now* than it was at the time when it was written,—that “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God : for they are foolishness unto him : neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

But, while the doctrine of “Christ crucified” is thus by many rejected and despised, there are others from whom, by Divine grace, it meets with a very opposite reception.

“Unto them which are saved, it is *the power of God.*” Its influence is felt, and its excellence appreciated by all who have any personal interest in the great salvation with which it is connected. Their once darkened minds have been enlightened, and their once proud hearts have been humbled by the grace of God. No longer is the Gospel hid from them. No longer do they despise and disregard it. Meekly do they receive it. Confidently do they rest upon it. Triumphantly do they rejoice and glory in it. And gladly can they bear their testimony regarding it, that, instead of being “foolishness,” it is of a truth “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.”

That such is indeed the case, no man who has been brought to a right apprehension of the truth can en-

ertain a doubt. The astonishing fact, that the well-beloved Son of God was crucified as an atonement for the sins of the world, presents to us views of the Divine character so affecting, with calls to repentance so awakening, motives to holy obedience so constraining, grounds of comfort and reliance so encouraging, that the more clearly and simply it is stated so much the more powerfully is it fitted, by Divine grace, to turn the soul from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God.

Nowhere else do we perceive so clearly the holy and unbending majesty of the Divine justice as *here*, where it is harmoniously blended with the freeness and fulness of the Divine mercy on the cross of Christ. Nowhere else is the authority of the law of God so highly honoured and magnified as *here*, where all its terms are fulfilled, all its penalties borne, all its curses silenced. Nowhere else have we so forcible a manifestation at once of the infinite value of the immortal soul, and of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, as *here*, where “a price all price beyond” is exacted and paid as the ransom of transgressors. Nowhere else have we so affecting a display of the tenderness and richness of the Divine love, as *here*, where we find a justly offended God addressing Himself in mercy to His sinful creatures,—conferring on them the choicest gift,—extending to them the freest grace,—confirming to them the most precious promises,—quieting all the alarms of conscious guilt with proffers of love and assurances of pardon,—disarming the long-alienated mind of all its gloomy suspicions and forebodings,—drawing us unto Himself in sweet attraction, and constraining us to live no longer unto ourselves, but

unto Him who died for us and rose again. Yes! there is in the doctrine of the Cross, when aided by the demonstration of the Spirit, a quickening, comforting, and sanctifying influence, such as all the natural enmity and corruption of the human heart are unable to withstand. And those persons know nothing of it as they ought to know, who have not found it to be, in their own experience, "mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds; casting down every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

In proof of this prevailing efficacy of the Gospel, I might appeal to the marvellous success with which its early propagation was attended. For you know that the preaching of "Christ crucified" was the simple yet most efficient instrument, with which the fishermen of Galilee were furnished for the conversion and regeneration of the world. It was this that shook the fabrics of idolatry,—silencing the lying oracles of superstition, baffling all the sophistries of false philosophy, and all the might of principalities and powers,—that forced on its way in every region of the earth, in spite of all the bitter enmity and persecution with which it was resisted,—and that gained everywhere a multitude of devoted converts, who were led to glory in nothing save the Cross of Christ.

I might also appeal, in confirmation of the same truth, to the history of the Christian Church in all subsequent ages. For wherever Christianity has flourished, it has been by "the preaching of the Cross." *This* is the means which God has always owned and blessed for the accomplishment of His

gracious purposes. In proportion as this essential truth has been fully, simply, and faithfully proclaimed, have the interests of pure religion been promoted ; and in proportion as it has been kept back, or unduly qualified and diluted, the cause of vital godliness has been found to languish.

Or, yet again, I might point to the achievements of missionary exertion at the present day, as farther proofs of the efficacy of this precious doctrine. For "the preaching of the Cross" is still found to be of all instruments the most powerful in making glad the moral wilderness, enlightening the "dark places of the earth which are full of the habitations of cruelty," and leading the abject votaries of heathenism to cast away the gods of their forefathers, and to renounce lying vanities which cannot profit, for Him who alone maketh wise unto salvation.

Happily, however, we are not obliged to have recourse to ancient times or distant regions, for proof of the mighty efficacy of the Gospel. Every believer *has* in himself, and *is* in himself a living witness of it. Every true Christian feels in his own heart, and proves from day to day by his own conduct, that the doctrine of the Cross is verily "the power of God." Yes! the influence which this precious truth exerts on the mind of him who is persuaded of it, is such as no other principle can produce. In vain are all the lessons of morality, weak are all the terrors of the law, as compared with the mighty energy of the Cross of Christ. It is "the power of God" to *convince us*,—displaying our guilt in colours the most affecting, and denouncing sin as that abominable and accursed thing which God's own Son must suffer to atone for. It is

“the power of God” to *convert us*, melting the hard heart into penitence, subduing the enmity of the carnal mind against God, and prompting the disaffected spirit to cease from its warfare and return to its allegiance. It is “the power of God” to *tranquillise us*, quieting all the fears of conscious guilt, taking away the oppressive burden of our iniquities, and filling the soul with all joy and peace in believing. It is “the power of God” to *comfort and encourage us* amidst all the trials and troubles of this mortal state, assuring us of a reconciled Father who chastens us, not in anger, but in mercy—of a compassionate High Priest ever pleading for us, and ever touched with the feeling of our infirmities—and of a heavenly inheritance obtained for us, with which all our present toils and tribulations are not worthy to be compared. It is also “the power of God” to *sanctify us*, by setting before us a manifestation of Divine love, which no amount of service we can ever render in the shape of holy obedience can requite; and at the same time securing in our behalf those prevailing influences of the Holy Spirit, by which alone the dominion of sin can be subdued, and the reign of holiness established and promoted. Thus does the believer furnish in his own experience a loving testimony to the statement in the text. The life, which he now lives in the body, is a life of faith in the Son of God, who loved him and gave Himself for him. And every step of advancement in his Christian course is just an additional evidence afforded by him, that the “*preaching of the Cross is to them that are saved the power of God.*”

There are, indeed, some persons to be met with at

the present day who speak as if this doctrine of the Cross had lost the power originally possessed by it, and who greatly desiderate some improved form or *fresh development* (as they are pleased to call it) of Christianity, to suit the present advanced stage of human knowledge. The Gospel, they tell us, as hitherto proclaimed among us, has served its day—but that day is gone by. It is now effete, obsolete, and ineffective. Some fresher and more vigorous manifestation of it is indispensable. The same old-fashioned doctrines, set forth in the same old-fashioned way, which might suit well enough the first Christians 1800 years ago, or even the Reformed Churches 300 years ago, when just emerging from the darkness of Popery, cannot be held sufficient to meet the new exigencies and tendencies of the present more enlightened and inquiring age. And why (they ask with an air of triumph)—why should not Christianity be allowed to partake, as well as other branches of knowledge, in the general advancement? Shall the march of intellect here alone be checked? Shall science and art go on from year to year, extending their boundaries, correcting their systems, maturing their discoveries, and improving their applications, while religion alone is obliged to stand still, admitting of no fresh adaptations or amendments?

Now, brethren, in meeting all such views (as we needs must) with a firm and uncompromising opposition, we are not concerned to deny that much has been already done, and that much still remains to be done, by a careful study of the original languages of Holy Scripture,—by a wise application of the principles of criticism,—by a diligent use of the discoveries and re-

searches of historians, geographers, and travellers, in so far as they bear on matters recorded in the sacred volume;—that by these and like means, much has already been done and much still remains to be accomplished, in the way of expounding and illustrating the Scriptures, removing their difficulties, explaining their allusions, reconciling their apparent incongruities, and bringing out their full meaning. But we utterly deny that by such means, or by any means, the main facts of Christianity can be modified, or its principles changed, or its morality amended. Those who think so, overlook the wide distinction between *human discoveries* and *Divine revelations*. The great truths of Christianity are not matters of human discovery, in the same sense as the truths of astronomy or of chemistry, so as, like these, to be susceptible from age to age of ever-increasing corrections and enlargements. *They are truths directly revealed to us from heaven*; and as originally given to those inspired men, whom God was pleased to employ for their promulgation, they were given *at once*, in all their fulness and maturity, so as to be thenceforward incapable of being in any way supplemented or improved. It is perfectly true that there *was* a gradual development of revealed truth, *previous to the days of Christ and His Apostles*, when God, at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake under the Old Testament dispensation by the prophets. This development, however, was made *by God Himself*, revealing more or less of His Divine will to one prophet after another, as age succeeded age, and not by any rationalising on the part of *man*, whereby the truths of God were modified or expanded. And, whereas the previous dis-

pensations of religion, which were given to the world before the days of Christ, foretold their own removal and displacement, and the coming of the Christian dispensation to supersede them; the Gospel is so far from uttering any like prediction, that it claims to continue while sun and moon endure—declares that all generations of men shall be blessed by it—exhorts believers to “contend earnestly for the faith *once* delivered to the saints”—and denounces a curse upon those who shall presume in any way to alter, abridge, or supplement it.

It is idle, then, to talk of any such thing as a *re-modelling* of the Gospel, or a fresh development of its essential truths, to suit the alleged exigencies of any particular period, or of any peculiar condition of human society. The Gospel is not a matter of *human discovery or invention*, which one set of men have found out by their own inquiries, and which another set of men may, by further inquiries, improve upon, so as to leave its original discoverers far behind them. No! It is a matter of *divine revelation*, which God has been pleased to disclose for the enlightenment of mankind in every successive generation—which its Divine Author, at His ascension into heaven, commanded to be preached in all the world, and to every creature, with the assurance that He would be ever present with the preachers of it, *even to the end of the world*, and which, therefore, as being perfect and entire when at first communicated, requires not, and admits not of, any after improvements. We must take the Gospel, therefore, and be content with it, just as we find it set forth in the New Testament. We cannot expect to get clearer or fuller notions of it

than those inspired men had through whom it was at first communicated. In other branches of knowledge we may turn away from the writings of the first discoverers, and prefer to study the more recent works of those whose investigations are more thorough and complete. But in regard to the knowledge of the Gospel we must reverse this process altogether; we must *go back* to those through whom it was at first revealed, and must test the expositions of all who have subsequently treated of it, by their agreement with the doctrine of *these* its inspired promulgators. The nearer we can get to *their* mind, or rather to the mind of the Holy Spirit as expressed by them, so much the better. And instead of aiming at new developments of the sacred doctrine, we must steadfastly adhere to and "earnestly contend for the faith *once* delivered to the saints."

Nor let it be thought that there is any real *call* for those modifications of Christianity, which are desiderated to meet the alleged exigencies of the age in which we live. The march of intellect has not yet carried us beyond those common ills and common wants of old humanity, for which the Gospel, as hitherto received among us, has ever been found to be the only effectual remedy. Notwithstanding all the advanced knowledge, and high culture, and stirring enterprise, for which the present age is so remarkably distinguished, the men who now live are still the same guilty, corrupt, weak, mortal, and accountable creatures which the fallen children of Adam have ever been. Nor has the Gospel, as at first preached by the Apostles, lost any whit of its suitableness to man's condition. On its first promulgation, it was found to

be adapted to men of every variety of character and attainment—to the learned rabbis of Jerusalem, to the subtle disputants of Athens, to the luxurious inhabitants of Corinth, and to the savage natives of Malta. It was so *then*, and it is so *still*. The lapse of time has not in the least impaired the strength or the grace, which originally belonged to it. It is still, as much as ever, “the glorious Gospel of the blessed God.” And God forbid that we should ever be ashamed of it. It is mighty *still* for the pulling down of strongholds; it is *still* the power of God and the wisdom of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth.

Tell us not, then, of any *new* Gospel as necessary to suit our present tendencies and requirements. We want no other and no better Gospel, than that *old* Gospel of “Christ and Him crucified,” which has been believed in and gloried in, from its first establishment. The Gospel which saved Paul, and Peter, and John; the Gospel which saved Jerome, Augustine, and Chrysostom; the Gospel which saved Luther, and Calvin, and Knox, and Howe, and Owen, and Baxter, and Bunyan, and other giant theologians of former times—in comparison with whom it is no disparagement to say that many of those who nowadays prate of *their* having outgrown its fitness for them, are the merest pigmies,—is a good enough Gospel (depend upon it) for *you* and for *me*. Those who would seek *another* mistake their *real* want, which is, not so much a new development of heavenly truth, as a *new heart* to receive the old truth in the love of it, so as to find, in their own blessed experience, as all who have fairly made the trial have ever found, that the Cross of Christ, though esteemed foolishness by them

that perish, is to them that are saved the power of God.

Allow me, in conclusion, with all sobriety, to remind you, that if "the preaching of the Cross be foolishness," it is so "*to them that perish*," and that "if our Gospel be hid," it is "hid to them that are lost." Yes! it is even so; and if there be truth in God's unerring word, it cannot indeed be otherwise. For the Cross of Christ is the only provision which God hath made for the redemption of a lost world. And hence, if this only provision be despised, there is no alternative but that we continue in the same state of guilt, and misery, and condemnation, in which all sinners would justly have been left to perish had no such method of salvation been revealed at all.

Wherefore, let me earnestly beseech you that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. For how shall you escape, if you neglect so great salvation?

But, I trust that there are many now hearing me, who can bear witness, from their own experience, to the blessed influence of that Gospel which we preach—many whose once darkened minds it has enlightened, whose once troubled spirits it has comforted, whose once corrupt dispositions it has sanctified, whose once stubborn hearts it has brought into subjection—many who esteem it as all their joy and all their glory, and who are in themselves living monuments of its saving power.

Let me beseech all such, to cling with full purpose of heart to that Gospel whose powerful and salutary influence they have thus experienced. Prize it yet more highly. Hold by it yet more steadfastly. Glory

in it yet more triumphantly. Continue still, yea more than ever, to count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus your Lord. And let it be your care, at the same time, to adorn in all things the doctrine of your God and Saviour. Remember that the honour of our most holy religion, in the estimation of the world, is to a very great degree bound up with the character and conduct of those who profess it. Strive so to live and so to act, that nothing more may be necessary than just to point to *your* Christian conversation, in order to stop the mouth of any gainsayer who would controvert the doctrine of the text, and to prove that the Cross of Christ, so meanly thought of by them that perish, is in reality to us who are saved "the power of God and the wisdom of God."

II.

GOD'S BEST GIFT THE PLEDGE OF EVERY OTHER.

“He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”—ROMANS, viii. 32.

WE have here an argument for confidence in God that is fitted, if anything can be, to inspire us with the liveliest hopes and the largest expectations. The form of a question, in which the Apostle puts it, shows us how clear and how convincing he felt it to be. He does not think it necessary to make any positive affirmation on the subject. He puts a question, without giving any reply; as if well assured that there was but one answer which could by possibility be returned to it,—and indeed there *is* but one. The matter is too plain for ignorance to mistake or prejudice to pervert it. “He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” “How shall He not?” It is inconceivable that He should not. The boon so inestimably precious, which He has already conferred, is a sure pledge of every other blessing which our necessities may require, or which His inexhaustible goodness can bestow.

I. The force of this argument lies in *the amazing sacrifice* which God is here, as elsewhere, represented as having made for our redemption.

It was "His own Son" that He gave for us,—"*His own*" in a sense that is altogether peculiar; not a Son of God like others, who are so styled as bearing some general features of resemblance to Him,—as created by His power and sustained by His providence, or as regenerated and adopted by His grace,—but "His own Son" by identity of nature and intimacy of union with Himself; "the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person;" His "eternal Son," "the Word," who in the beginning was with God and was God; His "beloved Son," in whom He is well pleased.

Even to the most exalted of the heavenly hosts this title cannot be given in the sense in which the Saviour bears it. *He* has "by inheritance a more excellent name than they." "For to which of the angels hath God said at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?" But *this* He said to Christ; and of *Him* it is emphatically written, that He is "the ONLY-begotten Son of God," so as to betoken that *His* Sonship is altogether *exclusive and unique*, involving a relationship to the Father which cannot be ascribed to any other than Himself alone.

It is not for *us*, indeed, to fathom the deep things of God, so as to explain the precise nature of this relationship. But this much we *may* say, without by any means pretending to be "wise above that which is written,"—that it implies the closest union and affection on the part of those Divine persons between whom it is said to subsist; and that God the Father,

in not withholding from us "*His own*" "*beloved*" and "*only-begotten Son*," may justly be held as bestowing on us His choicest gift, and as displaying towards us a "love that passeth knowledge."

The strength of parental affection is proverbial. How unwilling was Jacob to send Benjamin down to Egypt, although the preservation of his whole family seemed to depend upon it! Yet Benjamin was not his only son; he had many others to comfort him in his declining years, even if this beloved one should be taken from him. How tenderly did David concern himself for Absalom, his unnatural and rebellious son, when he said to Joab, "Deal gently with the young man for my sake"! And when he heard of his well-deserved death, how bitterly did he mourn and lament for him! Yet Absalom was but one of many children, and of them all the least worthy of his father's love. Abraham, it is true, in obedience to the Divine command, was ready to offer up Isaac upon the altar. But God stayed his hand before the offering was consummated, as if such a sacrifice were too great to be exacted from him; and, graciously taking the will for the deed, said to him, "Now I know that thou lovest me, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me." Yet this great sacrifice, for which He commended Abraham, as the highest possible testimony of his love, while yet He suffered not the patriarch to render it, God has Himself made for the sinful race of men, when He "so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

It is here said of God, that "He *spared not* His

own Son,"—that is to say, He did not *withhold* Him from us when our necessities required that He should be given up. He did not refuse or hesitate, in His unsearchable counsels, to set apart for us even this precious victim. Nor, when the time of His sacrifice had arrived, did He substitute, as was done in the case of Abraham, any other less costly offering in His room. He sought not to retain Him, but willingly surrendered Him.

No doubt the expression may bear a further meaning. It may also signify that God did not exempt Him, although He *was* His own Son, from the endurance of aught that was needful to expiate our sins and to secure our everlasting welfare. Not one tear of sorrow, not one groan of anguish, not one circumstance of labour or of trial, of ignominy or of suffering, was abated. The full amount for which He had become answerable was exacted from Him. And though in His mysterious agony He prayed, with strong crying and tears, that if it were possible, this cup might pass from Him, He was left to drink it even to the dregs.

This farther meaning, however, is more properly conveyed by another expression, which the Apostle here uses. For, while we are told that God "spared not His own Son," it is added that "*He delivered Him up* for us all." The text does not specify *to whom*, or *to what*. No such specification indeed was necessary. We have but to glance at the record of the Saviour's history, while He dwelt on earth as "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief," in order to see into how many hands, and to how great an amount and variety of sufferings, His heavenly Father was pleased

to deliver Him. His very assumption of our nature was a subjection of Him to the deepest personal humiliation and abasement, when "being in the form of God, and thinking it not robbery to be equal with God, He made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men." And what was His after-life but a continued "delivering" of Him to toils and trials, to poverty and reproach, to mockery and insult, to sufferings and distresses, to the enmity of wicked men, the temptations of evil spirits, and (more grievous than all) the hidings of His Father's face—and, finally, to the endurance of death itself, in its most painful and ignominious form, upon the cross? Justly might He have appropriated to Himself the plaintive lamentation of the prophet: "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see, if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of His fierce anger." For it pleased the Father "to bruise Him and to put Him to grief." Whatever of shame or of anguish He underwent, was no more and no other than *that* to the bearing of which, He was "by the determinate counsel of God delivered up." And hence, if there was an infinitude of love on the part of our adorable Redeemer in cheerfully submitting to such sufferings for our sakes, there was no less certainly a love beyond conception, on the part of God, the Father Almighty, in having, for our sakes, consigned to the endurance of them, a Person so dear to Him as His own beloved Son.

My dear friends, we must not so think of the love of Christ in our redemption, as to overlook or under-

rate the love of God, the Father who gave Him for us. There are some, who seem to regard the eternal Father as a stern, severe, inexorable Being, who is only moved to pity and befriend us, by the mediation of His Son in our behalf. *This* is exactly *the reverse* of the view which Scripture gives us of Him. For, we are there taught that the mediation of the Son, instead of being that which induces God to love us, is the most significant proof and the fullest commendation of God's free love to us, which could have been afforded. God did not require the obedience and death of Christ in order to make Him merciful towards us, but in order to reconcile the exercise of His mercy with the claims of His justice and the authority of His law. It is not because Christ died, that God loves us. It is, on the contrary, because God loves us, with a tenderness and warmth which no language can express, that He gave His own beloved Son to be the propitiation for our sins. And we must ever regard it, not as the origin, but as the issue and evidence of His exceeding love, that so unspeakable a gift was not spared, and that so inestimable a sacrifice was rendered for us.

II. The manifestation thus given of the love of God is all the more remarkable when we consider *in whose behalf it was displayed*. It was "*for us*" that God was thus pleased to manifest the riches of His grace,—"*for us*" who could not in any way be profitable to Him,—who did not deserve any favour at His hand, who had justly provoked Him, and were obstinately estranged from Him;—even "*for us*," sinful creatures of the human race, was the only-begotten

of the Father “delivered up” to suffer in our stead, the just for the unjust. Nor was it for a *few* such sinners, but for *many*,—for sinners of every age and generation, of every race and clime, of every character and condition,—for *all* sinners, without distinction and without exception, who feel their need of the Saviour thus provided, and are heartily willing to receive His offered grace. It is true, the word “*all*,” as here used by the Apostle, must be limited to those of whom alone he was speaking—that is to say, to all *real Christians*, according to the description given of them in the context. But, then, there is nothing to exclude any sinner *from becoming such*. He may, if he will. His own reluctance is the only obstacle. The calls of the Gospel are altogether unrestricted. They are freely addressed to all; and all, without exception, are not only permitted, but entreated to comply with them. No man living is entitled to conclude, that he is not one of those for whom the Saviour was delivered. That Saviour is freely held out to his acceptance. And it must be his own fault if he will not receive the gift, and equally his own fault if, having once received it, he fail to draw from it all the comfort and encouragement, which a gift so precious is fitted to administer, according to the clear and conclusive argument of the text: “He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, *how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?*”

I have already remarked that the form of a question, in which this inference is put by the Apostle, shows us how clear and how convincing, he felt it to be. It is as if he could not imagine the possibility of

any one coming to a different conclusion, than that which he had himself arrived at. Nay, it seems as if he were bidding defiance even to the most desponding and distrustful Christian, and challenging him, if he can, to harbour or express a doubt regarding the willingness of God the Father, who hath given us His own Son, to give us all things with Him! "How shall He not?" What is there to prevent Him? Nay, rather, what is there wanting to prevail with Him? What is there in God, or what is there in man, that can be supposed to stop the current of His bounty towards those, from whom He has not withheld His own Son? On the part of *God*, there can be no lack of munificence; for, He has shown in bestowing *this*, His choicest gift, an exceeding richness of liberality, to the exercise of which no limit can be assigned. All else, that may yet remain to be conferred, must be incomparably less precious than the boon He has already given. And with whatever loving-kindnesses He may yet crown us, we cannot possibly think of them as involving any such extent of bounty, or amount of sacrifice, as has been already displayed in the gift of His beloved Son. *Thus* we may well consider as the very utmost, which even *Divine* love could have done in our behalf. And having done this, we know of no principle, on which God can possibly be conceived to act, that should prompt Him *now* to withhold from us any other, and necessarily minor benefaction, that may, in His judgment, seem needful or expedient for us.

Now, if it be thus clear, that there is nothing on the part of God, it seems equally clear that there can be

nothing on the part of *man*, whereby the outgoings of the Divine bounty can be restrained, in behalf of those for whom the Saviour has been delivered. For let it be supposed, that we are ever so unworthy of the favour, and ever so justly exposed to the wrath of God, all obstacles on any such ground are effectually removed by the “unspeakable gift” that has already been conferred upon us. For judge ye, brethren, were we not *more unworthy*, beyond all proportion, of this inestimable blessing, than we possibly can be of any subsequent benefit? And if, notwithstanding our poor and ill deserts, this *greatest* boon has not been withheld, we have no cause to think that our unworthiness will debar us from any other communication of the Father’s goodness, which must necessarily be inconsiderable as compared with it. But why speak of unworthiness or sinfulness at all, in the case of those for whom the Saviour has been delivered up, and by whom He is cordially and faithfully relied on? *Their* sins and demerits, as you well know, are fully expiated. Washed in the blood of Christ, and clothed with His righteousness, they are, thenceforward, made accepted in the Beloved. The gift of the Saviour has altogether changed their relative position towards God. It has *reconciled* them to Him, making them His *friends* (whereas they were formerly His *enemies*), and has, thereby, put them in a much more favourable situation for obtaining any benefaction at His hands. For the Apostle’s argument, in a previous chapter, is irresistible, “If when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.” Nay more,

we know that the very purpose, for which the Son of God has been given for us, was, that by His obedience and sufferings He might remove those obstructions, that would else have hindered the extension of the Divine mercy to fallen and sinful creatures, such as *we* are. And *now* that He *has* been “delivered up for us all,” there is nothing in the number or heinousness of our sins, nothing in the offended majesty of Divine justice, nothing in the violated sanctions of the Divine law, that can stand in the way of our being enriched with the largest and fullest amount of heavenly blessings which the love of our reconciled Father can bestow. *The great difficulty* that seemed to make it hopeless for sinful creatures to receive “all things,” or, indeed, to receive *anything*, at the hands of God, was *the providing of an adequate atonement for them. This difficulty once removed*—as it has been most effectually by the all-sufficient sacrifice of the Son of God—all else that remains to be done is easy in comparison with it. The yielding up of God’s own Son as a ransom for us,—*that* is the *marvel* and *climax* of Divine mercy, beyond which there is no greater that can be thought of. Once persuaded of *this*, that Jesus Christ the Son of God has been given *to* us, and given *for* us, to expiate our sins, and thus make it consistent with the holiness and justice of God to show favour to us,—*then* there is nothing too great to be expected by us, which infinite riches and goodness can supply. If *this* “unspeakable gift” has not been denied, it is little in comparison that “all things” should be added to it. Nay, rather, I may say, there is *no addition* in the case. For the one gift *includes*

the other. In Christ we *have* all things. We are complete in Him. All fulness dwells in Him; and when we receive Him, we receive His fulness along with Him. It is true, "all things" are not at once given us with Christ, as regards the *actual possession* of them. But as regards our *right* to them, or our interest in them, "all things" are made over to us the moment that we receive the Son. Accordingly, we find it elsewhere written for the comfort and encouragement of believers: "All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's."

III. This remark leads me to notice the *connection*, that is so very plainly indicated in the text, *between the great gift of God's own Son, and all other gifts which the Father's goodness will bestow on us.* All things, as we are here taught, shall be given us "*with Christ.*" No doubt we are also told that they shall be given "*freely,*"—that is to say, gratuitously and bountifully,—without any parsimonious grudgings or narrow restrictions,—without any hard stipulations to be fulfilled, or costly price to be paid for the attainment of them. But still they are only to be given us "*with Christ.*" *He* must be received, if we hope to be partakers of them. Apart from *Him*, God does not confer any blessings. But *with Him*, He is ready to make all grace abound towards us, and to do for us "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think."

Wherefore, my dear friends, let me earnestly admonish as many of you as have cordially received the "unspeakable gift" of a Saviour who has been freely offered to all, to draw from the consideration of it those lessons of trust in the Divine goodness, of submission to the Divine will, and of unfeigned devotedness to the Divine glory, which it is so evidently fitted to impress upon you.

Learn from it, I beseech you, *to put your trust in God*, as willing to bestow upon you all things that are good. God has done much, in many ways, to win your confidence. But far above all He has ever done for this purpose, is that unequalled commendation of His love, which He made in the gift of His own beloved Son. *After this*, it would surely be offering Him the highest indignity, and doing Him the grossest injustice, to doubt His willingness to bless you to the uttermost. Lay aside, then, all gloomy suspicions of Him, all slavish fears, all disquieting doubts. Put *no limit* to your confidence and trust in Him. Honour Him by expecting *great* things at His hands. Of *this* be assured, that He loves you and cares for you, as never yet did the fondest earthly father love and care for the most cherished of his children. Do you ask a proof of this? You find it in the text: "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"

Learn also from this subject *to be meekly and cheerfully submissive* to God's dealings with you, whatever they may be. He has pledged Himself, over and over again, in His Word of truth, to supply all your

need according to His glorious riches,—to keep back from you no good thing,—and to make all things work together for your good. And in the gift of His own beloved Son, He has given you a pledge of what you may expect from Him, such as ought at once to silence your every doubt of the love He bears to you and the unfailing faithfulness with which He will verify every promise He has made to you. It may very possibly be, that *your* judgment and *His* of what is truly needful and expedient for you, may not always coincide. But, surely, it is far better that the circumstances of your lot should be ordered by unerring wisdom, and guided by never-failing love, than by your own short-sighted views and wishes. Whatever may be the blessing you desiderate, you may rest assured that it cannot be withheld, either from a want of power or from a want of love. If God saw it to be really proper or expedient for you, He *could*, and *would* lay the world with all its riches at your feet. And if He does not, it must be because He well knows that instead of being profitable, it would be useless or injurious to you. The same may be said of your trials and distresses. It is only “*if need be*,” that believers are ever found to be in heaviness through manifold afflictions. He chastens them, not for His pleasure, but for their profit, making their sorrows, however grievous while they endure, to yield to them afterwards the peaceable fruit of righteousness. Let it suffice you to know, my dear brethren, that the various events and circumstances of your present condition are numbered among the “*all things*,” which He who spared not His own beloved Son has taught you to expect

from Him. The *actual* events and circumstances of your lot, whatever they may be, and however they may affect you,—your wants no less than your possessions, your losses no less than your gains, your sorrows no less than your comforts, your pains, and disappointments, and bereavements, equally with your joys, and successes, and pleasures,—go to make up the fulness of that provision which God, in His fatherly goodness hath prepared for you. And it is *your* part, in the exercise of a confiding faith, to trace in them all the loving-kindness of your God and Saviour, acknowledging in all of them the wisdom of His dealings with you, enjoying in all of them the tokens of His peculiar favour, and deriving from all of them those blessed and holy fruits, which all He gives, and all He requires, and all He takes away, are alike designed to bring forth.

Finally, my dear friends, learn also from this subject to make *proper returns of gratitude and devotedness* to that gracious God, who hath dealt so bountifully with you. If God did not withhold from *you* His own beloved Son, and is now ready with Him freely to give you all things, surely there is nothing which you *can* or *will* withhold from *Him*. It must be the study of your whole lives, to honour and serve Him. You will cheerfully give Him your bodies and your souls, your strength, your time, your talents, and your substance, to be appropriated to His use and consecrated to His glory. What shall you render to the Lord for all His benefits? What *indeed!* How poor your warmest acknowledgments, how faint your highest praises, how mean and insignificant your best

services, when compared with the love of *Him* to whom they are rendered!

Be it your prayer to the God of all grace, that He would Himself dispose and enable you to give yourselves wholly to Him, “a living, holy, and acceptable sacrifice,” in return for His best, His “unspeakable gift” to you. Let it be the unfeigned language of your hearts—Lord, we are Thine, and all that we have is Thine; take us, and make us what Thou wouldst have us be. We owe Thee *our all*, and we devote *our all* to Thee; accept of our poor and unworthy offering, and let us be Thine only, Thine wholly, Thine now and Thine for ever!

III.

THINGS WHICH ANGELS DESIRE TO LOOK INTO.

“Which things the angels desire to look into.”—I PETER, i. 12.

THE “things” here spoken of, as furnishing matter of earnest inquiry and contemplation to the Angels, are no other than the mysteries of Redemption. In the previous verses the Apostle had been referring to the things, which the Spirit had testified by the prophets concerning the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow, and which the first preachers of the Gospel were then proclaiming “with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.” And then he adds, with reference to these things, that the “angels desire to look into” them.

Perhaps, in this statement, there may be an allusion to the attitude of the two cherubim that were placed in the innermost recess of the Jewish tabernacle, overshadowing the ark of the covenant with their wings, and bending down their faces towards this Divine symbol, as if it contained something to excite their deepest interest, and to call forth their most eager and reverent investigation. This posture of the cherubim may be fitly enough considered as an emblem of that fixed attention and searching scrutiny, which

the wonders of redeeming grace call forth from the hosts of heaven. And that there may be an allusion to it in the text, is all the more probable when we consider that the word here translated "*to look into,*" literally means *to stoop down with the view of looking into,* or to assume that very attitude of earnest and devout inquiry, in which the mystic figures above the ark were represented.

Be this as it may, we are taught in this passage, by no mere type of shadowy or uncertain import, but by a plain and unambiguous statement such as it is quite impossible to misconceive, that the highest orders of intelligent creatures in the universe find in the scheme of man's salvation an appropriate subject, on which their most earnest regards may be intently fixed, and to which their keenest researches may be directed. It occupies their thoughts. It captivates their affections. It moves their wonder. It calls forth their adoration. *They stoop down to look into it,* bending their high powers to the accurate survey and thorough comprehension of it. Nay, rather, they *desire* thus to view it, longing to see more and more of its surpassing wonders, and drawing from the exercise an ever-increasing delight, which makes them more and more eager in pursuing it.

That there is much in the method of our redemption which is calculated thus to rivet the attention, excite the admiration, employ the researches, and enlarge the knowledge of these exalted spirits, a very general survey of some of its chief features will, of itself, be sufficient to convince you.

I. The very circumstance, *that any such scheme*

for the recovery of the fallen race of Adam should have been formed,—apart altogether from the means used for its accomplishment,—was in itself fitted to attract the special notice and to call forth the keenest scrutiny of the heavenly hosts.

They had seen their own apostate brethren cast down without hope of mercy to perdition, and had not only acquiesced in the judgment thus inflicted, but had viewed it as a glorious manifestation of the holiness and justice of the Godhead. But, now, when *man*, a creature of an inferior order, though still formed in respect of intellectual and moral faculties after the Divine image, has fallen in like manner from the rectitude of his primal state, and incurred the just penalties of wilful transgression,—instead of seeing him visited with instant destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, they find the great God, against whom he has rebelled, in His own boundless love interposing for his deliverance! How should this be? Why should fallen man be dealt with, in so different a manner from the fallen angels? How should it be made consistent with those Divine attributes, which had called for the unsparing condemnation of the one, to hold out the hope of redemption to the other? In the case of our apostate race, on what principle was it—not hitherto called into action in behalf of those originally more exalted creatures, their forerunners and seducers in the path of wickedness—that mercy and truth should meet together, righteousness and peace embrace each other, and that without prejudice to the excellence of the Divine character, the authority of the Divine law, and the stability of the Divine gov-

ernment, forgiveness and favour should be extended to the rebellious? These are questions, which may reasonably be supposed to have excited no small measure of wondering and inquiring interest in the courts of heaven.

Nor can we doubt, that a scheme of mercy like that of the Gospel, fraught with the richest spiritual and heavenly blessings to unnumbered myriads of human beings, is calculated to afford the highest delight to spirits so purely benevolent as the holy Angels. Dwelling as they do in the immediate presence of the God of love, and reflecting in their own loving natures that unmixed goodness which they behold in Him, we cannot doubt that their sympathies are awakened in behalf of that dispensation of redeeming grace, which is destined to reconcile and gather into one the things that are in earth and the things that are in heaven, to change the moral aspect of this lower world, to reinstate those sinners who inhabit it, if only they will avail themselves of the offered mercy, in the full possession of all the blessings they have forfeited—nay, farther, as the Scriptures in some places seem to intimate, to bring them at last to the enjoyment of a blessedness far exceeding aught which even in their original state of unfallen innocence they could have looked for. We are told that “there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.” What, then, must be the emotions of delight with which they survey that wonderful provision which Divine love hath made for the rescue of countless multitudes from destruction, and for raising them to that heavenly glory and felicity, the excellence of

which the Angels are enabled, from their own blessed experience, so fully to appreciate ?

Redemption, however, as surveyed by those exalted creatures, is not merely to be considered as a scheme of grace designed for the spiritual good of those who will embrace it, but also as a mighty enterprise, undertaken for the overthrow and discomfiture of the powers of darkness in their vain attempt to frustrate the designs and to usurp the sovereign ascendancy of the living God. This globe of earth, insignificant as it may be when compared with that multiplicity of other worlds with which the fields of immensity are crowded, is the theatre of an arduous and momentous warfare between the good and the evil principalities of the spiritual world. It is *here*, that Satan and his hosts have been mysteriously permitted to exercise their malignant influence, in seducing other ranks of intelligent and moral creatures from the faith and homage, that are due to God alone. And it is *here*, that God has interposed to vindicate the glory of His name, to reassert the sanctity of His claims, and to re-establish the authority of His dominion, among those deluded sinners who have been tempted to rebel against Him, and to save them from the grasp of those inveterate adversaries, who, having prevailed to withdraw them from their allegiance, are eagerly bent on securing their continuance in a state of obstinate ungodliness and unbelief. No wonder, then, that a contest such as this, should be regarded with the most intense interest by all pure and loyal intelligences throughout the universe. No wonder that the Angels who kept "their first estate" should have their attention fixedly entranced, and their emo-

tions powerfully excited, by the spectacle presented in the Gospel of a mighty plan devised by infinite wisdom and executed by all-prevailing might, for not only reclaiming the sinful race of men to the worship, love, and service of the King of kings, but at the same time for gaining a complete victory over those spiritual enemies who have enslaved them, for spoiling principalities and powers, and for destroying the works of the Devil.

On all these accounts, I repeat, the very circumstance of such a scheme as that of the Gospel being formed, with a view to the attainment of such objects, was in itself fitted to attract the special notice and to call forth the most earnest scrutiny of the heavenly hosts.

II. But farther, if the mere formation of such a scheme was calculated thus to interest and excite them, much more may we suppose them to be animated with adoring wonder, and prompted to deep and searching investigation, by *the means employed in order to its accomplishment*. For, as the Apostle Paul has forcibly said, “without controversy great is the mystery of godliness : God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, *seen of angels*, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.”

It never could have entered into the minds of the most exalted Seraphs who surround the heavenly throne, that God should employ an agency so mighty, and offer a ransom so costly for man’s redemption. And when they found Him *so* loving the world as not to spare even His own beloved Son ; when they heard

the everlasting Word, the brightness of the Father's glory, declaring, "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God;" when they saw this glorious One, whom it had been their delight to worship, making Himself a little lower than themselves, taking upon Him the fashion of a man, assuming the lowly form of a servant, rejected of men, assailed by devils, complaining that the light of His Father's face was hidden from Him, and given up to death itself with every circumstance of ignominy and torture on the cross; and when, having thus surveyed the sufferings of Christ, they looked beyond them to the glory that should follow—His triumphant resurrection and ascension, His exalted throne, His prevailing intercession, His outpoured Spirit, His wide-spreading kingdom, His name above every name, His headship over all things to his Church, His ultimate treading of all His enemies beneath His feet, and glorifying of His purchased people on the day of judgment,—there was in all this a spectacle displayed to them more wondrous than heaven itself, with all its marvels, had ever yielded! May we not say that the riches of this grace, the priceless worth and efficacy of this ransom, the all-prevailing power of this agency, the measureless heights and depths of this love, did *indeed* form a "mystery of godliness," which, as "seen by angels," might well fill them with amazement?

III. Add to this, that *the gradual development and ever-growing advancement of the mighty plan* still farther tend to sustain the deep interest and to stimulate the inquiring spirit, with which it is re-

garded by them. So far as we can judge of *their* minds from our own, we cannot expect that their attention for any lengthened period should be entirely engrossed by any single subject which maintains the same unchanging aspect, and from which, as they continue to survey it, no further additions of knowledge are obtained. The subject of *their* study, however, is not of this description. It is continually affording them, as it moves along from stage to stage to its final consummation, new displays of wonder, new sources of instruction, new themes of joyous and adoring contemplation. The Angels, far as they may excel us in intelligence, are still but creatures of finite understanding. There are, doubtless, many things which they do not perfectly know. Our Lord Himself has expressly told us that they are ignorant of the time of His second coming. The beloved disciple speaks of a mystic book, which no one in heaven, any more than on the earth, was able to open or to look into the secrets thereof, until it was unsealed by the Lord of glory. And from the text itself we are warranted to conclude that their acquaintance with the scheme of redemption is gradually enlarging, that they do not yet see of it so much as they desire to see, and that, from age to age, they are constantly obtaining more full and definite views of it in its progressive advancement. The first promise of the great Deliverer, as the Seed of the woman who should bruise the head of the serpent, would give but such a dim prospect of the great salvation as would serve to excite, without gratifying, their longing wish to search to the uttermost the counsels of redeeming love. With the men of faith from earliest times they

would eagerly desire to see the day of the Son of man, and would rejoice as one star after another was lighted up in the firmament of prophecy, and as one brightening ray after another betokened the nearer and nearer approach of the longed-for dawn. *Like the cherubim in the tabernacle*, they may literally have stooped down to explore those heavenly truths, which were pictured in the types and symbols of the ancient Church. And when at last they saw God manifest in the flesh, while raising the anthem of His nativity, ministering to Him in His season of temptation, comforting Him in the hour of His sore agony, waiting on Him at His resurrection from the tomb, and hailing Him on His ascension into heaven, their minds would gradually open to the perception of the arduous nature and triumphant issue of His work of love.

Certain it is, that at the time when the text was written, these celestial beings had been employed in studying the wonderful scheme of our redemption in all the successive stages of its progress, for more than the long period of four thousand years. But still there were heights in it which they had not yet scanned, and depths which they had not yet fathomed, and lengths and breadths which they had not yet comprehended. Their eager wish to look into its mysteries had not as yet been thoroughly satisfied. Much has occurred in ages that have since elapsed, to give them a still further knowledge in regard to it. Nor can we doubt that the history of Christianity, in its long struggles whether with Pagan idolatry, or Jewish unbelief, or Popish superstition, or Mohammedan delusion, or prevalent infidelity and worldliness, as well as in its general diffusion throughout the earth, at one time

its general diffusion throughout the world, at one time more rapid and at another more retarded, has furnished matter at once of varied interest and ever-growing instruction to the Angels of God. Nor yet is the vision full. Still do they desire to see of it more than has hitherto been presented to them. There are many events which have not as yet occurred, in which we may well suppose them to be interested, as tending to the more thorough fulfilment of the Divine counsels. There is certainly nothing unwarranted in the thought, that their notice is won and their sympathy awakened by all that is done for the furtherance of the Gospel; that they look and long for the end that is approaching when all nations of the earth shall be subject to its influence; and that even beyond this they would fain extend their gaze to that farther period, of all others the most momentous, when the Lord shall appear to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in them that believe, and when His purpose of grace shall be finally consummated.

Thus may it be said that the gradual development and progressive advancement of the Christian dispensation tend to sustain in the minds of the angelic hosts that deep and searching interest, with which it is regarded by them.

IV. I may yet farther observe, that the Gospel may be viewed as an appropriate subject of earnest study and adoring contemplation to the Angels, by reason of *that unequalled display which it presents of the excellence and glory of the Divine character.*

To see God, to know Him, to resemble Him, to stand in His immediate presence worshipping and

serving Him, constitute the chief joy and dignity of these glorious spirits. Hence we conclude, that whatsoever gives them the clearest and broadest manifestations of His Divine perfections, must ever be to *their* minds a spectacle the most attractive, and a subject of inquiry the most absorbing. That the subject of the Gospel may be emphatically said to do so, is a truth which no one who believes in it will call in question. Without in the least disparaging that testimony which the works of creation and the course of providence so loudly bear to the excellences of their Divine Author, we may confidently say that it comes short, in many respects, of that which is borne by the wonders of redemption. Accordingly, St Paul has assured us, that one great purpose for which the scheme of salvation has been appointed was “to the intent that *now* unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places there might be *made known* the manifold wisdom of God,”—as if, comparatively speaking, it never had been discovered to them before. Most evident it is, that *some* of the attributes of God—as for example His *mercy* and His *patience*, and other modifications of His benevolence exercised towards the sinful and undeserving—could not otherwise have been made known to His intelligent creatures, than by some such manifestation of them in their actual working, as is exhibited in the Gospel. Yet it is not *these* alone, but *all* His Divine perfections which are here most brightly and gloriously illustrated. For where is there such an exhibition of His *wisdom*, as in reconciling the honour of His law with the free and full remission of its penalties, and providing for us such a method of deliverance as renders His dis-

pleasure against sin still more conspicuous by pardoning than by punishing it? Where is there such a display of His *power*, as in conquering sin, abolishing death, spoiling principalities of evil, subduing the obstinacy and wickedness of the human heart, and destroying all the works of the Devil? Where is there such a discovery of His *faithfulness*, as in fulfilling even to the minutest tittle, although by a most astonishing sacrifice, the promises which He had made from the foundation of the world? Where is there such a manifestation of the *holiness* and *justice* of His character, as in requiring that costly propitiation which His own Eternal Son hath offered for the sins of men? Or, where is there to be found so perfect a display of the riches of His *love* and the tenderness of His *mercy*, as in His sending this adorable Saviour to lay down His life for His people,—in His not even sparing the costliest gift He had to bestow—in His giving up that which His own infinite mind most dearly loved and most highly valued,—for the sake of those who deserved not even the smallest exercise of forbearance at His hands? Certainly it is *here*, in the “glorious Gospel of the blessed God,” as an Apostle has emphatically termed it, that the full-orbed perfections of Jehovah shine forth, at once in brightest lustre and in most harmonious combination. Even those of His attributes, which might have seemed before to be somewhat inconsistent, are here united in intimate alliance, and made to reflect new light upon each other. “Mercy and truth meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other.” Infinite power, unsearchable wisdom, immaculate holiness, undeviating truth, inflexible justice, pitying mercy,

abounding grace, and love that passeth knowledge—all these adorable features of the Divine character, which in other objects are only to be viewed *apart*, one by one, here a little and there a little, like the rays of the sun when untwisted into all the party-coloured hues of the rainbow, are here beautifully blended together in one pure blaze of splendour. None of them darkens—none of them distorts the others. Every one of them gives brightness to the rest. They mingle their beams and shine with united lustre. No wonder, then, that the Angels should “desire to look” more and more into the wonders of redeeming love. No wonder that thus beholding “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ,” they should gaze upon it with the most entranced interest, and search into it with the most unwearied scrutiny. For *here*, without exaggeration it may be said, there is more to be learned than was ever known before by even the most exalted of these intelligences, respecting the character and counsels of Jehovah, more to increase their veneration for His excellences, and to swell their notes of rapture in His praise.

These remarks may help you to understand how it can be, that the scheme of man’s redemption should excite that interest and inquiry, which the text speaks of, among the highest ranks of the intelligent creation. However, I must carefully guard you against supposing that this subject is one merely of a curious and speculative nature, by which a vain imagination may be excited, or an idle curiosity indulged, without any practical bearing on our conduct. Such a view of it is altogether erroneous. It is, on the contrary, fraught

with many lessons of the most solid and useful nature for our improvement.

1. I observe that we learn from it, in the first place, the *dignity and excellency of the Gospel*:

It was doubtless with a view to inculcate this lesson that the statement before us was originally made. The text is the crowning point of a climax. The Apostle is seeking to impress us with an exalted sense of the greatness of that salvation of which he speaks. With this intent he reminds us, that the prophets "inquired and searched diligently" regarding it, while testifying beforehand of the grace that was to come. He farther reminds us, that heaven-inspired evangelists had been sent forth with Divine authority to proclaim it. And then, to crown the whole, he brings before our view the Angels of God as "desiring to look into it."

Yet this is that Gospel which many in our own day, even as in the days of old, would cast aside as "foolishness!" They do not think it worth their while to seek any accurate knowledge of its nature, or to give any candid consideration to its evidences. They deem it a mean, and vulgar, and worthless thing, such as no man of expanded intellect, or cultivated taste, or just discrimination, should so far demean himself as to make it either the object of his inquiry or the theme of his discourse. Let us not judge of it, however, by *their* estimate. Let us look up from these men, wise in their own conceits, to Beings who are incomparably more intelligent. Let us think of *Angels*, greatly as they are raised above us in wisdom, and dignity, and happiness,—of *Angels*, far as they unquestionably excel the most accomplished

votaries of earthly science in their knowledge of all the wonderful works of God, bending *their* high powers to the contemplation of this scheme of love, finding fit exercise for all their faculties in the study of it, and ever discovering in it new lessons of instruction, new objects of wonder, new themes of praise, which heighten more and more their ardour in surveying it; and *then* may we learn to think more worthily of that glorious and precious Gospel which foolish men despise. *Then* may we be brought to say of it with an Apostle: "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord."

2. This subject also teaches us *to be prepared for mysteries* in the study of the Gospel, and to meet them with a spirit of patience and humility. It would be strange indeed, if a system of revelation, coming from the infinite Jehovah, were not in some respects unsearchable like Himself. We find, too, in His works of nature and of providence so many things that pass our comprehension, that nothing else can be reasonably expected, than that similar difficulties should be met with in His work of grace. But not to dwell on these considerations, which ought to reconcile our minds to much that is deep and unfathomable in Christianity, I would simply urge here, the fact which the text presents, that *the Angels* desire to look into these things. It would seem from this that even to their minds there are deep things in the method of redemption which require their close study and continued investigation in order that they may be able to understand them. If so, surely we have no cause to be offended, if *our* comparatively

feeble and contracted powers should be in some respects baffled by the mighty plan. If even the Angels know it but in part, and still seek to look into it that they may know it more thoroughly, well may *we* be contented to exclaim with an Apostle : " O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God ! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out ! "

3. Again, we are powerfully admonished by this subject, *to give earnest heed to the great truths of Christianity*, making them, as the Angels do, the constant and congenial themes of our diligent study and earnest meditation.

It is matter of deep humiliation to reflect how little, for the most part, professed Christians are disposed to do so. Engrossed with the vain concerns of this world, they turn away with indifference from that Gospel which in heaven is viewed with the most absorbing interest. They seldom think of it, except when some suggestion from without may bring it before their minds, or when some alarming judgment of Divine Providence may force it for a time reluctantly upon their attention. They rarely speak of it even to their most intimate friends ; nay, they are apt to be embarrassed or offended, and to think it a breach of politeness, or a want of discretion, if any serious allusion to it should be made in the course of familiar conversation. Alive, as they may be, to all that is grand, and beautiful, and wondrous in the works of nature, they have no discernment for the far greater excellences and far more astonishing marvels of the work of grace. And, ready as they are to kindle into rapture at the mention of any deeds of earthly hero-

ism or philanthropy, by which freedom has been secured and wretchedness alleviated and temporal peace and prosperity advanced, they feel no like enthusiasm at the thought of that most noble and benevolent of all undertakings which Infinite Love has so graciously devised, and so triumphantly carried into execution in behalf of countless multitudes of the human race, in order to rescue them from the bondage of Satan, to invest them with the glorious liberty of the children of God, and to enrich them with the choicest blessings and the most exalted honours in time and through eternity! Why should it be so? Why should there be so great a dissimilarity in this respect between glowing Seraphs who stand around the throne, and creatures of the dust who dwell upon the footstool? Surely *we* cannot be forming a right estimate of the claims which the Gospel has to our devout attention, if we treat it so differently from these exalted creatures, who so far excel us in wisdom and in goodness. And what is more, we cannot be at all fitted for joining at last in their occupations and enjoyments, if we be not now in any measure conformed to them in the pleasures we relish, and the pursuits we engage in. *Here* must we acquire a meetness for their fellowship. *Here* must we be qualified for partaking of their bliss. *Here*, by studying with eagerness and surveying with delight what *they* "desire to look into," must we be trained for that unutterable happiness which they experience while meditating on the wonders, and fathoming the mysteries, and celebrating the praises of redeeming love.

4. But, in conclusion, I must yet farther remind you, that the Gospel, as addressed to *you*, is not only

a subject of deeply interesting inquiry and contemplation, but also *a matter of the closest personal concern*, involving your highest interests as immortal and accountable creatures. It cannot be said that the Angels, on their own account, have any special concern in the method of redemption. However much it may excite their curiosity, or increase their knowledge, or awaken their sympathy, or gratify their benevolence, or kindle their adoration, still they cannot be properly considered as deriving any *immediate* advantage from it. It is different with *us*. The Gospel is for *our* behoof. The salvation provided by it, is offered and designed for *us*. It was *our* nature, and not that of Angels, which the Saviour assumed. It was for *our* deliverance from sin and misery, and not for *theirs*, that He was humbled and afflicted. It is not for *their* spiritual benefit, but for *ours*, that His free calls are given, His rich mercies spread out, His gracious aids offered, and His faithful promises recorded. Great therefore, unspeakably great, will be our condemnation if, while *Angels* are entranced and captivated by His work of grace, *we*, for whom He wrought it, should regard it with indifference. Let us remember that those things "which Angels desire to look into," are no other than the "*things which belong unto our peace*," and that it becomes us seriously to ponder the momentous question, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" It is not for us to rest in a mere speculative acquaintance with the wonderful plans and provisions of the covenant of grace. We must, in the exercise of an appropriating faith, receive them and rest upon them for our personal benefit. Not only must we

“desire to look into” them, but we must desire to *make them all our own*. Not only must we “count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus,” but we must seek to “*win Christ, and to be found in Him,*” washed in His blood, clothed with His righteousness, sanctified by His Spirit, and made heirs according to His sure promise of eternal life. Thus only can we come to the attainment of that knowledge which maketh wise unto salvation, and which will at last bring us into fellowship with the Angels and with the spirits of just men made perfect, and fit us for sharing in those high exercises, which they cease not day or night to be engaged in, as they stand before the throne of God and of the Lamb.

IV.

THE SON OF GOD PLEADING WITH THE
SONS OF MEN.

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock : if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”—REV. iii. 20.

IN these words we have an astonishing instance of the grace and condescension of our Redeemer. He represents Himself as pleading with sinners to open to Him the door of their hearts, as patiently waiting and urgently knocking for admission, as pressing them by applications the most earnest and persuading them by promises the most precious, to receive Him.

Well may the text introduce itself with the word “Behold,” at once to attract our attention and to excite our wonder. For it is a sight to fill heaven and earth with amazement, that God should thus sue to man, that the Saviour should thus beseech the sinner. Indeed, there is but one other sight of wonder that can equal it. And it is, that such solicitation should in any case be used in vain, that sinful man should ever be so perverse as to turn a deaf ear to the entreaties of his God and Saviour.

We are sometimes ready to wonder that the Most High should invite us to come with boldness to His mercy-seat, “asking that we may receive, seeking

that we may find, knocking that it may be opened to us." But how much greater cause of wonder have we *here*, when we find, as it were, the act reversed, and instead of the sinner knocking at the door of grace, we behold the Son of God knocking at the door of the sinner's heart and soliciting admittance! "Behold," He says, "I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

I. In discoursing on these words, the *first* thing to be considered is *the Dwelling*, into which an entrance is thus sought.

At what door is it that the Saviour seeks admission? Need I reply, that it is at the door of the human heart? It is at *your* door, dear Brethren, and at mine, if He be not even now dwelling in our inmost souls. It is at the door of every impenitent sinner who has never yet received Him at all, and of every unsteadfast disciple who has temporarily forgotten or renounced Him, and even of every immature believer, whose soul, albeit in some measure opened to Him, is not as yet thoroughly and intimately pervaded by Him. At the door of all such does He stand and knock for entrance, that He may cheer them with His fellowship.

It is not Angels or Archangels whom He thus solicits, though even *that* had been unspeakable condescension. It is to men He calls, and His voice is to the sons of men.

Neither is it to men pure and holy, that He addresses Himself, but to *sinner*s who are altogether unworthy of His regard; yea, even to *such* sinners as

are said, in a previous verse, to be in a peculiar manner distasteful and offensive to Him. He stands at the door of that guilty and polluted heart, which the world, the flesh, and the devil have so long appropriated, the seat of every vile affection, the abode of all impiety and impurity. How strange that the Holy One should seek admission into such a dwelling!

Nor is it at the house of friends, that He knocks. Were it so, however humble and unattractive it might be, there would be less cause for wonder that He should sue for entrance. But it is the house of *enemies*, who have opposed His cause, rejected His claims, defied His authority, who never liked to retain Him in their knowledge, and who are even now repelling and excluding Him as an unwelcome and uncongenial intruder. Some He finds asleep, lulled by Satan's opiates into so deep a repose, that neither alarms nor entreaties can arouse them; or, if they should be startled for a moment, they soon lie down again to their slumbers, and wrap themselves up on their couch of carnal ease, shrinking from all self-denial and earnest exertion. Others He finds with hearts so fully occupied by the cares and toils and pleasures of the world, as to leave no room within for Him. Others, again, are so fortified against Him by the strong barriers of pride and self-righteousness, that His Gospel finds in them nothing of which it can take hold, no sense of need through which it can effect an entrance. Not a few, also, are running into such excesses of riot, and joining so madly in the revels of worldly amusement or carnal gratification, that His knocking at their door is unheard amidst the din. Full well does this gracious

Visitant know, full often has He experienced, that the sinner's heart is to Him an unfriendly dwelling. The door is closed at the first signal of His approach. And the more He knocks, the more firmly is it fastened against Him. Other applicants obtain a ready entrance. The world has no need to stand and knock. Sin in its varied shapes has no need to sue for admission. The great adversary himself is not unwelcome. The door is thrown wide open to them, when they first appear. They are welcomed with eagerness and cherished with delight. But, when the adorable Redeemer comes, the door is closed. For *Him*, there appears to be no room in the crowded heart. The carnal mind discerns in Him no beauty that it should desire Him. It repels Him as a disturber of its peace, and as a foe to its most congenial pursuits and gratifications.

Such is the character of the dwelling at which the application of the text is made. Thus poor and lowly, thus vile and unworthy, thus unfriendly and ungracious, is the door at which the heavenly Visitant stands and knocks.

II. Let us now shortly consider, in the *second* place, *the character of the Visitant Himself.*

Who is it, that thus stands at the door and importunately knocks and pleads for entrance ?

Surely it must be one who has no right to claim admission, one whose society can afford no entertainment ! It must be some messenger of evil tidings, some dreaded invader of our property, or some vexatious intruder on our happiness !

Nay, Brethren, it is quite otherwise. It is One

whose right of entrance is the clearest, and whose claim to a favourable reception is the strongest. It is One whom we ought to welcome with delight, and to cherish with the fullest contentment and complacency.

Think of the dignity and excellence of His character. He is described in this book of Revelation, and in other passages of Scripture, as “the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, which is, which was, and which is to come;” “the Almighty;” “the King of kings, and Lord of lords;” “the brightness of the Father’s glory;” “God over all blessed for evermore”! What an honour to be visited by such a Being! What a privilege to receive Him as our guest! And how unutterable the perverseness of suffering such an applicant to plead in vain! Surely the most miserable being in all the world excluding from his hovel the most glorious of earthly monarchs, were but a faint approach to the folly of the sinner who closes his heart against the entrance of a Saviour-God!

Think, too, of the relation which He bears to us. He is our Creator, our Preserver, our Redeemer, possessing as such the strongest title to our regard, the fullest claim to our homage and affection. By every plea of right, on every ground of justice, by every tie of gratitude, we belong to Him. Those souls into which He wishes to be received, are souls to which *He* at first gave life and being, souls which *His* bounty has ever since sustained and cheered, souls which He shed *His* own precious blood to redeem, and in excluding Him from them we are chargeable, at once, with the most flagrant injustice and with the most detestable ingratitude. You

would not shut the door of your house on the friend who loves you, or on the wife who cleaves to you, or on the mother who bore you, or on the father who has provided for you. But you are doing worse than this, when you close your hearts on Him who loves you more warmly, who watches over you more carefully, and seeks your true welfare more faithfully, than the best of your friends and the nearest of your kindred.

Think, yet again, of the errand on which He comes to us. He comes not as a messenger of woe, but charged with "good tidings of great joy." He comes not to invade our property, but to enrich us with the treasures of His grace. He comes, not as the disturber of our peace, but as our comforter, to cheer us and to bless us. It is the *Saviour* who is standing at our door, plying us, it is true, with importunities, but not so much for *His own* behoof as for *our* advantage, entreating us to receive Him into our hearts, and to let Him bless us and save us to the uttermost. As He comes on an errand so gracious, how can we choose, it may well be asked, but open to Him? Shall the dying man exclude the good physician, who brings him a sovereign remedy to restore his health? Shall the victim of poverty and famine be so perverse, as to shut out the benefactor who would supply his wants? Or shall the pining captive hold fast his prison door against the liberator, who is ready to strike off his fetters, and to restore him to light, and liberty, and joy? Alas! such is too often the reception which the Saviour meets with. He speaks in the text indeed as One having authority, as One who is entitled to expect that the very first announcement of His name should cause the portals

to be opened wide for His admission. But, no! The heart of man is not of so easy access. The slumbers of unbelief, the dreams of worldliness, the revels of dissipation and self-indulgence, are not to be so readily disturbed. Great as is the dignity of Him who is soliciting us, close and endearing the relations in which He stands to us, and merciful the errand on which He is pleased to come, it is only by the most patient waiting, and the most urgent importunity, that He effects an entrance.

III. And this leads me to notice, in the *third* place, the *Means* which the Saviour, adopts in order to obtain admittance. "*I stand at the door,*" He says, "*and knock.*"

It cannot be doubted indeed that He, who is described as "holding in His hand the key of David, opening so that no man can shut, and shutting so that no man can open," is able at once by His own resistless power, and without any intervening instruments or appliances, to effect a forcible entrance into the human heart; and, apart from any concurrence of its own, to assume the absolute and undivided possession of it. *This*, however, is not the method which He has recourse to. His way is to seek admission into our hearts, not as it were by overwhelming force, but with our own consent and co-operation. He makes us "a willing people in His day of power." He "*draws*" us indeed; but *how* does He draw us? Not like machines incapable of thought and choice,—not like irrational and irresponsible animals that must be dragged along by physical compulsion,—but, in a manner suited to our

character as reasonable, moral, and voluntary agents. He draws us with "the cords of a man and with bands of love," bringing us into cordial subjection by the mild and attractive influence of His grace. He does not seek to break into the house, but stands at the door and *knocks* that we may open to Him, applying to the natural inlets of the soul, and seeking through these customary avenues to gain admission; addressing Himself to our judgments with persuasive arguments, to our memories with affecting recollections; to our consciences with awakening appeals, to our hopes with precious promises, to our fears with solemn warnings, to our heart and affections with tender and moving entreaties, and thus making our own faculties the instruments in His hands of carrying His gracious purpose respecting us into full effect.

The *Means*, by which the Saviour thus knocks at the customary inlets to the human soul, are manifold. He knocks by His *Word*. For, therein does He address to us doctrines the most interesting and important to instruct us, precepts the most pure and salutary to direct us, promises the most inestimable to allure us, threatenings of the most awful import to alarm us, and invitations of mercy and of love that are fitted, if anything be, to move and melt our hearts.

He knocks by His *Preachers*. For, what is *their* commission but to sound in every ear the tidings of His Gospel, beseeching sinners as though the Lord Himself besought them, and praying them, in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God?

He knocks by His *Sacraments*. For, therein, by appropriate signs exhibited to our senses, He gives us the most affecting representations and the most

assured pledges and tokens of His redeeming love, while He admits us to intimate fellowship with Himself, and pleads with us and to give ourselves up unreservedly to His service.

He knocks by the warnings and remonstrances of *Conscience*. For, what is conscience but the Lord's deputy within our breasts? And what are all those humbling thoughts, and accusing recollections, and gloomy forebodings which are from time to time suggested by it, but so many loud and earnest knockings from the Lord, reminding us of duty, convicting us of sin, and admonishing us to flee for refuge from the coming wrath to the hope set before us in the Gospel?

Need I add, that the Saviour also knocks at the door of our hearts by the *dealings of His providence*? The varied blessings and comforts of our earthly lot, of the least of which we are altogether undeserving,—what are they, if rightly viewed, but so many indications of that Divine goodness which ought to lead us to repentance; so many encouraging tokens, at the same time, of the Lord's merciful willingness to spare us, and to be at peace with us, and to bless us with those better gifts of a spiritual and heavenly nature which He has in store; so many loud calls, also, that we should yield to Him that tribute of love and confidence and gratitude, which His bounties justly claim from all His dependent offspring? And, what are the varied calamities and afflictions, with which ourselves or our brethren around us may be visited, but admonitions still more affecting to give earnest heed to the things which concern our peace? When we see, from time to time, the fairest hopes blighted,

the most cherished possessions lost, the closest ties severed—when we hear, as we often do, of youth withered in its early bloom, and of vigorous manhood cut down in its maturity,—or when we are called to follow to the grave the remains of those, who, but a few days before, were no less active and healthful than ourselves, and whose prospects of long life were as favourable as our own,—how solemn, *then*, is the warning given us that the time is short; that one thing is needful; that there is but a step between us and death; and that it becomes us to choose without delay that good part which shall never be taken from us! Sometimes the warning is closer and louder still. A breach is made in the circle of our own household; and we are called to mourn in bitterness for the loss of some beloved one, who was dear to us as our own soul. Or, perhaps, disease has laid its blighting hand upon ourselves, stretching us on a bed of languishing, and wellnigh bringing us down to the gates of death. *Then*, truly, the knocking is very near and very loud, and such as might well be expected to secure compliance. It is humbling to think, indeed, that such methods should be needful to gain for the Saviour an entrance into our hearts. But this is too often found to be the case. Seldom is the heart laid fully open to Him, until it has first been wounded and smitten by Him. And, accordingly, when other means fail, He scruples not to take up the rod of His chastening and to knock with *it*. He sends trials, sicknesses, disappointments, and sore bereavements to prepare the way before Him. In mercy to our souls He takes away our idols, when nothing else will persuade us to relinquish them.

And then, when the heart is lone and desolate, *He* comes, our true Friend and Comforter, to supply their place, and bless us with the joy of His salvation.

Thus does the Lord Jesus knock at the heart of man. He knocks patiently, repeatedly, importunately. He does not, on failing to obtain from us an immediate answer, at once depart. He *stands* and knocks. There is not one among you, my dear friends, whom He has not been soliciting, time after time, from your youth upwards, even to the present hour. And long as you may have resisted and despised Him, He is yet at the door of your hearts, waiting and knocking still, and pleading as earnestly as ever for admittance.

How different, in this respect, are *His* dealings with us from *ours* with *Him* ! If we are kept waiting only for a *little*, before we receive an answer to our prayers, we are ready to repine, to doubt, and to cease praying. And, yet, in *our* case, the wonder is not that we should be required to pray long before we obtain an answer, but that the most persevering supplications of creatures so ill-deserving should be heard at all. Such is not the manner of the Lord. "His mercy is more urgent than our misery." A few prayers not immediately answered are usually enough to weary out the sinner ; but, long years of unregarded expostulation and rejected entreaty weary not the Saviour. His patience is indeed marvellous. Let us beware, however, of despising or abusing it. It may have lasted long, but be assured it will not last for ever. It can hardly be doubted, that there is something ominous in the description here given of the Lord, as only in a *standing* posture at the sinner's door. He

has not sat down. He is only standing, and is ready, if He find us incorrigible, to *remove away*. At all events it is not to be questioned, that one day or other He will give the *last* knock. And should that final application be despised,—and how know we but that the *present* may be the final one?—*then* will there be no alternative for the sinner but hardness of heart, confirmed impenitence, and endless ruin. Ah! how fearfully will the Saviour's insulted patience and spurned entreaties be requited on that sinner's head, when it comes to be *his* turn to stand without and knock in vain; when, crying wistfully, "Lord, Lord, open to me," he obtains no other but the hopeless answer, "Depart from me: I know thee not"!

IV. Let us, therefore, briefly notice, in the *fourth* place, the *Compliance* with His entreaties, which the Saviour would have us to yield. It is but a simple matter which He asks of us—it is only to "*hear His voice and open the door.*"

He wishes us, in the first instance, to *listen to His call*. The deep sleep of thoughtlessness and unbelief, which makes us deaf to the heavenly summons, must be shaken off. Or, the noisy revels of carnal indulgence or worldly dissipation, which drown the still small voice, must be silenced. The soul must be awakened and aroused, its thoughts arrested, its false peace disturbed, its vain and dreamy imaginations driven away. The things which belong to its peace must be impressed upon it. The Saviour's call must be seriously pondered and laid to heart.

The entreaties of this heavenly Applicant, however, must not only be listened to, but also *complied*

with. He wishes us not only to "hear His voice," but to "*open the door.*" And need you be told, Brethren, what this demand amounts to? To "open the door to Christ" undoubtedly means belief on Him, the reception of Him as He is offered to us in the Gospel. It means the unfastening of those bolts wherewith unbelief or prejudice would keep Him out, the throwing open of those barriers which a thoughtless mind, a depraved heart, or a self-righteous disposition would oppose to His admittance. It means the giving up to Him of our confidence, the going forth to welcome Him of our desires, the full and cordial surrender to Him of our wills. It means the receiving and resting on Him for salvation, in His own prescribed way, on His own free terms, and with a view to His own most gracious purposes,—as our Prophet to teach us, our Priest to atone for us, our King to rule us, our Friend to dwell with us in intimate and habitual fellowship, our bountiful Providence, and our never-failing Guardian.

Such is the compliance which our blessed Lord demands. It is true *He* alone can enable us to render it. Nothing short of His own Divine power, can conquer the unbelief and obstinacy of the human heart. It was only when the Lord opened the heart of Lydia, that she attended to the things which were spoken to her by His Apostle. And so with ourselves, it is not enough that the Saviour outwardly proposes His Gospel to us; He must inwardly dispose us, at the same time, for the reception of it.

Yet, you perceive, the opening of the door to Him is spoken of, in the text, as if it were *our own act*. And so it really is, although it be the Lord, by the

power of His grace, who brings us to the performance of it. He "works in us," indeed, as the Apostle Paul assures us, "both to will and to do of His good pleasure." But, then, it is on *our will* that He operates, and it is *our* active powers that He calls into exertion. It is not Christ who repents, and believes, and obeys *instead of us*. It is *we* who repent, and believe, and obey, through the grace of Christ disposing and enabling us so to do. He does not dispense with our own faculties and efforts, but makes full use of them in the work of our salvation. He does not, as I before said, *force open the door of our hearts*, but He renders us willing, with our own hands to open it to Him, plying us at once with importunities from without and with influences within, which are suited to our nature as reasonable and moral creatures, and calculated to make us a "willing people in His day of power."

It is well, however, in reading such texts as the one before us, not to trouble ourselves with any puzzling questions regarding the several provinces of Divine grace and human effort. It is best to take the invitations of the Gospel simply, faithfully, and unhesitatingly, as we find them, and to let them exert their full influence upon our minds. When the man with the withered hand was told to "stretch it forth," he did not pause to consider *how* he should be able to do so, but made the attempt, and in so doing received the power. So let *us* act when the Saviour pleads with us to open the door of our hearts for His reception. Let us give full heed to Him, and endeavour to obey His call, imploring Him to aid us in complying with it, and never for a moment doubting

that grace *will* be given to work in us all that He is requiring and expecting of us.

And that we may be the more encouraged thus to act, let us mark here, the free and full warrant which *all* sinners have to comply with this invitation. "*If any man* hear my voice" is the Saviour's language, no matter *who* or *what manner of man* he be. *All* are invited, yea, rather *importuned*, to take full advantage of the call that is addressed to them. Why then, I ask, should sinners ever make it a question, whether or no they be warranted *to receive* the Saviour? In point of fact they are not warranted *to reject* Him. To receive Him is their *duty* no less than their privilege. It is what they are not only permitted but *required* to do,—required, at one time, by commandments the most peremptory, and, at another time, by entreaties the most persuasive. Yes, doubting soul, the Lord Jesus Christ is knocking at thy door, and urging thee, by the most pressing solicitations, to do *that* which thou fearest thou must not venture or presume to do! O thou of little faith, wherefore shouldst thou thus doubt? Look once again at the terms of His proposal. He makes no exceptions. He prohibits none. He welcomes all. "*If any man,*" He says—*if the most vile man, the most heinous sinner, the most hardened reprobate, the man who has most of all tempted and provoked me, the man who has opposed the stoutest, the longest, the most obstinate resistance to all my past remonstrances with him*—"*if any man* hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

V. There is one other point connected with our subject which remains to be considered,—the *Promise* which the Saviour here makes, to such as will grant Him an entrance into their hearts: “*I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.*”

“*I will come in to him.*” The Lord here graciously engages to accept of that surrender of the soul, tardy though it be, which may at length be made to Him. He will enter into the heart that is opened to Him, and dwell in it as His chosen residence. He will manifest His presence in it by the light, and peace, and consolation, with which He fills it, as well as by the beauties of holiness, wherewith, through His indwelling Spirit, it becomes adorned. He will make it His own, expelling all its idols, assuming the supreme and undivided dominion over it, and adapting to His own use its every faculty and affection. And He will cheer its possessor with His fellowship, not *walking* with Him merely as a casual associate, but *coming in to him* as His most familiar friend. Surely, my dear Brethren, it is a peculiar privilege to have “Christ thus dwelling in our hearts by faith.” Well may we say of Him, as was said on one occasion, “Lord, we are not worthy that thou shouldest come under our roof.” How great the blessedness, to have the King of glory taking up His residence with us, making our poor unworthy souls His dwelling-place, and filling us with the fulness of His grace!

This, however, is not all. The Lord Jesus further assures us, that He will graciously condescend, if we hear His voice, not only to be *received*, but even to be *entertained* by us. He promises to “*sup with*

us,"—partaking of our hospitality, regaling Himself with the tokens of our regard, feasting on such fruits of penitence and faith as we may by His grace be enabled to set before Him, It is indeed but a sorry repast we have to give Him, wretchedly coarse and scanty in itself, and miserably disproportioned to the claims of such a guest. Poor though it be, however, He will not scorn it. If furnished by a sincere and faithful heart, it will be in His esteem of the sweetest taste and of the richest savour. For the Lord, as it is written, "taketh pleasure in His people." "Since they were precious in His sight, they have become honourable." He rejoices in all the graces which they exhibit, and in all the good works which, by faith, they may be led to perform. *These* are the "pleasant fruits" of which it is His delight to taste. There may be much in them of weakness and imperfection. But this does not hinder the merciful Redeemer from being regaled and gladdened by the contemplation of them; for "when there is first a willing mind, our gifts are accepted according to what we have, and not according to what we have not." Our feeblest graces and most imperfect services will be a feast of joy to our Divine Visitant, if they be indeed presented in sincerity, as tokens of faith and tributes of affection.

Even this, however, does not exhaust the promise; for, the Saviour not only declares to the complying sinner, "I will sup with him," but adds, "*and he with me.*" He does not come to our door, you perceive, unprovided. He wishes us, indeed, to receive Him as our guest; but He is a *royal* Guest, who honours us by His company, and who brings the

better part of the entertainment with Him. And while He disdains not to accept of that humble and scanty fare which alone we can set before Him, He produces out of His own abundant stores rich and rare dainties for our nourishment and refreshment. "It pleased the Father that in Him all fulness should dwell;" and of His fulness we are called to be part-takers. If we hunger and thirst after righteousness He will fill us, satisfying our souls with the bread and the water of life. Nor is the repast which He provides for us of such a nature, as merely to supply our indispensable wants; it is fitted, at the same time, to gladden and to cheer us. What exceedingly great and precious promises does He give, for the feeding of our hopes and the increase of our graces! What delectable tokens of His love, what satisfying assurances of His mercy, what pure and peaceful experiences of His fellowship, what blissful and elevating foretastes of His heavenly glory, does He graciously afford for our comfort and contentment! Truly we are brought into His banqueting-house to "a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined;" and His banner over us is love.

And now, my dear friends, that you have had the Saviour's application in the text, with all plainness of speech unfolded and explained to you, it is for *you* to say what answer you will give to it. Will you comply with it, or will you set it at nought?

Be persuaded, I beseech you, to listen to His call. Suffer not the merciful Redeemer to plead in vain. Do not mock Him, by coming to *His* house, while you will not allow *Him* to come into *your* hearts.

But let it be the language of your souls, "*Come in,* Thou blessed Lord; wherefore standest Thou without? Do Thou Thyself prepare the way of entrance, and make our hearts ready to welcome Thee."

May the blessed Lord Himself, who holds in His hand the key of David, opening so that no man can shut, and shutting so that no man can open,—may even He by His all-prevailing grace set open our inmost hearts to receive Him; and may He make them a temple fitting for His residence, that He may indeed dwell in us, and work in us all the good pleasure of His goodness!

V.

EARNEST RELIGION NOT MADNESS.

“And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.”—ACTS, xxvi. 24, 25.

THE charge so inconsiderately advanced, and with such calm dignity repelled, in these verses, is quite in keeping with the judgments usually formed by worldly men, regarding the character of earnest and devoted Christians. Nothing is more common than for persons, who are themselves reckless or lukewarm about religion, to advance, in one shape or in another, the charge of mental imbecility or derangement, against any one who thinks it necessary to exceed them in His serious regard for the concerns and duties of a godly life. It is still as true, as it ever was, of the children of God, that “the world knoweth them not.” Their character is such as ungodly men are alike incapable of understanding and of appreciating. They must make up their minds, therefore, to meet with little sympathy from very many of those among whom their lot is cast, and must not think “some strange thing has happened unto them,”

should they meet occasionally with the same despiteful treatment, of which their blessed Lord had so frequently occasion to complain. The more nearly they resemble Him indeed, so much the more likely are they to be, as *He* was, derided or dis-esteemed. The more devotedly and earnestly they serve Him, so much the more readily will their conduct be condemned, as if by way of retaliation, by those who cannot help seeing in it a silent, but most forcible, condemnation of their own. The world will be sure, in a greater or less degree, according to the very growth and vigour of their spiritual attainments, to question either their sobriety or their sincerity. And, if it cannot with any show of plausibility express a doubt of the uprightness of their professions, it will try to discredit the soundness of their views and judgments. It will look upon them as "visionary," or "weak," or "superstitious," or "enthusiastic," when the truth is, that they have sound minds, warm hearts, tender consciences, clearness of discernment to approve the better part, and rectitude of will to choose it and to cleave to it.

No wonder that *Festus* thought Paul "beside himself," when so many, nowadays, with far greater light than he, are ready to form the same estimate of persons, who come incomparably short of the Apostle in all those features of character and conduct, which might have in any way exposed him to the imputation. For, where are the Christians to be met with at the present day, who lead such lives of strict, and marked, and unswerving conformity to the Gospel—who show such zeal, perform such labours, and make such sacrifices for the promotion of its interests, as

did this ardent and devoted servant of the Lord? It will not be maintained, that there are any to be now met with who can, in these respects, be likened to him, even among those who are most of all decried by an ungodly world as foolish or fanatical. We cannot wonder, then, that St Paul should have been assailed with the same charge, which is still so ready to be hurled against many, who, in everything calculated to provoke it, are so far behind him. Least of all is it matter of surprise, that Festus, an unbeliever and a heathen, one who had no knowledge and no conviction of Christian truth, should have uttered a reproach which is so frequently re-echoed by nominal friends and adherents of the Christian cause. For, certainly, the history and conduct of the Apostle were such as the Roman Governor must have felt himself altogether unable to account for, by any of the ordinary principles of human action. When he thought of a man of Paul's high talents and accomplishments, fair worldly prospects and rising reputation, strong sectarian prejudices and seemingly implacable enmity to the Christian cause,—when he thought of such a one utterly foregoing all that had once been most highly valued by him, renouncing his cherished opinions, exposing himself to losses the most serious, labours the most arduous, dangers the most formidable, insults the most galling, and sufferings the most severe, with the prospect of no earthly recompense to counterbalance them, and all for the sake of that persecuted faith, of which he had himself been one of the bitterest adversaries,—it was not unnatural that Festus should, in his perplexity, have sought an explanation of a phenomenon so strange, in the hasty

and reckless assertion of the text, "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad."

But, was it really so? Is this the true solution of the matter? Is there the smallest ground for tracing the Apostle's conduct to any such cause as this heathen has assigned for it?

No one, who has candidly marked his history or perused his writings, can for a moment entertain such a thought.

We never find in the great Apostle of the Gentiles any symptoms of that distempered gloom, or narrow bigotry, or turgid vanity, or reckless indiscretion, or extravagant vehemence, by which visionaries and fanatics are always more or less distinguished.

Great as was the ardour of his zeal, it was always tempered and regulated by a sound discretion, leading him, in so far as duty would admit, to deal forbearingly with the prejudices of his opponents; to treat them, as we find him doing on the present occasion, with the fullest measure of courtesy and politeness; and in fact to "become all things to all men," that so he might the more easily and effectually win them to the reception of the truth. Profound as was the depth of his contrition, for his former blasphemies and persecutions of the Christian cause, it dictated to him no gloomy penances, no extravagant mortifications and austerities, nothing but the simple and reasonable service of a life devoted to the glory of his Redeemer. Strict as was his adherence to his principles, and uncompromising as was his firmness in contending for them, he exhibited none of that frivolous preciseness in regard to matters of mere

form and outward observance, and none of that intolerance or narrow-mindedness in things of a manifestly accessory and subordinate nature, which wrong-headed men are so ready to indulge in. And, fixed as was his determination to brave the most cruel sufferings for Christ's sake, yet so far was he from *courting* persecution, or from throwing himself unnecessarily in the way of it, that we find him, on the contrary, using the most prudent methods to avert or escape from the dangers that encompassed him, in so far as it was competent for him to do so, without neglecting the duties of his office, or prejudicing the glorious cause in which he was engaged. As for his discourses, again, in so far as they have been reported to us, and his precious Epistles, whether addressed to private friends or to public bodies of professed believers, nothing can be more remarkable than their sound views, calm statements, rational sentiments, and solid and consistent arguments, unless, indeed, it be the glowing eloquence, the unaffected piety, the enlightened liberality, the large-hearted charity and philanthropy that distinguish them—qualities that are in every way opposed to the characteristic traits of fanaticism or of superstition. Well might he declare, as we find him doing on another occasion, "God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of *a sound mind*." And most justly might he reply to the imputation which Festus had so unwarrantably cast upon him, in the firm but respectful language of the text, "*I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.*"

But, then, if the charge to which we have been

referring be thus unfounded in the case of the Apostle, the question very naturally occurs : Whether there be any better foundation for it in the case of those devoted Christians, who are at the present day not unfrequently assailed with it? Is it with any truth, that those who are earnest, decided, and uncompromising in the service of the Lord,—those who are neither ashamed nor afraid to walk with Him consistently, and to work for Him devotedly,—who, in so doing, have the moral courage to be *singular*, bidding defiance to the maxims and fashions of society, in so far as these are at variance with Christian principle, and who therefore make it apparent from their whole conduct that they are animated by another spirit, governed by other rules, and seeking other ends than the votaries of a passing world,—is it with any truth, that such persons can be characterised as weak-minded devotees, or hot-headed enthusiasts, whom over-much zeal for religion has rendered “mad”?

In answering this question, as we are well entitled to do, with the utmost decision and confidence, *in the negative*, it does not at all concern us to deny that folly, extravagance, and indiscretion may be, and have been, occasionally associated with earnest piety.

There is nothing to hinder men of weak minds, nothing to hinder silly or injudicious people, from becoming seriously religious as well as others. And, of course, when they become so, it is natural to suppose that they will carry more or less of their imprudence and indiscretion into that new course of life, on which they have entered. We have cause to be thankful that high intellectual gifts, a sound and enlightened

judgment, great shrewdness and sagacity, are not by any means indispensable to a saving knowledge and reception of the Gospel; but that, on the contrary, those precious truths, which the wise and prudent are unable to discern, are therein clearly manifested to the veriest "babes," and set forth in a manner so simple and intelligible, that "the wayfaring man, *though a fool*, cannot err" regarding them. Such being the case, we have no reason to be surprised, that some truly religious persons should now and then be found who betray a considerable want of judgment, in their Christian walk and conversation, before the world. But, then, it is in the highest degree unreasonable to find fault with strict and serious piety, on *their* account. For, in truth, it is not their *piety*, that is at all to blame for aught that may be properly regarded as indiscreet or extravagant in their conduct, but that weakness of understanding which naturally belongs to them, and which leads them occasionally to show the same lack of prudence or discretion in the practice of a religious life, as they do in other matters in which they take a lively interest.

What we are now concerned to maintain is, simply, *this*—that *the serious and earnest prosecution of the Christian life is not, in itself considered, folly or fanaticism*; that pure and undefiled religion, such as the Bible inculcates, and such as *St Paul* exemplified, cannot be justly held liable to such a charge; that faith, hope, charity, penitence, meekness, patience, godliness, purity, temperance, in the very highest measures in which they have been ever displayed, are perfectly compatible with the dictates of the soundest mind;

that an earnest and anxious striving for the soul's welfare, a laying up of treasures in heaven rather than on earth, a renouncing of the most cherished worldly blessings for conscience' sake, a sensitive shunning of the very appearance or approach of evil, an ardent zeal for the diffusion of Divine truth, an unreserved devotedness to the Divine glory; that *these*, and suchlike characteristics of true godliness, although they may, in some persons, be combined with much that is weak and much that is injudicious, are not, *in themselves considered*, to be taken as any just marks of a weak or disordered mind, or as giving the slightest colour to the charge of madness or fanaticism, which has oftentimes been brought against them.

In arguing this point, our work is greatly lightened by a consideration of *the parties*, we have to contend against. It is not with *acknowledged unbelievers*, such as Festus, that we have now to deal, but with *nominal Christians*, who profess to be at one with us in regard to all the fundamental principles of religion, and who only differ from us regarding the *practical results*, by which the cordial adoption of these principles ought ever in reason and consistency to be attended. So that we are fully entitled to assume the truth of all the essential doctrines, the authority of all the moral precepts, and the faithfulness of all the precious promises of Christianity, when vindicating the conduct of those who give the most earnest heed to the things which it reveals, and who endeavour to shape their whole conduct in accordance with them.

Taking this ground, then, we confidently affirm

that these earnest and devoted Christians "are not mad,"—their very adversaries and detractors being judges.

If Christianity be indeed true, it evidently appears from the conduct of such persons, that *their intellects*, instead of being darkened, or in any way disordered, *are clearly and soundly enlightened*. The marvellous light of the Lord is shining on them. They are no longer blinded to the excellency and glory of God, the evil of sin, the beauty of holiness, the worth of the soul, the preciousness of the Saviour, the shortness of time, the vastness of eternity. *These*, and other things of a like important nature, which to all practical purposes are hidden from the world, true Christians have been brought to see with a vivid and realising perception. Their conduct is only that which is unavoidably suggested by a clear, firm, and intelligent persuasion of those very truths which those who count them "mad" profess to acquiesce in. Indeed they could not act otherwise than they do, without shutting their eyes to the plainest and most important of those revealed truths, of which they own their full conviction, professing to know of dangers from which they will not flee, to discern and deplore evils and miseries which they will not shun, to appreciate and desire blessings which they will not be at the pains to seek, and to acknowledge claims and obligations which yet they deliberately refuse to comply with. Assuredly, such persons cannot be considered as labouring under any manner of infatuation, unless it *be* madness to "*walk after the truth*;" unless it be folly or frenzy to be *consistent*; unless it be proof of a weak or distempered mind to act in

accordance with its avowed principles and convictions.

But that earnest and devoted Christians are "not mad" appears, further, from *the soundness and sobriety of their practical judgment*. They estimate things according to what even nominal Christians must admit to be their real value, weighing them in the balances of the sanctuary, trying them by the standard of revealed truth, viewing them in the light of eternity. They no longer prefer "the broken cisterns" to the "living fountain," the creatures to the Creator, the body to the soul, the applause of men to the favour of God, the base pleasures of sin to the pure delights of godliness, the fleeting concerns of time to the endless glories of immortality. They "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ," and regard the wealth of worlds as insignificant in comparison with the welfare of the soul. They do so, not merely in *word*, but in *deed*. The judgment, they thus form, is *practical and influential*. And it is only *as being so*, that it differs very materially from the *professed* judgment of others by whom they are derided for it. If *this* be a proof of madness, surely we may well wish, that it were a thousand-fold more prevalent than it is. For, it would *indeed* be well, if all men were persuaded thus (as the Apostle says) to "*become fools that they may be wise.*"

Again, that earnest and devoted Christians "*are not mad,*" appears from *the force and sufficiency of their motives* for all that is most peculiar in their conduct. As there is nothing that true Christians *believe*, for which they are not able to assign the fullest evidence; so there is nothing which they habitually

do, for which they are not able to allege a satisfactory motive such as a sound mind might reasonably comply with. Hear how the Apostle Paul explains his own conduct, when some persons reproached it as savouring of extravagance : “ Whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God ; or whether we be sober, it is for your cause. For the love of Christ constraineth us.” The main sources, you see, of all his zeal, and self-denial, and devotedness, were a regard to the glory of God, a deep concern for perishing sinners ; and, above all, a sense of the Redeemer’s love “ constraining him, to live not unto himself, but unto the Lord, who died for him, and rose again.” *These* were the motives which animated Paul, and which still exert their mighty influence on all who in faith and love resemble him—motives such as the children of this world are alike unable to comprehend and to appreciate, but such as are perfectly sufficient to account for far more fervour and diligence in the work of the Lord, than the most devoted Christian has ever displayed. Even the single consideration of *the love of Christ* is more than enough, to warrant all the zeal which ever has been shown by those who are partakers of it. And, it will be time enough to charge them with extravagance, when once their returns of gratitude *have exceeded it*, in all those immeasurable dimensions in which, as we are truly told, it “ passeth knowledge.”

But yet, farther, that earnest and devoted Christians are “ not mad,” is evident from the fact, which even those who esteem them so must in their moments of sober reflection be forced to admit, that *in all they do they are really consulting their true interests, and*

seeking to promote their substantial and lasting welfare. They are doing so, even with reference to the present world ; for it is a true saying, that “ godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come.” But, still more eminently are they doing so, with reference to a future and never-ending state of existence. They are laying up a good foundation for eternity, striving by faith and patience, by self-denial and indefatigable diligence in the work of the Lord, to secure an unfading inheritance of bliss and glory, with which all their toils, and trials, and hardships, in seeking to win it are not worthy to be compared. While they act on such principles, how can it be thought that there is anything unreasonable or extravagant in their conduct ? In all ordinary matters, it is thought a mark of true wisdom to subordinate a smaller interest to a greater, to forego in the meanwhile some temporary gain, or endure in the meanwhile some temporary loss, with the fair and reasonable, not to say the *sure* prospect of averting some more serious evil, or securing some more important advantage in the time to come,—and to strive for the attainment of objects which we have in prospect, with a measure of zealous and steadfast assiduity, proportioned to the value we attach to them, and the solid benefits we are expecting to derive from them. Surely there is no reason why we should judge differently regarding those measures, which a prudent man ought to adopt in seeking the everlasting welfare of his soul.

I cannot see why, in matters of religion, there should be set up a standard of practical wisdom different from that which is recognised and adopted in other matters ;

or why a line of conduct, which all men are prepared to approve when the object of it is to promote the interests of time, should be stigmatised as foolish or enthusiastic, when we seek to promote by it the interests of eternity. We do not consider the husbandman "beside himself," when in spring we see him, to all outward appearance, throwing *away* his precious grain, and burying it under the surface of the earth, because we well know, that he expects in due season to carry back in sheaves, what he casts from him in handfuls. We do not consider the merchantman "beside himself," when he empties his vessel's precious freight into the sea, rather than, by seeking to retain it, expose himself for its sake to the perils of shipwreck. We do not consider the diseased man "beside himself," when he submits to the most unwelcome regimen, and undergoes the most painful operations, for the recovery of his health and the prolongation of his mortal life. Why, then, should a Christian be considered as "beside himself," when *he* has recourse to a similar procedure in order to promote *the welfare of his soul*; when, rather than risk the agonies of the second death, he crucifies and dismembers "the body of sin;" when he casts away from him his most cherished lusts and idols, rather than suffer them to "drown him in perdition;" and when with all patience he "sows unto the Spirit," assured that "of the Spirit he shall reap life everlasting"? In all the ordinary engagements of the present life, we highly approve of the conduct of such persons as enter, *with heart and soul*, on the prosecution of them; we praise their zeal; we commend their assiduity; we highly extol the decision they maintain, the toils they incur, the sacrifices they sub-

mit to, the singleness of aim and purpose that they display. By what strange perversity of judgment, then, should it come to pass, that the great work of *Religion* should be the only work in which those qualities which are most valued in other matters, are not only slighted, but positively condemned? Why should it only be *in making merchandise* to gain “*the pearl of great price,*” and the “*unsearchable riches of Christ,*” that we must run no risks and take no pains, if we would not be charged with wild folly or fanaticism? Why should it only be as *disciples in the school of Christ,* that men are to be sneered at for their earnestness and diligence, seeing it is the “*true wisdom*”—the knowledge which maketh wise unto salvation—to which they are applying themselves? And why should it be in no other than *that spiritual warfare,* on which a crown of immortal victory is depending, that cowardice, lukewarmness, breach of strict discipline, not to say absolute treachery, are approved of, while courage, ardour, watchfulness, fidelity, and uncompromising steadfastness are reprobated?

Ah! my dear friends, did those persons who are accustomed to ridicule all serious concern about Religion, advert, for but a few moments, to *what Religion truly is*—did they but consider what mighty interests it involves, what solemn duties it enjoins, with what priceless blessings it is fraught—they would not, *they durst not,* speak of it as they are wont to do. Assuredly, the concerns of Religion are no vain or trivial matters, but things of the most overwhelming importance; so that we are ready to marvel that they do not wholly engross, to the exclusion of all inferior con-

cerns, the minds of all such as have faithfully contemplated them. If any man thinks or speaks lightly of religion, because he is firmly persuaded, as the result of a patient and careful inquiry, *that there is no truth in it*, let him at least have the honesty to say so, and then we shall be the better able to understand him. But for a man to say, that he believes in those weighty truths which religion proposes to him, and yet not only to slight them for himself, but to sneer at all others who will not join with him in slighting them,—for a man to profess his conviction, that there is a God, and yet to deem it a mad or weak thing with all his heart to love Him, and with all his strength to serve Him—for a man to acknowledge, that he has an immortal soul, destined to future happiness or to future misery that are alike interminable, and yet to regard the most serious concern for its everlasting welfare, as a fit subject of ridicule—for a man to tell us, that there is a heaven of glory and felicity to be won, a hell of shame and misery to be shunned, and yet to consider *any* measure of intense interest *too much*, to be bestowed on matters so momentous,—*this*, truly, is a mode of thinking and of judging, for which, on any other principle than the desperate blindness and deceitfulness of the carnal mind, it were altogether impossible to account. Certainly its truth being once admitted, Religion is, of all things in the world, the one with respect to which no measure of earnestness and diligence can be excessive. Even the wildest enthusiasm about it is far less culpable and far less irrational, than the conduct of those who can regard it with indifference. So far, therefore, ought we to be from wondering, when we find any of our fellow-

Christians very much engrossed with a matter so transcendent, that *this* is no more than we ought to be prepared for. We should indeed have *great cause* for wondering, were it otherwise. And *even as it is*, we have no small cause for wondering, that they are not *much more* engrossed by it than they appear to be. I doubt not, that many of those whom the world is wont to reproach for *making too much ado about Religion*, are ready to reproach *themselves* for heeding it *so little*. I doubt not, that it is often to *them* a matter of astonishment, that they are not a thousand times more fervent in their desires, and more diligent in their endeavours, to lay hold on eternal life.

But here, Brethren, in further repelling this most unfounded charge, it may be worth while to consider for a very little, *what credit is due to those who usually advance it?*

By what manner of men is it, that earnest and devoted Christians are usually reproached as if they were “beside themselves”? Is it by persons, whose claims to true wisdom in regard to those matters which they thus venture to decide, are so manifestly clear and so incomparably strong, that no protest can be allowed against their judgment? The very reverse is nearer to the truth. For with all their pretensions to superior wisdom and sobriety of mind, they are in reality much more liable to the charge which they advance than are those whom they assail with it. *Theirs* is the folly, — *theirs* is the madness, in making so light of the things which concern their peace.

The Scriptures, speaking of unconverted men, tell

us that "their hearts are full of evil, and that *madness* is in their hearts while they live." Nor, can we doubt, that this description is a true one. For what, indeed, is the whole life of those men who are living without God in the world, and giving no very earnest and engrossing heed to the great concerns of religion and eternity? What, I ask, is the whole life of such men, but one habitual course of phrensy or fatuity? They *may* indeed, like many deemed to be of unsound mind, be able to conduct themselves very rationally with reference to all subjects except *that one*, regarding which their intellect happens to be obscured. And even with regard to Religion itself they may, so to speak, have, now and then, their lucid intervals—their times of comparative soundness and sobriety. But still, in regard to this most momentous of all concerns, they prove by the habitual tenor of their conduct that their minds are in a lamentable state of darkness and disorder. And indeed there is scarcely a symptom of madness that can be thought of, but something more or less resembling it might be found in them. Is a madman *deluded*? Is he apt to entertain unfounded and extravagant ideas of his own condition? Does he, in the wanderings of a wild fancy, suppose himself to be a king, or a conqueror, or a philosopher, and mistake the miserable furniture of his cell for the ensigns of royalty or the badges of distinction? No such delusion can be grosser than that of the sinner, who thinks that he is spiritually rich and increased with goods, when in fact, he is poor and miserable and naked,—who says to his soul, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace,—who flatters himself that he has nothing to apprehend, while his

sins are all unrepented of and unforgiven, and the wrath of God is continually hanging over him, with nothing but the frail thread of human life to prevent its fall. Does the madman usually engross himself with trifles, such as in his sober senses he would fling away for more becoming and profitable occupations? In *this*, too, he is but a fit emblem of the sinner, who, having a heavenly inheritance to secure, can set himself down to toil or sport with earthly vanities,—spending his money for that which is not bread, and wasting his labour on that which cannot satisfy. Does the madman recklessly expose himself to obvious dangers? Will he rush into the flames, or dance upon a precipice, or plunge into the deep, regardless of the consequences? Yea, will he even court his own destruction, and wilfully seek to terminate his own existence? He cannot do worse in this respect than the careless sinner, “who wildly sports him on those slippery places which overhang the gulf of everlasting ruin,” or lifts his suicidal hand against the life of his own most precious soul.

Such are a few of the plain symptoms of that moral insanity, which may, with all justice, be ascribed to those persons who give themselves no serious concern for the duties of religion and the destinies of a future world. Yet THESE are the men by whom earnest Christians are derided! *These* are the men who look upon decided piety, as something approaching to phrensy or imbecility! *These* are the men that are ready to sneer at the conduct of all who are more deeply concerned than themselves for the things of religion and eternity, and sweepingly to denounce them, without the least distinction, as persons of weak

judgments or distempered imaginations! Judge ye, what weight is due to *their* decision. If there be any truth in what we have been stating, their charge may be not only repelled, but *retorted*. We may fling back on *them* the reproach which they would cast upon *us*, and we may confidently affirm, that it is *they* who are "beside themselves." For, truly, there are none who may more justly be so described. There is no one so "beside himself" as the heedless sinner, who lives *here* as if he were to live for ever. There is no such madman as he who misemploys his whole activity and ingenuity upon toys and trifles, to the utter neglect of those all-important ends for which existence has been given and redemption has been offered to him,—no such madman as he who acknowledges that there is but a step between him and death—that it wants but an unexpected fever, or a sudden fall, or the failure of some slender blood-vessel, to cut the thread of life asunder and let him sink by his own weight into perdition,—and yet can live on regardless of such affecting truths, and slumber or dream away his lifetime amid the cares, and toils, and pleasures of the world, without any serious preparation for eternity. Certainly, of all kinds of infatuation, *that* of the lukewarm or heedless sinner is the most deplorable. There is none so utterly unreasonable in its nature,—none so fatally destructive in its consequences.

And now, my Christian friends, if these things be so, need I say aught more to encourage and confirm you, in steadfastly bearing all the reproaches of worldly men? To *you* it is a small thing, to be judged of

man's judgment. So long as you have reason to think that God and His Word are with you, you have no cause to fear though all the world should be against you. Nay, if ye be reproached for the name of Christ, *happy are ye*. For *this*, of itself, is a very hopeful symptom that *you* are not of the world, even as *He* was not of the world. You must not expect to fare better than your Lord. If sinners reviled *Him*, they will also revile *you*. If they said of *Him* that He was beside Himself, or possessed with a devil, what less can you expect them to say of *you*, if you resemble Him? But heed not *what* they say. Follow *ye* the Lord, whatever the world may think of you, for so doing. If zeal for Christ be called "bigotry," and faith "delusion," and charity "wastefulness," and purity "hypocrisy," and piety "gloom," and self-denial "superstition,"—if to be earnest, faithful, devout, pure in heart and speech, scrupulous in sentiment, and strict in practice with reference to religion, shall expose you to the charge of folly or enthusiasm, heed it not. You cannot help this. You are not answerable for it. And, in the meanwhile, you must patiently submit to it,—comforting yourselves with the thought that the time is coming when true wisdom will be "justified of her children." We would not, indeed, by any means advocate an utter disregard of prudence and discretion, in the manner in which as Christians you conduct yourselves. It is right and needful that you *should be* prudent and discreet. It is right that you should "walk in *wisdom* towards them that are without," taking heed "lest your good be evil spoken of," and trying, as far as your Christian principles will allow of it, to give no offence

to any, lest the Gospel should be blasphemed. At the same time, however, you must especially beware of consulting *prudence* to the detriment of *principle*. You must not allow yourselves, out of the fear of *man's* opinion, to be led into unlawful compromises or compliances. And, indeed, you have much more cause to be afraid of *not going far enough* than of *going too far* in your conformity to the rules of godliness. Few men need be cautioned, in the present day, against carrying their zeal and their devotedness to an inordinate extent. It will be time enough to address to Christians such a caution, when we find them more strict, more ardent, more self-denying, than was that holy Apostle Paul, against whom, with all his greater attainments, the charge of madness was yet, as we have seen, altogether destitute of foundation. Be not afraid, and be not ashamed, to be *as* liable as *he* was to such a charge, by reason of nonconformity to the ways of the world. Do not hesitate to be followers of *him*, even as *he* was of Christ. And doubt not, that the Lord in His own good time will interpose in vindication of you from all the charges, with which you may be assailed for thus acting. *He* will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noon-day, and make it at length apparent in the sight of all the universe, that the way of the humble and often derided Christian is, in reality, the way of truth and soberness.

I cannot leave this subject, without addressing one or two words of admonition to those who may have been hitherto accustomed to utter such charges, as we

have been trying to refute. I trust, my friends, that you will most seriously consider, before you again speak lightly of true godliness. I trust, you will not be any longer disposed to treat it, as a proper theme of levity or derision. Be not content, however, with giving due credit for soundness and sobriety of mind to earnest and decided Christians. Make it your care, also, in these respects, to *emulate them*. Adopt for *yourselves* that course which you commend in *them*. Choose, as they have done, the good and gainful part; and when you *have* chosen it, steadily adhere to it. Taking your stand resolutely on the Lord's side, endeavour in all things to honour and to serve Him. And, whatever a blinded world may think of you for so doing, let *your* rejoicing be the testimony of a good conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, you have your conversation in the world; while it is your great hope and comfort to be persuaded that the Saviour, whom you are thus willing faithfully to confess before men, will not be ashamed to own and honour you, "when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy Angels."

VI.

RETRIBUTION A LAW OF GOD'S MORAL
GOVERNMENT.

“Be not deceived ; God is not mocked : for whatsoever a man soweth,
that shall he also reap.”—GALATIANS, vi. 7.

THE maxim here laid down is a very plain one ; so much so, that if considered by itself, apart from the practical application that is made of it, we might, at first sight, be not a little surprised at the solemn and imposing manner, in which it is introduced.

“*Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.*”
—Assuredly he shall ! If he sow wheat, he shall reap wheat. If he sow tares, he shall reap tares. If he sow sparingly, he shall reap sparingly. And if he sow abundantly, he shall reap abundantly. The product of his field shall, in all cases, be answerable, both in quality and in quantity, to the seed which he has sown in it. In the ordinary process of husbandry, we are well aware, that such is the uniform and unavoidable result. And no man needs to be warned against deceiving himself with the hope of so far frustrating the manifest intentions, and setting aside the fixed arrangements of Divine Providence, as to secure, in harvest, a crop entirely different from that to which the labours of spring-time have been conducive.

You do not need to be told, however, that it is of a *spiritual* and not of a *natural* husbandry, that the Apostle speaks. And hence the exceeding gravity and earnestness, with which he solicits our attention to his statement. There is no greater solemnity in his warning, indeed, than the case requires. For, in *moral or spiritual* matters, men are exceedingly apt to cherish hopes and entertain opinions which, if held and acted on in reference to other things, would be symptomatic of the grossest blindness or delusion. Without, perhaps, venturing *formally to deny* the fact of a coming retribution, in which they shall be dealt with according to the character and conduct which they now maintain, most men certainly *live and act*, as if they denied it. The thought of it makes upon them no sensible impression, and exercises over them no perceptible influence. It is evident from the whole strain of their sentiments and actions, that they are not habitually and seriously expecting to “eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.” Day after day do they go on “*sowing to the flesh,*” without any apparent dread that “*of the flesh they shall reap corruption.*” And though, to all appearance, utterly neglectful of everything that could be reasonably considered as “*sowing to the Spirit,*” they have no distressing apprehensions of their ultimate failure to “*reap of the Spirit, life everlasting.*”

And yet, one should think, it cannot be an easy thing for any intelligent man to escape from the conviction, that under the government of an infinitely perfect God, *there must be in the moral world, a like orderly and regular connection of causes and effects, as*

that which we uniformly meet with in the material world. Apart, altogether, from the discoveries of revelation, it is reasonable to conclude, that the principle of seed producing fruit after its own kind, which we find operating invariably in the lower, must also be maintained in the higher departments of the Divine administration; or, in other words, that the conduct of rational and moral creatures must lead to certain results, which bear the same relation to it, as the crop that is reaped to the seed which has been sown.

Nor are there wanting, within the range of actual experience, various indications, more or less distinct, that such a state of things has really been established. There is, for example, the judgment of our own conscience, approving or condemning us according to our deeds, and solemnly warning us of a merited retribution, with which, either here or hereafter, they shall be visited. There is the observed influence, also, of certain sins in impairing the health, and shortening the life, and blighting the happiness of those who are addicted to them, by reason of which it may truly be affirmed that "the sinner's own wickedness shall correct him," and that, even in this world, his sin is sure to find him out. And, there is the never-failing tendency of all our actions to strengthen those habits and dispositions from which they spring, and thus to contribute to the formation of a character which, whether for good or evil, shall cleave to us in after-years. Nor are these evidences of what may be called a *natural Retribution*, to be overcome by some occasional instances of suffering virtue or prosperous wickedness, that may seem to be at variance with them. On the contrary, when viewed

in connection with these instances, they lead us with all the more confidence to anticipate the advent of some day of reckoning in a future world, in which all present imperfections and anomalies in the moral government of the universe shall be rectified, and men shall be exactly and uniformly recompensed according to what they have done, whether it be good or bad.

Now, you need not be told, that these suggestions of reason and these presumptions of experience are fully confirmed by the clear testimony of revelation. The doctrine of a future state of Retribution is set forth in the oracles of Divine truth, with a clearness which it is impossible to misconceive, and with an authority which cannot be controverted. God has *therein* told us, that the life we now lead is preparatory to a more enduring existence which lies beyond it, and that, on our character and conduct in the present world, depends our everlasting destiny in the world to come. Not only so, but He has further made known to us the laws or principles of His spiritual government, according to which His ultimate dealings with us shall be regulated; unfolding to us that method of acceptance with Him, through the mediation of His well-beloved Son, and of sanctification through the grace of His Holy Spirit, by which alone it is practicable for fallen creatures to obtain an inheritance of blessedness in His heavenly kingdom; and plainly declaring, that repentance towards God and faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ, leading, as they must, to earnest diligence and patient continuance in all manner of good works, are indispensable to our attainment of eternal life—while, on

the other hand, impenitence, unbelief, and practical ungodliness must bring us to perdition.

These are the true sayings of God, as all intelligent readers of Holy Scripture must acknowledge. If there be truth in the Bible *at all*, *these* things are true, for they lie on its very surface; so that it is scarcely possible by any heedlessness to overlook them, or by any artifice to explain them away.

This being the case, we may confidently affirm that men at last shall be recompensed according to their principles, character, and conduct, *as surely* as the crops of the husbandman correspond to the seeds from which they spring. For we cannot suppose that God will be *less faithful* in carrying out those principles of His *moral* government, of which He has given us the assurance of His *pledged word*, than in maintaining those laws of the *natural* world, which He has left us to ascertain by our own experience and observation. He has Himself taught us, indeed, to argue in this manner, from His constancy in the one department to His faithfulness in the other. "If," He says, "ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season; then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant." "For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations." "For ever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in heaven. Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: Thou hast established the earth, and it abideth. They continue this day according to Thine ordinances." In these and in va-

rious other passages of a like import, the constancy of God in the regulation of His works of nature is evidently appealed to, as a sure pledge and fit emblem of the unfailing faithfulness with which He may be expected to fulfil, in like manner, the declarations of His Word. And, surely, such an appeal is altogether just and reasonable. It is the same God who rules in both departments. And, we cannot suppose otherwise, than that there should be a *harmony* and *consistency* in His whole procedure. It is no inordinate demand, then, that we are making when we ask you to admit, that the course of action which God has indicated as necessary to secure our everlasting welfare, is just as fixed as the process of vegetation, or any other familiar process in the physical world. And if so, there is evidently no alternative but the reaping of a harvest of blessedness or of misery, according as this course is followed or neglected by us. In *spiritual*, no less than in *natural* husbandry, we must take the laws which God has established, as we find them. We cannot alter them. We must yield to them and act upon them, regulating all our plans and doings in conformity with them. And no greater infatuation can be well imagined, than to think that these laws shall in either case be suspended, in order to prevent us from reaping what we have sown.

Such, then, being the manifest clearness and soundness of the maxim laid down in the text, let us see how effectually it may be used to dissipate some of those delusions, by which men are wont to impose upon their own souls.

I. Take, for example, *the very common delusion of trusting to a mere outward profession or "form of godliness."* How utterly vain and irrational does it at once appear, when viewed in the light of the maxim we are now considering! What can it avail us, that we *profess*, however solemnly, and *appear*, however speciously, to be leading a Christian life, if such be not *truly* the character which belongs to us? We may by this means deceive *our fellow-men*, or we may even succeed in deceiving *ourselves*. But we cannot deceive *God*. *He* will not be "mocked." *He* knows us, and will deal with us according to what we *really* are. He has placed us under a system of moral government, in which, according to certain orderly laws and fixed methods which have been explicitly revealed to us, our principles, dispositions, and conduct in the present life are to fix and determine our ultimate destiny in the life to come. And it is vain to think that the order He has thus established, can, by any mere *pretence* or *semblance* of conformity to it, be, to all practical purposes, nullified or evaded. No, Brethren! The principle must ever remain a sound one—in the world of spirit, no less than in the world of matter—that "whatsoever a man soweth, *that* shall he also reap." It is not what he *seems* or *professes* to be sowing, but what he actually *docs* sow, that will regulate his future harvest.

II. Take, as another example, *the persuasion* which we often meet with, *that sincerity in all moral or spiritual matters is the only requisite*, and that provided a man's sentiments regarding religion, and his consequent practice, as founded on them, be *sin-*

cere, their *rightness* or *wrongness* is a question of subordinate importance. Such a persuasion as *this* is, also, utterly unjustifiable, when tried by the plain and sound maxim of the text. "Whatsoever a man soweth, *that* shall he also reap;" not what he *thinks* or *believes* that he is sowing, but what he *actually* sows, is that which he shall reap. Suppose a man were honestly to think that he is sowing good grain in his field, when in point of fact he is sowing *tares*, the *honesty* with which he entertains such an opinion, and proves that he *does* entertain it by acting upon it, will not induce God to alter the course of nature, so as to save him from the consequences of his mistake. It must be even so in reference to religion, if religion be a matter of real truth and certainty. Either God has *not* prescribed to us any one particular course more than another, by which we are to escape perdition and to obtain eternal life; or He *has* prescribed such a particular course, and then we must necessarily fail of securing its appointed results, when we refuse to adopt it—even although our refusal is founded on ever so honest a persuasion that it is not required of us. Surely, then, it is not asking too much of any man *who believes that God has given us a Revelation of His will*, when we ask him to admit that the arrangements therein revealed, with reference to the conduct and consequent destiny of God's rational creatures, are just as fixed as the order of the seasons, or any of the common laws or processes of the natural world. And, if so, it is plainly unreasonable to expect that God will alter the one any more than that He will suspend the other, in order to prevent us from reaping what we have sown.

In *both*, we may be quite sure, the course which He has established will be maintained by Him, steadfast and inviolate. And hence, in regard to *both*, it is of the like importance that *our views*, by which our practice is to be regulated, be not only *sincere*, but *correct* or *consistent with truth*.

A notable idea truly, that the *sincerity* of our views and actions, be they ever so wrong in themselves, will exempt us from the consequences of them! Who does not see that if such a principle were carried out to its legitimate extent, it would undermine the foundations of all morality,—destroying altogether the eternal distinction between right and wrong, truth and falsehood—and allowing us with impunity, and without restraint, to cherish sentiments the most unjustifiable in themselves, and it may be the most pernicious in their practical tendency, on no other ground than that *they really are our sentiments*? Surely the circumstance of our being thus *sincere* in any *wrong* views deliberately entertained by us, and in any *wrong* course of action which they may lead us to adopt, is so far from *exempting* us from our responsibility in regard to them, that it actually *fastens* upon us that responsibility, and leaves us without the possibility of escaping from it.

Be that as it may, however, of one thing we may be sure, that God will not alter the order of things established by Him, to save us from the evil consequences of misconceiving it. The *truth of the case*, whatever that may be, will not shift or vary according to *our* views of it. “Whatever a man soweth, that shall he also reap;”—the *real* nature or quality of the seed, and not his opinion, however honest, in

regard to it, being *that* which determines the fruit that is to spring from it.

III. Take, as a further instance of those strong delusions which the maxim in the text serves effectually to dissipate, *the trust which so many are accustomed to repose in their ever-postponed intentions and resolutions*, as substitutes for an immediate and earnest maintenance of the Christian life. Perhaps there is no delusion more common, or more fatal than this. Of those multitudes who are habitually living in utter neglect of the calls and precepts of the Gospel, there are comparatively few who have made up their minds to a full, deliberate, and final rejection of it. By far the majority of them are *Christians in prospect*, cherishing amidst all their sins the visionary dream of some future and more convenient season of becoming so in reality, and silencing all the remonstrances of conscience by a promise of eventual repentance, sufficiently confident to allay their fears of punishment, but at the same time sufficiently indefinite as to the season when it is to be carried into effect, to leave them ample scope, in the meanwhile, for the unrestrained indulgence of their besetting sins. Now, what does the text say to persons of this description? It tells them, that they are cheating their own souls by an artifice of the most flimsy and transparent kind. It assures them, that the harvest which awaits them will be answerable, *not* to that *good seed* which they are always *intending* and *promising* to sow, without ever actually sowing it, but to that *evil seed* which, day after day, in spite of all their purposes to the contrary, they are suffering to spring and grow up

within their hearts. It solemnly warns them, that while they are putting far from them what they seem to consider the "evil day" of giving earnest heed to the duties of religion, they are suffering their brief and uncertain period of preparation for eternity to pass away unimproved—cherishing within them a noxious growth of evil habits which, the longer they are persevered in, will be the more difficult to root out; hardening their hearts and searing their consciences, and filling up the measures of their sins, and treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath; wearing out the patience of that God who bears with them long, but will not bear with them for ever, and grievously provoking Him either to cut them off—how soon and how suddenly they know not—or, sparing them still alive but to leave them to themselves, and allow them to become hardened and hopeless in their impenitence.

IV. Let me just notice, as one further instance of those delusions which the maxim in the text is most effectual in dispelling, *that groundless expectation* which many sinners entertain, and by which they take encouragement in their evil courses, *that God will not ultimately inflict, to the full extent, those awful penalties which are threatened in His Word*, but that He will either dispense with them altogether, or if that may not be, that He will in a great measure mitigate their amount or shorten their duration. This vain presumption on the part of sinful men is founded, for the most part, on the *patience and forbearance* which are extended in the meanwhile towards them, and from which they are ready to infer, that a merciful

God, who is so very slow to inflict punishment, will in the end be much less rigorous in His dealings with them, than His Word has declared Him to be.

The inference, however, is altogether unwarranted. "God is not a man, that He should lie; or the son of man, that He should repent. Hath He said, and will He not do it? hath He spoken, and will He not make it good? Yea, though heaven and earth may pass away, His words shall in no wise pass away. Although we believe not, yet He abideth faithful; He cannot deny Himself." His temporary delay in the execution of His sentence denounced against the workers of iniquity, affords no presumption, that it will not be at last inflicted. For, it so happens, that those very Scriptures in which the terms of the sentence are revealed, have told us that the sentence *will not be executed speedily*. And surely the observed verification of Scripture on the *latter* point, is the *very reverse* of a reason for supposing that it *will not*, in like manner, be verified in the former also. But not only so; the Scriptures have further told us the *reason why* the sentence is so long deferred, assuring us that God "is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering towards us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Such being the case, the patience with which He spares us and gives us prolonged opportunities of repentance, instead of being any proof that He will finally retract His threatenings, in the event of His patience and long-suffering being misimproved, ought rather to be viewed as portending the absolute certainty, and withal the awful

severity, of that doom, which He knows to be in reserve for impenitent men, when once they have filled up the measure of their sins. It is unnecessary, however, to go farther than the text in order to repel the false inference we have just referred to. The figure there employed is sufficient to expose its fallacy. No man expects the *harvest* to be either *contemporaneous* with, or *immediately consequent* on the *seed-time*. Nor is it any proof of the connection between them being dissolved, that a considerable interval may separate them from one another. "Behold," saith an Apostle, "the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth; and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." The case is similar, as we are taught in the text to believe, with the connection between *our probation* and our *retribution*, however great may be the interval between them. Let not the believer, then, "be weary in well-doing; for *in due season* he shall reap, if he faint not." And let not the impenitent flatter himself with the deceitful hope of ultimate impunity; for in due season *he* also shall "eat the fruit of his own way, and shall be filled with his own devices."

The specimens I have now given may suffice to show you how very serviceable this maxim of the text may be, *in the way in which St Paul obviously meant it to be applied, as a safeguard against the deceitfulness of the human heart in the conduct of life.* And, I think, you will be ready to agree with me,

that there is no method by which the Apostle could have more effectually enforced his solemn warning, "*Be not deceived, God is not mocked,*" than by assigning this weighty and conclusive reason for it, that "*whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.*"

Besides this practical use, however, which was more immediately contemplated, there are some very important truths, which this pregnant maxim may be suitably applied to confirm and to illustrate, and which I am unwilling to pass without briefly noticing them in connection with it.

1. We seem, for example, warranted by it to conclude, that *our happiness or misery in a future state shall mainly consist in the full development of that character or disposition, which may have been formed or matured within us while on earth.*

The crop which a man reaps is not only *correspondent*, but exactly *similar*, to the seed which he had sown. No doubt the seed is greatly multiplied in the course of the process; yet *each one* of the multiplied grains is precisely alike in nature and properties to that which has produced it. It is no unwarrantable forcing of the comparison which St Paul has here instituted, when we venture to infer from it, that there will be something analogous to this, in the *spiritual harvest*. Nor are there wanting various statements of the Word of God, by which such a conclusion is expressly sanctioned and confirmed. The righteous "know not" as yet, in all respects, "what they shall be;" but thus much they do know, that "when Christ shall appear, they shall *be like Him*; for they shall see Him as He is," perfectly "transformed into the image of the Son of God," and "presented by Him faultless

and without blemish, before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy." The wicked, on the other hand, are repeatedly assured, that for *them* there is no place of repentance after death,—that as the tree falleth so must it lie,—that they shall hereafter be filled with their own devices,—and that, instead of repenting in the midst of their plagues, they shall *still* continue to be hateful, and hating God, and shall blaspheme His name with the devil and his angels. With respect to both classes, we may find a very explicit indication of their final destiny in these solemn words of the book of Revelation : "*He that is unjust, let him be unjust still : and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still : and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still : and he that is holy, let him be holy still.*"

It would, certainly, be taking an unwarrantable licence with many of the most distinct statements of the Word of God, were we to affirm that there are no *positive* rewards and punishments reserved for the righteous and the wicked in a future world, beyond those which actually and unavoidably spring from the full evolution or development of their personal character here. But still, I think, we are entitled by the text, and by many other passages of Scripture, to conclude, that *this* is to be one of the *main* elements of their future portion. They shall reap *what* they have sown—not something else, but the very things sown, reproduced and multiplied—a crop *the same in kind and quality* with that which they have been cultivating in this preparatory state. The beauty and blessedness of holiness, or the hatefulnes and wretchedness of sin, as already realised in this life, shall cleave to

them still, and form a most essential part of their harvest of endless retribution to be reaped in the life to come.

2. We may further learn from this maxim of the Apostle, that *there shall be different degrees of happiness for the righteous, and of misery for the wicked in a future state*, proportioned to the measure of their advancement in the Christian graces or sinful habits which distinguish them in this world. The justice of this inference from the comparison which the text contains, is almost too plain to need any illustration. For the crop which a man reaps may naturally be expected to correspond in *quantity*, as well as in quality, with the seed which has produced it. And, in another passage, the Apostle has expressly told us, that in the spiritual, no less than in the natural harvest, "He that soweth sparingly, shall reap also sparingly; and he that soweth bountifully, shall also reap bountifully." Besides, it is elsewhere declared respecting the wicked, that some shall be punished with fewer stripes than others, and shall have a "more tolerable" doom inflicted on them; and in like manner, respecting the righteous, that "every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour;" and that some, in the figurative language of our Lord's parable, shall be made "rulers over ten cities," while others are made "rulers over five cities," according to the measure in which they have improved the talents, with which they were severally intrusted.

This, Brethren, is a most important and pressing consideration. Let sinners learn from it, how greatly it concerns them to check and restrain the excesses of

their corrupt hearts. They must not suppose that, being in a state of impenitence, their case is already *as bad as it can possibly be*, and, therefore, that they need be at no pains to prevent the aggravation of it. Bad as it now is, *it may become much worse*. For, every additional step of advancement in the ways of sin will lead them to a lower depth of misery and condemnation. Let Christians, on the other hand, learn from it to be more and more earnest and diligent, in the work of the Lord. *They* ought not to suppose, that being in a state of grace, their case is already as *good* as it can possibly be, and that nothing can be done or need be attempted to improve it. Blessed as their condition is, it may become much more blessed; and they are unworthy of their high calling, if they do not strive with all their might, in dependence on the aids of heavenly grace, to make it so. Be not content, Brethren, with the prospect of merely reaching heaven, without further concern for the place you are then to hold, or the measure of bliss that is there to be allotted to you. If there be rewards *there* of various degrees of excellence, you ought to contend for one of the noblest of them. In other things ambition and striving may be sinful; but in this they are dutiful and commendable, and are even necessary to show, that you have a just estimate of the true dignity and excellence of your moral nature. Seek, then, to be *great* in the kingdom of heaven—to *lay up treasures there*—to secure an *abundant* entrance—to reap a *plentiful* harvest—to win a *full* reward.

3. Finally, we may learn from this maxim, *how mighty is the importance of our present conduct, as tending to shape our character and to fix our doom!*

All our life long, we are continually employed in sowing the seeds of that harvest which we must eventually reap. Our actions do not expire with their performance, nor our words with their utterance, nor our thoughts with the thinking of them. Each of these is a seed sown, and will bear fruit after its kind. Each of them survives in us, after it seems to be past and gone, and when it is perhaps forgotten, in the impress which it has left upon us, or in the habits and tendencies which it has strengthened and confirmed. It is matter of experience, that every after-period of life is affected more or less by the conduct of every earlier period, manhood by youth, and old age by manhood. "The child is father of the man." Such as we now are, we are as the offspring of the past, the practical result, or the living embodiment, of the days and years during which we have been occupied—it may be without much thought about it—in acquiring or developing the qualities that now distinguish us. And the like process still continues. We are sowing on, from day to day, the seeds of that character which will cleave to us in after-life, and which, if the same course of action be adhered to, will follow us beyond the grave, and go with us to the judgment.

Of what *immense moment*, then, is it for one and all of us, seriously to consider what manner of life we are now leading? Whether are we sowing to the flesh, so as to reap corruption, or sowing to the Spirit, so as to reap life everlasting? Let us seriously bethink ourselves, that our destiny will be determined, not by some *imaginary* life which we are always *intending* to lead, but by the life which we *actually do* lead. And

let us take heed that *ours* really be that life of faith, and penitence, and godliness, which can alone conduce to a blessed immortality.

Let all of us be admonished, as dying creatures, to give earnest heed to the things which concern our peace, before they be removed from our eyes. Let us work the works of Him that hath called us while it is day, because the night cometh when no man can work. And whatsoever our hand findeth to do, let us do it with all our might; forasmuch as there is neither knowledge, nor wisdom, nor repentance in the grave, whither we are all hastening.

VII.

CHRIST THE GIVER OF REST.

“Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”—MATTHEW, xi. 28.

THESE are great words. They evidently bespeak the majesty and supremacy of Him who uttered them. It is true they are at the same time very gracious words. Their gracious character, indeed, is that which most readily strikes us on first looking at them. But, when we more maturely consider them, we find also a wonderful loftiness in them, which is equally fitted to excite our admiration. It was a great thing, truly, for the meek and lowly Jesus of Nazareth to rise up from His slumber in the frail bark tossed on the waves of the sea of Galilee, and to say with effect to the stormy winds and swelling waters, “Peace, be still.” And, no wonder, that the disciples asked on that occasion, “What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?” But, methinks, it is a still greater thing for the same Jesus to undertake the calming and quieting of the troubled hearts of men, and to issue his large and liberal invitation to all weary and burdened souls, to come to Him for rest. When we hear Him thus speaking, well may *we* ask, “What manner of man is this?”

Who is it, that thus assumes to Himself the power of quelling the storms and agitations of the spiritual world, and of giving perfect peace to all who have recourse to Him? Surely there is, in the language He thus employs, a tone of more than human dignity and authority—a conscious sufficiency—a fearless self-reliance—which no one could be warranted to assume but *He*, concerning whom it is written, that “in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead.”

Be it observed, too, that the Person who thus speaks is the same who adds in the verse immediately following: “Learn of Me; *for I am meek and lowly in heart.*” And yet He deems it in no way inconsistent with that remarkable meekness and lowliness, of which He presents Himself as the great model for our imitation, to claim the unlimited and un-failing power of quieting all weary and troubled souls.

There are many other instances of a like nature, in which the Lord Jesus Christ, without any formal assertion of His Divinity, has so expressed Himself as evidently to imply it. Thus, on the last and great day of the Feast of Tabernacles, when, according to custom, the priests and Levites were pouring water from the pool of Siloam around the altar, and singing with glad voices these words of the prophet Isaiah, “With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation,” Jesus stood up in the midst of the crowded temple, and cried out: “If any man thirst, let Him come unto Me and drink.” Here He evidently claims to have “all fulness dwelling in Him” to satisfy the wants of every human being. For, He does not say, “Come unto *Him that sent Me* and drink,” but “Come unto **ME** and drink.” On various other

occasions too we find Him, without any *direct* affirmation of His Divinity, assuming characters and advancing claims, and with the utmost calmness and confidence asserting the possession of powers of the most surprising greatness, such as no created being, however exalted, could arrogate to himself without extreme presumption—as when He declares that He is “the light of the world;” the “resurrection and the life;” the Judge “of all nations;” “greater than the temple” of God; “Lord even of the Sabbath-day;” that “He and His Father are one;” that “those who have seen Him have seen the Father;” that “all things that the Father hath are His;” and that “all men must honour the Son even as they honour the Father.”

All these are striking instances of self-assertion, on the part of Him who was “meek and lowly in heart,” and plainly betoken that conscious greatness of which He felt Himself to be possessed, even amidst the lowest depths of His humiliation, and which, as in the text, we often find breaking forth, in the most easy and artless manner, in His discourses. And, as it seems to me, they afford proof of His supreme Divinity, not less valuable and forcible than can be derived from any of those statements by Himself or by His Apostles, in which that cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith has been most distinctly and unequivocally affirmed.

After all, however, it is the *gracious* rather than the *majestic* character of these words of our Saviour that is most apt to strike us, and may most profitably engage our attention while farther meditating upon them.

This gracious invitation of our Lord is, you will see, exceedingly broad and comprehensive. It embraces, "*All that labour and are heavy laden*"—a vast multitude, truly, in this toilsome and weary world. There is no specification of any particular kind of labour or of burden that may be oppressing those to whom it is addressed; but be this what it may, He assures them that He is ready to relieve them of all the distress and disquietude that may arise from it.

It may be, that a harrowing conviction of their guilt, and a vain effort by means of their own devising to escape from it, may be causing them to "groan, being burdened." Or, a painful struggle with the sins that ever beset them, may be prompting them to cry out in bitterness with the Apostle: O wretched men that we are! who will deliver us from the body of this death? Or, the restless pursuits, and harassing cares, and ever-unsatisfying enjoyments of a worldly life, may be wearing them out with lassitude and disappointment, and forcing from their lips the mortifying confession that "all is vanity and vexation of spirit." Or, they may be "in heaviness through manifold temptations." They may be threatened by dangers, from which they can see no escape. They may be sorely fretted by anxieties, which they can find no means of soothing or alleviating. They may be distressed by heartrending sorrows, which no earthly sources of comfort can assuage. But, under these, and all other burdens by which they may at any time be wearied and overladen, there is the fullest relief offered to their acceptance, in the wide and unrestricted invitation in the text.

Some are disposed, to limit this invitation to those

who are in painful anxiety for their soul's welfare, convinced of their guilt, deeply humbled for their sinfulness, seriously alarmed at the prospect of the coming wrath, and vainly striving by their own strength to work out that deliverance, which no human efforts are able to secure. That the call *does* include such persons is unquestionable. Of all toils and burdens, indeed, *theirs* are the most oppressive. And it were no better than trifling with the Saviour to come to Him for the removal of *any other* causes of trouble and disquietude, while *these* are still oppressing the soul.

We have no reason, however, and no right to think, that the Saviour's invitation is *confined* to such persons. The description He here gives is more or less applicable to all men, without exception, who have not yet come to Him. Weariness or disquietude, in one shape or other, is a never-failing characteristic of our fallen race. Whatever it be that troubles or depresses mankind,—whether it be sin, or suffering, or sorrow,—whether it be hard struggles, or ineffectual toils, or jealous rivalries, or bitter griefs, or anxious cares, or disappointing pleasures, they may ALL be alike described as "*labouring and heavy laden.*" And as such they are all, without distinction, comprehended in the large and unqualified terms of the invitation that is here issued.

I. *What, then, is the blessing which all men are here invited to receive?* It is "Rest,"—the very thing which all are most in need of—the very thing which hitherto they have been eagerly yearning for, and with earnest but fruitless efforts striving to attain.

It is Rest—a blessing which all creation cannot afford them, which wealth, rank, fame, pleasure, learning, influence, are powerless to bestow; but which the adorable Saviour largely and freely offers to all such as “labour and are heavy laden,” when they come to Him.

But, let us not misapprehend His language. The “Rest” He here speaks of is not *inactivity*. Indeed we are so constituted, that *this* would be *no real rest*. The very thing which makes many worldly men *uneasy* is, that they seem to themselves to have *nothing to do*. Their time hangs heavily upon them, and they know not how to employ it. Hour after hour floats lazily along, without any fit occupation to engage in, and leaves them the victims of a lassitude that is altogether fatal to their peace. *Not such*, assuredly, is the “Rest” which Christ provides and offers. *His Rest*, as you may see from the following verse, is inseparably connected with the “*taking upon us of the yoke of Christian duty*” which He imposes, with the “*learning*” from Him, of that “*meek and lowly heart*,” which He Himself so winningly exemplified, and which alone will enable us to bear His yoke, without being wearied or fretted by its weight. Yes! It is “Rest” *in the discharge of duty* that He gives us,—“Rest” in the untiring performance of such work, as is fitted to employ the energies and to satisfy the aspirations of those spirits which His grace has regenerated and renewed. *His own* “Rest” was found, in the doing of His Father’s will. And, certainly, He has no *other* or *better* rest for His disciples. He tells us, indeed, that it was his very “*meat*” to

do the work which His Father had assigned to Him. And by enabling *us* also from the heart to say so, by exciting *our* appetite for this "meat which the world knoweth not," He teaches us, like Himself, to find "Rest" in active duty, while we *go about*, as *He* did, "*doing good.*"

But, farther, if the promised "Rest" does not consist of *inactivity*, neither does it consist of an *entire exemption from all outward causes of trouble or distress*. On the contrary, the Lord Jesus was most careful to warn His disciples, that they must be prepared to *bear their cross* if they would follow Him. Even when giving them the most precious assurances of that perfect peace which He would unfailingly bequeath to them, He frankly declared that "*in the world they should have tribulation.*" It is not, then, rest *from* trouble that He promises. It is something far better, and far more wonderful; it is Rest *in* trouble—a settled calmness and composure of the mind within, amidst all the trials and afflictions that surround us. He teaches us to meet all the distresses of our outward condition, with a full persuasion that they are sent to us in love and mercy, and with a patient and hopeful expectation that they shall in the end be conducive to our good. And He gives us such supports and consolations in the endurance of them, that our every rebellious thought is quieted, our every feeling of discontentment is allayed, and "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keeps our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

II. If it be farther inquired, *What is the true nature*

of that precious blessing which the Saviour here proposes to us?—I may briefly refer you to various elements which are included in it, and which correspond to the various sources of disquietude that are more or less inseparable from our fallen state. There is, for example, *Rest from the load of conscious guilt* with which the convinced sinner is so heavily burdened, but from which a blessed deliverance is obtained, as soon as he looks in faith to the Redeemer bearing this load for him, in His own body on the cross. There is *Rest from the hard servitude of the law*, which we might else have vainly toiled in the spirit of bondage to accomplish, but for which the Saviour substitutes that “easy yoke” of loving and childlike obedience to the will of God, which every redeemed soul feels himself strongly impelled, as well as graciously enabled, to take up and bear. There is *Rest from the tumult and disorder of a sinful heart*, with its craving desires, its turbulent passions, its guilty fears, its envious and fretful tempers, which, of all foes to our peace, are unquestionably the most deadly, but which, by the power of Divine grace working in us, are quieted and brought into due order and subjection. There is *Rest from the wearisome pursuits of the world*—from the hard tasks and heavy burdens it imposes on us—from the vexing cares with which it grieves us, and the false promises of good with which it disappoints us,—until we are brought under the teaching of the Saviour, to choose in its stead the good part, which cannot fail us. And need I add, that there is *Rest in the enjoyment of blessings, privileges, consolations, and promises*, so great, high, rich, and glorious, as are well

fitted, did we but adequately appreciate them, not only to keep our hearts in perfect peace, but even to animate them with joy unspeakable and full of glory?

But the deepest element and the inmost nature of the "Rest" to which the Saviour invites all that "labour and are heavy laden," are only seen when it is considered as a participation in that Rest which He Himself experienced when labouring and heavy laden in the fulfilment of His Divine mission, in the days of His humiliation. Whither, then, was it, that the Lord Jesus betook Himself for comfort and relief, in seasons of trial and perturbation? Where was it, that *He* sought repose for His weary soul when grievously vexed and troubled by "enduring the contradiction of sinners against Himself"? He sought it, where alone it could be found—in an uncomplaining submission to the Divine will,—in an unsuspecting reliance on the Divine faithfulness,—and in an unflinching trust in the fulness of that provision, which Divine wisdom supplied for the fulfilment of all its purposes. Thus did He enter into His own rest, with all its calmness and confidence and power. He rose, on such occasions, from earth to Heaven—from man to God—from the ingratitude and enmity and change of a fickle and faithless generation to "the Eternal God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the Earth." When weary, He rested Himself on the bosom of the Father, even then entering with Him into high and intimate communings regarding the eternal counsels, of which a few brief and broken utterances have been vouchsafed to us. At such times, He expressed not only quiet acquiescence, but cheerful and grateful concurrence

in His Father's will respecting the treatment, which He and his Gospel met with. He comforted Himself with the thought, that all things were "delivered to Him" which were needful for the execution of His great and gracious work, and that by it the Father would glorify His Son and be glorified in Him. Realising His oneness with the Father and yielding Himself up in holy self-surrender to Him, He therein found His highest solace and joy.

Such was the Saviour's rest. And having Himself experienced it in His human nature, He sought to impart it to all His followers. From the very nature of things, He could not enjoy it by Himself alone. Its purpose, and its meaning, and its preciousness, even to Him, would have been lost, had it not been communicated to the weary world He came to save. This, His own rest in God, He still asks all burdened souls to come and share with Him. He is ready to convey to them, all the elements of His inward peace which their limited minds are capable of receiving. He will sweeten their labour and lighten their heavy burden; amid all their toils and sorrows He will give them "Rest." Who of all the weary, worn sons of men is not ready to exclaim: "O blessed One! show us this rest, and it sufficeth us; only tell us where and how this great blessing can be obtained"? And in reply, we have this most gracious invitation, this plainest of directions, addressed to us by an all-sufficient Saviour: "*Come unto Me, and I will give you rest.*"

III. *The Lord Jesus, then, directs us to Himself as*

the source from which alone the blessing of true rest can be obtained. Nor is it here alone, that we receive this direction. For it is the clear and uniform doctrine of Scripture, that *He only* can give us that knowledge of God, and that acceptance with Him,—that enjoyment of His favour and experience of His fellowship—that sanctified conformity to His will—that personal interest in His promises and consolations,—which form the essential groundwork of the believer's peace. And it is most important to know and remember this. It is not salvation *in the abstract* that the Gospel reveals and offers to us, but a *Saviour*. It is to a *living Person* that it brings us, with whom we must deal for such blessings as He has to give. "It pleased the Father, that *in Him* all fulness should dwell. All things are delivered unto Him of the Father;" and "no man can know, or come to the Father, but through Him."

Yes! it is to the *Saviour Himself*, then, we must have recourse for Rest, as for every other spiritual and heavenly blessing. None else than He is able to impart it—not the most glorified saint, not the most exalted Angel—no created being in heaven or on earth. Not even *the Saviour's own ordinances and institutions* must ever be allowed in this matter, to come between us and His Person. We may come to His *Word*, in which He is revealed; we may come to His *house*, in which He is worshipped; we may come to His *preachers*, by whom He is proclaimed; we may come to His *table*, at which He is commemorated;—but all this, if we come not to *Himself*, will avail us nothing. His ordinances and institutions

are indeed very precious and very serviceable, as *leading us to come to Him*;—but, if they serve not *this* purpose, they are worse than useless. If we *put them in His room*, and rest in them instead of Him, we are most grossly and fatally perverting them to our own prejudice.

IV. And if it be here asked, *What is meant by "coming to Him"?*—I might answer, justly enough, that *it signifies the act of faith*. For in various passages of Scripture, with which you must be familiar, "*coming to Christ*" and "*believing in Him*" are used interchangeably, as two forms of expression, to convey the same meaning. Take as an example that statement of the Saviour Himself—"He that *cometh* to Me shall never hunger; and he that *believeth* on Me shall never thirst," where the one expression is substituted for the other, as indicating the same act.

But though this answer be *true*, it is scarcely satisfactory. It does not suffice to make the matter much clearer than before. Indeed I may rather say, that by giving such an answer, we are seeking to explain the meaning of the phrase before us by using another that is *less* immediately intelligible than itself. For the expression here employed, "*coming to the Saviour*," is one of the plainest and simplest illustrations of the nature of faith, which the Scriptures have afforded us. You know well what it is for a person in distress to *come to a friend*, by whom he is offered, and from whom he may confidently expect, relief. And hence you may readily enough apprehend what it is for weary and burdened souls to *come to Christ*

for Rest. Thus much is certain, that the use of this expression shows us that something more is included in *the act of faith* than a mere *knowledge* or *conviction*, however clear and firm, of certain speculative truths with reference to the object of it. It is one thing to know and believe that there *is* a Saviour able and willing to save and bless us to the uttermost; but it is something more to “*come*” to this Saviour. To “*come to Him*” is evidently to *act* on our conviction so far as to *claim* or *appropriate* His offered mercies—to close with His terms—to comply with His invitations—to seek *in our own behalf* the exercise of His saving power—or, in the most suitable and expressive words of our Catechism, to “*receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation, as He is offered to us in the Gospel.*” *Faith*, as illustrated by “*coming to the Saviour,*” is not merely the *full persuasion of a truth*, but the *cordial and trustful acceptance of an offer*. It implies not only the *assent* of the *understanding*, but, along wit’ this, the *consent* and *reliance* of the *heart*. Accordingly we find the Apostle Paul declaring that “*with the heart*”—that is to say, with *the whole inner man*, the desires and affections, as well as the intellect—“*with the heart* man believeth unto righteousness.” And the Lord Jesus, when remonstrating with unbelievers, ascribes their rejection of Him not so much to intellectual blindness as to wilful perversity, saying to them, “*Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life.*”

I need scarcely tell you, that this “*coming to the Saviour*” does not at all imply a *bodily* approach to Him. *That* is impossible, indeed, now that He is in

heaven. And even were it not so,—even were He still with us so that we could actually come into His presence, such an approach to Him would of itself be useless, except in so far as it might be a faithful index of the inward desires and dispositions of our hearts. Multitudes flocked thus around Him while He dwelt on earth, who never derived any benefit from their access to Him. Many of His worst enemies came into closest contact with Him. None came nearer than the traitor when he kissed Him, and the rude soldiers when they seized Him and nailed Him to the cross.

Of *this* we may be sure, then, that it is no local access to Him, nor aught else in the shape of mere “*bodily exercise*,” which the expression here used is intended to denote. It is the *spiritual* part of our nature, that He here addresses. It is our *souls* that He graciously invites to “come to Him.” A true compliance with His call, therefore, is an *inward* thing—a process taking place in the *heart* for which no “bodily exercise” can be substituted. Let sinners make to Him *any other* approach—let them look to Him with their eyes—let them listen to Him with their ears—let them bend to Him their knees—let them speak to Him with their lips—let them do, in short, anything or everything they can think of, that may have the outward appearance of drawing near to Him,—but yet, so long as they keep back their *hearts*, they are still, to all saving purposes, as far from Him as ever. Yes, it is a *spiritual* access to Him that the text requires—a “coming to Him” *inwardly with the soul*—a turning of the thoughts unto Him—a going

forth of the desires after Him—a fastening of the hopes and expectations on Him—a confiding of all the soul's interests to His care—a seeking of all its needful supplies out of His fulness. It is a realising of His presence and saying to Him, truly and from the heart, 'Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me; guilty, pardon me; unholy, cleanse me; ignorant, instruct me; self-willed, subdue me; labouring and heavy laden, give to me Thy promised Rest.'

Such is the compliance with His invitation, which the Lord requires. And what is there to hinder one and all of you from rendering it? Why should you *not* come, when so urgently and freely invited, to be relieved from all the curse of your labours, and lightened of all your burdens, by being cleansed from all your sins? You are *unworthy* indeed, but not therefore *unwelcome*; for He calls not the righteous, but sinners to repentance. You have done and can do nothing, whereby you might be commended to Him; but neither does He ask any such things at your hands. He wishes you to come, not in order to *give*, but rather to *receive*. It is of no consequence, therefore, that you have nothing to give; you have much to *receive*, and that is your qualification. Your wants and sins, your burdens and distresses, are the only recommendations to His mercy, that you need to bring with you. Perhaps your burdens are peculiarly oppressive, so that you are greatly discouraged by their weight. But be of good cheer. The text does not offer rest to those only *whose burdens are comparatively light*, but to *all* such, *without exception*, as

“labour and are *heavy laden*.” And *the more sensible* you are of the oppressiveness of your burden, so much the more closely you answer this description—so much the more urgently do you need the Saviour’s rest, and so much the more will His grace be magnified in giving it to you. Perhaps you urge, that you have *no special warrant for thinking*, that the mercies of the Gospel were intended for *you*. But what *would you have* in the way of warrant for coming to Christ, beyond what is so plainly given in the text? You cannot expect, surely, to have *anything more* revealed to *you*, than what is revealed to *all men* in the Word of God! The declarations of the Bible—its general calls and liberal promises—are the only warrant which *any* believer has ever received. The brightest saints who now surround the heavenly throne had no better or more special encouragement than *these* afford. And why should they not be sufficient warrant for such as *you*? You cannot suppose, that the Saviour is *insincere* when He asks “*all that labour and are heavy laden to come to Him*.” And yet you are virtually saying so if you think that *this* and suchlike unqualified invitations which you find profusely scattered throughout the Scriptures, are *not enough* to warrant your compliance. The truth is, that instead of being unwarranted to come to Christ, there is not one of you who is warranted to *refuse* coming. To come is your *duty* as well as your *privilege*; and God will severely reckon with you if you do not perform it. Let me beseech you then, Brethren, utterly to throw aside all such unworthy suspicions of the Saviour’s grace. *Venture to trust in Him; take Him at His*

word; and you may rest assured He will not fail or disappoint you. Never has He sent any humble applicant empty away. Still is He true as ever to His sure promise—"Him that cometh unto Me, *I will in no wise cast out.*"

Allow me, finally, to observe that the invitation given us in the text, *is one which we must be habitually complying with.* We have not done with it, when once we have accepted of it. It is *still* offered to us, and pressed upon us from day to day. It is meant not only for awakened sinners, but for true believers. It is the *constant* invitation of the Saviour to His own faithful people, who have already come to Him, as well as to sinners, who have hitherto refused to come. The most sincere Christians have many burdens to depress and weary them. Cares often disquiet them. Sorrows often afflict them. Doubts, and difficulties, and temptations often harass them. Sins, alas! but too easily beset them. And *where*, in such circumstances, are they to seek relief except where they first found it, *in the never-failing grace of Christ?* Blessed be His name, we are *always* welcome to Him. *He* is neither wearied nor displeased by the utmost frequency and largeness of our applications. The oftener we come to Him, indeed, we are *the more welcome.* And there is no more acceptable way in which we can acknowledge the grace we have already received from Him, than by earnestly looking and urgently pleading for more and more of it. Be it our care, then, constantly and habitually, to comply with this gracious invitation of our Saviour,

at *all* times, and under *all* circumstances, so that the whole of our life which we are now leading in the body may be a life of faith on the Son of God. If we strive, with His gracious aid, to make it so, our souls will be constantly nourished and refreshed with the fulness of the comfort and blessedness which are derived from Him ; and, at last, we will be brought to that land of heavenly promise, where we shall *rest with Him* and joy in Him for ever.

VIII.

FAITH'S VICTORY OVER THE WORLD.

“And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”—

1 JOHN, v. 4.

GLORIOUS things are written in the Scriptures concerning the power and influence of FAITH. Mighty works are said to be done by it. Blessings inestimably precious are connected with it. Everything, indeed, that is excellent in the believer's character—everything that is happy in his experience—everything that is lofty in his privileges—everything that is glorious in his destiny,—is traced, directly or indirectly, to its operation. We have on record its achievements, in the days of old. Many a bright pattern has been left us of the trials it has borne, the dangers it has braved, the battles it has fought, and the conquests it has won. Nor is there any reason to suppose, that such things are now beyond its power. On the contrary, they have been written as *examples* to us—*examples* of what Faith has *once* done for men of like passions with ourselves, and of what, even in these days, it may again accomplish. Physical miracles, indeed, are no longer to be expected from it; but, in other respects, its influence is the same as

ever. It is, *even now*, the "like precious" and powerful Faith. *Even now*, is that statement of the Divine Word a faithful saying: "*If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.*"

For, the most glorious of those attainments which have at any time been made by this principle are still, as much as ever, within its reach. Faith can yet work wonders in the *spiritual* world, as great as any that it once wrought in the *natural* world. It still can cure the maladies of the soul. It still can raise the dead in sin, to newness of life. It still can cast out the demon of indwelling corruption from the heart. It still can take up the mountains of iniquity and throw them into the depths of forgetfulness. It still can "quench the violence of fire," enabling us to pass unharmed through the midst of the furnace of affliction. It still can "stop the mouth" of that "roaring lion who goeth about seeking whom he may devour." It still can subdue the kingdoms of this world, and "put to flight the armies of the aliens," causing us to "wax valiant in fight," and making us in all things "*more than conquerors through Him that loved us.*"

In the words which form the subject of our discourse, the Apostle briefly but forcibly describes to us one of the noblest achievements of Christian Faith. He speaks of it, as *conquering the world*,—or, in other words, as prevailing against those influences adverse to the welfare of our souls, which temporal objects are so apt to exercise upon us. This conquest he had ascribed, in the previous clause, to all the true children of God, — declaring without any reservation, that "whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world." In the following verse he claims it for believers, and

for them *alone*, as their distinguishing prerogative, asking, with the decision and boldness of one who knew the challenge to be unanswerable: "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" And, in the text, he tells us of the instrument whereby this signal triumph is secured: "*This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.*"

The *necessity* of such a conquest as is thus described, in order to the consistent maintenance of our profession, may here be reasonably assumed. No experienced Christian can be ignorant of this necessity; scarcely any reflecting man can fail to admit it. The world is certainly opposed, in many ways, to our steadfastness and advancement in religion. Countless are the checks and hindrances which it gives us, formidable the obstacles which it places in our way, wily and ensnaring the allurements which it spreads for us. By its fair looks and flattering promises, it entices us to sin; while its frowns, and threats, and crosses, and hardships, deter us from duty. Its pleasures are seducing; its glories are dazzling; its riches are corrupting; its cares are distracting. Its maxims are so calculated to mislead, its friendships to ensnare, and its fashions and examples to deprave, that the man who would advance steadily along the "narrow way that leadeth unto life" has no alternative but to *overcome the world*,—arming himself against those influences wherewith it seeks to impede him in his progress,—and meeting them, in the strength of Divine grace, with a resolute and unyielding opposition.

Now, the instrument with which the believer is en-

abled thus successfully to strive against the world is no other than *his Faith*, that radical grace of the Christian character, to which in Scripture all his spiritual blessings, and privileges, and attainments, are ascribed.

As to the *nature* of Christian Faith, it may, in general terms, be described as a firm and confident reliance on the testimony of God. It is the conviction yielded by the understanding, and the acquiescence given by the heart, to those precious truths which Scripture has revealed to us. *Faith* may be differently conceived of and described, according to the diversity of its objects. With reference to the *doctrines* of revelation, Faith is a *full persuasion of their truth*. With reference to the *precepts* of revelation, Faith is a *cheerful admission of their authority*. With reference to the *promises* of revelation, Faith is an *undoubting trust in their fulfilment*. And with reference to the varied *blessings* which revelation holds out to our acceptance, Faith is a *cordial and eager appropriation of them*, and especially of Him who is God's best gift and the pledge of every other. *This* is precisely the view that is given in our Confession, in which it is stated, that "by faith a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is written in the Word, and acteth differently upon that which each particular passage thereof containeth, yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God, for this life and that which is to come. But the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life."

It is not so much with the *nature* of this grace, however, as with its *practical influence*, that we are at

present concerned, and in particular with that view of its influence which is pointed out by the Apostle in the text: *Faith is "the victory that overcometh the world."* In what respects does this character belong to Faith? How comes it that such a power is exerted by it? Wherein consists its suitableness or capacity to win for us that signal conquest, which the Spirit of God here traces to its operation?

A satisfactory answer to these questions will be found by considering—*first*, the truths which Faith contemplates; *secondly*, the line of conduct which it dictates, and the change of heart with which it is connected; *thirdly*, the aids of Divine grace which it receives; and, *fourthly*, the expectations which it cherishes.

I. *The truths which Faith contemplates have in themselves a natural tendency to counteract the enticements of the world.*

"Faith is the evidence of things not seen." It brings the all-important doctrines of religion, so vividly and convincingly, before the mind that their due impression is made upon the heart, and their proper influence exerted upon the conduct.

That the tendency of Divine truths, when freely and fully developed, is adverse to the powers of this world, cannot by any reflecting man be called in question. Take, for example, that elementary doctrine which lies at the very foundation of all religion, *the existence of a God*, immaculate in holiness, inflexible in justice, unwearied in benevolence—a God whose power is almighty, whose knowledge is boundless, and whose presence is all-pervading. Suppose a man had a clear and firm conviction of this one

truth,—suppose he had as full a persuasion that there is such an unseen God above him, as that there is a visible world around him,—suppose the gains or pleasures of a worldly life were not more real in his estimation than the wrath with which God views it, and the condemnation with which He visits it,—and suppose the cares, and trials, and afflictions, of a temporal nature, with which he is beset, were not more evident and palpable to his mind's eye than the wisdom, power, and love of that Being who is pledged to order all things for his good,—is it not clear, that he is thus armed against the world? Can it be doubted, that with such a conviction as this, vividly and habitually impressed upon him, the force of every temporal inducement to the neglect or violation of his duty would be spent on him, comparatively, in vain? Is it to be thought, that the cares of the world would trouble, or its fears discourage, or its pleasures allure him, taught as he has been to “set the Lord always before him,” and to “endure as seeing Him that is invisible”?

Or take as another instance that primary and most prominent article of Christian faith—*the doctrine of salvation from sin*, through the sufferings and death of the Redeemer. May it not be truly said of every one, who makes *this* truth the object of his Faith, resting on it with a firm and lively confidence, that the world is thereby crucified unto him, and he unto the world? For how powerfully does this great truth display to us the sinfulness of sin, and warn us against the very appearance of that abominable and accursed thing, which God's own Son must suffer to atone for! How warmly does it commend to us the

love of Christ,—that all-constraining love which dispossesses the world of our affections, and prompts us to live no longer unto ourselves, but unto the Lord who died for us! And, how clearly does it illustrate the preciousness of that immortal soul, which no “corruptible things” could have availed to ransom, but for which a price infinitely surpassing the treasures and glories of the universe has been paid! How striking a commentary does it give us on that one weighty text, which did a man but seriously ponder, no earthly considerations would ever induce him to peril his eternal welfare: “What is a man profited, if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

The case is similar with all the other truths, which God has proposed as the objects of our Faith. All of them are just so many arguments against sin, so many motives to holiness. All of them tend, in a greater or less degree, to counteract the enticements of the world. This tendency, indeed, the doctrines of religion cannot be expected to exercise, so long as we do not regard them with the eye of Faith. It is not the cold and distant contemplation of them, nor a speculative knowledge of their nature, nor an indolent acquiescence in their truth, nor the formal arrangement of them in our creed, nor the casual and temporary reflection on them, when any particular occurrence may suggest them to us, that will counteract the influence of those present and visible objects, with which we are continually surrounded. The higher truths must first be brought *nigh* to us, that our minds may *realise* them, and that our

hearts may be *impressed* by them. The "things unseen" must be regarded with the same lively and confident persuasion, as if they lay immediately before us. And the "things hoped for" must be considered as having all the substance and reality of a present possession. Now, this is done by the exercise of *Faith*. It is *Faith* that places the truths of revelation thus presently, and, as it were, palpably before our minds. It is *Faith* that thus realises and embraces them. It is *Faith* that brings them thus to bear upon our hearts. It is *Faith* that draws them forward from that background of mistiness and obscurity into which the continual thronging and pressure of sensible objects thrust them back, claiming for them their due prominence in our thoughts, and securing their proper influence upon our conduct. And thus, from its very relation to the Truths which it contemplates, it may be truly said, that "Faith is the victory which overcometh the world."

II. Its influence and power in overcoming the world is, however, more clearly seen when we consider, that *Faith is not merely a contemplative, but also an operative principle*. It is connected with a change of the heart, no less than with an enlightenment of the understanding. While it realises *truth*, it also dictates and enforces *duty*.

Faith would be highly operative in its tendency, although the *doctrines* of revelation were its only objects. For it is, as we have already shown, of the very nature of these doctrines, when faithfully appropriated by the heart, to bring forth the fruits of holiness in the conduct. But this is not all.

True Faith has other objects besides these. It has respect to those *precepts and rules of action* which the Scriptures have enjoined, no less than to those doctrinal truths which they have revealed. So that if it be an act of Christian faith to trust in God's testimony, when He declares to us the method of our salvation through Jesus Christ, it is just as truly an act of Christian faith to acquiesce in His sovereign authority, when He prescribes to us such precepts as the following: "Be not conformed to this world;" "Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth;" "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness;" "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life." The one act of Faith may be, and doubtless is, more immediately connected with our salvation than the other; but both are alike proper and alike necessary, in the true believer. It were just as idle, indeed, to pretend that we have true Faith, so long as we confine our view to one part merely of the Revelation which God hath given us, as it would be for a blind man to pretend that he has *vision* to discern one class of objects that are presented to him, while at the same time it is evident from his conduct that he has no perception of another class which are placed just as closely and just as conspicuously before him. Assuredly Faith, wherever it is real, extends its view to the whole compass of Divine truth. Not only has it respect to those doctrines by which the power of temporal objects in marring our spiritual welfare is counteracted, but also to those practical precepts by which a worldliness of spirit is condemned, and

a heavenliness of disposition is broadly and authoritatively prescribed to us.

But further still, true Faith, while it thus dictates a course of action opposite to the world, does at the same time generate, by Divine grace, such a change of temper and affection, as dispossesses the world of its dominion over us. It purifies the heart, renovates the character, and opens the soul to the influences of the grace of God. It takes its origin and finds its consummation in that mighty work of the Divine Spirit, whereby the Christian is regenerated, and renewed, and carried onwards progressively towards perfection. Accordingly, believers are spoken of, in the chapter before us, as "born of God." And, elsewhere, we find them frequently represented as "new creatures in Christ Jesus;" "dead unto sin, and alive unto God;" "created in holiness after the Divine Image;" "not conformed to this world, but transformed through the renewing of their minds."

Can it, then, be a matter of wonder that *Faith* should gain for us the victory which the text describes? Dictating, as it does, a course of action, and at the same time generating a disposition, by "which the world, and all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," are decidedly opposed, it cannot surely do otherwise than conquer them, in so far as due effect is given to its power, and free and full scope opened to its exercise.

The interference of things temporal with our religious duties arises, mainly, from the depravity of our natures. It is the *wicked heart within*, that renders

the *wicked world without* so formidable an enemy to our salvation. The world no sooner knocks, than "the spirit of the world" is ready to open a wide and effectual door for its admission. Temptations to vanity, meeting with a vain heart—temptations to covetousness, meeting with a covetous heart—temptations to ambition, meeting with an ambitious heart—temptations to folly, thoughtlessness, and dissipation, meeting with a frivolous and foolish heart,—find it not only a *certain* but an *easy* conquest.

The case is otherwise, however, with the Christian. According to the measure of his Faith, the natural depravity of his character has been rectified. He is "born of God;" "born from above;" "*in* the world," but yet "*not of* the world." The holiness and heavenliness of his spirit keep pace with the strength and increase of his faith. And were but his faith as vigorous as it ought to be, the world and its prince would "find no part in him"—nothing friendly, or congenial—nothing to favour their efforts, or to aid their influence. His resistance to them in that case would be steadfast, and his victory over them signal and complete.

III. But, in the *third* place, Faith is still further qualified to gain the conquest here ascribed to it, by reason of those *Divine aids to which it trusts*.

It is not by any resources of his own that the Christian is enabled to overcome the world. All his strength, and skill, and courage, in the prosecution of his warfare, are from above. It is "God who maketh him to triumph." His Faith may bring before him certain truths, and dictate certain rules of action, and

generate certain moral dispositions, which give it a *tendency* to counteract the world. But did it not also secure in his behalf the all-prevailing aids of Divine grace, its natural tendency in this direction would be frustrated, and its proper influence impeded and overborne. For there is more than enough of sin remaining within the breast of the sincerest Christian, to render all the energies of his Faith, if unassisted by a higher power, of none effect.

But further, the Faith of the believer is indebted to Divine grace, not only for its *efficacy*, but even for its very *existence*. It is by the agency of God's Spirit, that Faith is at first established in the soul, as it is by the same mighty agency that faith is preserved, and nourished, and invigorated. Without this aid, imparted from on high, "the evil heart of unbelief" would very soon resume its influence; and faith would not only *operate without effect* in overcoming the temptations of the world, but it would *cease to operate at all*.

Now, if Divine aid be thus necessary in our Christian warfare, need I remind you how freely it is offered, and how unfaillingly it is furnished to believers? Manifold and precious are the promises which the God of all grace has given for their encouragement. He has undertaken to "gird them with strength," to "keep them from falling," to "preserve them from all evil," to give them "grace to help in time of need," and to "send them with every temptation a way of escape." He calls Himself their "refuge" and their "strength," "their strong tower and rock of defence," "the shield of their help, and the sword of their excellency." "My grace," He says, "is sufficient for thee: My strength

is made perfect in weakness." "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."

Trusting to these and like precious promises, the man of real Faith is fully armed against the world. The very thought of them cheers his heart, and quickens his zeal, and nerves his resolution. And what is more, the actual fulfilment of them secures his final triumph in the contest. Greater is the Lord that is for him, than all they that can be against him. Nothing can ever separate him from the love of God; nothing can harm him when shielded by the power of God. His Faith has formed an alliance with Omnipotence, and thus, although weak, he becomes strong. Although of himself he can do nothing, yet, through Christ strengthening him, he can do all things.

IV. I would only farther add upon this subject, that the power of Faith in conquering the world is very materially aided by *the hopes or expectations which it cherishes.*

"Faith is the substance of things hoped for." It imparts, as it were, an actual subsistence or a present reality to blessings which are yet future. It places them on common ground, and brings them fairly and equally in competition with those interests of a worldly nature which, being present to the senses, might otherwise have an undue advantage over them. It gives them, in the judgment of the believer, all that substantial worth, all that urgency of influence, all that prevailing power over the conduct, which is be-

yond all controversy their due, but which will not, while they are distantly contemplated in hazy and uncertain prospect, be awarded to them.

It is to *this* property of Faith, as realising the blessings of futurity, that much of its practical influence must be ascribed. It were in vain to demand of a Christian the sacrifice of all his worldly affections, if his soul were thereby to be left a cheerless void, without any purer and better attachments wherewith to fill it. The soul of man must have *something* to love and to cling to—*something* to occupy its thoughts and to engage its affections. If his desires are to be hindered from falling and creeping along the ground, they must be trained up, and bound to higher objects. If his tastes are to be weaned from base and sordid pleasures, a relish for purer joys must be imparted to him. The things that are *beneath* will only relax their hold, when the things that are *above* have attracted and withdrawn him from them. He will only cease to grovel on *the earth*, when he learns to have his conversation in *the heavens*.

Now, it is precisely in this way that the Christian is enabled to dispossess the world and the things of the world of their dominion over him. It is not by the utter extinction of all his natural desires and affections, but by the better direction and employment of them. It is by the presentation to him of *other* objects worthier far than this vain life can furnish—objects in comparison with which all its riches are but dross, all its pleasures are but dreams, all its substances are but shadows,—it is by having his mind's eye opened and his heart's desire turned to the glories of futurity—it is by being brought to re-

gard the "things not seen" with that confident persuasion, and the "things hoped for" with that lively expectation, which gives them their due ascendancy in his soul—it is thus, even through the working of his *Faith*, that the Christian gains the victory over the world. His Faith can outbid all the world's bribes, and outvie all its charms, and outbrave, too, all its threatenings. The pleasures of this life are powerless to allure him, or its honours and riches to seduce him from his steadfastness, so long as he looks beyond them to the endless pleasures, and unfading honours, and incorruptible riches, of the kingdom of God. The cares of this life cannot engross him so long as he chiefly concerns himself about "the one thing needful," and chooses the "good part which shall not be taken away." The afflictions of this life cannot overwhelm him when he compares them with that eternal and "far more exceeding weight of glory" for which they are intended to prepare him. The frowns and terrors of this life cannot daunt him who, knowing *whom* and *what* to fear, dreads not the reproaches of man, but the wrath of God—not the loss of earthly fame or earthly friendships, but the loss of heaven and of his immortal soul.

Thus does the Christian rise superior to the cares, and trials, and temptations of his present condition, simply because he "walks by Faith, and not by sight." He views himself as but a stranger upon the earth—one who has here no continuing city, no fixed ties, no enduring interests. He has his conversation in heaven. His treasure is there, and his heart is there also. Thither his mind soars in lofty contemplation. Thither do his hopes and his desires tend. Mounting

up as on eagles' wings far above the littleness of earth, he looks down with a holy indifference proportioned to the measure of his Faith on all its fleeting interests and concernments.

Thus have I endeavoured to illustrate the power of Faith to overcome the world, and to show, from a consideration of the truths which it contemplates, the conduct which it dictates, the aids of Divine grace of which it is the channel, and the hopes and expectations which it cherishes,—that Christian faith is eminently fitted to gain that conquest which is ascribed to it in the text. Perhaps there are some now present who may be disposed to allege that all this is but a mere theory or vain fancy, and to ask : “Where do we find this picture realised ? Where do we see this theory reduced to practice ? Where do we meet with any such mighty results brought about by the influence of Faith, or any such signal victories achieved by it, as those which you have been attempting to describe ?”

Now, this question might be simply answered by another. When you inquire of *us*, “Where are the *results* of faith ?” we ask of *you*, “Where is *Faith itself* ?” Show us the one, and we will show you the other. The absence of the practical effects is no argument that Faith cannot produce them. It is rather a sign that Faith is really wanting. If a tree does not flourish in due season, its root is dead. If a fountain yield no streams, it is dried up. And even so, if one who calls himself a Christian be not “overcoming the world,” that man’s profession of religion is vain.

But we can give another answer besides this. The doctrine we have advanced is *not* mere theory. Hap-

pily we are warranted to urge, not only a theoretical *estimate*, but an actual *experience*, of the power of Faith in confirmation of it. Let any of you read the 11th chapter of Hebrews, and then say if Faith be not the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Think of *Abraham*, who, in obedience to the Divine command, forsook his home, his kindred, and his country, and went out, he knew not whither, to wander abroad as a pilgrim on the earth. Did not *he* overcome the world? And have we not the authority of Scripture for affirming that it was *by Faith* that he did so—"because he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God"? Think of *Moses*, who cheerfully renounced the luxuries of a court and the honours of a kingdom,—“refusing to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; and esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.” What a noble sacrifice was this! how clearly did it evince a heart in which the world, with all its fairest charms and its mightiest influences, had no dominion! Here, again, it was *by Faith* that this magnanimous victory was achieved, “because he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.” Or think of *Job*, on whom, without effect, the world exhausted all its trials, and the prince of this world all his fiery darts,—to what but the power of *Faith* can we attribute that unconquerable patience which distinguished him? Or think of the three heroic Hebrew youths, whom neither the wrath of an infuriated king nor the flames of his seven-times heated furnace could terrify from their allegiance to the living God!

What was it but *their Faith* that led them to pass undaunted into the fire, and kept them all unharmed in the midst of it?—that Faith which put into their mouths the noble answer: “If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace; and He *will* deliver us out of thy hand, O king.” Or, finally, to pass by a cloud of other witnesses, think of the early disciples of the Gospel, who, for the kingdom of God’s sake, “endured so great a fight of afflictions,”—opposing resolutely all the powers and principalities of the world,—attacking its interests and prejudices,—triumphing over its hatreds and persecutions,—esteeming its reproaches honour, its losses gain, its tribulations joy and glory! By what means was it that such mighty deeds of spiritual prowess were performed by them? You know that it was by the influence of *Faith*. It was because they were persuaded of God’s will—because they trusted in God’s help—because they relied on God’s promises. “They looked not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.” And “they took joyfully the spoiling of their earthly goods, because they knew that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance.”

Such was the practical influence of Faith as shown by these renowned worthies of the olden time; and such, beyond all controversy, ought to be its practical influence still. For the principle of *Faith* is always the same; the same in its nature, the same in its objects, the same in its tendency. It may still, as justly as ever, be described as “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” It still gives credit to the same influential truths—

submits to the same authoritative precepts—secures the same all-powerful aid—and trusts to the same animating promises. Hence it is still as well fitted as it ever was, to purify the heart and to overcome the world. The saints, whose bright example we have referred to, were naturally men of like passions with ourselves, children of wrath even as others. The obstacles which *they* had to surmount, the evil affections which *they* had to repress, the temptations and enemies which *they* had to resist, were no less numerous and formidable than our own. The aids of Divine grace, too, by which *they* were strengthened, are just as fully and as easily within *our* reach. For the Lord's ear has not waxed heavy that it cannot hear, nor is His arm shortened that it cannot save. And need I add, that the promises of God, by which *their* Faith and patience were encouraged, are equally great and precious as addressed to *us*? The endless joys and glories of futurity are no less animating *now* than in former times. The trees of life still flourish in the same unfading beauty. The rivers of pleasure still flow on, as full of gladness as ever, from the throne of God. And the crown of glory has lost, through the lapse of ages, not a gem of its inestimable value, not a ray of its inextinguishable lustre. What then, Brethren? Shall *we* fail where *they* have triumphed? Shall *we* tamely yield to enemies whom *they* have baffled? Shall the world, which *they* have so nobly overmastered, be suffered to retain *our* hearts in base subjection? No, surely! If we are sharers in their Faith, we ought to be imitators of their example. Like them we must fight, and like them we shall be "more than conquerors."

And, O Brethren, think what a noble victory this is! Who would not covet the glory of attaining it? How justly it is said that "he who ruleth his spirit," keeping it free from the pollutions of the world, "is better than he that taketh a city"! The humble and self-denying Christian is, in reality, the truest hero and the noblest conqueror; and well does it become him to know his own greatness, to raise up his soul in conformity with his high calling, to deport himself as one who is enabled by the mighty power of God to "overcome the world." Compared with *his* conquest, all the most renowned deeds of the mightiest warriors of this earth are insignificant. *Their* victories were outward and limited; and even when they triumphed most signally in the world, they were oftentimes enslaved and led captive by their own evil lusts. *His* victory is to be entire and universal, subduing the world and crucifying the flesh and bruising Satan under his feet. *Their* victories were won by violence, stained with bloodshed, and marked by devastation. While *his* are such as best beseem a reasonable and moral creature—*spiritual* triumphs won by the power of Faith—to secure which no blood is shed, no treasure wasted, and nothing but evil passions and affections sacrificed. The glory of *their* exploits was only for a season. But the glory of *his* is eternal and imperishable.

For the conquest of the believer is not confined to the limits of this earthly scene. He needs not to lament, like one of old, the want of some *other* world to be subdued by him. He *has, indeed,* another world to win, "a better country, that is an

heavenly," of which he is assured, as the prize of his warfare. His Faith not only vanquishes *the world*, but takes, as it were, "by storm" *the kingdom of heaven*; into which an abundant entrance shall be administered to the conqueror, and where a glorious triumph shall be conferred on him. In that better land of promise, all his toils and conflicts will be rewarded, and all his highest hopes more than realised. For thus saith the Lord—"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me on my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father upon *His* throne;" "He that overcometh shall inherit all things;" "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

IX.

THE UNBELIEF OF THOMAS.

PART I.—CHRIST REMOVES THE UNBELIEF.

“Then saith He to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands ; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side : and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto Him, My Lord and my God.”—JOHN, XX. 27, 28.

THE account here given of the incredulity of Thomas, and of the means so graciously and so successfully employed for its removal, is on various accounts one of the most important passages in the whole of the Gospels. In whichever of *three* points of view it may be looked at,—whether as illustrating *the consistency of the Apostle's character*, or as evidencing *the perfect candour and impartiality of the narrative* in which his conduct has been detailed, or as triumphantly *redeeming him from the charge of credulity or enthusiasm* in his adherence to the Christian cause, —it is eminently useful for the establishment of the general credibility of the Gospel history, and more especially of that great miracle of the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead, on which the foundations of Christian Faith and Hope mainly rest.

I. In the *first* place, the recorded unbelief of Thomas serves to illustrate *the consistency of his character*, so simply and artlessly delineated by the Evangelist.

There are only two other passages of the Sacred Narrative in which the conduct of this Apostle has been particularly referred to. And it is a striking circumstance, that *in both of these* he indicates, by a few casual words, the same prevailing disposition that is here ascribed to him. One of the passages I allude to, is also contained in the Gospel of St John, in the 14th chapter, at the 5th verse. Jesus had just been telling His disciples that He was going to prepare a place for them in His Father's house. And in so doing, He took occasion to appeal to the knowledge which they might have acquired through His teaching both of the blessed abode they had thus in prospect, and of the way, set open by Himself, through which they might eventually reach it. "Whither I go ye know," He said, "and the way ye know." Thomas, however, was far from being satisfied with this statement; he either did not comprehend its meaning, or he was not disposed to admit its truth; and instead of concealing his doubts within his own breast, he did not hesitate openly to give expression to them. He said, "*Lord, we know not whither Thou goest; and how can we know the way?*" Here was an outbursting of an incredulous spirit, in the face of assurances so perfectly explicit, that they ought to have silenced, if they did not convince him. Jesus had just declared whither He was going, and on many former occasions had clearly taught, by what means alone His disciples could ex-

pect to follow Him; yet such was the slowness of Thomas to receive the truth, that he broadly questioned whether, as to either point, any such knowledge as his Lord alleged had been imparted to them at all, or, at least, had been given with such clearness as to be again recognised and accepted as true.

The other passage, to which I referred, is likewise contained in the Gospel of St John, in the 11th chapter, at the 16th verse, and in it the same features of character that are exhibited in the text are still more strikingly displayed. Jesus had just been intimating His purpose to return to Judea in consequence of the death of Lazarus. The disciples had striven to dissuade Him from this journey, by representing the dangers to which it would expose Him from the malice of His powerful enemies in Jerusalem. But when they found Him bent on His design, and heard Him declare, that, whatever might be its hazards, it would tend very greatly to the establishment of their faith, they ceased from offering any farther opposition, and, with one exception, seem to have been satisfied that in this, as in all things, He was acting with consummate wisdom. That one exception was *Thomas*. With his characteristic "slowness of heart to believe," he is still doubtful as to the propriety of the intended journey; while, from his manly decision and warm affection, he resolves, in opposition to his own convictions, to accompany his beloved Master at every risk. *He* alone stands forth, and says to his associates, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him." He sees no purpose that is likely to be served by returning to the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, except a gratuitous pro-

vocation of the wrath of the Jews. He is persuaded that Jesus is about to throw away His life, without any apparent cause to warrant such a sacrifice; and yet he resolves to accompany Him through every danger, and encourages his fellow-disciples to do the same. It is as if he had thus expressed himself: ‘Our Master is about to make a needless sacrifice of His life; but since we have forsaken all and followed Him hitherto, let us follow Him still: however questionable may be His present movement, let *us* also go, though it may even be to *die with Him.*’ We see here the manly decision of a mind that loved and clung to the Saviour, even while it distrusted Him. We have traces, too, of the same sceptical tendency which made him afterwards declare, that no evidence, however strong, but that of his own senses, would convince him of the fact of his Master’s resurrection; and, likewise of the same *warmth of feeling*, which drew from him, as soon as he was convinced, the earnest confession, “My Lord and my God.”

There are many like instances, to be found in the New Testament, of no less striking consistency maintained in the sentiments and actions of the persons there referred to. The whole life of *St Paul*, for example, is a highly consistent picture of ardent zeal and daring intrepidity, displayed at one period of his life in the fury of his persecutions, and at another in the fervour, boldness, and constancy of his apostolic labours. In the life of *St Peter* an equally natural display is given of affectionate warmth and earnest devotedness, qualified, however, with a certain admixture of rashness, and of self-confidence, and with some occasional symptoms of a timid and com-

promising spirit, which were quite foreign to the character of the great Apostle of the Gentiles. The leading events in the life of *St John*,—his leaning on his Master's bosom at the last supper, his standing alone of all the Apostles beside the Cross, his receiving the dying charge of the Saviour, and from that hour taking the mother of Jesus to his own home, his *running*, with all the swiftness of affection, towards the sepulchre, on hearing the report that the body was no longer there—all these exactly tally with the character so often ascribed to him of "the disciple whom Jesus loved," and with the engaging simplicity and tenderness which we find pervading his writings. But *the character of Christ Himself*, as it has been more fully developed in the Sacred Histories than any other, and was by far the most difficult to portray, is also the most remarkable for the harmony and consistency which it exhibits. Piety, grace, meekness, and benevolence shine forth conspicuously in every incident of His life. All His sentiments, all His actions, are of a piece. Under every variety of circumstances we find nothing said or done by Him in any instance that does not accord in the most striking manner with the offices He sustained, the ends He had in view, and the personal graces and virtues that distinguished Him. Without further prosecuting the illustration of this subject, however, allow me to indicate to you the circumstance which gives to *the consistency of the Scriptural characters* its chief value as an evidence of the truth of those Sacred Histories in which it is exhibited. The circumstance is *this*, that the traces of this consistency are presented in a manner at once the most *artless and undesigned*.

Nothing can be more clear than that the Evangelists did not write with any studied intention to *depict characters*. They wrote with the simpler and humbler design of *narrating facts*. They leave these facts to speak for themselves, and are never at the least pains to attract the reader's notice to any appearance of congruity that may exist between them,—and that, too, although the congruity in many cases is so far from lying obviously upon the surface, that it needs for its ascertainment and exhibition a process of careful and minute comparison, in which few readers will take the trouble to engage. In these circumstances, how can we fail to recognise, in the uniform consistency of the various characters alluded to by the writers of the New Testament—exhibited as it is, not by formal and studied description, but by artless and incidental narration of facts,—a convincing proof of the truthfulness and reality of those histories, on which we must lay the foundations of our faith and hope?

II. But, further, the recorded Unbelief of this disciple gives us the most satisfactory proof of *the candour and honesty of the narrative in which it is related*.

It is a circumstance which any unscrupulous writer, who was anxious to present his story to the world in a shape the least liable to excite objections, would have been careful to suppress. For such a one could not fail to see in it a plausible ground of cavil against the Christian cause, of which its opponents would most eagerly avail themselves. The evidence to which Thomas refused to yield was the *very same* in kind, as that on which all those to whom the Gospel

was afterwards preached were required to believe in the fact of the Saviour's Resurrection. But still, as we are ingenuously told, he was not convinced. Is it not clear that *his* Unbelief, in such circumstances, might have been urged by those whom the Apostles and Evangelists addressed as an apology for a similar unbelief? Might they not, when told, for instance, by St John, "that the Lord was risen indeed," have somewhat perplexed him, by referring to the very incident which he has here narrated, and have plausibly urged the example of a brother Apostle as a ground for distrusting any evidence, however strong, which fell short of the actual confirmation of their own senses? Such being plainly the case, we have in this incident a striking proof of the candour of the Sacred Historian. It shows that he has written his narrative, not with the circumspection and reserve which are always characteristic of deception, but with the communicative frankness of an upright mind, confident that its statements are true, and fearless of any consequences that may flow from them.

In this respect, our text is quite in harmony with many like instances of openness and candour which we meet with in the New Testament. For nothing is more remarkable in the Sacred Writers than the ingenuous manner in which the whole truth, in all its material circumstances, has been told by them, whatever oppositions it might provoke, and whatever objections or cavils it might originate. It never seems to have entered into their minds to consider in what light this or that action would probably appear to the judgment of a captious reader. The denial of Peter, the treachery of Judas, the unbelief of Thomas, the dispute of Paul and Barnabas,—*these*, and the like

facts, they lay before us as they occurred, without any attempt to qualify or explain them away. There is no air of caution or reserve about their narrative,—there is no studied suppression or anxious vindication of such things as might be likely to convey an unfavourable impression of their character and conduct,—there are no remarks purposely inserted with a view to anticipate probable objections,—there is no attempt to reconcile the judgment of the reader to what might appear extraordinary in their testimony,—there is nothing, in short, of that artifice and accommodation which would, in one shape or other, have been displayed by men who were inwardly conscious of writing to deceive. Every page of their writings, on the contrary, is marked by the most ingenuous frankness and the most unpretending simplicity, such as betoken their full and sincere conviction of the all-important truths which they proclaimed.

III. There is one other light, however, in which this portion of the Sacred History may be viewed, in which it is very eminently conducive to the confirmation and establishment of the Christian faith. It may, in connection with other passages of a like description, be held as *triumphantly vindicating the character of those by whom the Resurrection of Jesus has been attested, from the slightest suspicion of credulity or enthusiasm.*

There are only two suppositions, on one or other of which the reality of this great miracle can be controverted,—namely, either that the professed witnesses of it were *wilful deceivers*, or that they were themselves *the victims of a gross delusion*. To these alternatives the negative issue must be reduced; and

I can do nothing better than follow, in the main, Paley's clear and conclusive reasoning upon them.

As to the *former* of these suppositions, we have most satisfactory reasons for rejecting it. It is, for example, altogether at variance with the frank, simple, and ingenuous manner in which the testimony of the witnesses has been borne, — with the high moral excellence of the religion which they promulgated, and in support of which the miracle was appealed to, — with the circumstances under which their evidence was given, at the time, in the place, and before the persons that were most likely, had it been false, to insure its detection, — and, most of all, with the ordeal they were subjected to, of “labours, dangers, and sufferings” in the Christian cause, such as no company of deceivers would have encountered for the sake of a scheme which they knew to be false, and from which no worldly benefits could accrue to them.

When, again, we turn to the *latter* supposition, we find it, to say the least, equally untenable. It is not to be thought, that the witnesses were themselves deceived in regard to a fact of which they were quite competent to judge, and with respect to which they received, on many occasions, the clear and indubitable evidence of their own senses. “We cannot but speak,” they solemnly affirm, “the things which we have seen and heard.” They had seen Jesus, whose person they were well able to identify, on divers occasions subsequent to His death and burial. They had not only seen Him, but had touched Him, and conversed with Him, and sat at table with Him, while He shared in their repast. *Ten times* at least did He show Himself to

His more intimate friends, and once to five hundred brethren at the same time. In such circumstances as these, deception was impossible. A few weak enthusiasts might, perhaps, on one or two occasions have been momentarily deluded; but it is not to be seriously maintained that so great a number of persons could, in so many instances, have been mistaken regarding a matter of fact which came under their own observation, and that for their whole after-lifetime they could have laboured unwaveringly under the same extravagant delusion, in spite of all the sufferings and trials which it brought upon them.

And this supposition is all the more incredible, when we take into account such instances of extreme hesitancy and culpable backwardness in yielding to the force of the evidence establishing the fact, as that which is brought before us in the context. For we thence see that the persons who have borne witness to the Resurrection of Jesus were very far from being of that weak and credulous spirit which would make them the easy victims of deception. So far were they from being readily persuaded, that they were, on the contrary, "slow of heart to believe," even when clear and sound evidence was presented to them. When the women returned from the sepulchre, and told "unto the eleven, and to all the rest," what had befallen them, they regarded it as an "idle tale," to which no manner of credit need be given. When the two disciples who had met Jesus on the road to Emmaus reported the particulars of their interview with Him to their associates, "neither," we are told, "believed they them." When Jesus Himself appeared to ten of the Apostles, they "believed not," until He thoroughly convinced them, by showing them the

marks of His wounds, and by eating in their presence. Yet here we are told how one of their number, who had not been present at this interview, was still incredulous; Thomas declared that no testimony would ever convince *him* but that of his own senses,—nay, that he would not even trust his own eyes for the truth of so astonishing a miracle, but must be allowed to confirm *their* intimations by putting his finger into the very prints which had been made by the nails and by the spear in his Master's wounded body. In the course of a few days the desired proof was offered. The unbelieving Apostle was thoroughly convinced; and after a few more days had elapsed, he stood forth publicly, along with the other Apostles, as a witness of that glorious fact which he had before disputed, and was ready to lay down his life in confirmation of it. In *his* case, truly, it cannot be alleged that aught of enthusiasm or credulity can be detected. There was no probability that *he* would be induced, either by the representations of other men, or by the misguided fancies of his own mind, to give easy assent to the allegation of any miraculous occurrence without the most satisfying evidence and the fullest inquiry. *His* testimony to the Saviour's Resurrection was extorted from him by proofs which only wilful unbelief could withstand. And there is no way in which we can account for it (assuming, as we needs must do, his sincerity) except by concluding that *the facts really were* such as he was ultimately brought to acknowledge, notwithstanding all the pertinacity with which he had opposed them. And thus has the unbelief of Thomas, however dishonouring it was in itself to his Divine Master and his fellow-disciples,

been overruled for the advancement of the Christian cause. It gives us the fullest assurance we could wish that he and the other Apostles who had exhibited a similar incredulity at first, although they were much less obstinate in adhering to it, were not only men of probity and truth, but men of a cautious, sober, and inquiring spirit, and therefore certain not to adopt a persuasion like that of their Master's Resurrection from the dead on any but the most satisfactory grounds.

I have thus endeavoured to show the importance of the narrative which records the unbelief of Thomas—as illustrating by a remarkable example the consistency pervading all the Scriptural characters,—as evidencing the candour and integrity of the writers of the Gospels, and as vindicating the witnesses to the Resurrection of Christ from any suspicion of enthusiasm or credulity. These are so many marks or criteria of an internal kind which confirm the truth of the sacred narrative from itself, and consequently establish the reality of the miracle of our Lord's Resurrection, which it attests. Without prosecuting this general line of argument further, let me now draw your attention more particularly to the important facts and the practical lessons contained in the 27th and 28th verses, which I have read from the narrative, as the special points for our present consideration.

1. And, in the first place, we have here recorded *the means so graciously taken by our Lord for removing the Unbelief of Thomas.*

On the former occasion, when Jesus appeared to His assembled friends on the day of His Resurrection, Thomas was not present. And when his

brethren eagerly imparted to him the joyful tidings that they had seen their risen Master, instead of receiving the intelligence with delight, he met it with the most obstinate incredulity. Nothing they could tell him of all that they had seen and heard seems to have produced the smallest effect upon his mind. He peremptorily declared that the evidence of his own senses—nay, even of touch, the most realistic and objective of all the senses—would alone convince him of the fact which they alleged : “ Except I shall see in His hands,” he said, “ the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe.” Little did Thomas imagine, when he thus spake, that Jesus Himself was fully cognisant of his presumption. But so indeed He was ; and, ere long, He found in His great goodness a fit opportunity to reprove him for it.

Eight days later the disciples are again assembled, and Thomas is with them ; for though he did not believe the testimony they had borne to his Master’s Resurrection, he loved them, and clung to them, and by mixing in their society, put himself in the way of such manifestations of light, and grace, and comfort, as might be there enjoyed. The Lord is again pleased to honour His own Day by showing Himself to the congregation of His followers. Again, on the first day of the week, does He come to them, and after repeating His former salutation—“ Peace be unto you,” He at once addresses to Thomas words evincing that He was well acquainted with his Unbelief, and offers to remove his doubts, by the very evidence which, in his former rashness and presump-

tion, he had required. "Reach hither thy finger," He said, "and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing."

You see here the *wonderful knowledge* of the Saviour. He thus proves Himself to be no less than that Divine Being to whom all hearts are open, and from whom no secrets are hid. Little, perhaps, did His disciple imagine that Jesus had heard his expressions of incredulity. But here he is apprised that his state of mind was fully known, and that every word he had uttered was discovered to that great Lord with whom he had to do. Let *us*, also, remember that He is cognisant of *our* conduct. Not an idle word can we speak, but He hears it. Not an action can we do, but He observes it. Yea, not a thought can we cherish, but He knows it. He compasseth our path and our lying down, and is acquainted with all our ways.

But if the *knowledge* of the Saviour was thus wonderful, no less so were His *kindness and condescension*. Justly might He have left this unbelieving man to reap the bitter fruits of his obstinacy and presumption. But instead of abandoning him, He pities and restores him. He goes after the lost sheep, and with unspeakable tenderness and love brings him back into the fold. He even condescends to meet him on his own ground,—offers to comply with his wayward and capricious humour,—grants the unreasonable demand which he had made,—and deigns to remove his morbid incredulity, by submitting His own wounded body to be touched by him. There was, indeed, a special reason for this gracious conduct of the Saviour in the

present instance; for it was a matter of unspeakable importance that the glorious miracle of His Resurrection from the dead, on which the faith and hope of Christians are mainly dependent, should be established by evidence so conclusive as to leave no reasonable ground for controverting it. But His goodness on this occasion is not without a parallel. His people, in all ages, can testify from their experience that they have often met with the like kindness at His hands. He has ever pitied their errors, and helped their infirmities, and removed their doubts, and reclaimed them from their wanderings. Sometimes by the teaching of His Word,—and sometimes by the dispensations of His providence,—and sometimes in the observance of His ordinances,—has He made Himself known to them, by tokens which they could not mistake—made them ashamed of their folly in distrusting Him, and filled them with “all joy and peace in believing.”

2. The next particular in these verses to be considered is *the full persuasion to which the unbelieving disciple was at length brought, of that truth which he had once questioned.*

It does not appear that Thomas thought it necessary to satisfy himself in the manner he had himself proposed. We are not told that he availed himself of the liberty which the Saviour gave him to touch His pierced hands and wounded side. The look, the tone, the words of His Divine Master,—the knowledge He showed of his presumptuous demand,—were more than enough to banish all his doubts. Conviction flashed upon him. The evidence was irresistible. He seems to have felt ashamed

and grieved for his former perverseness. With the fullest confidence, and the profoundest reverence, he answered and said, "My Lord and my God."

In using these words, he not only expresses his recognition of the Saviour's Person, and of the reality of the Resurrection, but makes an unqualified *acknowledgment of His Divinity*. He calls Him not only his "Lord," but his "God;" and Jesus accepts of the homage and approves of it, which He would not have done if He had not been entitled to it. Some, indeed, have tried to escape from this conclusion, by representing the words of the Apostle, not as a confession, but as an exclamation,—a sudden outburst of astonishment and surprise. This is a light, however, in which they cannot at all be regarded. Viewed in this light, they would have involved profanation of the holy name of God, which Christ would not have allowed to pass without stern reproof and rebuke. Besides, we are expressly told, that Thomas *addressed these words to the Saviour*. He did not merely *exclaim about Him*, but *spake to Him*. "He answered and said unto Him, My Lord and my God"—distinctly marking and owning Him as the person to whom these adorable titles appertained. And Jesus, in the verse following, was pleased to recognise his words, not as a mere expression of surprise, but as a formal declaration of his faith; and this is our warrant for accepting them in their deepest meaning.

Further, it is to be observed, that these words of the Apostle are expressive of a *personal interest* in the risen Saviour. They not only declare the fulness of his conviction that the person who stood before him was Jesus, the Son of God, who had risen from the

grave; but they *claim and appropriate* this Divine Person *as his own*. “*My Lord and my God*” are the terms of his acknowledgment; evidently implying the confidence, and joy, and lively affection, with which he was now regarding Him. He might perhaps have feared that his temporary Unbelief had separated him from the grace of his Redeemer. But now, with Jesus visibly disclosed to him, mercifully offering to scatter all his doubts, and kindly inviting a renewal of his faith, he ventures, unworthy as he feels himself to be, to look up to this adorable and gracious Being as One who will still acknowledge and befriend him. Again does he know Him in whom he has believed. Again does he cleave to the Saviour as his friend, and own Him as his Lord, and choose Him as his portion. Such, too, must be *our* faith, Brethren, if we would profit by it. A mere speculative belief in Jesus, even as declared to be the Son of God, with power, by His Resurrection from the dead, has no blessedness here or hereafter to impart to us. But when we choose Him as our Lord and our God, He graciously *becomes ours*. He *gives* Himself to us, with all that He has, to satisfy our souls, and fill us with His fulness. All His perfections are engaged in our behalf. All the dispensations of His providence are ordered for the promotion of our welfare. His grace is ours to support us while we live, and His precious promises to bless us when we die.

I need scarcely add, that these words of the Apostle are still farther expressive of *entire homage and devotedness*. He not only claims an interest in the Saviour, *but gives to that Saviour an interest in himself*. By saying to Him “*my Lord and my God,*” he fully

acknowledges the right which Jesus has to his unreserved affection and obedience. And well, we may believe, did his after-life verify this profession, and that with no less zeal and devotedness than the other Apostles, did he yield himself up to the service of his heavenly Master, braving all manner of losses and hardships, and dangers and persecutions, for the furtherance of the Gospel; and, ultimately, as we are assured by tradition, laying down his life for the sake of his risen Lord. A like profession of obedience to the risen Saviour must be openly made, and practically verified, by all who would be partakers of His grace. We cannot sincerely and intelligently address Him as "*our* Lord and *our* God" without thereby fully acknowledging ourselves to be "*His* people." If we are not *His* to honour and to serve Him, we have no sufficient reason to conclude that "*He is ours,*" to bless us with His great salvation. And he is no real Christian who will not yield to the force of that exhortation of an Apostle: "Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God with your body, and with your spirit, which are God's."

Now, may the God of peace, "who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus," and, "according to His abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope," cause us more and more to "know Him and the power of His Resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings," that we may be "made conformable unto His death," and finally may "attain unto the Resurrection of the dead," and to the "inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away."

X.

THE UNBELIEF OF THOMAS.

PART II.—CHRIST JUDGES THE UNBELIEVER.

“Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed : blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”—
JOHN, xx. 29.

SUCH was the notice taken by our Lord of the tardy profession of faith made by the Apostle Thomas, when no longer able to resist the direct proof given him of that glorious miracle, which hitherto he had disbelieved. I propose now, in continuation of my former discourse, and as a conclusion to the discussion of this important subject, to direct your attention to this remarkable utterance of the risen Saviour ; and to point out the great practical lessons touching our relation to the faith which it conveys. In doing so, I shall advert, in the *first* place, to the rebuke here administered to the Apostle for the slow and reluctant conviction that had been extorted from him ; and, *secondly*, I shall endeavour to explain the gracious benediction so clearly pronounced on those who display, in reference to Divine truths, that teachable and candid spirit in which this disciple had been found defective.

I. There is conveyed in these words *a rebuke of the Apostle for his Unbelief*. The rebuke, indeed, is rather *implied* than broadly expressed. It is marked by all the characteristic gentleness of Him who seeks not to "break the bruised reed." But still it cannot escape the notice of the discerning reader. Nor can we doubt that it was very acutely felt—all the more so, perhaps, from its very mildness—by the individual to whom it was addressed.

There is a very remarkable contrast between the warmth and cordiality of the Apostle's homage, and the calmness—almost coldness—with which the Saviour accepts of it. I am not aware that there is any fuller and more unqualified declaration of faith in Christ, to be anywhere met with, than that which Thomas made, when, acknowledging not only His Resurrection but His supreme Divinity, he "answered and said unto Him, My Lord and my God." His words, as I have formerly shown, are not by any means to be understood as a mere exclamation of wonder and surprise, but as a formal profession of his faith. And yet how coldly is this profession received! Compare our Saviour's language in regard to it with what he said in a like instance to another Apostle. When Simon Peter, on being asked by Him, "Whom say ye that I am?" replied, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," he met at once with this glorious commendation—"Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood have not revealed it unto thee, but my Father, which is in heaven." How different was the reception which Thomas met with! *His* declaration of faith in the Son of God, though no less full, decided, and reverential, had come too late,

and had been yielded too reluctantly, to meet with that unqualified approbation with which the Saviour might else have been disposed to hail it. It had been all but extorted from him by evidence which he could not withstand. It did not betoken that candid and teachable spirit, that fairness of inquiry, and that openness to conviction, which the Lord delights to mark in those who are relying on Him; and, therefore, it was barely accepted of, and nothing more. Not a word was said in commendation of it. Nay, rather by the blessedness ascribed to faith, which has less palpable evidence to compel it, it is virtually set down as in comparison of small account. "Because thou hast *seen* me," saith the Lord Jesus, "thou hast believed." "As long as there was a possibility of turning a deaf ear to proofs which, if fairly examined, would scarcely have failed to produce conviction, thou hast resisted; but now that there is no such possibility left to thee, thou hast at length acknowledged thyself to be convinced." Faith thus extorted is not of such a kind as to call for any special benediction; "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

Let us beware, however, that we do not altogether misconceive the meaning of our Saviour in administering this reproof. We must not suppose that Thomas is here censured for having withheld the acknowledgment of his belief, until a *sufficient amount* of evidencé was presented to him; and that he would, on the contrary, have been commended had he shown a disposition to credit the alleged fact, however inadequate the evidence on which it rested. Such a supposition would be no less at variance with the

doctrine of Scripture, than with the dictates of right reason. A readiness to believe marvels on slight inquiry, or on slender grounds, is justly esteemed a sure mark of a weak intellect. And we freely grant that it would be quite "unreasonable to think that any man can earn the Divine blessing by his imbecility, or incur the Divine censure by his discretion." The Scriptures are very far from countenancing such a notion. It is written "that the simple believeth every word; but the prudent man looketh well to his going." And exhortations like the following are of frequent occurrence:—"Prove all things: hold fast that which is good;" "I speak as unto wise men; judge ye what I say;" "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind;" "Believe not every spirit; but try the spirits whether they be of God;" "Be ready always to give an answer to every one that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you." Nor is there anything inconsistent with these and the like Scriptural admonitions in the case before us. Thomas is here blamed, *not for having withheld his belief until reasonable grounds for yielding it were placed before him, but for having obstinately persisted in his incredulity, notwithstanding all the clear evidence he had already obtained*—such evidence being well fitted to satisfy an impartial inquirer—and *for having most rashly and unwarrantably formed to himself a resolution of Unbelief*, whatever amount of proof might be afforded him, unless it should chance to be of that particular kind which *he*, in his perverse and presumptuous humour, had thought fit to dictate. That *this* is the right view of the case to be taken by us, no one who considers all

the circumstances can entertain a doubt. This faithless disciple had shown a determined resistance to proofs which ought to have won the full assent of any impartial mind that would give them due attention—indeed, to substantially the same proofs that have been given as the groundwork of Christian faith in all succeeding ages. And, if in doing so he were not altogether without excuse, most certain it is that no unbeliever in after-times would justly be condemned. The Resurrection of Christ, when declared to him as a fact, ought not to have seemed a thing incredible or improbable in itself. It was, on the contrary, nothing more than what all the disciples of Christ might reasonably have expected.

The character of the Saviour, the doctrine He had preached, and the miracles He had wrought, might naturally have prepared them for it. For it was no marvel that a Being who so evidently possessed a wisdom, and a power, and a goodness, that were more than human,—whose miraculous birth had been celebrated by descending angels—whose Divine origin, as the well-beloved Son of God, had been repeatedly proclaimed by an audible voice from heaven—who had spoken as man never spake, revealing doctrines the most excellent and sublime, precepts the most pure, and promises the most precious—who had on many occasions shown himself to be possessed of an uncontrolled dominion over the universe, healing by a word the most inveterate diseases, rebuking the winds, and walking on the waves, casting out devils, and restoring the dead to life,—no marvel was it that this superhuman Being should have shaken off the chains of death, as one who could not possibly be holden by them.

The prophecies, again, which He had uttered concerning His Resurrection, appealing to it as the great decisive test by which His claims as a Divine teacher were to be tried, ought to have still further prepared the minds of all who had hitherto adhered to Him, for the actual occurrence of it. Often had He forewarned them of His approaching death; and, when He did so, He usually assured them that on the third day He would rise again from the tomb. So well known, indeed, were these predictions, even to the very enemies of the Christian cause, that they took every precaution that could be thought of, to prevent their fulfilment. And, though it is possible that Thomas may have forgotten them, yet he could hardly fail to be reminded of them by the other disciples, to whose memories they had been previously recalled by no other than the reanimated Jesus himself.

The fact alleged to him ought, on these grounds, to have been not only a *credible* thing, in itself considered, but even invested with *a high degree of probability*. And, then, how full was the evidence attesting it! It was reported to him by a number of his fellow-disciples, whose probity he well knew from long and constant intercourse; whose means of correct judgment, from the testimony of their own senses, combined with their thorough acquaintance with the Saviour's person, were such as he could not reasonably dispute; and, it may be added, whose unwillingness to be convinced had been only less obstinate than his own. Such evidence, certainly, was as complete as any reasonable man in his circumstances could have looked for. But, still, his Unbelief was too obstinate to be shaken by it.

Clear, and full, and consistent as it was, it made no sensible impression upon his mind. Indeed, he does not seem to have given heed to it at all. For his doubts were not rested on any supposed defect which he was able to point out in the evidence submitted to him, but on the rash and presumptuous demand that *another kind of evidence should be given to supplement it*. Whether it was that he stood upon his *imagined right* to have the same palpable demonstration given him which had been already afforded to his brethren, or that his doubts and prejudices were so strong, that nothing short of this was adequate to remove them ; certain it is, that instead of patiently examining and carefully weighing the proof that was laid before him, he set it aside, and declared that he would not believe until he was convinced by the testimony of his own senses. Nothing could be more unreasonable than such a condition. The circumstance that he himself had not seen the Lord, was no proper objection to the evidence of his fellow-disciples. *It would have been so if he had been present on the occasion in question*, and had satisfied himself by actual observation, that the Saviour did not on that occasion manifest Himself. But, *as he had not been present*, his want of ocular proof could not in the least discredit the statements of those who avouched it from their own experience. It is true, that if Christ had been actually beheld by him, his grounds of conviction would have been *stronger* than they were. But this consideration was no manner of excuse for rejecting grounds which, in themselves, were unexceptionable. A man is always entitled to say that he will not believe without *sufficient* proof. But no man is entitled

to stipulate for any particular kind of proof which he may prefer ; and because it is not given, to refuse attention to any other, no matter how clear, and full, and free from reasonable objection it may be, in the judgment of all who may impartially examine it. Indeed, there is no fact, however strongly attested, which might not in this way come to be discredited. Let ten men declare it to us, we might object that there are not twenty. Let twenty confirm it, we might still object that there are not a hundred. And as to the most authentic occurrences of past history, and the most undeniable peculiarities of foreign countries, there is not one of them which we might not, on the same principle, refuse to believe, merely because we have not seen them. The conduct of the Apostle, then, was altogether without excuse. The Resurrection of Jesus was declared to him, on testimony which he could not and did not even attempt to refute ; but still he protested that he would not be persuaded of it, until he had such other evidence as he chose to prescribe. The rebuke, accordingly, which the Saviour administered to him, pronounces no commendation on credulity, and reflects no censure on reasonable and fair inquiry. That which it commends, is openness to conviction when evidence that cannot be gainsaid is afforded us. And that which it reproves is the rejection of such evidence, from no real defect that we are able to discover in it, but simply because some other proof, which we either think stronger, or like better, has not been given.

In this view, the text conveys a most important lesson to all who appear to be like-minded with the

Apostle, as too many, alas! in all ages, have been found to be,—sinning, not as he did, on one occasion, but in the habit of their lives, “after the same example of unbelief.”

It is no uncommon thing for unbelievers to object that they have not *ocular and personal* proof of the miracles of the Gospel, without ever reflecting that the Christian dispensation could not, from its very nature, have been confirmed to us in such a manner. It would be grossly unreasonable to expect that the Son of God should be crucified and revived in every age, and in every country, in order that all who are summoned to believe on Him may have direct proof as the groundwork of their faith. And if so, then—whether Britain or Judæa, whether the nineteenth century or the first, were chosen as the scene and period of His manifestation,—it is plain, that those who live in other countries, and in succeeding ages, would have to believe the facts and the miracles accompanying them on precisely the same kind of evidence which confirms them to us now, that is, on indirect or mediate testimony. To demand immediate proof for our conviction, were manifestly quite unreasonable and inconsiderate, the nature of the case being such as to preclude it. It may, indeed, be said, that miracles *of a like description* with those of the Saviour might be still performed by *other persons*, in order to strengthen our confidence in the Christian faith. But if they were, they would *cease to be miracles*. They would become, in all ages and in all countries, matter of familiar and everyday occurrence, and would thus be deprived of all the force which they possess, as exceptional signs and cre-

dentials of Divine authority. But are we not warranted, when miracles are reported to us, to urge their opposition to the known constancy of the course of nature as an insurmountable bar in the way of our believing them? No, Brethren. Such a plea were altogether inadmissible, at least in the only case in which we are concerned to repel it; that is to say, in the case of *such miracles as God is alleged to have wrought in confirmation of a revealed religion.* To prejudge them in such a case, because they are opposed to our ordinary experience of the course of nature, would be trying them by a test which cannot fairly be applied to them. They do not profess to be the results of any natural power, but to be the supernatural operations of the power of God. And if, therefore, before inquiring into the evidence of them, a question be proposed as to *how far they are events likely or unlikely to have really taken place,* that question must be determined, not by considering whether they are such effects as usually result from any known cause of ordinary operation, but by considering this very different point, whether the revelation, in support of which they are adduced, be such as to make it a credible or an incredible thing, that God should interpose His Divine power in an extraordinary manner to confirm it. If ten men come to me, and tell me that they have seen a person rising from the dead, or walking upon the sea, without apprising me of any ostensible purpose for which God has interposed to enable him to do so, I am entitled to plead against their testimony, that such an occurrence is so contrary to common experience as to make it in a very high degree improbable. But if the same

men, while telling me of the miracle, inform me at the same time *that it was operated by the power of God with the view of authenticating a great system of revealed truth*; then, if I am to plead against them, it must be on *another ground*,—it must be on the ground that the revelation which they allege bears upon its face such clear and palpable marks of being unworthy of the character of God to give, or unnecessary and unimportant in the circumstances of man to receive,—that no interference of Divine power to authorise it can, with any degree of probability, be looked for. And if I am not prepared to meet them on this ground, I am bound, with all fairness, to try and weigh their testimony; and on finding it trustworthy, to make no deduction from it in consequence of the alleged fact being foreign to the course of nature. For the circumstances, indeed, of a well-attested miracle, wrought in support of a revelation that is worthy of God, being evidently opposed to our everyday experience, instead of being an insuperable objection to it, is in one respect at least, an argument in its favour. For if God is to work a miracle at all, we may reasonably expect that it will be *so decided a miracle*,—so clearly and unequivocally opposed to all the observed effects of natural power,—as to place its miraculous character altogether beyond dispute, and to force every witness of it to acknowledge with Nicodemus, that no man could do it, “except God were with him.”

But, still, the Unbeliever may fall back on the position, that *stronger evidence might have been afforded* of the miracles of Christ than has actually been given,

so as at once to urge them on the attention, and to force them on the convictions, of all to whom they are proposed. It is not necessary to deny this assertion in order to repel the implied inference that is drawn from it. For it does not at all follow, that an evidence is defective because it is not irresistible and demonstrative. Even in regard to the existence and attributes of God, those fundamental truths of natural religion, which the very rejecters of Christianity are, with a few rare exceptions, wont to admit,—the proofs given might have been stronger than we find them to be. For God has not been pleased, with a view to cure the morbid blindness of the atheist, to make so palpable a manifestation of Himself as would overpower the faculties of the intellect, and leave no room for inquiry and reflection. Although the invisible things of His eternal power and Godhead be clearly enough seen from the things which He hath made, they are seen only by those who are willing to investigate them; and a possibility is left for the careless to overlook them, or for the uncandid and perverse to dispute against them. The want of stronger evidence, however, *in this case*, is not regarded, even by those who disbelieve the Gospel, as any good ground for rejecting that which is given. They readily acknowledge that the proofs of the Divine existence, though not such as absolutely to preclude inquiry or to force conviction, are perfectly sufficient to assure them of the glorious truth. Why, then, I ask, should they act on a different principle, when they come to investigate the claims of Christianity? The great question in *this case*, also, is not whether the evidence afforded be the strongest that could by possi-

bility be supposed, but whether it be strong enough to satisfy a candid mind, willing to examine, and open to receive the truth? Look, then, to the evidence, as it is. Refute it, if you can, on its own merits. Prove to me that Christianity is a system unworthy of the character of God, and unnecessary or unimportant in the circumstances of fallen man. Prove to me that Jesus, who inculcated in His precepts, and exemplified in His whole conduct the most exalted morality, was yet the most daring and presumptuous of all deceivers,—and that, too, for no inducement of a personal nature that can be thought of,—for nothing, indeed, unless it were to cheat the world into piety, honesty, purity, and benevolence. Prove to me that it was a likely thing that a few illiterate and simple-minded Jews should, by their own wisdom, have devised and published a system of religion which puts to shame the collective attainments of the wisest and best of uninspired men in every age, or that by their own efforts, in feeble opposition to the combined power and influence of all who were in league against them, they could in a few years have succeeded in diffusing it over the wide extent of the ancient world. Prove to me, in fine, that the witnesses of Christ's miracles, and the professed workers, too, of like miracles in His name, could possibly have been deceived in reference to matters of fact which fell under the frequent observation of their own senses; or else that they wilfully attempted to deceive others, for the sake of a cause by which they could gain nothing of this world's goods, and did, in fact, lose everything,—and in their adherence to which they were subjected to losses the most serious, and hardships the most severe, and mockery the most

galling, and persecution the most implacable; and were ultimately called to seal their testimony with their blood. *Prove to me all this, and then* will you be entitled to take your stand against the claims of Christianity, on the fair and rational ground *that its evidences are insufficient*. But if you confess yourselves *unable* so to do,—if you are forced to acknowledge that the proofs given are such as you cannot conclusively set aside,—then you are not warranted to take refuge in the vague and utterly irrelevant assertion, that, had God so willed it, these proofs might have been *yet* stronger. It were in such a case the most obstinate perversity to make your mere preference for another kind of proof a ground for rejecting proof which, in its own nature, is unexceptionable.

II. Having noticed and applied the rebuke which our Lord administers in the text to His unbelieving Apostle, let us now proceed to consider the gracious benediction which He here pronounces on those who display, in reference to Divine truths, that teachable and candid spirit, in which Thomas had been found deficient,—“*Blessed,*” He says, “*are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.*”

And here, my Friends, I must again warn you against a very gross perversion of our Lord’s statement. You must not suppose that He by any means discountenances a full and searching inquiry into the grounds of such religious truths as may at any time be proposed to us, or that He justifies a blind credulity in the reception of them, however slender may be the evidence on which they rest. It is not “*believing without good evidence*” that He here approves of, but

“*believing on good evidence,*”—such evidence as *Thomas had before the Saviour was personally manifested to him, without that additional proof, calculated to compel belief, which he had so unreasonably demanded.* Our Lord here blesses, not the credulous and uninquiring, but the humble and unprejudiced searcher after truth, who is patient in investigating it, impartial in weighing it, candid in acknowledging it, and cheerful in receiving it. What He commends is, not a disposition to give easy credence to any alleged fact without first examining and considering well the proofs of it, but a disposition to be satisfied with such proofs as ought in the circumstances to suffice for our conviction, instead of frowardly requiring different or stronger proofs, such as the nature of the case does not require or will not admit of,—a disposition, in other words, thankfully to avail ourselves of that kind and measure of light which God is pleased to give us, instead of peevishly shutting our eyes against it, and refusing to be benefited by it, because it is not greater.

This benediction extends *backwards* to those Old Testament saints who lived before the day of Christ, and who on the strength of the promises that were made to them, believed in Him confidently as the Saviour that was yet to come. It extends *forwards*, too, to Christians in future ages, who should, on the testimony of the Apostles and Evangelists, believe in the same Saviour long after his Ascension into heaven. And even to *Thomas* himself, and his fellow-disciples, it justly belongs, with reference to many of the chief articles of their faith. For though they had ocular proof of the Resurrection, and of the other

miracles of the Gospel, in order that they might be qualified to attest these for the conviction of those to whom their testimony might be addressed; yet were there many truths proposed to them besides these,—such as the Father's acceptance of Christ's sacrifice—the intercession of the Saviour in heaven—the unperceived influence of the Holy Spirit upon the human heart—the resurrection of all the dead on the day of judgment—the condition of the righteous and the wicked in a future state,—truths which *they*, as well as all ordinary Christians, must have been content to believe, without receiving any sensible demonstration of them.

Now, in pronouncing this benediction, our Saviour may be viewed, on the one hand, as *stating a fact*, and, on the other hand, as *expressing an opinion*.

He may be considered as stating the *matter of fact*, that the blessings of His Gospel were only to be obtained by such as should be disposed, on good grounds, to credit Divine truths without palpable and overpowering evidence. The disposition of Thomas, prudent as he might think it, would prove fatal to the great mass of mankind, who are necessarily debarred from receiving that proof, which he had prescribed as needful for his own conviction. All who should form a resolution like his, not to believe without having seen, must thenceforth perish unavoidably in their unbelief. And *even Thomas himself*, had he acted on the same principle in regard to the main truths and promises of the Gospel, relating as these do to things that are invisible,—must needs have been excluded from all share in that blessedness which faith in these great truths and promises can alone secure. *It is the*

fact, in short,—no matter what opinion the perverse disputers of this world may entertain regarding it,—*it is the fact*, that true blessedness can be alone attained by those who are willing to receive Divine truths, on such reasonable grounds as God is pleased to assign for them, instead of rejecting them because they are not forced in an irresistible manner on our conviction.

But, on the other hand, our Lord may be here regarded, not merely as *stating the fact*, that those who believe in the truth of Christianity, without demanding ocular proof for their belief, are the only persons on whom its blessings shall be conferred, but as *expressing an opinion in favour of their being so*. He calls them “blessed,” *as commending and approving of them, and cordially acquiescing in the preference that shall be given to them*. And there can be no doubt that in this, as in all things, the judgment which He pronounces is according to the truth. Most justly may it be said, that a reception of the Gospel on such good grounds as cannot reasonably be objected to, is more to be approved of than an obstinate demand of irresistible proof in order to our conviction. It indicates a better temper of mind in those who exemplify it. It argues greater industry in searching after truth, greater discretion and impartiality in weighing it, and greater humility and ingenuousness in embracing it; and it more fully displays the power of Divine grace in subduing prejudices, guarding against errors, overcoming difficulties, casting down imaginations, and bringing the soul into captivity to the obedience of Christ. It is said, respecting the Jews at Berea, that they “were *more noble* than those

of Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so." A like commendation may be given to all candid inquirers, who, instead of turning away from the Christian doctrine because it does not at once force itself on their belief, are willing to examine and ready to receive such reasonable proofs as may be urged for its establishment. *Theirs* is the true *nobility* of mind. It is quite a mistake to suppose that a sceptical spirit is any sure mark of superior enlightenment. As there is a vulgar and ignoble credulity, there is also a vulgar and ignoble incredulity. The truly great mind is that which so loves truth, as neither to receive doctrines where the evidence is found defective, nor sweepingly to reject them, from the mere want of stronger proof, when that which has been given may be found, on due inquiry, sufficient for the conviction of any candid and reflecting man.

Let it not be thought, then, that there is anything strange in the sentiment which our Saviour here expresses. It is not only fully warranted by the reason of the case itself; but it is altogether in accordance with our ordinary modes of thinking and of acting, with reference to matters unconnected with Christianity. Take, for example, the daily business of life. In the greater part of it we are left, after a manner, to "*walk by faith and not by sight*,"—relying on testimony,—arguing from past experience,—balancing opposite probabilities against each other. And were we to insist upon ocular or demonstrative proof for any important fact that is to influence us in our daily conduct, we should often be obliged to sacrifice our

wealth, or health, or comfort, to the obstinacy of our unbelief. Take as another example the truths of *natural science*. These are received by the great mass of mankind, who have neither the time nor the capacity to investigate them, on no higher ground than *faith in the testimony* of those who have patiently laboured for their establishment. And this, too, although they are, in some cases, quite as astonishing, and as opposite to our expectations, as some of the deep things disclosed to us in the Word of God. This is very eminently the case with that doctrine of Astronomy, which is now universally received, *regarding the motion of the earth around the sun*. It seems to contradict the evidence of our senses, which led men for ages, till the progress of science corrected the error, to conclude *that it was the sun that revolved around the earth*. And had it been held forth in revelation as an object of faith, instead of being laid down in systems of human philosophy, there would have been no end to the cavils and disputes, with which a theory, apparently so opposed to our natural perceptions, would on all sides have been assailed. And yet it is now universally admitted. And on what ground is it so? Not on the ground of those scientific demonstrations which have established it. For *as to these*, there is not one man among ten thousand who has leisure to examine them or learning to understand them;—but just on the ground of *human testimony and authority*. “*Not having seen*” the alleged fact with our own eyes, or ascertained it for our own personal satisfaction, we *nevertheless believe it* on the evidence of other men, whose ability to judge of it, and veracity in declaring it, we think

we have no sufficient reason to dispute. Another instance, still more pertinent to the case before us, is found in *the great truths of natural religion*. These, as already remarked, have not been pressed upon us with an evidence at once so obtrusive and so overwhelming, as absolutely to preclude inquiry and to compel belief. They are left to be collected by that pious and patient exercise of the human understanding, which traces the character and agency of God, in the works of His hands, and in the ways of His providence. And certain as they may be to the diligent and candid inquirer, there is still a possibility for the thoughtless to neglect them, and for the perverse and disingenuous to dispute against them. Nor are there wanting mysteries connected with them,—such as the permission both of physical and moral evil,—which are to the full as incapable of explanation as any of the most mysterious articles of revealed truth. Now, my dear Friends, if these things be so,—if in regard to the ordinary affairs of life, to the general reception of the great truths of physical science, and to the fundamental articles of natural religion, men are accustomed to give the fullest credit to proofs, that come unquestionably short of actual demonstration,—I see not why they should withhold credit from the like proofs, when they come to consider the claims of Christianity. I see not why Christianity should be the only subject, of which it should be thought reasonable to say, that we will not believe it without evidence of such a kind, as leaves us not even a possibility of doing otherwise. I hold, on the contrary, that *the very circumstance of such overwhelming proof not having been afforded*, is

of itself a manifestation of the Divine wisdom, inasmuch as *it leaves room for that exercise of candour, diligence, attention, humility, and discretion*, which constitutes, in this probationary state, the proper discipline and trial of the understanding.* It seems to have been most wisely no part of God's purpose, in dealing with His creatures in matters of a religious nature, to compel their *belief* any more than their *obedience*. And, accordingly, He neither presents light to produce the one, nor motives to secure the other, in a manner so overpowering, as to render our compliance a mere matter of mechanical constraint; but rather administers them in such a way, and in such a measure, that their influence depends greatly on the character and exercise of those different minds to which they are presented. There is meant to be a *probation of the intellect*, just as much as a *probation of the heart*. And *this there could not be*, if the evidences of Divine truth were of so obtrusive and palpable a character, as to leave no scope, and no opportunity for a right or wrong exercise of intellect with respect to them. It is quite true, that owing to this want of demonstrative proof, there are various doubts and difficulties of a speculative nature, with which the mind may occasionally be perplexed. But *these*, it ought to be considered, stand in very much the same relation to the exercise of our understanding, as the allurements of sin or the sacrifices of virtue relatively to the culture and discipline of the heart. Speaking of both, we may say with the like justice: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life." And just

* Cf. *The Mysteries of Christianity*, p. 99.

as a man's moral principle is more conspicuous when he steadily prosecutes a course of holy living in the face of strong inducements to depart from it, than if he were all the while acting as he does from the mere want of any temptation to do otherwise; so may we say that a man's belief is more commendable when it has been arrived at by diligent and patient inquiry, in the face of doubts, and difficulties, and objections, than when it is produced unavoidably in his mind, without any generous exercise of his faculties, by proofs so conspicuous that they cannot be overlooked, and so overwhelming that they cannot be resisted. On this ground alone, although there were no other, may we see the justice of our Lord's maxim in the text, "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." *Their* faith is all the more noble and illustrious in proportion to the greater difficulties surmounted, both in its original acquirement, and in its after exercise—the higher degree of diligence, and attention, and candour, and humility, and teachableness implied in it; and, I may add, the brighter instance which it furnishes of the enlightening and convincing efficacy of the grace of God.

And now, Brethren, that I have endeavoured to illustrate the gracious benediction here uttered by the Saviour, let me express a lively hope that many of *you* may be found among the number of those blessed ones on whom it was pronounced. Seek to be partakers of that precious faith, with which all the blessings of the Gospel are connected,—that faith which is "the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen." You are not expected,

indeed, to give credit to any statements, for which a sufficiency of evidence has not been afforded to satisfy a candid mind that they are *indeed* the truths of God. But having, as you all have, the Word of God in your possession, and satisfied, as you all profess to be, on the ground of those miracles and prophecies, and other marks of Divinity belonging to it, that it really *does* contain a record of His mind and will, you are bound to search it with diligence and candour; and to receive whatsoever truths you find to be revealed in it, though they relate to things that are invisible, and involve doctrines that exceed your comprehension. Alas! we are too apt to stumble at Divine truths, because they are not presented to us in that precise shape which accords with our own views and wishes. We wish them to be brought, if not actually, as Thomas did, to the test of our own senses,—at least to some other standard equally inadmissible,—our narrow intellect, our limited experience, our hasty conceptions of fitness or probability. And unless they perceptibly abide the standard, we are ready, in an unbelieving spirit, to set them aside. We are slow to give credit to certain revealed facts, or to take to ourselves the comfort of certain revealed promises,—not from any lack of Scriptural evidence to assure us of them, but because some other ground of confidence in them is withheld. They seem to us strange things. They are foreign to our experience. They hurt our pride, or they exceed our comprehension; and we cannot discover their propriety or expediency. Let us beware, however, “lest there be in any of us an evil heart of unbelief.” When once we have admitted the Bible to be the Word of God, we must thence-

forth come to it, not as judges to dictate what manner of truths it is to declare, or with what kind and measure of evidence it is to propose them to us, but with the meekness and teachableness of little children, to receive in faith whatsoever it reveals. We must cast down all imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the Lord, and bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. So shall we be partakers of that blessedness, which is promised in the text to those who are content, in this present scene of darkness and imperfection, to walk by faith and not by sight. We shall be greatly blessed, even for the present, with the favour, and grace, and fellowship of our risen Redeemer, whom having not seen we love; and blessed supremely and eternally hereafter with that fulness of joy in His presence, which He is reserving for those that are kept by His power through faith unto salvation.

XI.

THE UNCHANGEABLENESS OF CHRIST.

“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.”—HEB. xiii. 8.

IN the preceding verse the Hebrews are exhorted to a faithful remembrance and zealous imitation of those departed servants of the Lord, under whose pastoral superintendence they had been placed: “Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God; whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.” The persons thus commended to them appear to be not their present, but rather their former pastors. It is true the English expression, “them which *have* the rule over you,” would, if taken by itself, seem to indicate their *present* rulers; but not so the corresponding expression in the original, which might equally be rendered “them which *have had* the rule over you,” pointing, as it simply does in a general and indefinite manner, to the *office of ruling* with which the persons had been invested, without any special reference to the *time*, whether past or present, when that office was discharged. The call to “*remember*” them,—the description given of them not as *now speaking*, but as “*having spoken* the word of God,” and the

allusion made to the “*end*,” or literally the *outgoing* or *exit*, of their conversation as worthy of special remark,—all serve to show that their presence was withdrawn, their labour ended, and their course finished. The object of the writer in referring to them evidently was, that the Hebrews, bearing in affectionate remembrance their animating example as well as their instructive doctrine, and considering, above all, how in death they had set their seal to those precious truths which in life they had been wont to proclaim, might learn by Divine grace to walk in their footsteps, so as, in terms of a precious exhortation, given in the earlier part of this Epistle, to be “followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

The words of the text which follow close after are held by some commentators to be part of the same sentence and to be read thus: “Whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation, *which was* Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.” This view, however, is altogether inadmissible. Christ might indeed be called the “*end of their conversation*,” if by *that* we could understand in the present instance *the main design or object of their life*. For we cannot doubt that “to them to live was Christ,” and that whatsoever they did in word or deed, they did all in the name of the Lord Jesus. The original phrase, however, will not bear such a meaning. It signifies the close or *termination* of their life,—their *exit* or *departure* out of that temporary scene of labour and of discipline in which they had last been engaged. And in this sense it cannot be said with any propriety

that "the end of their conversation" was "Jesus Christ."

But though the words before us must be taken as a new and distinct sentence, there can be no doubt that the exhortation contained in the previous verse served very naturally to suggest and introduce them. It might be that the loss which the Hebrews had sustained by the removal of esteemed pastors, who had declared to them the Word of life, led the writer to comfort their minds with the reflection that they had always with them the one great Shepherd and Bishop of souls, of whom no lapse of time or change of circumstances could ever deprive them. Or it might no less probably be that the allusion to departed teachers as worthy of imitation,—from the strength of their faith, the ardour of their zeal, the holiness of their lives, and the fortitude of their deaths,—induced him to remind those who were now called to follow them, of that unchanged and unchangeable Saviour, whose never-failing grace might enable them to do so—His power, and love, and wisdom, and faithfulness being the same to *them* as to those who had gone before them.

According to either view of their connection with the previous sentence, the words of the text convey to us a great truth that is highly conducive to our comfort and encouragement. In a world of constant change and uncertainty, in which our firmest props are ever apt to fail, and our fondest hopes to disappoint us, we eagerly long for some immovable ground on which the confidence of our souls may be securely rested. And called as we are, in the prosecution of our Christian course, to imitate many bright

patterns of moral excellence, by whom we find ourselves incomparably surpassed, it is in the highest degree desirable to be assured that the same Divine agency, to which *they* were indebted for all their eminent attainments in the life of faith, is ready, in *our* case even as in *theirs*, to be exerted with undiminished efficacy.

And surely all we could thus wish for is fully supplied in this statement, in which it is declared that the Lord Jesus Christ, here set forth as the object of our faith and the source of all our strength and consolation, is “*the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.*”

I. This statement may, in the first place, be understood with reference to *the essential attributes of the Saviour's Person, as the eternal and unchangeable Son of God.*

No words could more emphatically convey the idea of an existence in which there is no mutability, than those which are here employed. To be “the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever”—that is to say, *in time past, present, and to come*—evidently implies the possession of a nature that is underived, independent, and unalterable; such as can be attributed to no created being, but only to the self-existent Jehovah Himself, with whom there is no variableness nor shadow of turning. Nor is it in this text only that this distinguishing attribute of the Godhead is ascribed to the Lord Jesus. Towards the commencement of this Epistle these remarkable words of the Psalmist are applied to Him, “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever;” “Thou art the same, and Thy years shall

not fail." And we find Him declaring with reference to Himself, "Before Abraham was I am;" and again, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, which is, and which was, and which is to come."

From these plain testimonies, fully borne out by the no less unequivocal ascription to Him of other essential perfections of the Divine nature, we are unavoidably led to the conclusion that all heavenly honours and prerogatives belong to Him—that He thinks it not robbery to be equal with God—and that in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead.

Nor let it be thought that the Divinity of our Lord, of which we have here an evidence so explicit, is a matter of barren and useless speculation. Our highest interests as believers are involved in it. On no other ground is it possible to explain the saving efficacy of His sufferings and obedience. *These*, had He been but a creature however exalted, He would have been bound, *on His own account*, to undergo when they were laid upon Him by the will of His Creator. But being the coeternal and coequal Son of God, He was under no such personal obligation. His submission to them was altogether gratuitous, and its merit transferable to those for whom He interposed. And at the same time the excellence of His Divine nature gave to His obedience and sufferings an infinite merit, such as was adequate to the redemption of a world of sinners.

Need I say how full a source it is of peace and consolation to the sinner, burdened with a conviction of his guilt, and groaning under a sense of his infirmities, to know that the Saviour on whom he is called to rely, is Himself the immutable Jehovah, and

that all His Divine perfections are unalterably pledged and will be most unfailingly exerted to secure the welfare and happiness of His people? With this precious truth distinctly before his mind, how confidently may the Christian exclaim: "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; He also is become my salvation;" "I know Him whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day"!

II. But though the words of the text be thus clearly significant of the absolute Unchangeableness of the Saviour's Person as the eternal Son of God, it seems to have been intended by the sacred writer that we should specially understand them of the Lord Jesus Christ *in His mediatorial capacity*, or in the relation which He bears to His redeemed people. And, therefore, I go on to observe that we are here taught to regard *the Lord Jesus as unalterably the same in the office He sustains as the only and all-sufficient Saviour of believers.*

There never has been, and there never will be, any other Mediator between God and man than He, who from the beginning of time to the end of ages has been carrying onwards, and still continues to prosecute His one harmonious scheme of mercy and salvation. In the "yesterday" of the older dispensations, in the "to-day" of Gospel light and grace, in the coming "ever" of millennial peace and heavenly glory, —*all*, from the first sinner who was ransomed by His blood, to the last elect soul that shall be pardoned and reclaimed, have owned and always will joyfully

own Him as the Author and the Finisher of their faith. Typical high priests were appointed to prefigure Him. But *these* were not suffered to continue by reason of death ; whereas *He*, as the High Priest of our profession, continueth ever, and “ hath an unchangeable Priesthood.” Typical sacrifices were for a time ordained as faint preparatory emblems of His atonement. But *His* great sacrifice is of perpetual efficacy. The “ Lamb slain from the foundation of the world ” still stands in the midst of the throne, “ a Lamb as it had been slain.” And one song of praise continually ascends to Him from Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, Martyrs, and glorified Saints of every nation and of every age, for having washed them from their sins in His own blood, and made them kings and priests unto God. Subordinate pastors and teachers have been raised up to expound His doctrine, to set forth His offered grace, and to labour for the conversion and edification of His people. But these, however eminent their gifts, and however great their usefulness, must pass away. “ Our fathers, where are they ? and the prophets, do they live for ever ? ” All human agencies are transient and mutable. But Christ, the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls, is without variableness ; and though all flesh be as grass, and all the goodliness thereof as the flower of the grass, *His Word*, which by the Gospel is preached to us, endureth for ever. Need I add, that while His *office* is thus the same, so also are His *qualifications* for its exercise ? The might of His power, the excellency of His wisdom, the freeness of His grace, the warmth of His love, the perfection of His merits, and the prevalence of His intercession, are subject to

no diminution in the lapse of ages. Whatever He has done at any period of the world's history for the enlightenment of the most ignorant, or the pardon of the most guilty, or the strengthening of the most feeble, or the comforting of the most wretched, or the sanctification of the most depraved, He is equally able and ready to do again and again as often as He is solicited. In Him it pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell. And still does it dwell in Him; nor is it in the least exhausted by the utmost extent and frequency of diffusion. Race after race of sinners, to the end of time, may be confidently invited to put their trust in Him. For "His name," as Jesus, the Saviour, "shall endure for ever; His name shall last as long as the sun; and men shall be blessed in Him; all nations shall call Him blessed." Yes, Brethren, and in this respect the sun may, indeed, be viewed as a fit, though feeble, emblem of the Saviour's excellence. The same glorious luminary which shone on Adam in Paradise, and on Noah when he came out of the ark, has been scattering his enlightening and fostering rays for thousands of years on every region of the world, and yet shines as brightly as when he was first created. So shall it be with the still more glorious Sun of Righteousness. Though millions, who have already beheld Him, have been cheered by His light, and cherished by His genial influences, He shall still arise on millions yet to be illuminated, with undiminished brightness and healing in His wings. For it is our strong consolation to be assured that He, in whom alone there is life and salvation, is, in His fitness and sufficiency for His gracious work, "the same yester-

day, and to-day, and for ever,"—able to save unto the uttermost, and evermore, all who come unto God by Him.

III. This statement farther implies that *the Lord Jesus is ever the same in His kind and compassionate dispositions towards His people.* Earthly friends are too often fickle and capricious. Some slight, and perhaps unintentional, offence will alienate them. Any important change in *our* circumstances, or in *their own*, will readily induce them to forget or to desert us. Not so is it with that Heavenly Friend, of whom it may be truly said, that "He sticketh closer than a brother." His love is, like Himself, unchangeable. No lapse of time, or distance of space, can separate us from it. Not even the coldness and ingratitude with which it is so frequently met, and so unworthily requited, can extinguish or exhaust it. Its sensible manifestations may, indeed, be interrupted for the chastening and correction of our sinful hearts. But even *then* it is not finally withdrawn. It glows as warmly as ever within His breast. He hath said: "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee; for a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee: for the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed." We may, then, with all certainty rely on the continuance of whatever we may at any time have experienced of the friendship and loving-kindness of the Saviour. His

outward dealings with us may indeed vary. And our own inward sense of His goodness may fluctuate. But *He* never varies or fluctuates in His love to those who are heartily placing their trust in Him. "Having loved His own from the beginning, He loves them still, and will love them to the end."

Nor, happily, are we left, in reference to this matter, to form our judgment from the results merely of *our own* experience. We may take also for our guidance the experience of *others*, who have more largely and more sensibly tasted of His goodness, and cheer our hearts with the confident persuasion, that whatever the Saviour was, and whatever He did to *them*, He is equally ready to be and do for *us*. Most of all may we take for our instruction the sure record given of His mercies in the Word of God. We see *there* what manner of love we may expect from Him. Think of the manifold proofs that are there recorded of His never-failing kindness and compassion, while He dwelt in visible presence among the sons of men. See how He literally "went about doing good;" healing the sick, comforting the sorrowful, instructing the ignorant, reclaiming the sinful, inviting the weary and heavy-laden to come to Him, and blessing all who came with the fulness of His grace. Behold how meekly He endured the contradiction of sinners,—how patiently He bore with the infirmities of His followers,—how tenderly He wept, and how fervently He prayed for those who were obstinately despising and rejecting Him! See how He condescended to the humblest, and encouraged the weakest, and pitied the most unworthy,—how kindly He took up little

children into His arms,—how fully He sympathised in the groanings of His spirit with those who were lamenting the loss of a departed friend,—how mercifully He interposed in the face of the most injurious calumnies to vindicate the faith and dry up the tears of one who had shortly before been noted for her profligacy,—how generously, on the very evening before His death, He seemed to forget His own approaching sufferings in His anxiety to comfort the drooping spirits of His disciples,—how considerately He softened His merited reproof, when they failed to watch with Him in the dark hour of His agony, by saying that “the spirit was willing, though the flesh was weak,”—how mildly He turned and looked upon Peter when that faithless friend was protesting that he knew Him not,—how cordially He forgave, not Peter only who had denied Him, but all the others who had forsaken Him and fled when after His resurrection they penitently returned to Him,—and how affectionately, amid the glories of His ascension, He lifted up His hands to bless them at the very time when the clouds were receiving Him out of their sight! Think of all this, to say nothing of that unspeakable manifestation of His love which He gave when laying down His life for us on the cross, and then say, if it be not a source of the fullest comfort to reflect that He, of whom such things have been recorded, is “the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever,”—that the splendours of His present exalted condition have not changed Him,—that He still retains amidst the celestial glory those compassionate dispositions which dwelt within Him while on earth,—that He is touched now as much as ever with

the feeling of our infirmities, and ready at all times to pity and relieve us. Oh! where is the sinner who may not come to such a Saviour? And where is the disciple who would not cleave to such a Lord?

IV. I must yet farther observe in illustration of this statement, that *Christ is unchangeably the same in His adherence to the declarations and requirements of His Word.* For ever His Word is settled in heaven, and His faithfulness is unto all generations. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but His words shall in no wise pass away. Although men believe not, yet He abideth faithful; He cannot deny Himself.

This statement may be specially applied to the *promises and threatenings of the Word of Christ.* These are all of them the true sayings of One who will not fail to carry them into full effect. His promises, exceeding great and precious as they are, shall all to the utmost jot and tittle be fulfilled. *This* has ever been the experience of His people. In so far as they have trusted Him, they have found that He has never deceived them. Not one thing on His part has ever failed of all the good which He said that He would do for them. Enthusiasts, indeed, who have put their own vain imaginations in the place of His Word, and have presumed to call their own fancies or feelings by the name of promises, have often met with disappointments; nor could they reasonably expect that it should be otherwise. But those who rest on the clear promises of the Gospel, and wait in faith and hope for their accomplishment, shall not be ashamed or confounded, world without

end. We have heard with our ears, and our fathers have told us what works He did in their day, and we feel assured that He will help us too for His name's sake and for His honour. But, on the other hand, the *threatenings* of the Lord are equally sure to be carried into execution against all such as have righteously incurred them. In this respect the Unchangeableness of Christ, like the pillar that guided His ancient people through the wilderness, has a dark side as well as a bright side,—an aspect of wrath and terror to the impenitent, as well as an aspect of comfort to the faithful. It is a fearful thing for unbelieving and ungodly men to fall into the hands of that unchangeable Lord, with whom in His justice, and holiness, and truth, no less than in His mercy, there is no shadow of turning. Sinners may try to delude themselves with the hope that the Lord is too merciful to deal with them at last according to the full extent of His threatenings. But it is a vain and impious imagination. “Hath He said, and shall He not do it? Hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?” Verily, “He is not man, that He should lie; or the son of man, that He should repent.” We have many striking instances on record,—in the waters of the deluge, in the flames of Sodom, in the plagues of Egypt, in the fall of Jerusalem, and in other signal visitations of Divine anger—to show how faithful the Lord is in executing His purposes of wrath as well as His designs of mercy. And He is the Lord, who changeth not. His word of truth is unalterably pledged to the woes denounced against the workers of iniquity. And upon all such as perversely abuse

the present fleeting period of His forbearance, His threatened wrath shall come unto the uttermost.

Thus have I endeavoured to illustrate the precious and interesting doctrine of the Unchangeableness of Christ in some of the chief lights in which it may be viewed. And now let us inquire what manner of profitable counsel and consolation, of needful "correction and instruction in righteousness," may be derived from this weighty and important truth.

1. We learn from this subject confidently to anticipate the progressive advancement and final triumph of the Christian cause. He who has established His kingdom upon earth, ever lives to protect and to extend it. Subordinate agents and instruments that seemed to be almost essential to its prosperity may be removed. Prophets may cease. Apostles may be withdrawn. Pastors and teachers of eminent usefulness may be taken away. But He who is head over all things to His Church will never fail it. Its interests are always safe under His guardianship. Its enemies are vain and harmless against His power. "Upon this Rock," He says, "I will build my Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

2. We learn also from this subject fully to rely on the fixed terms and settled arrangements of the Gospel. The covenant which God has made with us in Christ Jesus, is ordered in all things and sure; and nothing will ever prevail with Him to deviate from it. Vain are all the hopes which sinners would attempt to build on any other ground than the Word of God proposes to them. There is no other than one

unchangeable Mediator through whom we can find acceptance with the Father. And there is no other than one unvarying way of faith, repentance, self-denial, and progressive holiness, by which He undertakes to save us from the coming wrath, and bring us to the ultimate enjoyment of the promised glory. Equally vain are all those doubts and fears which are apt to deter sinners from closing with the great salvation. He who invites us to come to Him for life eternal is One who cannot deceive, and will not disappoint us. The Author of our faith is the Author of our being; the Captain of our salvation is the Governor of the universe. All power belongs to Him in heaven and on earth. And it is all pledged by Him who changeth not, to be unfailingly exercised in saving to the uttermost such as put their trust in Him.

3. We learn further, from this subject, how great is the encouragement which believers may draw from the grace of their Redeemer amid all the trials and difficulties of the Christian life. He is at all times our very present help, our never-failing Counsellor and Guardian. Nothing can ever separate us from His love—nothing can harm us when under His protection. We may groan beneath the burden of our sins, but *He* is ever nigh to relieve us of their load. We may be disheartened at the thought of our infirmities; but with Him there is everlasting strength, and that strength is ready to be made perfect in our weakness. We may be appalled by our enemies and temptations; but *He* by His grace can make us more than conquerors. We may be filled with despondency when we reflect how far we come short of

the faith, and patience, and holy resolution, and godliness, and heavenly-mindedness, of many devoted servants of the Lord who have been held up as models for our imitation; but that gracious Lord who so remarkably distinguished them, will, if we trust in Him, be the same to us that He was to them in His strengthening, perfecting, and sanctifying influences. "My grace," He still says to each of us, "is sufficient for thee;" "as thy days, so shall thy strength be."

4. Finally, we may derive from this subject the strongest consolations and supports amid all the losses and vicissitudes of this mortal state. We live in a changing world, a world of fading joys, and disappointing hopes, and transient connections. We know not what a day may bring forth. We are liable every moment to be deprived of these earthly blessings which we would most fondly call our own. Possessions which we cling to may make to themselves wings and flee away. Schemes and projects, in which we are disposed most confidently to engage, may be frustrated and ruined. Friends, on whom we are accustomed to rely, may faithlessly deceive us or heartlessly forsake us. Those whom we love best, and who have most truly loved us,—our most faithful friends, our most valued instructors, our dearest relatives,—may be taken from us by the stroke of death. But *this* best support and comfort ever remains, as an anchor to the soul both sure and steadfast,—an *unchanging Saviour*, whose love is all-sufficient to alleviate every sorrow and compensate every loss. To Him, then, let us cleave; on Him let us

cast the burden of all our cares ; from Him let us seek relief in all our troubles. So, amidst the vicissitudes and afflictions to which in this mutable state of existence we are exposed, shall we realise the full worth and comfort of this precious truth, “ Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever ;” and “ the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus,” after that we have suffered awhile, “ shall stablish, strengthen, and settle ” us, and bring us to His heavenly kingdom.

XII.

CHRIST'S LIVING EPISTLES.

“Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men : forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God ; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.”—2 CORINTHIANS, iii. 2, 3.

THE Apostle Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, had frequent occasion to vindicate himself from the aspersions cast on him by certain false teachers, who called in question his claims to the Apostleship. Among other arguments to which he appealed in confirmation of the authority of his sacred office, one of the most forcible was *the practical result* with which his labours in that office had been attended. He was willing to be tried by no less severe a test than that which his heavenly Master had furnished when, having issued His warning against false prophets, He added, “*by their fruits ye shall know them.*” He felt that no other evidence was needful than that which the hearts and lives of his true converts might abundantly afford to prove that the Lord, whose he was and whom he served, had owned and singularly blessed his ministrations.

“Am I *not* an Apostle?” we find him arguing in

his former Epistle, "Are not ye"—*even ye*—"my work in the Lord? If I be not an Apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to *you*; for the seal of mine Apostleship are *ye* in the Lord."

To the like purpose is his argument in the passage before us. "Do we," he had asked in the preceding verse—"do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you?" '*No, truly,*' he leaves them to answer. Any such testimonial was, in the circumstances, altogether unnecessary. For, as he adds in the text: "*Ye* are our Epistle, written in our hearts" (or, as some manuscripts have it, "written in *your* hearts"),—"Ye are our Epistle, written in your hearts, known and read of all men; forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the Epistle of Christ ministered by us."

This was indeed an argument for his Apostleship, the force of which it was not easy to call in question. His faithful converts possessed in their own experience, and openly exhibited in their consistent lives, a proof that his labours had truly been accompanied with the power and demonstration of the Holy Spirit. Whatever his enemies and detractors might say against him,—as not having "compañied" with the other Apostles from the beginning—as not having been in the first instance nominated, like the successor of Judas, by the voice of the assembled Church—as having recently been a blasphemer and a persecutor—or as otherwise lacking what they may have conceived to be the proper signs and credentials of a Divine commission,—the faithful Christians at least knew in themselves, and all who candidly observed them

were obliged to acknowledge that he had, of a truth, been in *their* case a "chosen vessel to bear the name of the Lord before the Gentiles." Whether he had *other* marks of the Apostleship was to *them*, accordingly, a matter of comparative indifference. *One thing* they knew, that whereas they were once blind, they had now, through his instrumentality, been made to see. He had been the means of awakening and converting them; of turning them from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God. And how then could either *they* who had experienced, or *others* who had observed, the change that had been wrought in them, dispute his claims to the office he sustained? They were *themselves* the seal of his Apostleship; and what *other* seal then was necessary to attest it? They were *themselves* the Epistle of Christ ministered by him; and what *other* letters of commendation need he bring to them?

It would be well, truly, if Christians in *these* days would enable those who are set over them in the Lord to make any such triumphant appeal as *this*. We might in that case almost venture to dispense with other arguments for the warrant of our ministry. For who shall repudiate that which *God* is pleased to own? Who shall reject as altogether invalid those ministrations which *He* is pleased to bless for the edifying of the body of Christ?

Whether the preachers of His Gospel be able to plead the antiquity of the Church with which they are connected, or its independence of the kingdoms of this world, or its exact conformity, even in the minutest points of outward form, to the pattern of the

primitive ages—whether they can trace their authority as its pastors to the suit and calling of the people, or to their own connected succession reaching back unbroken to the days of the Apostles,—*these*, truly, are points of very secondary importance as compared with this other and much more momentous question, Whether they have been in any wise instrumental in bringing men to the knowledge and belief and obedience of “the truth as it is in Jesus”? So long as it can be said of Zion : ‘ this man and that man were born in her,—these thoughtless sinners were awakened,—these proud hearts were humbled,—these broken spirits were comforted,—these saints of God were sanctified more and more, and led more fully and richly to adorn themselves with all the graces and virtues of the Christian life,’—it matters little what *else* may be left *unsaid*. To all other questions we might *then* be content to reply, “We are not careful to answer you in these matters,”—*here* are our proofs, our practical and solid proofs, that the great Head of the Church is fulfilling to us His own promise, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world,”—*here* are the seals and credentials of our ministry, by which you may see that He has owned it and made it effectual,—*here* are the best of all letters of commendation to you, even those Epistles of the Lord, written in the hearts and lives of our believing people.

It is not, however, merely in *this* light, as living evidences or seals of his own Apostleship, that Paul here appeals to the faithful members of the Corinthian Church. The testimony they bore to his own suc-

cessful labours among them, was of very subordinate value in *his* estimation to the honour and praise they reflected on his Divine Master. It was more from a regard to the interests of the Gospel, than from any private and personal considerations, that he sought to vindicate the authority of his sacred office. Nor could he even forget that in all that he had been honoured to do, he was but a humble instrument in the hands of God. Accordingly, while he here speaks of the Corinthians as being, in a certain subordinate sense, *his own* Epistle, he is careful in the very next clause to represent them in the far higher character of *Epistles of Christ*.

How this character came to be possessed by them is very plainly stated in the text. The Epistles of Christ are "written, not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God." *He* is the writer of them,—even the Holy Spirit, whose special function it is, as the Scriptures teach us, to testify of Christ and to glorify Him, by taking of that which is Christ's and showing it unto us. The agency of human instruments is indeed employed, for Paul speaks of these Epistles of Christ as "*ministered by us*." But it is the power of Divine grace that gives to the human instruments all their efficacy. Without this, the most able and earnest ministrations will carry no conviction to the conscience, and make no lasting impression on the heart. Paul may plant, and Apollos may water, but it is God alone who can give the increase.

It is on the inward character and disposition that the influence of the Spirit is here said to be exerted.

The Epistles of Christ are not written, like the Law of the Ten Commandments, "on tables of stone," but "*in fleshy tables of the heart.*" The work of Divine grace is altogether spiritual. It has, above all, to do with *the heart*, which, hard and impenetrable as it may be in its natural state, is softened and made susceptible of holy impressions, by Him who has access to it, in ways that we know not of, and who is able to change and mould it as He may will.

But, then, though the work of the Spirit be thus inward, its practical results are outward and apparent. Out of the heart are the issues of the life. "The fruit of the Spirit" is manifest, and "is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth." Accordingly, Christians are represented in the text, not only as Epistles of Christ written on the heart, but as *manifestly declaring* themselves to be so, insomuch that they may be "*known and read of all men.*"

Such, then, being the peculiar character ascribed in this passage to all real Christians, the question very naturally arises, In what respects does this character belong to them? What is there to be seen about them, that should make such a title as *this* fitting or appropriate?

An "Epistle," as we all know, is a written communication of the mind of the author to those whom he addresses, conveying to them his wishes, informing them of his circumstances, disclosing to them his purposes and expectations, imparting to them his instructions and advices. It is but a substitute for his personal and familiar converse,—by which, when distant, he is brought nigh,—when out of sight, he

is recalled to remembrance,—and by which he may even hold intercourse with those who have never seen his “face in the flesh.”

If Christians, then, be *Epistles of Jesus Christ*, what information do they bring from *Him* to men around them? What are their contents? What may we learn from them respecting the mind and will of the Divine Author from whom they proceed?

This is a wide question. It would far exceed our limited time to show you in detail the purport of these living Epistles. All we can now aim at is a very brief outline of some of the chief heads of intelligence which are contained in them.

I. One thing that may very obviously be learned from them is, *the practical excellence and influence of the religion of Christ.*

In so far as believers are enabled, by the grace of God, to live in accordance with their principles and professions, they exhibit to all with whom they associate a living proof of the excellence of the Gospel. They show both what it *is* and what it is *able to do*. They manifest the sanctifying influence of its truths. They illustrate the purity and holiness of its precepts. They refute, in the most satisfactory manner, those groundless charges, with reference to its practical tendency, which unbelieving men are fain to bring against it. They prove it to be, not only a doctrine of the freest grace, but, at the same time, a doctrine of the purest godliness,—repressing every sinful desire, and fostering every virtuous disposition,—promoting the best interests, spiritual and even temporal, at once of those by whom it is embraced and of all

with whom in the bonds of society they are connected, and tending to make the "man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

And, truly, it would be difficult to overrate the value of that testimony which would be borne to the truth of God in the midst of an unbelieving world, were Christians in their daily conduct as careful as they ought to be, to do substantial justice to that heavenly Master whose followers, nay, whose Epistles, they are called. Oh, Brethren, did men but see our blessed religion visibly and palpably embodied in our personal characters—were they but forced to look at it, not in the shape of abstract doctrines or dry precepts, still less in that of lifeless forms or hollow professions, but warm with life, instinct with power, breathing, moving, acting in the midst of them—did they but see it opening the darkened mind, softening the stony heart, taming the stubborn temper, reforming the vicious life, teaching us to live as brethren in unity, and to walk in love, as Christ also loved us—did they but see it shining forth in all the beauties of meekness and humility, patience and contentment, gentleness and forbearance, charity and benevolence,—might we not hope that even the most prejudiced among them would *then* be constrained, if not to love, at least to honour it? Would they not be led more carefully to consider, and more candidly to weigh, its claims to their acceptance? Would not the persuasion involuntarily flash upon them, that surely such a religion as this—a religion so pure, so beneficial, so lovely—cannot be the fruit of base artifice or of gross delusion, but must be the very truth of God, and

worthy of all acceptation by His creatures? And by the Divine blessing, might they not at length be brought to love it, to confide in it, and to obey it,—to the glory of that God in whose goodness it originated, and by whose grace it is seen to be so effectual?

II. Another thing that may be learned from the character of believers, considered as Epistles of the Lord, is, *the greatness of that change which sinners must undergo in order to fit them for inheriting the kingdom of God.*

The Scriptures speak of this spiritual change in language exceedingly forcible and emphatic. They speak of it as a “crucifying of the flesh,” a “dying unto sin,”—a “renewing of the spirit of the mind,”—a “calling out of darkness into marvellous light,”—a “putting off of the old man with his deeds, which are corrupt, and a putting on of the new man,” formed after the image of Christ. They liken it to a “*new birth*,” a “*new creation*,” a “*resurrection from the dead*.”

In doing so, however, the statements of the *written Word* have much need of confirmation by *the living Epistle*, in order to gain a ready entrance into the heart. The doctrine they reveal is most unpalatable to worldly men. It humbles their pride. It offends their prejudices. It aims the axe at the root of all their cherished sins. “This is a hard saying,” they tell us—“who can hear it?”

Nor is there anything that tends more lamentably to strengthen their unbelief regarding this important matter than *the inconsistencies of some who assume the Christian name*. When worldly men see that not a few of those who make a high profession of religion,

and talk perhaps very fluently and plausibly of their Christian experience, differ so little in personal character from themselves,—when they find these high-sounding professors of Christianity just as self-seeking in their aims, as ambitious and covetous in their disposition, as narrow-minded and uncharitable in their sentiments, as fretful and peevish in their tempers, or as frivolous in their pleasures and gratifications as others who make no serious profession at all;—they are led to think that men in their natural state cannot surely be so very far from the kingdom of God as the Scriptures represent;—they are apt to set down all that the Bible teaches regarding a “new creation,” or a “resurrection from death in sin,” to the account of poetical licence or oriental figure, or, it may be, of fanatical exaggeration and extravagance; or, at all events, they are tempted to conclude that the application of such strong statements must be confined to the case of men who, like the primitive converts, have been recently turned from the abominations of heathenism, and that a very great deduction must be made from them when applied to such as have been born and educated in a Christian land.

Such is the not unnatural inference of worldly men when witnessing the inconsistencies and grievous shortcomings of many nominal Christians. But let them once be brought into close contact with those who are Christians in sincerity and truth,—let them but peruse the characters of those who may truly be entitled *Epistles of Jesus Christ*,—and then, how different is the impression that is made upon them! They now see that there is a reality and a power in the work of Divine grace which they never before im-

agined. They now see that there is a mighty and most essential difference between the children of light and the children of this world, of which they had formerly no adequate conception. *To be a Christian*,—when they look at these fair though still imperfect patterns of what a Christian ought to be, is not now in *their* eyes so simple a matter as they once thought it. It is not the mere assumption of a name, however honourable, or the mere assent to a creed, however sound, or the mere observance of a round of forms, however solemn, or the mere utterance of certain conventional phrases, however expressive. They *now* see, that *to be a Christian* is nothing less than *to be a man renewed after the image of Christ*,—to have the likeness of Christ imprinted on the soul, and the life of Christ manifested in the mortal body,—to be of the same mind that was in Christ Jesus—thinking as He thought—loving as He loved—going about, as He did, doing good,—learning of Him to be meek and lowly in heart,—taking up His cross, denying self, and following Him. They *now* find that the character of a true Christian, with all the imperfections that cleave to it in this life, is one with which they themselves have no real sympathy or fellowship; and hence, that they must be much more incapable, until some very great change has been wrought in them, of holding fellowship with the spirits of the just made perfect. And *thus* are the words of Christ brought home to them, and far more powerfully impressed upon their hearts than they could be by the most forcible verbal demonstrations, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

III. Another lesson which we find written, even as with a sunbeam, on these living Epistles, is *the freeness, fulness, and efficacy of the grace of Christ*. We see in them a practical exhibition of what the Redeemer *can* and *will* do in behalf of all such as put their trust in Him.

For what were these men more than others in their natural state? Were they not men of like passions with ourselves,—children of wrath even as others,—involved in the same guilt, subject to the same doom, tainted with the same pollution as the rest of mankind? And what are they *now*? A peculiar and holy people,—blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a perverse and crooked generation, among whom they shine as lights in the world. And to *what* is this blessed change to be ascribed? It is altogether to be attributed to the grace of Christ, which sought, and found, and saved them in their lost estate, setting them free from the bondage of iniquity, as well as from the condemnation of the broken law, and purifying them unto the Lord, a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Yes; there are none more ready than themselves to own that “by the grace of God” they are what they are. And that grace is the same to *others* as it has been to *them*, equally free, and rich, and efficacious. The Spirit of God is not straitened. The Holy One of Israel is not limited in His operations. The grace of Christ is not monopolised as the exclusive property of any man or of any class. It is free as the air or light of heaven to all who seek it. What it has done for some, it is able and ready to do for

others. The hand of the Lord is not shortened, that it cannot save ; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear.

In every truly consistent believer, therefore, we find an " Epistle of Christ," clearly written and easily read, in which the Lord is manifestly declaring to us the power of His grace and the plenteousness of His redemption. St Paul himself was such an Epistle. For he tells us that though a blasphemer and a persecutor, and in his own judgment a "*chief of sinners,*" yet he obtained mercy for *this* very cause, that " in him *first*" (that is to say, *first* or *chief of sinners,* standing in the front ranks of enmity to the Gospel), " even in him the Lord Jesus might show forth all long-suffering, for a *pattern* to them which should hereafter believe." So was it also with the converts in the Corinthian Church. St Paul speaks of them in his previous Epistle as having been once tainted with the grossest abominations ; yea, as having been addicted to such shameful vices as are not even to be named among Christians. And yet he sums up the black catalogue of their iniquities by saying, " Such were some of *you* ; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." In *these*, and in all like cases, who does not see the hand-writing of the Lord confirming to us the mercies of His Gospel ? He who runs may read in them the gracious things which Christ is ready to do for all who come to Him. We cannot misconstrue the precious declarations which, by means of these living Epistles, He addresses to us. He seems in so many words to be thus writing to us, ' I have saved these sinners, come *you* also and be saved : a new heart will I give

to *you*, and a right spirit will I put within you; and I will cleanse you from all your iniquities, and remember your transgressions no more. Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out. For see *here* the trophies and monuments of my power and grace; read in these sinners, ransomed by my blood and sanctified by my Spirit, the full assurance that I am willing and able to save you to the uttermost.'

IV. Of the many other lessons that may be read in the character of true Christians considered as "Epistles of Christ," the only one which your time will allow me to notice, is *the power of His Gospel to comfort, and sustain, and satisfy the hearts of those who have sincerely embraced it.*

Although it is written of believers that "the world knoweth them not," and that their "life is hid with Christ in God," yet thus much the world may clearly see, that they must have found something in the practice of a Christian life to recompense them for all their efforts, and support them under all their trials in maintaining it. How else, indeed, is their conduct to be accounted for? Why do we see them acting so differently from other men? Why do they enter in so resolutely at the strait gate, and progress so steadily along the narrow way? Why do they hold no conference with flesh and blood, and give no heed to the dictates of self-interest, and show no deference to the fashions of society, in so far as these are at variance with their principles? Why do we not find them wearied with their labours, disheartened with their trials, disconsolate with their afflictions? How comes it to pass that they so cheerfully adopt, and

what is more wonderful still, so consistently adhere to a course of life which the children of this world would shrink from as altogether irksome and intolerable? How is it that we find them peaceful and contented in circumstances that would make other men most miserable,—still trusting in God, and still praising Him when deep seems to be calling unto deep, and mighty waves of adversity to be going over them,—and in the midst of trials the most painful, verifying that wonderful picture which an Apostle draws of them “as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things”? Surely there must be some motive adequate to explain their conduct. *They* must have discovered in the maintenance of a Christian life something more than the world has yet seen in it,—some recompense for all the toil and trouble and self-denial which it requires of them. They must have found out some gain in godliness,—some pleasantness in the ways of heavenly wisdom,—some meat to eat that others know not of,—some joy with which a stranger intermeddeth not,—some peace that passeth understanding, such as the world can neither give nor take away.

From the conduct of mere nominal Christians, who walk after the course of this world, and are in no respect distinguishable from other men by their calmness in trial and their steadfastness in duty, the very opposite inference will be drawn. Sinners will be strongly confirmed by it in their persuasion that the ways of their own heart are better than the ways of God. What else, indeed, can we expect them to conclude but that religion must be a dull, cheerless,

unsatisfactory thing, when they find some who make a very high pretension to it stealing away from it as often as they can, to refresh themselves with the pleasures of the world, and evidently deriving from it no comfort and support at those times when comfort and support are most needed.

But not so is it with the genuine Epistles of Christ. You may read in *them* a palpable and convincing proof that "a good man shall be satisfied from himself,"—that God's children find enough and to spare for all their exigencies in the provision of their Father's house,—and that those who serve the Lord have no need to look to any other than to Him for their comfort and refreshment. They have tried and found that the Lord is gracious, and that in the keeping of His commandments there is a great reward. They have tasted of the hidden manna with which He feeds them, and sigh not any more for the dainties of Egypt. They have felt a gladness diffused within them, when the light of His countenance was lifted on them, far greater than worldly men have ever experienced, even when their corn and wine were most abundant. They have found the part which they have chosen to be of a truth *that good part* which shall never be taken from them; and *this* it is which makes them so firm, so cheerful, so earnest and devoted in their adherence to it. And thus by their unfailing steadfastness and equanimity do they hold out a practical demonstration to all around them that pure religion is the pearl of great price, and that all things else are unworthy to be compared with the hopes which it imparts and the joys which it administers.

Such are a few of the more important lessons that may be learned from the character of sincere believers, considered as Epistles of Christ. And you will observe that these lessons ought, if there be any meaning in the text, to be *clearly* and *unequivocally* taught by them. *The writing on the heart* must have its index or outward exhibition plainly visible in the conduct. The living Epistles are meant for universal perusal, without the necessity of translation or of commentary. Paul here speaks of them as "*manifestly declaring*" themselves so as to be "*known and read of all men.*"

It is a reproach to us as Christians if it ever be otherwise. Surely the Saviour has not done *so little* for His people that it should remain doubtful, both to themselves and to those who live among them, whether He has done for them *anything at all*? Surely His Gospel is not so poor a remedy for the maladies of the soul, that even in the case of those who profess to have been applying it for years together, there should be any serious difficulty in discovering whether or no it be restoring their spiritual health? Surely the kingdom of Christ does not so nearly approach or so closely resemble the kingdom of Darkness as that men should be at a loss to distinguish whether we are subjects of the one kingdom or of the other? No. It is a shame and a reproach to us that there should be the smallest uncertainty in such a matter. If we are *real* Christians, we ought to be *decided* ones, standing forth *in* the world, but yet not *of* the world, in broad and marked conformity to the Gospel.

Alas! there are many naming the name of Christ who come far short of the character which the text

describes. It would not be safe, were we, from what we see in *them*, to judge of the nature and tendency of their professed Religion. The interests of the Gospel would be seriously damaged were we to try it by any such criterion. If a heathen were to come among us, wishing to learn the character of our Religion, we could hardly venture to bid him just look around him at the lives of those by whom it is professed. They who are nominally the Saviour's living Epistles, would, as an exposition of His doctrines, be no fair or adequate substitute for His written Word. The heathen, it is to be feared, would often read in *them* not what Christianity *is*, but what it most assuredly *is not*. For what shall be said of the manifold iniquities to which, in so many instances, they are addicted? And not to speak of more gross and scandalous sins, what shall be said of the worldliness, the pride, the selfishness, the vanity, the fretfulness, the discontentment, the forgetfulness of God, the uncharitableness towards man, which are so often to be found in those who bear the Christian name? Surely *these* characters never were inscribed on them by Him whose adorable name they have assumed, but rather by that wicked and deceitful One who is ever ready to counterfeit His handwriting, so as to bring Christ and His Gospel into disrepute. Yes; such persons are very far indeed from giving to the world a fair pattern of Christianity. Either they are not Epistles of Christ to any further extent than as having the mere title thereof, or if they do bear the traces of His handwriting, it is in a manner so dim and indistinct,—the pages are so torn and stained—so much has been erased, and so much has been in-

terpolated,—that it is not easy, even for a critical eye, to find in them any clear tokens of their Divine Authorship.

And yet, my dear Friends, the character, which the text describes, is virtually claimed by all professed believers. It is virtually claimed by *you* whom I am now addressing. By calling yourselves believers in Christianity,—observing its forms, assenting to its truths, receiving its sacraments,—you are to be considered as taking to yourselves the title and superscription of the Lord's Epistles,—publishing yourselves as expositions of His doctrine,—inviting all men to look at you, and learn of you the character, claims, and practical tendency of the Gospel of Christ.

Such is your profession. What, then, is the result, if your practice be widely and wilfully at variance with it? If your lives be such as would tend to persuade men that there is no material difference between the children of God and the children of this world,—that Christians are just as carnal, and worldly, and proud, and self-seeking, and frivolous, and uncharitable, as others who make no pretensions to the Christian name,—what are you doing but falsifying the doctrine of Christ, giving to the world an unfair representation of it, exposing it to undeserved calumny and reproach? Yes; you are chargeable with guilt the same in kind with that which would attach to a minister of the Gospel did he handle the Word of the Lord deceitfully, suppressing or corrupting its most essential truths and precepts.

We hope and trust, however, that instead of falsifying or bringing reproach upon the doctrine of the Gospel, it will be your study in all things to adorn it.

Remember, I beseech you, that a *consistent life* in all professed believers, is one great means ordained of God, for furthering the interests of religion in the world. The preaching of the Gospel is, indeed, honoured to do much; but it is not intended *to do all*. You must hold forth the word of life by your *practice*, just as we hold it forth by our preaching. Look at the text again. See what a high calling, what a glorious designation it assigns to you! Oh, how should the very thought of it fire your souls with a generous ambition to be holy in all manner of conversation! You are the Epistles of Christ,—in other words, you are *His living Bibles!* Indeed, you are the only Bibles, which many of your fellow-men will ever be at the pains to look at. They cast aside, perhaps, the Volume of inspired truth. But they read *you* very carefully and critically, and judge of Christianity by what they can see in you. Be it your care, then, to give them just ideas and favourable impressions of the faith which you profess. Endeavour to *live down* the prejudices of the ignorant, the reproaches of the profane, and the cavils of the unbelieving. Mere talking, and preaching, and professing will be of little avail. But the mute eloquence of a godly life is seldom ineffective; the quiet influence of a “living Epistle” is seldom lost. And it may be hoped that many may, without the word, be won to Christ by your holy conversation, and taught, by seeing your good works, to glorify your Father who is in heaven.

I doubt not, Brethren, that some of you are deeply humbled at the thought of many shortcomings and imperfections, which render you most unworthy in

your own eyes of so high a title as that which the text assigns to you. It is well that you be so. It is a token for good, if your shortcomings be acknowledged and deplored, and if you so feel your deficiencies, as humbly and earnestly to long for the removal of them. But be of good cheer. He who hath begun in you a work of grace will perform it to the uttermost. Look to Him more steadily; learn of Him more diligently. Be ever bringing your hearts to Him in faith and prayer, that something more of His grace and truth may be inscribed upon them. Be ever examining the contents of His Epistle, as written in the tablet of your heart, in order to find out how far it conveys a faithful delineation of the mind of Christ. When you find a blot on it, entreat Him to erase it; and whatever may be indistinctly written, beseech Him to trace it over and over again, until it appear in characters more worthy of Him, and more fitted to impress the minds of all who read it with the manifold wisdom and excellency of its blessed Author. Be sure of *this*, that the more closely you walk with Him, so much the more full and striking will be your resemblance to Him. For it is written that "we all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord;" and "we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is."

XIII.

PAUL'S OBTAINING MERCY THE PATTERN OF
CHRIST'S LONG-SUFFERING.

“Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting.”—1 TIMOTHY, i. 16.

THERE is one word here that needs to be explained, in order to bring out the force of this statement of St Paul. It is the word “*first*.” In this passage it signifies not a *precedence in time*, but a *pre-eminence in rank or order*. In the original it is the very same expression which the Apostle uses in the previous verse, when calling himself the “*chief*” of sinners. He had been magnifying the grace of God so strikingly displayed in his conversion and Apostleship, and in doing so was naturally led to advance the general doctrine of salvation through the Redeemer, as the only ground that could satisfactorily explain how such a sinner as himself should have found mercy. Then, again, he refers to his own case, as furnishing a most notable example, by which this general doctrine of salvation may be very signally illustrated and confirmed. “This is a faithful saying,” he remarks, “and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit,” he adds, “for this cause

I obtained mercy, that in me *first*," or *chief of sinners as I am*, " Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting."

The force of this statement, you will at once see, is mainly dependent on the prominent position among sinners which St Paul assumes. It is just because he *was* the foremost, or the chief of sinners, standing in the front rank of obstinate and hardened offenders, and of all others seemingly the least likely to obtain mercy, that the grace which *he* received, affords so striking an exhibition of the Saviour's long-suffering, and at the same time gives so mighty an encouragement to all men, however aggravated their guilt may be, to put their trust in the same all-merciful Saviour.

In reading these words, we can hardly fail to wonder at the singular humility and disinterestedness of him who wrote them. We cannot but be amazed to find this distinguished man, so eminent as a Saint, and so devoted as an Apostle, embracing every opportunity that occurred,—even when his course was wellnigh finished, and the crown of glory was almost within his grasp,—of meekly reverting to his former unconverted state, humbling himself that Christ might be exalted, and fully exposing the manifold aggravations by which his hostility to the Gospel had been characterised,—in order that the matchless grace of the Redeemer, in plucking such a brand from the burning, might be magnified and honoured to the uttermost. How well in this does he verify his own declaration : " God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, whereby the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world "!

But, if in this respect we marvel at the Apostle, much more have we cause to marvel at the Apostle's *Lord*. Truly we may say, that "His ways are not as man's ways." It is not the usual manner of an earthly government to single out the *greatest* criminals as special objects of mercy and forbearance. *They*, on the contrary, are usually *excepted* in all acts of grace done to those that have been less guilty. It is thought necessary, that the *leaders* or *instigators* of rebellion should at all events be visited with punishment, however mercifully their followers may be dealt with. But here, you perceive, the method observed by the King of kings is altogether different. *He* singles out the "*chief of sinners*," and makes him a special monument of His grace. The very ring-leader of rebels is laid hold of, not to be punished, but to be pardoned and reclaimed; and that, too, for the purpose of exhibiting to all transgressors an encouraging pattern of that free mercy, in which the Gospel invites them to place their confidence.

We do not require to ask what there had been in Paul's conduct to justify that description of it which he here gives, when he says of himself, "*howbeit* I obtained mercy;" as if there were in *his* case circumstances so peculiar as to make it, humanly speaking, more difficult or improbable that mercy should be extended to *him* than other men. No one who is at all acquainted with the Apostle's history, previous to the time of his conversion, can be at any loss to understand why he expressly calls himself "the chief of sinners,"—as if he had been of all offenders the most criminal. It is quite true, that from many gross sins he was even then entirely free. He was not unjust

or dishonest, or profligate, or intemperate, or selfish, or ungodly; on the contrary, he was remarkable for his attention to all the outward proprieties and observances of a religious life,—so much so, that he seemed in his own judgment, as well as in that of society around him, to be, “as touching the righteousness of the law, *blameless.*” And yet, with all this, as he tells us here, he truly *was* a “chief of sinners,”—a very leader of the enemies of the Lord,—standing in the front rank of those that hated and opposed Him. He was a vainglorious Pharisee, steeped in formalism, and puffed up with spiritual pride,—one of that class of whom the Saviour hath declared, that they are of all others the most adverse to the humbling and self-denying truths of Christianity, insomuch that the very publicans and the harlots entered into the kingdom of God before them. He was a self-blinded and bigoted unbeliever,—hating the Gospel because it was opposed to the prejudices of his mind and the self-righteousness of his heart,—and obstinately refusing to attend to those evidences which might else have brought full conviction to his mind. He was a “blasphemer,” as he tells us in the context,—applying habitually the most scandalous and reproachful language to the Son of God,—striving, by the most abusive epithets he could think of, to vilify the Gospel, and all who put their trust in it,—and not content with doing so himself, but compelling the followers of Jesus to blaspheme Him also. He was a “*persecutor,*” and “*injurious,*” or a doer of outrage, driven by his unhallowed zeal to acts of savage cruelty and oppression. The earliest glimpse we get of him in history is on the occasion of the first Christian

martyrdom,—when “a young man, whose name was Saul,” appears standing by, consenting to the martyr’s death, and taking charge of the clothes of them that slew him, so as to enable them, stripped of their outer raiment, to prosecute with greater energy their murderous work. Having thus, as we may say, tasted of Christian blood, he seems to have thenceforward thirsted for more and more of it. He willingly gave his services to the enemies of the Christian cause, as a minister of wrath against all who might adhere to it; and, armed with the necessary authority from the Jewish Sanhedrim, he showed the most unsparing fierceness in its exercise. He made havoc of the Church,—entering into every house in which the victims of his fury might have taken refuge, and without regard to sex or age, dragging them away to prison and to judgment. Nor was he content with thus oppressing them in Jerusalem, but he pursued them even to distant cities. Justly may he be described in his own emphatic words, as having been “*exceeding mad* against” the Lord’s disciples,—or, in the still more forcible language of the narrative of the Acts, as “*breathing out threatenings and slaughter*” against the Christians,—like some furious wild beast panting after its prey. Such having been his character and conduct previous to the time of his conversion, we cannot wonder at the position which he assumes, or at the light in which he regards himself in the text. Without exaggeration might he rank himself among the “chief of sinners.” And with peculiar propriety might he speak of the “mercy” which had notwithstanding been conferred on him, as a most striking and unlooked-for instance of the grace of Heaven.

The justice of such a representation will be more apparent if we take into account the *time and manner of his conversion*. Never was man so unlikely to obtain mercy, nor so far from either seeking or expecting it, as Saul of Tarsus at that very time, when mercy was so remarkably extended to him. See him hastening on his journey to Damascus,—exulting in the commission with which he had been intrusted, to seize and bind the disciples in that city, and burning with more than his wonted bigotry and fury against the Christian cause. Who could have thought that at such a time as *this* the Lord would have graciously interposed in his behalf? Yet so it was. In the very height of his wild and furious enmity he was arrested. The towers of Damascus were already within his view, and his helpless victims were almost within his grasp, when Jesus Himself appeared to him in the way, and, by a tender and affectionate remonstrance, accompanied with the power of heavenly grace, subdued his enmity, humbled his pride, softened his hard heart, and brought him to repentance. *These* were the circumstances in which he was converted. And certainly nothing could be well imagined more unpromising. So far, indeed, as *man's* judgment could have determined, we may truly say that there was no period of Saul's life at which his conversion seemed to be more improbable than that very period at which it was accomplished. And when we think of the spirit he was exhibiting, the work he was engaged in, and the purpose he had in view, at the time when that gracious Lord, whom he had persecuted, was pleased so signally to interpose in his behalf,—we see a peculiar force in his expression,

when he says of himself, "*howbeit* I obtained mercy."

But we must also take into account the *mighty results that followed his conversion*,—we must think of the bright Christian virtues and attainments by which he came to be distinguished, of the zealous and devoted labours which he performed, and of the highly exalted position of honour and influence in the Churches which he occupied,—in order to form an adequate conception of the boundless extent of Divine mercy that was shown to him. It would have been a marvellous exercise of redeeming love had such a malignant enemy of the Cross of Christ been simply reclaimed from his hostility to the truth, and saved from the merited consequences of his wickedness,—although he had ever afterwards been left to occupy the humblest position among Christ's disciples, as one that was scarcely fit to be associated with them. But that the persecutor should be turned into the Apostle,—that the "chief of sinners" should be ranked among the "very chiefest" of saints,—that the most inveterate adversary of the Christian cause should thenceforward become its most ardent and devoted champion,—that he who had been an object of terror to the faithful, by reason of the violence and fury of his rage against them, should in all future ages be an object of veneration, as, of all the early propagators of the Gospel, beyond comparison the most active and the most successful,—*this* truly displays an incomparable fulness, and an all-prevailing efficacy of the grace of God, which no man can seriously reflect upon without amazement. Justly might Paul himself say of it in the context, that the "grace of our Lord," as

thus manifested, had been "*exceeding abundant.*" Nor can we wonder that it left upon his mind,—as it ought to leave on *all* minds that soberly contemplate it,—a peculiarly deep and lasting impression of the height, and depth, and length, and breadth, of that love of Christ which passeth knowledge.

The main point to be noticed in the text, however, is *the gracious purpose* which the Saviour had in view, in so remarkable an exercise of His mercy. It was, as Paul declares, *that in him, the chief of sinners, Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to those who should hereafter believe on Him.* His object was thereby to exhibit to all sinners an actual specimen of the greatness of His mercy. He wished us to have an opportunity of judging of Him, not merely from His statements and His promises, but from His dealings with a conspicuous and declared enemy, knowing, that such a striking fact as the text refers to would make a much stronger impression upon every mind regarding "the riches of His goodness and forbearance" than a thousand general assurances of mercy, however distinctly and solemnly expressed. It is quite proverbial, that *example is the best instructor.* Facts are more striking than words. They more forcibly awaken the attention, impress the memory, and touch the affections. They often exert a powerful influence on the mind, where general statements would be comparatively ineffectual. And, in particular, when judging of a person's character, there is nothing that gives us so lively a conception, or so satisfactory a persuasion of it, as his actual conduct. It is on this principle that the Lord has often

proceeded, in making known to us the perfections that distinguish Him. He teaches us *what He is*, by showing us *what He does*. By signal judgments inflicted on the ungodly, He exhibits, from time to time, the truth of His threatenings, and vindicates the claims of His justice, while, by unexampled forbearance to those who have obstinately trampled on His mercy, He manifests the riches of His grace and shows forth the whole extent of His Long-suffering.

In the case of Paul it was, as the text affirms, "*ALL long-suffering*" that the Lord Jesus designed to show forth. You know what is meant by "*long-suffering*" on His part. It is one of the most adorable of His perfections. It comprehends that slowness to anger,—that unwillingness to punish,—that readiness to pardon,—that long forbearance under outrage and provocation,—that patient waiting for the first symptoms of repentance,—that willingness to receive and welcome the returning sinner,—which our Saviour-God has so manifestly claimed for Himself in the Scriptures, and has so frequently displayed in His dealings with our fallen race. Nothing can be more clear and forcible than the statements in which these generous qualities are ascribed to Him. And if actual proofs were asked of His possessing them, many such might be easily adduced from the personal history and experience of sinful men. But we may safely affirm, that in no instance that was ever heard of, do we find a more full and striking exhibition of them than in the memorable case of St Paul. In his' case it may be emphatically said that *ALL long-suffering* on the part of the Lord Jesus Christ was shown forth, in the full extent and variety of its operations. Long did the

Saviour bear with him,—much did He endure from him,—without any sensible tokens of displeasure. How provoking must have been the pride, and unbelief, and malice of this Pharisee, when cloaked beneath a form of godliness! How odious must have been his offerings and prayers, proceeding from a heart at enmity with God and His Christ! How loudly did his blasphemous reproaches and his persecuting spirit cry out for vengeance upon Him! And yet, all the while, the vengeance was withheld. Are we not ready to wonder that the Lord should have permitted this infuriated bigot to revile His name, and oppose His cause, and make havoc of His people, without interfering to punish and restrain him? What could it be but “*all* long-suffering” that stayed so long the infliction of deserved wrath? And when, at length, the Lord Himself appeared to arrest him in his course, was it that His forbearance had been exhausted, and that His anger could no longer be restrained? Nay, rather, it was in order that “long-suffering” might be exchanged for pardoning “mercy,” and give way to softening and converting grace. No rod of anger is visible in the Saviour’s hands,—no words of terror proceed out of His lips,—He speaks in earnest and affectionate remonstrance: “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” It is as if He had said, ‘What cause have I given thee for all thy fierce enmity against me?—for inasmuch as thou hast done it unto the least of *these* my brethren, thou hast done it unto *me*. For them I kept every precept of the law,—yea, laid down my life to free them from its curse; and therefore they follow me and shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them

out of my hand. So it may be with thee if thou wilt own me as the loving Saviour of sinners—*of whom thou art chief.*' You know with what effect this remonstrance was attended. The heart of the hardened persecutor was softened; the Pharisee was humbled; the enemy was subdued; the ravening wolf was turned into a lamb. And no sooner did the blasphemer and persecutor acknowledge his guilt, and earnestly pray to heaven for forgiveness, than all his past sins were freely blotted out, and grace so "exceeding abundant" was conferred on him, as made him thereafter one of the brightest ornaments, and one of the most distinguished Apostles of that Church of Christ which he had laboured to overthrow. There was *something more* than "long-suffering" displayed towards him, unless we take the word in a wider sense than is usual. The Lord not only *bore* with him, but *forgave* him,—not only waited to be gracious to him, but went to seek and save him while yet in his sins,—not only stayed the infliction of His anger, but visited him with the tokens of His love. How glorious a manifestation was thus given of the matchless grace and mercy of the Saviour! If it was wonderful that such a "chief of sinners" should have been tolerated in the midst of his fury and provocations, how much more wonderful that he should have been freely pardoned;—and not only so, but honoured and distinguished,—employed as a chosen vessel of the Lord to bear His name abroad among the Gentiles,—raised to the most honourable services on earth,—and destined to one of the most exalted places in heaven! Truly may we say of him, that "where sin

abounded, grace did much more abound." Not only was "all long-suffering" displayed in him, but all the unsearchable riches of a love which no finite mind is able to comprehend.

But observe, that it is not as a *mere display of marvellous grace to excite our admiration* that this case of Paul obtaining mercy is proposed to us, but as "*a pattern to them which should hereafter believe.*" It is not to be viewed as a *singular* instance, to which no parallel need ever be expected, and from which, under ordinary circumstances, no manner of comfort or encouragement can be drawn, but rather as a specimen, to sinners in every age, of that which the Saviour can and will accomplish in behalf of all such as put their trust in Him.

In *some* respects, it must indeed be owned that St Paul's conversion *stands alone*, and cannot be fairly looked to as a precedent. It took place *suddenly*, without those preparatory steps which, in the case of other men, are ordinarily conducive to it. And there were means employed for its accomplishment, such as the light from heaven and the audible voice, which are not in ordinary instances to be looked for. Laying aside these specialities, however, which, so far from *lessening*, tend rather to *increase* the force of that demonstration which it gives us of the grace of Heaven, we are warranted to say, that the salvation of this "chief of sinners" affords an encouraging example to all, in every age, who are willing, like him, to flee for refuge, to lay hold upon the hope set before them in the Gospel. It is in this light that we are taught to view it by the Apostle himself. He holds it forth to us as *a sample*, or as an *earnest*, of the

Saviour's dealings with such as should hereafter believe on Him.

In various points of view this character may be assigned to it.

We have in it, for example, a fair pattern of the *absolute freeness* and *sovereignty* of the grace of God. It is the general doctrine of the Scriptures, that the grace of God is the *prime mover* in man's salvation. It is not *we* that love and choose *Him*; but it is *He* who *first* loves and chooses *us*. He *seeks* as well as saves us. He makes us a willing people; He draws us, that we may run after Him. He convinces us of sin; He brings us to repentance; He opens our hearts for the reception of the truth. I speak not here of the high mystery of His *decrees*, by which His people were chosen from eternity. Whether a man believes this mystery or no, he must undermine the whole system of Christianity before he can deny that "*all things are of God*,"—and that sinners are led to the reception of His offered mercy, not by any inherent qualities or dispositions which either entitle or incline them to obtain it, but through Divine grace enlightening and arousing them, and bringing them to that Saviour who hath Himself said, "*No man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.*" Now, of this great truth there could not be imagined a more complete and signal illustration than that which is furnished by the instance in the text. If ever man lived of whom it could be said, that there was nothing inherent in himself to make him either a *worthy* or a *willing* subject of the Saviour's mercy, that man most assuredly was Saul of Tarsus. Had any one told him, on his departure from Jerusalem,

that before the object of his mission could be accomplished he should have become a penitent and devoted servant of that despised Nazarene whose followers he was persecuting, he would doubtless have scorned or derided the very thought. Yet so it came to pass. This sinner was arrested in the very height of his enmity and rebellion. The Saviour came to him and drew him to Himself, when, so far from either expecting or desiring mercy, he was hardening his heart in bitter opposition to that Gospel whereby alone it can be found. Surely we have *here* a notable example of the sovereign freeness of Divine grace in saving sinners. Well does it illustrate that statement of the Apostle: "By grace are ye saved through faith; and *that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.*" Learn, then, from this instance *to be humble*. Whatever may now be your excellences and attainments, remember *who it is* to whom you are indebted for them, and be ever ready to say with the Apostle, "We were by nature the children of wrath, even as others;" "howbeit we obtained mercy,"—and, "by the grace of God" we are what we are.

Again, we have in the conversion of the Apostle Paul a pattern of the *power* and *efficacy* of the Saviour's grace. We see *what great things* it is able to accomplish. We see that there is no exaggeration in speaking of it as,—opening the blinded eyes of the understanding,—turning the heart of stone into a heart of flesh,—quickenng the souls that are dead in trespasses and sins,—and making us altogether "new creatures." Never was a mind more bigoted against the truth than that of Paul. Never was a heart more adverse to its humbling, mortifying, sanctifying influ-

ences. And yet this darkened mind was enlightened, —this obdurate heart was softened and subdued. Who, after this, has reason to suppose that any extent of prejudice or of depravity is too great for the power of the Gospel to overcome? Let no one despair of the conversion of a fellow-creature, however obstinate his unbelief may seem to be. Perhaps your heart may be grievously cast down when you think of a brother, a parent, or a child, who may be living in a state of absolute indifference, or even of open enmity to religion. But look at the “pattern” exhibited in the text, and let it teach you to despair no longer of any such one. Bring *their* case in fervent prayer before the Lord. Use every fitting means that you can think of for turning their minds to the things which concern *their* peace. And doubt not, that however unpromising their state may be, it is not beyond the reach of that Redeemer who bestowed mercy on a Saul of Tarsus. But this is not all in this connection. The efficacy of the Saviour’s grace appears in this remarkable instance, not merely in turning the hardened sinner from his wickedness, but in making him ever after a distinguished saint, and not a whit behind the very chiefest Apostles. His case is *substantially* a “pattern” to us of that holiness, that devotedness to the Lord, that earnest zeal for the prevalence of the truth, by which all who are truly converted must be distinguished. Divine grace, once received, *never leaves us as it finds us*. And if we profess to have experienced its influence, we must prove our sincerity by exhibiting its practical results. We must in our turn be *patterns*, like the Apostle,

of all that the power of Divine grace is able to accomplish.

There is one other point of view not to be overlooked, in which the mercy shown to the Apostle Paul may be justly viewed as bearing the character which the text assigns to it; and that is, when we regard it as illustrative of the willingness of the Lord to receive sinners when they come to Him, freely forgiving their iniquities, however great, and fully bestowing on them all the blessings of His great salvation.

We are told in Scripture that "the blood of Jesus cleanseth from all sin,"—that "He is able to save unto the uttermost all who come unto God by Him,"—that "whosoever cometh unto Him shall in no wise be cast out,"—that God, for His sake, "will wait that He may be gracious" to us,—pardoning iniquity, passing by transgression, casting all our sins into the depths of the sea. These, and suchlike precious declarations, are every way fitted to revive the drooping heart, and to inspire with confidence the penitent and contrite spirit. It often happens, however, that the sinner, when brought to a deep conviction of his guilt, will take no comfort from even the most gracious and most encouraging assurances of the Word of God. He thinks that they are either too good to be believed, or, at least, that they are too full of mercy and loving-kindness to be really meant for such a base sinner, as, in the depth of his penitence, he feels himself to be. Now, what can be so well calculated, in these circumstances, to dispel his fears and revive his confidence, as the *pattern of mercy* held forth to him in the text? *By it* he may behold, not only what the Lord has

promised, but what He has *actually done* to a transgressor, whose sins against Him were incomparably more flagrant than those of the vilest and most criminal among us all. *Look at this pattern*, and say, if there be any man whose guilt is too great for a merciful God to pardon, or too black for a Saviour's atoning blood to wash away! Surely, if *Saul of Tarsus* obtained mercy, no humbled sinner has reason to despond. If *he* who had wrought such havoc in the Churches, and uttered such blasphemies, and perpetrated such cruelties, and cherished such bitter enmity against the truth, as led him ever after to call himself "chief of sinners,"—if even *he* was graciously accepted, so soon as he humbly cast himself at the Saviour's feet,—surely we may venture to say, with all confidence, to the most inveterate transgressors we may meet with, "Come to this Saviour, and *you* also shall be forgiven." No matter what may be the number of your sins—no matter what may be the depth of your depravity—no matter how long or how obstinately you may have scorned and put away from you the offered mercy,—that mercy is still in store for you, if you will but seek it. And if you *should* perish, with such grace within your reach, it will not be because the magnitude of your sins exceeded the power of the Saviour to atone for them, or made Him unwilling to use it in your behalf,—but because *your own* "evil heart of unbelief" withheld you from coming to the Saviour that you might have life. A thousand witnesses will rise up against you, in the persons of sinners, once as guilty as yourselves, testifying that *they* found forgiveness with the Lord, and that *you*, had you taken the same course, might have found it also!

And, foremost of them all, will stand forth *Saul of Tarsus*, and,—recalling his hatred of Christ, and his obduracy of heart in days when his hand was stained with martyr-blood,—he will bear *his* testimony to the grace which *he* received, and of which *you* also were called to be partakers,—saying : “ I was a blasphemer and a persecutor, and injurious : howbeit I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them who should hereafter believe on Him.”

It is quite possible, however, that some may be disposed to wrest this “ pattern ” of Divine mercy to their own destruction. They may reason within their hearts that if Paul was so long borne with, in the midst of his aggravated sins and provocations, and yet was at last converted and forgiven, *they* may continue in their sins, in the hope that God will still bear with them from day to day, and, ere it be too late, will bring them to repentance. Such reasoning, however, is alike impious and fallacious.

The case of Paul lends no countenance to any such perversion of the grace of Christ. Of whatever else it may be a *pattern*, it is certainly *no pattern of this*. Paul did not continue to persecute the Christian cause in the hope of eventually desisting from his enmity, so as to obtain forgiveness of the Lord. Had any one told him that he should one day become a Christian, he would have denied it, with scorn and indignation. *His* guilt lay, not in violating the dictates of conscience, but in keeping his conscience blinded and misinformed ; and inexcusable though he was, when he did so “ many things contrary to the

name of Jesus of Nazareth," he "verily thought with himself that he *ought*" to do them. No sinner can say that *this is the case with him*, when he wilfully takes encouragement from the Divine forbearance to persevere in the practice of his sins. *He* cannot say that he verily thinks that what he is doing is only what he *ought* to do. Should he attempt to do so, his very intention of ultimate repentance would at once expose his self-delusion. Let no man then take encouragement from Paul's conversion to "continue in sin, that grace may abound." It lends no encouragement to any such presumption. Rather should it induce all sinners, without delay, to flee for grace and mercy to that Redeemer, who, if they *now* come, will in no wise cast them out—to cease longer to despise the riches of His goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, and to let the goodness of God lead them, even now, to repentance!

XIV.

MARTHA AND MARY.

“And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things : but one thing is needful : and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”—LUKE, x. 41, 42.

You are all, I doubt not, familiar with the occasion on which these words were spoken by our Lord. While He “went about,” in His usual manner, “doing good,” attended by the twelve, who were now His constant followers, “He entered into a certain village : and a certain woman named Martha received Him into her house.” This village, as we learn from other passages of the Sacred History, was Bethany, a small retired place, lying in a ravine at the back of the Mount of Olives, within two miles of the city of Jerusalem. The house was that of Lazarus and his two sisters ; and it is here called Martha’s, probably because, as being the eldest, she was intrusted with the care of it, or because, as some have supposed, she was a widow, who had taken her brother and sister to reside with her. Certain it is, that this little family enjoyed the peculiar friendship of the Son of God. It is said of them, very emphatically, by an Evangelist, that “Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and

Lazarus." And from some incidental expressions in the sacred narrative, it would seem, that He was accustomed to reside with them during His occasional visits to Jerusalem, going out to Bethany in the evenings, and returning again to the city in the mornings. In the quiet circle of these familiar friends, we may well suppose Him to have found a grateful relief from the toils, and cares, and trials, of His public ministry. Even in such brief intervals of retirement, however, He was never forgetful of the great and gracious end of His mission into the world. Truly might He speak of it as His "meat and drink to do the work" which His Father had committed to Him. Wherever He went, however He was circumstanced, and whatever He did, He was always bent on "doing good." While sitting in the house or walking by the way, as well as when preaching in the temple or the synagogue, He was eager to impart His lessons of Divine wisdom. He had always a word in season to speak, suggested by the scenes that were passing before His eyes, and suited to the cases and characters of those who heard Him. And with such easy, artless simplicity did He address them, that His doctrine might be appropriately said to "drop as the rain and distil as the dew."

Of this we have an example in the case before us. Jesus had no sooner come into the house than we find Him engaged in communicating instruction to the little circle around Him. For them He spread at once a far better repast than any which His hospitable friends could provide for Him, giving them, for their spiritual nourishment, the bread of life,—and discoursing to them, in a kindly and familiar manner,

concerning the things that belonged unto their peace. Mary, while He thus spake, was wrapped in deep attention. So wholly was she engrossed with what He said, that all other concerns seem to have been forgotten by her. She sat at His feet, in a humble and devout posture, catching every word that fell from His lips, and carefully laying it up in her heart, with a view to her spiritual comfort and improvement. Martha, however, was differently employed. We cannot doubt that *she* also would have been gratified by listening in mute attention to the Saviour's lessons; but domestic cares were pressing hard upon her. She felt a needless anxiety for the comfort of those beloved and honoured guests who had favoured her humble dwelling with their presence. Their visit on this occasion seems to have been unexpected; and hence she was not a little harassed and perplexed in making a suitable provision for their entertainment. We are told that she "*was cumbered about much serving.*" And such was the load of carefulness that weighed upon her, that it not only deprived her of the benefit she might have obtained from the teaching of her blessed Master, but even ruffled the calmness of her temper, and made her "speak unadvisedly with her lips." She blamed her sister for lending her no help, in the manifold occupations that engaged her. She thought the anxiety of Mary to receive instruction *for her own personal good* unseasonable and unwarranted, when so many household arrangements had to be made, in the way of ministering to the great Teacher who was imparting it. And not content with fretting within her own breast, she gave vent, in audible murmurs, to her discontentment. She rudely broke in upon the

strain of the Lord's discourse, and sought to make *Him* a party to her quarrel, and even insinuated some reflection *against Himself*, for having hitherto permitted that neglect of sisterly aid and sympathy which she complained of. "Lord," she said, "dost Thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me."

It was this expression of fretful and unkindly feeling that drew forth the answer in the text. Jesus, instead of interfering in the way required, to send Mary from His presence, defended her from the reproach that had been cast upon her, and solemnly declared that she had "chosen that good part, which should not be taken from her;" and, *least of all, by Him*. At the same time, He mildly reproved Martha for her inordinate concern about many things which she thought necessary for His due reception,—a concern which, albeit dictated by the warmest love, was really far less pleasing in His sight than would have been the same engrossing interest as her sister took, in the "one thing needful" for her own spiritual welfare. "Martha, Martha," was His affectionate but earnest remonstrance, "thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

In making a few further observations on these words, I shall, in the *first* place, turn your attention to the character and conduct of the two sisters as here delineated; and *then* I shall notice the instructions that may be drawn from the judgment here given respecting them by our Lord.

I. *First*, then, as to *the character of the two sisters*—there can be no doubt that *both of them* were sincere and warmly attached disciples of our Lord. It is expressly stated by St John that “Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.” The whole family were alike the objects of His tender regard. He honoured them with His friendship,—blessed them with His society,—and was well-pleased to make His abode within their dwelling. And when He came to raise Lazarus from the grave, He distinguished the two sisters, and Martha even more than Mary, by the full and comforting assurances of His power and grace. We must view *both* the sisters, then, as His faithful and devoted followers. Both of them looked to Him in faith as the Redeemer of Israel. Both of them acknowledged His claims,—received His doctrine,—relied upon His promises,—and, in the face of obloquy and persecution, were ready to confess His name, and willing to bear His cross.

But, still, there were *some particulars in which they differed*. Divine grace does not perfectly assimilate the characters of those to whom it is imparted. It sanctifies all our faculties and dispositions; but it does not alter the capacity of the former, nor wholly reverse the qualities of the latter. As to the *intellect*, sinners, when converted, still continue to manifest those various shades and measures of mental endowment which belong to them. They are dull or acute, profound or shallow, judicious or injudicious, sober or imaginative, just as they were before,—although all their powers are now placed under the control and used in subserviency to the interests of

pure religion. The same may be said of the constitutional *temper*. Much of its natural complexion may remain even when the grace of heaven has renewed it. The bold and the timid, the grave and the lively, the quick and the sluggish, the sanguine and the phlegmatic, differ no less in their converted than in their natural state, although they be all alike subject to the power of godliness. How striking are the varieties observable between Paul and Peter, between Thomas and John, evidently showing that the influences of religion did not, with all its sanctifying power, confound those original features which distinguished them. And it is just so in the case now before us. There was a very perceptible difference between the two persons referred to in the text, although they were both of them followers of Jesus, and "loved" by Him. Mary seems to have been of a quiet and reflective spirit, less disposed for activity than for contemplation, with much intensity of feeling, quickness of sentiment, and tenderness of affection,—readily moved by any affecting experience or interesting subject, however brought before her mind, and apt, at such times, to regard all other matters with indifference. Martha, on the other hand, appears to have been marked by greater strength and vigour of character, and to have been better fitted for engaging in active duties, whether of domestic management or of pious and benevolent exertion; while, at the same time, she fell behind her sister in the warmth, and depth, and liveliness of her devout affections. Less remarkable for the fervour of her spirit than for her practical diligence and prudence, and naturally quick and active in her disposition, Martha

was ready for any good work in which her cheerful services might be available ; and she seems to have never been so much absorbed in any one subject as not to be always ready to attend to whatever other calls and interests pressed upon her. Indeed, her failing lay on the opposite side,—in a tendency to multiply the objects of her concern, until her mind became “cumbered” or distracted by them.

These different features of their character are developed not only in the passage before us, but in the only two other passages in which we find them specially referred to.

When mourning over the loss of their brother, Martha no sooner heard of the Lord’s approach than she at once hastened to meet Him, saluted Him with respect, and declared not only her confidence that, had He arrived sooner, her brother’s life would have been saved, but her undiminished trust that He was able even now to undo the sad calamity that had befallen them. With all her grief, she was able to collect her thoughts and to calm her feelings to an extent sufficient for entering into converse with the Lord, for seriously pondering the truths which He declared, for frankly answering the questions He proposed, and for making a formal profession of her faith in Him as the Lord of life and the Saviour of the world. Mary all the while remained at home, overwhelmed with grief, and heedless of all that was occurring around her. It was not until her sister had returned with a message from Jesus Himself that He desired to see her, that Mary was induced to go forth to meet Him. And even then her feelings overpowered her. “When she was come where

Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell dōwn at His feet, saying unto Him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." The same words had been used by Martha when she met Jesus; but Mary is stunned by her great sorrow, and can find vent for her deepest feelings only by her tears.

Here you may discover much the same difference between the two sisters that is noticeable in the passage before us. And you will observe, also, that Martha's disposition gave her, in this instance, the advantage over Mary; just as in the former instance, it had given Mary the advantage over *her*. She, who had been the more eager and devout hearer, is now, from the same peculiarity of temper, the more disconsolate and helpless mourner; while she who had been busily attending to household duties when Jesus was discoursing, is able now to rise above the pressure of domestic griefs when Jesus comes to comfort and relieve.

There is only one other passage of the Sacred Narrative in which the two sisters are brought under our notice. It is contained, like the last, in the Gospel of St John. Jesus, shortly before His death, was sitting at meat with the same friends, in the same village of Bethany. We are told of Martha that on that occasion she "*was serving,*" just as we might have expected her to be doing from what we already know of her active and busy habits. And Mary, seemingly quite at a loss in what way to testify the ardour of her grateful affection, took an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and, breaking the box, poured the ointment on the Saviour's head. This was just such a testimony of her love as we might

have looked for from one of *her* spirit, who, as we have seen, was too much engrossed with the feelings that immediately possessed her, to be either cautious or calculating in her method of expressing them. And, accordingly, when she was blamed for what she had done, Jesus interposed to vindicate her conduct. He knew that her action sprang from the best intentions; and therefore was willing to think the best and make the most of it. "Let her alone," He said, "Why trouble ye the woman? she hath wrought a good work on Me. She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body for its burial."

The consistency in the conduct and character of these two sisters, as exhibited in the very different circumstances in which they are presented to us by St Luke and St John, is very remarkable; and coming out, as it does, in a few slight and merely incidental touches, and not in designed and studied descriptions, it furnishes a very striking proof of the veracity and reality of the Gospel histories. But, without dwelling for the present upon this argument, which I have occasionally illustrated in connection with other similar instances, let us now revert for more special, practical study, to the conduct of the sisters, in the particular circumstances referred to in the text. We must not suppose, as some have been inclined to do, that Martha betrayed on this occasion a worldly mind, engrossed with earthly vanities and cares, and little, if at all, concerned for spiritual and heavenly objects. This were to form a judgment of her character, which the real circumstances of the case do not at all warrant. She was, as I have already remarked, a true believer, one whom Jesus loved,

admitted to peculiar intimacy, and honoured with many distinguished marks of His regard. And even her present conduct, culpable as it partly was, had in it some things worthy of commendation.

She showed an excellent spirit, for example, *in welcoming Jesus and His disciples into her dwelling*, although He was well known to be an object of bitter hatred and implacable persecution to the rulers of the Jewish nation. Nor must it be forgotten in reference to this point, that the house is especially spoken of as being *Martha's*; and *she* is singled out as that member of the family, who, rising above the fear of men, invited the Saviour, on this occasion, to lodge within it.

She also discovered, not only a kindly and hospitable disposition to receive strangers, but *a genuine esteem and affection for the Lord Jesus*, in her earnest desire to make full provision for the entertainment of Himself and His attendants. Her dwelling, her substance, her time, her exertions, were cheerfully consecrated to Him whom she delighted to honour. No doubt she carried her anxiety in regard to this matter to an inordinate extent, when she suffered it to overload her mind, to disturb her temper, and even to interfere with her profiting by the Saviour's teaching. But we have every reason to think that her motives were of the purest and highest kind. It was not an engrossing concern for worldly things that animated her, but rather an ill-timed and misdirected carefulness in reference to what she conceived to be her duty to Jesus. All her "much serving," with which she was so sadly "cumbered," was undertaken from love to the Re-

deemer. She is not therefore to be considered as a type of those who neglect the interests of the soul in their undue regard for secular and carnal matters. She is rather a type of those busy and zealous spirits, who in their earnest endeavours to further the Saviour's cause, to extend His kingdom, and to advance His honour in the world, are apt at times to be less heedful than they ought to be, of the more private and unobtrusive offices of the Christian life,—and who run some risk of becoming less considerate of their own deep *personal* interest in religion, through the very ardour and abundance of their labours to promote its influence and prevalence. It has been well said, too, by one whose intimate knowledge of the living customs and condition of the holy "Land" has enabled him to reflect many a ray of brightening light on not a few pages of the holy "Book," that : "As excuse for this Martha, we should remember, that she was the responsible housekeeper, and that she belonged to the class of society *in which the women of the family performed the household work with their own hands* ; and, hence, it was *perfectly natural* she should claim the assistance of her younger sister."

It is not to be disguised, however, that there were some things in Martha's conduct worthy of reprehension. She was culpable for so far mistaking the mind of Christ, as to think that any unusual display of show, or service, or luxury, was necessary to gratify one who "pleased not Himself," who "sought not great things," who "came not to be ministered unto but to minister." She was culpable for allowing her occupations to fret her temper and to burden or

distract her heart. She was culpable for not rightly distinguishing her *present* duty, which certainly was to reap all the benefits she possibly could from the Saviour's instructions,—an object, to which all other concerns, however important they may have been at other times, ought, in so precious a season of improvement that might not long continue or soon recur, to be subordinated. She was culpable for reflecting on her sister in an unkind and uncharitable manner, because *she* did not feel it to be incumbent on her to testify her love to their Divine Master by the same over-anxious ministrations with herself, but chose rather to listen with deep interest to His heavenly doctrine. And, most of all, was she culpable for her petulance, in seeking to obtrude her complaints upon the Saviour's ear, and even to impute to *Him* a want of consideration for herself, in not having already sent Mary to her assistance. In all these particulars Martha was to be blamed. However commendable might be the ends she had in view, and the motives by which she was urged to the promotion of them, she yet betrayed in the manner in which she sought them, an undue measure of anxiety and concern, a want of right discrimination and discernment, and a peevish irritability of temper, which made her in all justice liable to rebuke.

In regard to *Mary's* conduct, on the other hand, it is but little that is stated in the narrative; yet *that little* is full of force and meaning. "She sat," we are told, "at Jesus' feet, and heard His word." It was her delight and her honour to be near to Him. In the deep reverence with which she was regarding Him, and the all-engrossing interest and attention with

which she listened to Him, no other concerns could find a place within her breast. She was free from disquietude. She was experiencing that "perfect peace," in which He has promised to keep "those minds that are stayed upon Him." It never occurred to her, that she could in any better way exhibit the warmth and cordiality of her love to Him, than by meekly and eagerly listening to His doctrine. Had she stopped to reason with her own mind upon the subject, she would doubtless have thought it a very poor and very unseasonable token of regard, to turn away from His spiritual instructions, even for the sake of ministering to His personal comfort. When Jesus thought fit to address to her His heavenly lessons, she could not but see that it was her *present* duty—a duty to which all other engagements must for *that* occasion give place, to hearken to His words with undivided interest,—and that it ill became her to seek another mode of testifying the regard in which she held Him, than *that* which His own procedure so clearly pointed out. But, in truth, it was not, by *reasoning* that she was influenced. She was acting on the more powerful impulse of *devout affection*. There was no posture which she loved so much as sitting at her Master's feet,—no occupation which she felt to be so congenial, as treasuring in her heart the gracious truths that were uttered by Him. Her sister might unkindly blame her for thus acting,—and even reproach her in the hearing of all around them. But no such complaints could greatly discompose her. She felt too happy and peaceful in her own mind to be harassed by any such causes of disquietude. And she was doubtless persuaded at the

same time,—and as the event proved had ground for the persuasion,—that “*He* was near who would justify” her conduct; and that with *His* approbation to sustain her, the censure of others was unworthy of a thought.

II. Having thus endeavoured to illustrate the character and conduct of Martha and Mary, as noticed in the text, we must now proceed to consider *the useful lessons* that are to be derived from the judgment here given respecting them by the Lord Jesus.

“Martha, Martha,” He said, “thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”

And I may begin by noticing *the truly disinterested goodness of the Saviour*. You see from the text, how far He was from “pleasing Himself.” On this, as on all other occasions, He was actuated by that true charity which “*seeketh not its own*.” Ever far more desirous to *give* than to *receive*, He more highly approved of Mary’s deep concern to benefit her own soul by listening to His instructions, than of all her sister’s kindly assiduity and bustling zeal in ministering to His personal comfort. So earnestly was He bent on the accomplishment of that gracious work which He came to perform, that He preferred the welfare of souls before even His necessary food,—before even His *life*; for as you well know, He laid down that also to save them. On all occasions, as well as on this, He verified His own saying, that “the Son of man came, not to be ministered unto, but

to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.' Let us never, then, forget this precious truth, that the most acceptable tribute we can render to our heavenly Master is heartily to give ourselves up to Him and *earnestly to seek from Him that wisdom and that grace which He so freely offers for the benefit of our immortal souls.* He wishes rather to see us sitting at His feet with a view to our own spiritual improvement, than cumbered about much serving in *His* behalf. He would rather that we should be anxious to receive *from* Him than to *give* to Him. It is good, indeed, to minister, if not to His personal comfort (which cannot be done by us now that He is in heaven), at least to His honour and influence in the world; and *he* is no true Christian who will not do so. But Martha's zealous activity in working for Him, purified from that mixture of anxious care that tainted it, must ever be blended with Mary's humble self-surrender and earnest desire to wait upon His word. Nothing we may do for the advancement of His honour, and the extension of His kingdom, must at any time or in any measure be substituted for that deep concern, which He primarily requires of us, to further our own spiritual benefit, by growing more and more in knowledge and in grace.

You will next observe, in these words of our Redeemer, *His just and generous vindication of Mary's conduct* from the charge that had so unadvisedly been brought against it. He knew and acknowledged the grace that was in her heart, although she did not labour to display it by joining in the busy ministrations of her sister. Martha's "much service" might be *useful or becoming*, if freed from that overcareful-

ness which she mixed with it, but could not *at the best* be viewed under the circumstances as *indispensable* to the exercise of faith and love. To *that*, "one thing," and one only, was "needful,"—*an earnest disposition to prize and to embrace the truth*, and Him who is "the Truth," "the Light and Life of men." This "disposition" Mary was exhibiting in such a way as met with His approval. He adds that she had "*chosen that good part.*" By this we must not suppose Him to imply that *Martha had not made* the same good and pious choice, by seeking, in the general habit of her life, a personal interest in the blessings of the great salvation. His meaning simply is, that *on this particular occasion* Mary was giving evidence of her choice, in a manner still more striking than her sister, however little Martha might give her credit for it. He then further adds, that "that good part" which Mary had chosen "*should not be taken away from her.*" He would not *Himself* interfere to deprive her of it, as He had been asked to do, by sending her from His presence. Nor would He suffer any other influence of men or of devils to wrest it from her hands. You see from this, Brethren, how confidently the believer may leave his cause to be vindicated by the Lord. Men may ignorantly misunderstand or perversely misrepresent our conduct, imputing to it wrong motives and false tendencies, and giving us no credit for those genuine principles of faith and love which we are striving to maintain. Our dearest friends and nearest relatives may hinder and discourage us in our religious duties. Our fellow-Christians may be wanting in their sympathy, and may even censure us because we are adopting another mode than that which

they have chosen, to show the influence of Divine grace upon our hearts and lives. But under every such trial we may look up with humble confidence to that gracious Lord, whose approbation is of far greater consequence than that of all the universe besides. It ought to suffice us to know that *He* fully sees, and candidly appreciates our conduct. With *Him* there is no injustice, no prejudice, no risk of misapprehension or mistake. In the midst of all our infirmities and imperfections, He is able to discern, and ready to recognise and maintain, the integrity of our hearts. And He will not fail in due season to “bring forth our righteousness as the light, and our judgment as the noon-day.”

You will farther observe, in these words of the Lord Jesus, the *seasonable reproof which He administered to Martha*. Although He loved her,—nay, all the more *because* He loved her,—He kindly admonished her of the faults she was committing. He was far, certainly, from chiding her with that severity which her fretfulness and petulance deserved; and His mode of addressing her, by the repetition of her name, betokened at once the tenderness of His affection for her, and the earnestness of His concern in her behalf. But still He did not withhold from her the needful correction. He pointed out to her, as we have already seen, the injustice of her complaint against her sister. He assured her that Mary was, for the time being, adopting what He regarded as the better course, and that she herself would do well to *imitate her*, instead of seeking to turn her from her adherence to it. He gently rebuked her for suffering those employments, in which, from the best of motives

doubtless, she was engaged, to mar her peace or irritate her temper. And he solemnly cautioned her never to forget, amid all her concern for the "many things" which were engrossing her, that "*one thing was needful*,"—the care of her immortal soul,—and that no other matters must come into competition with it.

It would be quite an error to suppose that Jesus intended, when thus rebuking Martha, to discourage, under ordinary circumstances, an active discharge of social or domestic offices, or a zealous engagement in such pious or benevolent schemes as love to Himself may prompt us to undertake. It is only against *encumbering* ourselves with such things that He here designs to put us upon our guard. We must not unnecessarily multiply those engagements, whether they be of a secular or of a religious nature, that do not directly bear upon our own salvation. We must not allow them to fill us with distracting cares or anxious fears, or fretful repinings, such as beseeem not the faith and hope, and love and peace, that animate the true Christian. Least of all must we give ourselves to such matters, at times when the Lord is evidently requiring us to further the welfare of our own souls by calling on His name, or waiting on His word, or engaging in His ordinances.

Such was the judgment which our blessed Lord pronounced on the character and conduct of the two individuals, whose case is specially referred to in the passage before us. In meeting *their* case, however, He takes occasion to lay down some general maxims of universal application and importance. And these weighty maxims it becomes us all, without excep-

tion, seriously to ponder and carefully to lay to heart.

He speaks, for instance, of the *paramount necessity of that care of the soul* which Mary was exemplifying when she sat at His feet and listened to His words. He says, in respect to it, "*One thing is needful.*" He does not mean that other things are absolutely unnecessary, but that this "*one thing*" is especially and supremely necessary. It is so pre-eminently necessary, that all things besides are, in comparison with it, unworthy of a serious thought. No doubt there *are* other things which we require for our comfort, and convenience, and maintenance in the present world. And it is right that we should labour to obtain them, so long as we take care to keep them in their proper place, and do not let them interfere at any time with the all-important work of our salvation. But whatever need we may have of other things, they are not for one moment to be put in competition with the care of the soul or the maintenance of personal religion. *This is our one great want*—we cannot be safe without it,—we cannot be happy without it. It is needful, not on *some* occasions, but on *all* occasions. It is needful, not for *some persons*, but for *all*—needful for each individual on his own account. It is needful, not for purposes of a subordinate nature, but for the greatest and most important of all purposes. It is needful for our peace of mind—needful for our comfort and contentment—needful for our acceptance with God—needful for our moral excellence and advancement—needful for our assistance in the discharge of every duty, and for our support in the endurance of every trial—needful for our true welfare

and happiness in the present life, and for our everlasting welfare in the life to come. Our *all* depends upon it. Nothing can supply its place;—without it we are undone, and *that* for ever. Oh that this weighty maxim of our great Teacher were deeply and fixedly engraved upon our hearts; and that while *He* says “*one thing is needful,*” each of us were ready cordially to reply, *this “one thing have I desired, and that will I seek after”*—“*this one thing I do!*” How often is it otherwise! How frequently is the care of the soul dealt with as if it were *the one thing superfluous* instead of being “*the one thing needful!*” For what poor trifling vanities is it slighted! by what grovelling pursuits and anxieties is it superseded! on what shallow and frivolous pretexts is it set aside! Brethren, see to it, that it be not so with *you*. Let no minor concerns turn aside your thoughts from that great concern which bears upon your highest interests. “*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.*”

But, further, our heavenly Teacher has here assured us, not only of the paramount necessity of personal religion, but also of its *surpassing and enduring excellence*. He very emphatically speaks of it as “*that good part, which shall not be taken away*” from those who choose it.

Justly may it be called *the “good part,”* for it secures for us Christ, and all His blessings—a peace that passeth understanding—a joy with which a stranger doth not intermeddle—a hope that maketh not ashamed—a comfort in every trouble—a refuge in every danger—a strong support in death, and everlasting glory in the life to come. Those who have

chosen it know it to be a goodly portion, and would not exchange it for all the treasures of the universe. Even those, who for the present are despising it, have many fears and misgivings that in doing so they are slighting *that* which would be truly for their good; and they will, at all events, be sensible of its priceless value, when at length all things come to be seen in their true light, and to be judged of according to their real importance.

This "good part" is as *durable* as it is excellent. It cannot be lost. It shall never be taken away from us. This is more than we are warranted to say of our other enjoyments and advantages. Those earthly blessings which we labour with so much industry and carefulness to acquire, may be lost in an hour by some unforeseen reverse, and must, in the course of a few years, be lost for ever. Riches, honours, friendships, enjoyments,—all of this world's goods, that are so apt to cumber and engross us for the present,—will soon be no more to us than the fleeting visions of a dream. But the "good part" is ever secure; no fraud, or violence, or accident, can deprive us of it. God *will* not take it from us, and no other *can*. Even death itself, that fell spoiler, that strips us of all else which we were wont to call our own, is so far from robbing the Christian of this possession, that it brings him to the full and never-ending enjoyment of it.

Choose ye, then, Brethren, "that good part;" and if you have already chosen it, be steadfast, resolute, and consistent in adhering to it. Make it your chief care; prize it as your richest treasure. And whatever a short-sighted world may say of it, be ready at all times to acknowledge and to glory in it. By doing so, your

hearts will be exempted from all those harassing troubles and anxieties which cumber the restless votaries of the world. And you will, at the same time, secure to yourselves a blessedness, both in this life and in that which is to come, far more precious than worldly men have ever experienced, even when *their* fancied sources of bliss have most abounded. He who so graciously vindicated Mary's choice, will be equally ready to honour and approve of yours. He will smile on you now when seated at His feet, and, ere long, He will invite you to sit down with Him upon His throne.

May God, of His infinite mercy, grant that all of us may be enabled, by His grace, to choose and cleave to this sure and blessed portion!

XV.

THE CONSTRAINING LOVE OF CHRIST.*

“The love of Christ constraineth us.”—2 COR. v. 14.

IN order to see the force of this statement, you must take into account the circumstances that led to it, and the special purpose for which it was advanced. Often do the Scriptures suggest the love of Christ as a motive to the discharge of Christian duty, urging us to love Him in return for His love to us, and to show the sincerity of our love by our obedience to Him.

It is not so, however, in the present instance. The love of Christ is referred to in the text, not with the view of stirring up believers to adopt such a line of conduct as it dictates to them, but rather with the view of explaining and of justifying that peculiar line of conduct which believers have been already impelled by it to adopt, and which, since it cannot be accounted for on any other principle, must be ascribed to the influence of the Saviour's love. The Apostle, in this passage, is not looking *forwards* from the love of Christ, when first implanted in the heart, to those practical fruits which may reasonably be expected from it. He is looking *backwards* from these practi-

* Preached in 1855, before the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge.

cal fruits, already displayed in full and rich abundance, to that "constraining love of Christ" which could alone have been adequate to the production of them.

It would seem that certain members of the Corinthian Church were disposed to censure the conduct of the Apostle. His dauntless zeal in braving the severest hardships and persecutions for the furtherance of the Christian cause, was ascribed by some among them to phrensy or fanaticism; while the prudence he displayed, in conciliating opposition and shunning danger, when able to do so without compromising his religious principles, was held by others to savour of a lukewarm and pusillanimous spirit. These most unfounded or inconsistent charges he does not seek directly to repel. He does not condescend to argue in his defence against them. Whatever opinions his detractors might entertain of him, he is careful only to point out the true motive, by which he was actuated in all his conduct; a motive which, to every ingenuous mind, was quite sufficient to vindicate and explain it,—even the constraining influence of the love of Christ, which left him no choice but to seek by every competent means—whether by caution and circumspection at one time, or by ardour and intrepidity at another,—the promotion of the Saviour's glory and of the Church's good. "Whether we be beside ourselves," is his dignified answer to the imputations that were cast upon him, "it is to God; or whether we be sober, it is for your cause. *For the love of Christ constraineth us.*" Yes; *this* was the mainspring of all his actions. It was this that led him to endure hardships, to suffer afflic-

tions, to brave dangers, to resist temptations, to take cheerfully the spoiling of his goods, and even to rejoice that he was counted worthy to suffer ignominy and persecution for the Redeemer's sake. It was this, too, that induced him, as circumstances might require it, to bear with the infirmities of the weak, to conciliate the prejudices of the hostile, and, as far as the interests of the truth would allow of it, to "become all things to all men." By the ignorant or unreflecting his conduct might be misconceived; by the perverse or uncandid it might be grossly misrepresented. It might be stigmatised on some occasions as timid and temporising; and on other occasions as foolish and enthusiastic. But none of these things moved him. There was an influence at work within his breast which was mightier far than all that could oppose it. It was *the love of Christ constraining him.*

Even so, Brethren, ought it to be with all Christians, according to the measure of their faith. To say that redeeming love may be urged—legitimately and forcibly urged on them—as a motive to the performance of their duty, is to say comparatively little. I should rather say, in the spirit of the text, that there ought to be *no need of formally urging on them* a consideration of redeeming love at all, but rather a *constant necessity of referring to it* as the great principle which habitually predominates in their hearts, and the power of which is clearly discernible in their whole conduct. Either they are not like-minded with the Apostle Paul, or else the life they are leading is of such a kind as cannot be satisfactorily accounted for by any other cause than "the love of Christ constraining them."

The "love of Christ" may signify either His love to His people or their love to Him. These two affections, indeed, are inseparably connected. And as influencing the conduct of the Christian, we can scarcely, even in thought, disjoin them from one another. It is true that the obedience of believers springs more immediately from *their* love to their Divine Master. But, then, their love to Him derives its origin and its influence from that previous love which He has manifested towards them. It is the Saviour's love, trustfully relied on and gratefully appreciated, that enthrones Him in their hearts, and brings down their every thought and feeling into subjection to Him.

Nor can we wonder at the influence it thus exerts. For never, assuredly, was there a love like His,—so warm, so rich, so generous, so devoted. Whether we think of the infinite majesty of that adorable Being by whom it was displayed, or of the utter unworthiness of the objects of it,—whether we think of the height of glory from which it stooped, or of the depth of humiliation to which it descended,—whether we think of its incomparable ardour, such as no ingratitude could cool, no provocations alienate, no trials dishearten, no sufferings extinguish—or of its unchangeable constancy, defying alike principalities, and powers, and height, and depth, and every other creature, to separate us from it in time or through eternity,—whether we think of the inestimable benefits of pardon, and peace, and hope, and joy, and comfort, and holiness, and heaven which it has conferred—or of the costly price of voluntary suffering, and ignominy, and death, by which it has procured them,—

we find, in every view of this Divine Love, abundant matter for grateful and adoring wonder. Think of it as we may, indeed, our thought is too limited to form any adequate conception of it. It has in it heights too lofty to be scanned, and depths too profound to be fathomed, and lengths and breadths too vast to be measured by us. Those who best know it, will ever be the readiest to say, in the words of inspiration, that "it passeth knowledge." It is the continual study of the saints in heaven. The very "angels desire to look into it." And eternity itself will be too short to learn all its excellence, or to utter all its praise.

It is not, however, as a mere subject of admiration that the Love of Christ is referred to in the text, but as the great predominating principle to which the conduct of Christians must be ascribed, and by which alone it can be satisfactorily accounted for. It is of the nature of love to beget love, and to this general rule the Love of Christ is no exception. No sooner has it been effectually shed abroad within the heart of a believer by the Holy Spirit, than it excites there a reciprocal affection which, taking supreme possession of the soul, impels it to acts of cheerful and devoted homage.

The manner in which this influence is acquired by it is very distinctly stated in the passage before us. "The love of Christ," we are told, "constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead,"—or as it may be more correctly translated, *then all died*—"and He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again."

The idea here expressed is a very favourite one with the Apostle. Often does he speak of Christians as “dead with Christ,” as “made conformable to His death,” as “planted together in the likeness of His death.” And in one very striking passage in particular, which occurs in the 2d chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians, at the 20th verse, he thus writes : “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.” In this striking passage the very same idea is expressed in nearly the same language as in the text—namely, that in the practical judgment of the faithful Christian, *his own life, as to all selfish purposes, is held by him to have expired upon his Saviour’s cross*, so that in his prevailing disposition he is now *dead* to everything that interferes with his devotedness to the Son of God, who gave Himself for him. So closely does his fate unite him to the Saviour, that he views himself as having fellowship with that Saviour alike in His crucifixion and in His resurrection, and “reckons himself to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ.” He lives no more himself, but Christ liveth in him; the whole life which he now leads, as a Christian, being one of conformity to the example, and subserviency to the will of Christ.

Just such is the judgment which, according to the text, the love of Christ dictates to all who are “constrained” by it. As many of us, then, as truly love Him “thus judge, that *if one died for all, then all died.*” *His death was our death* to all intents and purposes.

It was *our* death not only in the view of God's law, which looked on His propitiatory sufferings, endured in our stead, as equivalent to ours, but also in the eye of our own moral or practical judgment. We regard our old man as crucified along with Him, to the effect that self and sin in us may be put to death. We consider that henceforth we have *no life of our own* to lead,—that is to say, no life for the furtherance of our own interest, or the gratification of our own will, apart from His, but a new life, of which faith in the Lord Jesus, working by love, is the quickening and sustaining principle,—a life of cheerful conformity to the will, and of unreserved devotedness to the glory, of that Redeemer, who “to this end both died, and rose, and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living.”

Such being the light in which all faithful Christians are led by the power of redeeming Love to view themselves—as *deadened to all selfish aims and interests by the death of Christ*, so that they “should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again”—let me now direct your more particular attention to the mighty influence which the Love of Christ is here described as exercising, conformably to such a view, upon their conduct.

“The love of Christ,” says the Apostle, using a highly forcible expression, “*constraineth us.*” The corresponding word in the original primarily signifies to *shut up* or to *compress*, as by some coercive power which cannot be withstood; and in its secondary sense it means to *impel*, to *bear away*, or to *hurry onwards*, as if by the force of some rapid and impetuous torrent. As employed in the text, it inti-

mates that the Love of Christ exerts somewhat of this mighty and wellnigh irresistible influence on His people as often as it takes full possession of their souls, captivating their every thought, engaging their every affection, shutting them closely up, or hemming them completely in, so that only one line of conduct can be adopted by them—urging all their energies into action, bearing them on in the face of every obstacle, and leaving them no alternative but to obey its dictates.

I. I need scarcely observe, in attempting to illustrate the strong language here employed by the Apostle, that it clearly intimates the *cheerfulness* and *alacrity* with which the Lord Jesus is served by His attached people.

It is true they are “drawn” to Him; but it is “with cords of love.” They are “constrained;” but it is with a *heart-constraint*. He has “made them a *willing* people in His day of power.” He has won from them their *hearts*; and these once secured, nothing else He may require can be withheld from Him.

It is not in the nature of any love to yield a reluctant service to the object of it. The Love of Christ, urged by its own impulse, likewise eagerly seeks to commend itself to His approval. It studies to please Him, and stands ever ready, not only to fulfil, but to anticipate, and, were it possible, exceed His wishes.

In this respect, love is a stronger law to itself than any other law that can be prescribed to it. It prompts us to submit to those things with the utmost cheerfulness, which otherwise would have been most irksome

and intolerable. It lightens every burden, softens every hardship, sweetens every toil, and shortens every journey. It makes our duty, even when most arduous, to be chosen and clung to as our privilege and our delight. What was it that made Jacob's seven years of hard servitude, twice over endured for Rachel, appear but as a few days? What, but "the great love he bore to her"? What makes the fond mother, in tending her baby charge, joyfully undergo watchings and privations, which to any but a mother's heart would be unbearable? Is it not the power of love, which will not allow her to forget or neglect the infant she has borne? If love can do all this when cherished towards other objects, what will it not do when cherished towards Him, who is felt and owned by such as truly know Him to be "the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely"? Surely it will lead *them* also, and it *does* lead them, with hearty and cheerful alacrity to engage in any course of duty to which He may invite them—esteeming His service perfect freedom, and counting it their meat and drink to do His will. Heavy and galling, indeed, in the judgment of other men, may seem to be the yoke that they are carrying; but love to that heavenly Master who has imposed it, renders it so light that they scarcely feel its weight. Dreary and rugged may seem to be the path which they are called to traverse while walking in the Saviour's footsteps; but love to Him, who has trodden it before them, can make it a way of pleasantness and peace—leveling its mountains, filling up its valleys, making its crooked places straight, and its rough places smooth. Painful and grievous, to such as confer only with

flesh and blood, may be the sacrifices required of them. But at the call of Love, the most painful sacrifices will be submitted to without a murmur, for the sake of that adorable Redeemer, who hath taken away their sins by the sacrifice of Himself. "Speak, Lord," is the language of the believer, "for Thy servant heareth." Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? Be it to endure hardships, or to suffer afflictions; be it to renounce my most easily besetting sins, to forego my fondest earthly hopes, to part with my dearest creature-comforts and enjoyments; be it to cut off a right hand, or to pluck out a right eye; Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? Through Thy Love, behold, I am willing, and through Thy grace I am able to do all things.

II. I would farther remark, as implied in the statement before us, that the homage of true believers, when prompted by the Love of Christ, is not only cheerful, but *unqualified* and *unreserved*.

In this respect it differs widely from that stinted service which others are wont to render. If you look at the ordinary conduct of those who are not cordially actuated by Christian principle, you will find them eagerly striving by every means to limit the amount of homage to be exacted from them. They are cold, and calculating, and grudging in all that they do. They look upon the commandments of the Lord as so many irksome restraints, from which it is desirable, as far as possible, to be exempted. And in obeying them, they seem to consider themselves as dealing, not with a gracious Benefactor, whose mercies can never be adequately

repaid, but rather with some rigorous creditor, whose claims they must strive to the utmost extent to mitigate. Even when the precepts of Christianity are most explicit, they will try to relax or modify the import of them, in as far as it interferes with the indulgence of their besetting sins. And in regard to all doubtful cases, they are sure to *take to themselves* the full benefit of every doubt. When warned to abstain from any course of action, which, if not decidedly and unequivocally sinful, has certainly somewhat about it of "the appearance of evil," their answer is quite ready, "*I cannot find it; 'tis not in the bond.*" They will rather run the risk of indulging in what is sinful, if there be even the faintest possibility of supposing it innocent, than deny themselves to a gratification, which is at least dangerous, considering how nearly it may approximate to the verge of sin. Their great fear seems to be that very groundless one, of doing in any respect *too much* in the Lord's service. They jealously watch lest in anything they should exceed the indispensable requirements of their duty, giving no more than they dare not withhold, and not even yielding up that little without a murmur.

How different is the conduct of the believer when actuated by the motive in the text! *He* is a cordial, liberal, devoted servant. Serving his Lord from a principle of *Love*, he feels that he never can serve Him too faithfully. *He* cannot be content to measure out, with slow and sparing hand, the stinted portion of a reluctant homage. *He* cannot think, like another Ananias, of "keeping back part of the price." It is not for *him* to be anxious in every instance to find out the utmost limit of his obligations, and jealous of

passing in the least degree beyond it. Even could this precise limit be ascertained, the man who is duly influenced by the Love of Christ would much rather go a thousand steps beyond it than fail by ever so small a measure of attaining to it. But, in truth, this limit he never can arrive at. His obligations are commensurate with his Saviour's love, and *that* he feels to be altogether immeasurable. Never can he think himself exempted by any past doings from attempting yet more in his Lord's service, so long as he comes short—as still he needs must—of the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge. Instead, therefore, of asking, From what service he may be allowed to escape? he will rather ask, What service he may be privileged and empowered to render? Instead of calculating *how little he may be allowed to do*, without a gross dereliction of his principles, he will rather calculate *how much he may be able to do*, in order to give free scope and full efficacy to his holy affections. And even when he has done his utmost, the question will still as readily come back upon him, and as loudly demand a reply as ever, "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits?" Thus unreserved and unqualified must be the service of all who are truly actuated by the love of Christ; and those who can be content to render any less, must certainly know nothing, as they ought to know, of that "constraining" power which is ascribed to it in the text.

III. I would yet farther observe, in illustration of this statement, that the obedience of the believer, when prompted by the Love of Christ, while it is thus

ful, and thus *unreserved*, is also *bold*, *decided*, and *uncompromising*.

This is evidently taught us in the text, when taken in connection with the context; for the very circumstance which led the Apostle to allude, on this occasion, to the love of Christ at all, was, that his own conduct, which some of the Corinthians were disposed to censure, required such a reference to its impelling motive to account for it. So bold was he, so zealous, and so decided in furthering the cause and glory of the Saviour,—so marked and palpable was the difference between his habits of life and those which would have been dictated or commended to him by the current maxims and prevailing fashions of the world,—and so little did he heed the reproaches that might be cast upon him, or the dangers and trials that might encompass him in his path of duty, that his conduct would have been utterly inexplicable, but for his being able to appeal to *the love of Christ* as the great commanding principle by which he was mightily constrained to the adoption of it.

In this respect, if we be partakers of his faith, we will not fail to be imitators of his example. A backward or equivocal profession of Christianity is altogether unworthy of the love of Christ. If we duly appreciate and gratefully return His love, we will be decided and uncompromising in our adherence to Him. We will not be always puzzling the world around us, and, it may be, puzzling our own minds within us, to determine what manner of spirit we are of. We will not be so faint and lukewarm in our efforts, or so unstable and vacillating in our principles, as to render it a matter of uncertainty, whether we be

animated by the love of Christ or no. We will strive, on the contrary, to be so conformed to His likeness, so obedient to His will, so devoted to His glory, at whatsoever cost of exertion and of self-denial, that all who observe us shall have cause to take knowledge of us, that we are, beyond doubt, His faithful and attached disciples. It is true, we are to shun ostentation. We are not called to be ever and anon making a high-sounding profession—affecting in things indifferent a needless singularity—or exhibiting a vain-glorious display of what we would have to be thought our excellencies and attainments, in order to attract the notice of our fellow-men. But we are equally to shun the opposite extremes of backwardness, duplicity, or indecision. We must not think of following Christ “afar off,” or of stealing after Him by some clandestine path, as if we were afraid or ashamed to be seen among His people. We must “follow Him fully,” and cleave to Him steadfastly, through bad report as well as through good report, and be willing, at any call of duty, to go with Him, even “without the camp, bearing His reproach.” Nor is it enough that there be nothing in our habitual deportment that is *glaringly inconsistent* with our love to Him. Our whole life ought to be marked by the clearest tokens of cheerful and thorough devotedness to His service, insomuch that both ourselves and others shall be necessitated to ascribe them to the love of Christ, as alone adequate to the production of them. Such, unquestionably, ought to be the conduct of all who have any sincerity in their Christian profession. Such *will* unavoidably be their conduct at all such times as they are able with truth to say, in the language

of the text, that “the love of Christ constraineth” them.

You see, then, dear Brethren, how mighty is the power which the love of the Saviour exerts upon His people as often as their hearts are duly pervaded and affected by it ;—you see with what alacrity and cheerfulness,—with what unqualified and unreserved devotedness,—with what uncompromising firmness and decision,—the obedience of all such persons must be characterised, as are really the subjects of its sweet but strong constraint.

For a *practical* proof of the efficacy of this principle, we need not go any farther than to the history of that man by whom the words of the text were written. For no one who reads the history of the Apostle Paul, —no one who thinks of the sacrifices he made, the labours he underwent, the trials he encountered,—no one who views him traversing sea and land in the ardent and untiring prosecution of his holy enterprise, braving the most formidable dangers, enduring the severest hardships, submitting to the most galling insults and indignities, exposing himself to the most relentless persecutions,—no one who thinks of him speaking all the while of the manifold tribulations to which he was thus subjected, as “his light afflictions,” —esteeming the reproach of his Divine Master above all the pleasures and honours of the world, and rejoicing that he was counted worthy to suffer the loss of all things for the Redeemer’s sake ;—no one, I say, who thus follows him throughout his life, and sees him at last laying down that life with all the joy and triumph of a martyr, can hesitate to say of this devoted man that truly the “love of Christ” *did* “constrain” him.

And, Brethren, the same principle which wrought in him so mightily has not now lost anything of its efficacy. It is still as powerfully “constraining” as it ever was. It still lives and reigns in the hearts of all sincere and lively Christians. They may not, indeed, be called to testify their love in the same conspicuous manner with the Apostles, but still they are more or less the subjects of its constraining power. In the quiet intercourse of social or domestic life,—in the daily routine of their walk and conversation,—as well as in the regular discharge of their religious duties,—the influence of this principle is felt in all its energy, sweetening their tempers, purifying their desires, elevating their affections, strengthening their resolutions, stirring them up to activity and devotedness in whatever sphere Divine Providence may have allotted to them, prompting them to “walk in love, as Christ also loved them,” and to go “about,” as He did, “doing good,”—lifting up their souls from the vanities of the world to that better country where their Redeemer liveth, and making the life which they now lead in the body a life of faith on the Son of God, who loved them and died for them.

Let me ask you, dear Friends, whether it be so with *you*? Can *you* thus confirm by your own personal experience the truth of that statement on which we have been meditating? Is there anything to be noted in the state of *your* hearts, or in the habitual tenor of *your* lives, which “the love of Christ,” and that only, can account for?

Alas! there are many with whom it is far otherwise. When we look at the mass of nominal Christians who surround us; when we think how little, for

the most part, is to be seen about them, beyond a cold and lifeless profession, to mark them out as Christians at all; when we see how exceedingly unwilling they are to make any sacrifice, to incur any expense, or to put themselves to any trouble or inconvenience in discharging the duties or promoting the interests of religion; when we find how ready they are to plead the most flimsy excuse, or to urge the most contemptible sophistry, in order to escape from the strict requirements of Christianity,—how easily they are induced to compromise their principles, as often as these may be at variance with their worldly interests,—and how paltry a consideration will oftentimes prevail with them to set the authority of their professed Master at open defiance;—when we think of these things it is impossible, even with the utmost stretch of charity, to suppose that such persons are really living under the influence of that powerful principle of which we have been speaking. “Constrained by the love of Christ!” Not they, assuredly. To say such a thing of them would be too palpable a contradiction of the whole strain of their sentiments and actions to be once thought of; rather may we say of them, on the contrary, that they seem to be just as indifferent to a Saviour’s love as if He had never displayed it to them at all,—as if for them He had shed no blood, and borne no curse, and purchased no heaven.

But even among those of whom it may be said that they have in some good measure been enabled to apprehend and to appreciate the love of Christ, how few are there in whom it has wrought with that prevailing power which it is fitted to exert! Must we not all of us be humbled by the reflection, how much

more we have lived to ourselves than to the Lord! For, alas! how cold have our hearts often felt towards Him! How backward, grudging, and partial has been our homage! How apt have we been to murmur at His easy yoke, and to rid ourselves, as far as we could with any regard to outward decency, of His light burden! And even in those respects in which we have most strictly served Him, how often have we had to be dragged or driven along by a very different kind of constraint from the self-moving impulse of a loving and devoted heart, instead of running in the way of His commandments! Paul was obliged to refer to the love of Christ in order to explain peculiarities in his conduct, which could not otherwise be satisfactorily accounted for. But *we*, even the best among us, have too often to reverse the process, and to search about for some faint tokens in our character and conduct, in the midst of much that is equivocal or inconsistent, whereby we may be enabled to resolve the question, Whether we be animated by the love of Christ at all?

Oh then, let us seek to have this constraining Love more clearly and fully manifested to our minds, and with livelier force impressed upon our hearts! Let us confidently rely and gratefully reflect on that astonishing worth of redeeming grace, by which it has been so marvellously commended to us, until our whole souls are captivated with the sense of it, and are moved to love, with a fervour more worthy of Him, that adorable Saviour who hath first loved us. And let it be our earnest prayer to His Father and our Father, “of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant us, according

to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith; that we, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." *Then* shall we be brought to yield ourselves up to Him with full and unreserved devotedness as His willing people. *Then* shall there be no more of that indifference to His cause,—no more of that backwardness in His service to be seen about us,—of which we have so often had reason to be ashamed. *Then* shall we no more be satisfied with mere professions as any sufficient evidence of our love to Him. Ah! Brethren, true love is never satisfied with mere professions. You full well know that Christ's Love was not satisfied with them. It cost *Him* something more than professions: it cost Him tears, and ignominy, and blood, to manifest the Love He bore to *you*. And, in like manner, if you love Him in sincerity, you will seek to give Him some more substantial proof than mere professions, of the love *you* bear to *Him*. Often meditating upon that marvellous Love of His, and ever keeping it in remembrance, you will gratefully tell of all its preciousness and all its power of strengthening and sustaining your own soul. You will eagerly seek, by every appointed means of grace, to cultivate more and more your fellowship and acquaintance with Him. You will carefully shun whatever is displeasing to Him, and cheerfully perform whatever He approves of. You will prize His Word, and take pleasure in His ordinances.

You will advance His kingdom, and honour all His laws.

The one supreme way in which you may always practically manifest the constraining influence of the love of Christ is *by humbly endeavouring to imitate it*, in your warm and active benevolence towards your fellow-men. Hearken to the Saviour's own injunction: "This is my commandment," He says, "that ye love one another, as I have loved you," pointing to His own Love as at once the *motive* and the *model* of that brotherly affection which He would have us all to cherish. He is pleased to make our brethren of mankind the recipients of a large proportion of the debt of gratitude which we owe to Himself. He gives them authority in His name to draw upon us for the exercise of our benevolence. And He graciously recognises every act of kindness, which we may be induced to do to them for His sake, as a fit and acceptable requital of His goodness to us.

This is more especially the case with those whom we have reason to regard as our Christian brethren. With them the Lord Jesus is pleased to identify Himself in the closest and tenderest manner. He owns them as His familiar friends,—He claims them as His near kindred. He says of them: "Behold my mother and my brethren. For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother!" Oh! what a claim, then, have all such to our fondest regard! How well does it become us to love them, to feel for them, and to show them all manner of kindness for His sake! You know how cheerfully the beloved Disciple responded to the touching appeal which was

made to Him from the Cross, when the mother of Jesus was commended to his care. Even so still does the Saviour commend to us His spiritual kindred amid their necessities and their griefs. The Lord Jesus, though now exalted, has many a poor follower on earth, whom He owns still as His mother, or sister, or brother, and for whom He warmly solicits our compassion. When disciples plead with us—the hungry for food or the naked for clothing, the sick for relief or the sorrowful for comfort, the ignorant for instruction or the helpless for protection,—let us bear in mind their affinity to Him who has unbounded claims to our gratitude and service. Let us think of the Saviour, even from His throne of glory, pointing to them, and saying to us: “Behold my mother and my brethren! Oh! reverence them, pity them, love them for *my* sake!” Let us think of *this*, and surely it will prevail with us, if any consideration *can*, to communicate to the necessities of the saints, and to do good to them that are of the household of faith.

But not to such only must our higher sympathies be confined. No, Brethren, if we would imitate the love of Christ, we will not restrict our benevolent regards to those merely whom we believe to be truly numbered already among His people. We will, after His example, extend them to every member of the human family. The love of Christ was universal and diffusive. He was loving towards all, though not indiscriminating in His Love. He pitied the erring, mourned over the obdurate, and gently bore with the spiteful and injurious. He held out the rich treasures of His grace to those who were alike

unworthy to obtain them, and unwilling, even in spite of His urgency, to receive them. If, then, we would prove ourselves to be truly influenced by His Love, we must imitate it in all the wideness of its extension. Though we may love more warmly our brethren in the faith, we must also truly love all our brethren of mankind, and be willing according to their needs and to the utmost of our power, to supply their wants and promote their welfare both for the life that now is, and also for that which is to come. Thus only can we show that the Love of Christ is constraining us to live no longer unto ourselves, but unto the Lord who died for us and rose again.

XVI.

SELF-DEDICATION AND CHRISTIAN LIBERALITY.

“And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.”—2 COR. viii. 5.

SUCH is the explanation which the Apostle gives of that remarkable instance of liberality, on the part of the suffering Churches of Macedonia, to which he had borne so high a testimony in the previous verses. He is wishing to persuade the Christians at Corinth to make such bountiful contributions, as their prosperous circumstances warranted him to look for, in aid of their poor and afflicted brethren at Jerusalem. And, with this view, he warmly commends to them the example of certain other Churches, that had not only taken the precedence of them in this work of love, but had shown a degree of generosity in the performance of it, which it equally became them to admire and to emulate.

The Churches, thus honourably referred to, were those of Berea, Philippi, and Thessalonica, and perhaps of some other places in the province of Macedonia. Their temporal circumstances assuredly were not such as to give promise of any large amount of liberality. And yet we are told of them in St Paul's emphatic language, that in a time of great affliction,

“the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.” They gave to the full extent of their ability; yea, as their inspired witness bears record, they gave what might, on the ordinary principles of computation, have been thought to be “*beyond* their power.” They were cheerful donors too, “willing of themselves,” requiring no importunity to *extort* their gifts, but on the contrary *using* importunity, and “praying” the Lord’s servants “with much entreaty” to “*receive*” them. And in all this they *exceeded the expectations* that had been formed of them even by the Apostle, doing it, to quote his words, “*not as we hoped,*” but more than realising all that he had looked for from the utmost warmth and generosity of their Christian love, in circumstances so unfavourable to its exercise. Such was the notable liberality of the Macedonian Churches, a liberality which *abounded even unto riches*, out of the veriest depths of poverty and suffering, and by which the devoted Paul seems to have been himself astonished.

If it be asked, *Whence did this arise?* On what ostensible ground can it be accounted for? How came it to pass that persons, thus circumstanced, should have displayed a bountifulness in their gifts, such as might not only surprise a selfish world, but exceed the hopes that had been formed of them by one who had himself learned to endure the loss of all things, and even to count all things but loss for Christ’s sake? We can only answer by referring, as the context does, to the “*grace of God bestowed on these Churches.*” Yes; it was the “grace of God bestowed on them,” which opened their hearts,

warmed their affections, and stirred them up to “devise liberal things.”

And if it be again asked, *after what manner* did the grace of God exert its influence on them? What was the nature or what the order of the process, by which through the power of Divine Grace they were brought to exhibit so notable a pattern of munificence?—to this question we find a ready answer in the text. *The grace of God was exerted in the way of prompting them to a thorough surrender of themselves to Him.* It led them to give their *property*, by first leading them to give *themselves*, as sacred offerings to the glory of their Lord and Saviour. It made them a willing people in His day of power. It won for Him their *hearts*; and *these* once secured, nothing else that they possessed could be withheld from Him. For as the Apostle here declares concerning them, “they first gave *their own selves to the Lord and unto us by the will of God.*”

There are *two observations* which I would endeavour to illustrate, in addressing you from these words.

The *first* is, that *self-dedication to the Lord is a necessary pre-requisite to his acceptance of any such gifts or services as we may render to Him.* And the *second* is, that *the offering of such gifts and services as in His Word are required of us,—cheerfully and bountifully to the full extent of our ability,—is a necessary result of the yielding of ourselves to Him, wherever we have done it in sincerity.*

To a few plain remarks in illustration of these points, let me now, in dependence on the Divine blessing, beg your attention.

I. Our first position is, that *we must dedicate ourselves to God, as an indispensable pre-requisite to His acceptance of any such services or offerings as we may present to Him.*

It is, indeed, rather by implication, than by direct statement, that this doctrine is inculcated in the text. And yet there cannot be a doubt that it *is* inculcated. Paul is here speaking with evident approbation of the special course or order of procedure which had been adopted by the Macedonian Churches, when they "*first* gave their own selves to the Lord," and *then* by the will of God, gave *themselves to the Apostles*, with a view to the performance of such godly and beneficent deeds as these inspired men, on behalf of the Lord, might dictate to them. And you will at once see that, in the commendation thus pronounced upon them, there is an especial force or emphasis on the word "*first.*" It is not so much the liberality of their alms-deeds, as their *devotedness* to God, of which these alms-deeds were but the natural fruits to which the Apostle here solicits our regard, as the primary and most prominent object of our contemplation. All that they might *do*, and all that they might *give*, in furtherance of such good works as might be suggested to them, were, in *his* judgment, matters of subordinate concern to the principle of *godly self-surrender* from which they flowed. That which came *first* in the order of their procedure, and which ought to stand *first* in the estimation which we form of it, was, not their good service rendered to the Church, but their unreserved homage rendered to the Church's Head. *First* came the gift of "their own selves to the Lord ;" and only

second the gift of their time, their strength, their talents, and their substance to His service. The altar was first erected in their souls, and then the gifts followed which were sanctified by the altar. They were first consecrated and set apart as a royal priesthood, and *then* the spiritual sacrifices were presented by them, so as to be acceptable and well-pleasing in the sight of God.

That such truly *is* the order of procedure which the Lord requires, and which can be alone expected to meet with His acceptance, must be obvious to every one who takes an enlightened and Scriptural view of the Divine character and government.

God does not ask of us our gifts and services *on their own account*, as if He stood in need of them, or as if He could be profited by them. Indeed, we can give Him nothing, but what we first receive from Him; and can do for Him nothing but what His power enables us to perform. It is *He* who worketh all our works in us. And even when we have served Him to our uttermost, we are obliged to say, it is altogether of *His own* that we have rendered to Him. We should therefore be forming a most unreasonable and highly derogatory notion of the great God, were we to suppose that our services can be approved of as having an intrinsic value in His sight, apart from that spirit of loving devotedness to Him, of which He regards them as the natural and fit expressions. If God were "altogether such an one" as ourselves—a weak, limited, dependent creature, we might *then* be more excusable for imagining that He prizes the doings and offerings of His people apart from the source or principle from which they

flow. But when we remember that He is the self-existent Jehovah, to whom no created goodness can extend, and no created power or wisdom can be profitable, we cannot for one moment cherish such a thought. He is not in the position of an earthly Master, *requiring* the ministrations of those whom He employs, and caring but little for the *motives* of their service, as compared with the substantial advantages He derives from it. He is rather in the position of a *Father*, who smiles on the cordial endeavours of His little children, not because He needs them,—not because He is benefited by them,—not because He could not do for Himself, in much less time, with much less trouble, and in a far more perfect manner, that which He sees *them* labouring hard to do, and with all their labour doing most inadequately;—but because He traces their every effort to its impelling motive,—because He sees in it an evidence of their *love*,—because He hails it as a pledge of that entire and cheerful submission with which *their hearts* are yielded to Him.

Accordingly, we find that, in the Gospel, the method which God takes in order to secure our service, is, first of all, to win that *surrender of the heart*, which leads to the practical obedience of the whole conduct. Works do not occupy the foreground in the Christian system. They are, on the contrary, the final result to which it leads. In this dispensation of grace God does not come to us, stipulating at the outset for certain works or certain gifts, as the terms on which His favour shall be conferred upon us. He comes to us with such *free* offers of His mercy, and such unsolicited assurances of His love, as are calculated

to inspire our confidence, to win our affection, to secure our devotedness, and, as the practical issue of the whole, to stir up our hearts to unreserved obedience.

We find, too, in full accordance with the same principle, that God, in His Word, requires of His professed people this consecration to Him of "their own selves," in terms so broad and absolute as plainly show that nothing short of it can meet with His approval. "Yield yourselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead; and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God." "Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." "Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." From these, and other passages of like import, which are of the most common occurrence, it is plain that God requires of all who would acceptably serve Him, that *their own selves*, and not merely their *performances*, be devoted to Him. It is the homage of the *heart* that He demands; and with nothing short of it will He be satisfied. We may give Him *the ear*, to listen to His Word; we may give Him *the tongue*, to utter forth His praise; we may give Him *the hand*, to labour in His service; we may give, no matter to how considerable an extent, our *time*, *strength*, *talents*, or *property*, to be turned to such practical uses as are prescribed by Him;—but all will not do, if *the heart* be still withheld. '*Not yours, but you,*' is His peremptory requirement,—a requirement which He will not relax nor compromise. He will not be mocked by all our efforts to evade it. Nothing

we may *do*, and nothing we may *give*, will ever, in *His* judgment, be held as a substitute for the unre-served surrender of *ourselves* in subjection to His will and subserviency to His glory.

It is to the utter forgetfulness of this truth that many of those gross delusions may be traced, by which the ungodly have frequently deceived themselves, and many of those superstitions and corruptions, by which the simplicity of pure religion has been perverted. There is nothing to which "the carnal mind," in its "enmity against God," is more determinedly opposed, than just this absolute *yielding of itself to Him*, without which no other performances can be accepted. Accordingly men, in all ages and in all countries, have eagerly sought after some manner of substitute for it. Costly have been the gifts, wearisome the labours, solemn and highly imposing the outward forms, painful and mortifying the penances and austerities, by which they have striven (as if it were possible) to pacify their consciences, and to satisfy the claims of God, without *that thorough surrender of themselves*, from which they are naturally disposed to shrink with such aversion. Nor is it only among heathens or among Jews that this disposition of the "carnal mind" has shown itself. Even among those who call themselves Christians, and not only so, but enlightened *Protestant* Christians, the same superstitious tendency may be discovered. For it is not to be questioned, that even among such persons, there are not a few to be met with at the present day, who observe rigidly the Sabbath,—who attend regularly on Divine ordinances,—who read as a prescribed task large portions of Holy Writ,—and

who give, as often as occasion is afforded them, munificent contributions to charitable or pious purposes ;—but who do all this just as a species of compensation for keeping back from God the offering of *themselves*. So far they are acting under the influence of the same spirit which sought, in a ruder age, to evade God's righteous claim by carrying the most precious treasures to His shrine, or slaying the most approved victims at His altar, or filling His temple with clouds of sweetest incense,—by fasts, and forms, and prayers, and penances, or, in short, by any outward means that might be thought of, as a substitute for the *homage of the heart*.

You know well, however, that God has never been mocked, and you cannot think that He ever *will* be mocked, by any such evasion of His requirements. Even in the times of ceremonial worship, and in the very midst of bleeding victims and blazing altars, which *then* held a recognised place in the Divine ritual,—even *then* was Jehovah wont to proclaim that, in the absence of a holy and devoted heart, all the oblations of His worshippers were in vain, that the multitude of their sacrifices was a weariness to Him, that their solemn rites and festivals were an abomination. Even in those times was the question put : “ Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord ? ” And the answer was most explicitly returned to it : “ Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.” Much more, then, in the fulness of *these* Christian times, when the complicated forms of Judaism have been done away, and a simple and purely spiritual worship has been substituted for

them, much more may it be *now* said that no mere gifts, or ceremonies, or external performances, can be recognised as any compensation for the "living sacrifice" of a heart and will freely devoted to the Lord's service.

You know that God, in estimating all our doings, looks not so much to the mere outward conduct, as to the inward spirit or disposition from which it flows. It is the "*cheerful giver*" that He loves, the hearty and willing servant that He delights in. But givers and servants of *such* a spirit are to be found only among those who have *first of all given to Him "their own selves."*

We find this exemplified even in the Old Testament. Thus, when the tabernacle was to be erected in the wilderness, Moses thus spake to all the congregation of Israel: "This is the thing which the Lord commanded, saying, Take ye from among you an offering unto the Lord: whosoever is of a *willing heart*, let him bring it." "Of every man that giveth it *willingly* with his heart, ye shall take my offering. And they came," it is written, "*every one whose heart stirred him up*, and every one *whom his spirit made willing*; and they brought the Lord's offering to the work of the tabernacle; they brought a *willing offering* unto the Lord, every man and woman whose heart made them willing to bring." In like manner, David, when making preparations for the temple at Jerusalem, which his son Solomon was honoured to build, declared, that he had prepared with all his might for the rearing of the house of his God, because he *had set his affection* thereto; and asked the people,

saying : "Who then is *willing* to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord?" Whereupon, we are told, that "the chief of the fathers and princes of the tribes of Israel . . . offered *willingly*. Then the people rejoiced for that they offered *willingly*, because with perfect heart they offered *willingly* to the Lord ; and David the king also rejoiced with great joy."

Exactly similar to these two instances is that which is brought before us in the text. *Here*, too, it was a free and spontaneous offering that was presented ; and this circumstance is mentioned by the Apostle as one of the most excellent features that distinguished it. For he writes that the Christians of Macedonia "were *willing of themselves* ; praying us with much entreaty, that we would receive the gift." And, no doubt, the reason, in this as in the other instances, why their gifts were of that voluntary and cheerful kind which can alone meet with a favourable reception, was that a dedication of "*their own selves*" had preceded them. The donors had first of all given *themselves* to the Lord ; and having done so, it was quite easy and natural for them to give to Him that which only *appertained* to themselves. The self-surrender of the *person* being once made, a surrender of the *property* followed as a matter of course, to whatsoever extent the Lord's service might require it of them. The reason why many persons give so grudgingly, or work so reluctantly for the cause of Christ, is because they have *not* given up themselves to Him. They have not *begun* aright. They have not observed the proper method, of *first* giving *themselves*, and *then*

presenting their offerings. And hence it is that there is so much coldness, and sluggishness, and heartlessness, in everything they are induced to do.

Let not such persons imagine for a moment that their unwilling homage will meet with the Divine acceptance. The Scriptures teach us, that the *cordiality* of our offerings is of far greater moment in the sight of God than the amount of them. The poor widow's two mites, which she cast into the treasury, were more highly esteemed than the rich gifts of her fellow-worshippers. And St Paul declares, in the chapter from which our text is taken, that "if there be *first a willing mind*, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not." And why, indeed, should we think that it can be otherwise? There is not a parent among you who would be content with receiving a *heartless* obedience from your children. You would not be content with the compliance of their *hands*, if all the while you could not help seeing that the affection of their *hearts* was obstinately withheld from you. The sullenness^z of their alienated countenances, and the ill-suppressed rebellion of their spirits, would altogether mar your satisfaction with them, even although the tasks you had prescribed should be, to the last item, punctually executed. Now, it is even so with our Father who is in heaven. *He* requireth, above all, "truth in the inward parts." "My son, give me thine heart," is what He asks of us; and except we have truly complied with this demand, He values not any extent of labours we may perform, or any amount of offerings we may present to Him.

Let us bear this truth, Brethren, constantly in mind,

and be guided by it in everything we *do*, and in everything we *give*, for the furtherance of the work of the Lord. As well in the everyday course of our Christian duties, as on those special occasions when we are called to contribute towards the diffusion of Divine truth, whether in our own native country or in the world at large, let us carefully remember, that no gifts and no efforts can be expected to meet with the Lord's acceptance, unless they proceed out of the fullness of a heart inspired with His love and devoted to His service. Before we can dedicate our substance or our service to Him in such a way as shall meet with His approval, we must in the first place dedicate to Him *ourselves*. We must follow the example set by the Churches of Macedonia, when "first they gave their own selves *unto the Lord*," and then gave liberally of their substance for His cause.

II. Having thus endeavoured to illustrate the *first* proposition, suggested for our consideration by the text,—namely, that *self-dedication to the Lord is a necessary pre-requisite to His acceptance of any such gifts or services as we may render to Him*; we come now, in like manner, to illustrate our *second proposition*, which is the *converse* of the former one,—namely, that *the presentation of our gifts and services to the Lord, cheerfully and bountifully, to the full extent of our ability, is a necessary result of the yielding of ourselves to Him, wherever we have done it in sincerity*.

This point, indeed, may appear to be so obvious as to place it altogether beyond the reach of doubt, and scarcely to leave room for argument to establish it. And certainly it *is* obvious—obvious to such a degree,

that the bare statement of it ought to carry conviction to every seriously reflecting and ingenuous mind.

And yet, however clear and palpable it may seem to be, it is too often practically overlooked or set at defiance; for it is not to be questioned that many persons are wont to live as if their Self-dedication to the Lord were nothing more than a matter of decent ceremony, conveying no real meaning, and leading to no substantial result.

All Christians *profess* to have given themselves to the Lord. They know and acknowledge that such a self-surrender is implied in that very exercise of *faith*, whereby, on receiving the benefits of *redemption*, they necessarily *assume the position*, and *incur the obligations, of the Lord's redeemed*.

Nor is it in the way of mere *implication* that this self-surrender on their part has been made. Many of them have made it explicitly and avowedly. Again and again have they observed solemn rites and made open professions, in which it was declared by them. And in a more particular manner by celebrating the Holy Ordinance of the Supper, after all due certification of its import, they have separated themselves unto the Lord,—pledged themselves to be faithful to His service,—and vowed that henceforth their bodies and their spirits should be subject to His will and subservient to His glory. Yet, in the case of too many who have done so, it is certainly no breach of charity to say, that in their daily conduct you see little or nothing from which you could be led to suppose that any such solemn act of self-devotion had been performed by them. You never would think, from ought that you could see in them, of pointing

them out as a peculiar and purchased people,—a people who are evidently “not their own,” but God’s, and who heartily feel and acknowledge that they *are* so. *This* may be the import of their *professions* and *observances*; but in the case of many of them we are forced to say, that it is certainly *not* the import of their *conduct*. For, let but the Lord, “whose they are, and whom they serve,” as they are wont to declare to us, *put them to the test*,—let Him but try their devotedness to Him, how far it is sincere, either by subjecting them to some course of discipline or by prescribing to them some course of duty which does not fall in with their own natural inclinations,—let Him but take away from them in His providence any of those cherished objects in respect to which they profess to have placed themselves wholly at His disposal,—or let Him claim from them, for the furtherance of His cause and kingdom, any considerable portion of that time, or strength, or influence, or substance, in respect of which they profess to be His mere stewards, subject to His will, and accountable at His judgment-seat for the manner in which their trust has been discharged,—and oh, how soon is it made to appear, by their murmuring and reluctance, if not by their wilful rebellion, that there must have been no inconsiderable measure of insincerity or duplicity in their professions, and that they could not have intended in their hearts *that God should take them at their word*, when they formally gave themselves up to Him as a living sacrifice, and bound themselves to Him in a sacred and perpetual covenant!

Very different was it with the persons who are honourably commended in the text. In *their* case,

truly, the giving "of their own selves" was something more than a decent and imposing form. There was a true *meaning* in it, and a real *sincerity* about it. It was what they honestly purposed in their hearts, and were fully prepared to verify by their conduct.

Let us just look again at the course which they pursued, so clearly and fully expressive as it thus was, of their devotedness.

They testified the sincerity of their love to God by a generous and self-denying love towards their brethren. They had not forgotten the words of the Lord Jesus, how He taught—"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." And gladly did they avail themselves of His permission to make their poor brethren in some measure the recipients of that mighty debt of gratitude which they owed to Him.

It was for the relief of *temporal* wants that they contributed—the wants of the persecuted disciples at Jerusalem, who had been reduced by the violence of their enemies to the utmost extreme of wretchedness and destitution. We cannot doubt that the same spirit which prompted them to supply the pressing necessities of the *body* would lead them no less cheerfully, when called upon, to minister to the necessities of the *soul*. And certainly *their* example lends no countenance to those who, professing to be wonderfully zealous for the moral and spiritual elevation of their fellow-creatures, appear to have no consideration for their temporal hardships, and usually have nothing but Christian advices and consolations wherewith to answer the appeal of a brother or sister who is naked and wretched, and destitute of daily food.

You will farther notice that the object was a *distant one*, in behalf of which their bounty was displayed. Their donations were for the benefit of persons who lived a far way off, and with whom they had never had any personal intercourse. They might have excused themselves from contributing on this account. They might have said that they had objects enough at home, and that there was no need of going abroad to seek them. They certainly *would* have excused themselves by such a plea had they been like-minded with some modern Christians, whose charity not only *begins* but *ends* at home, and who think it altogether unreasonable if we ask them to do or give anything for the diffusion of Divine truth among the heathen, who are sitting in gross darkness in foreign lands, or even among their own fellow-countrymen in the British colonies. But it seems that the consideration of *distance* had not that weight with the Christians of Macedonia which it has with too many Christians in Britain. They felt that wherever human beings were to be found, to whom they might in any way be serviceable, thither must their sympathies extend—thither must their efforts be directed.

It is still more important, however, to observe the *circumstances* in which their liberality was thus displayed. It was in a time of “great affliction” and of “deep poverty.” A violent persecution had recently been endured by them. They had suffered the spoiling of their goods for Christ’s sake. And the ordinary courses of their industry had been disturbed, so that it was not without much difficulty that they could hope to retrieve the losses they had sus-

tained, or even to alleviate the immediate wants that pressed upon them. In *these* circumstances it is a wonder, not only that they should have given *liberally*, but even that they should have given *at all*. Persons enduring "a great trial of affliction" are usually so stunned by their own calamities, and so entirely engrossed with their own hardships, as to have little of either leisure or inclination to care for the distresses of other men. And if they be also in a state of "*deep poverty*," they seem to be exempted from every call of charity. The shedding of a tear of pity, or the utterance of a word of commiseration, is as much as can be expected from them in such circumstances. Yet such was the very condition of the Macedonians at the time when they exhibited that pattern of beneficence, by which the wealthy disciples at Corinth were stirred up to a holy emulation. In the midst of their "great trial of affliction" they experienced an "abundance of joy," which bore them up under the pressure of their adversities, and proved, as "the joy of the Lord" always does, to be "their strength." And "their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality." That is to say, they gave, out of their poor supplies, that which in God's estimate was held to be abundant riches. They exemplified the truth of the proverb, that "Where there is a will there is always a way." Having it honestly in their *hearts* to give, they contrived by means of earnestness, economy, and self-denial to get it into their *power* to give. And their gifts were offered in that cheerful and liberal spirit which renders everything, however

small, that flows from it, an "odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God."

And this suggests the farther observation, that these Macedonians were *heartly* and *spontaneous* givers. They did not wait to be solicited or importuned. All the urgency was on *their own* side. They gave in anticipation of Paul's request, as well as beyond his most sanguine expectations. "To their power," he says, "yea, and beyond their power, they were *willing of themselves*; praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints."

Now the reason of all this, as we have already seen, was no other than the *Self-dedication* which had preceded it. These benevolent men had first of all been led to make a full surrender of *themselves* unto the Lord. And having done so, they were thoroughly furnished for every good work to which they might be called. The *greater* gift of "*their own selves*," which they had first presented, was easily, and, indeed, unavoidably followed by the *lesser* gift of their service and their substance. Or rather, I should say, the one gift *included* the other. It was not an *additional* sacrifice they were making; it was but a part of their first and great sacrifice,—a completion of its amount, or an expression of its sincerity. They felt that in yielding themselves to the Lord, they had in effect said to Him and to His Church that they were willing to be offered up, on the sacrifice and service of their faith, at whatever time, and in whatever way, it might by the will of

God be proposed to them. And accordingly, when a special call was made, whether it might be for gifts to be conferred, or service to be done, or sufferings to be endured, they held themselves ready with all cheerfulness to comply with it, and felt that in so doing, even to the uttermost, they were only striving in some measure to implement their previous act of self-devotion to their Lord and Saviour.

Well would it be for the interests of godliness, as well as for the prevalence of true charity and philanthropy, were Christians, in these present days, enabled by Divine grace to imitate so bright a pattern. Oh that the spirit of these men of Macedonia would come over and help us! *Then* should ourselves, and all that pertains to us, be unreservedly consecrated to the Lord. *Then* should there be no more of that indifference to His claims,—no more of that backwardness in His service,—of which we have so often had reason to be ashamed. *Then* should we no longer grudge Him our stinted gifts, or put Him off with perfunctory observances; while the utmost we can do, and the best that we can give, are lavished on the vanities and pleasures of the world. *Then* should we deem no services too laborious, no offerings too costly, no sacrifices too great, by which we might show the sincerity of our devotedness to Him and to His cause.

XVII.

THE SABBATH A GIFT OF GOD.*

“The Lord hath given you the Sabbath.”—EXODUS, xvi. 29.

WE learn from the context that “on the seventh day,” in open defiance of the prohibition laid upon them, certain of the Israelites had gone to gather manna and “found none.” The Lord was sorely displeased with them for so wanton a violation of His commandment; and in rebuking them for their conduct, reminded them of the provision He had made to guard the seventh day from being thus profaned, by supplying a double portion of manna on the day preceding. “See,” He said, “for that the Lord *hath given you the Sabbath*, therefore He giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days : abide ye every man in his place ; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.” The expression here used with referencè to the Sabbath is worthy of special remark. It is spoken of as the *gift of God*. It is not so much a restriction imposed as a privilege conferred,—a day, not *taken from man*, but *given to him*. Elsewhere the Sabbath is often represented as that portion of time which God has reserved

* This Sermon was written in 1846.

and appropriated exclusively to Himself, and which He will not permit us to invade. But in the text it is represented as a portion of time, which God has in a peculiar sense *allotted to His people*; and the arrangement made to preclude the necessity of following their ordinary avocations during the course of it, is viewed as a special provision to preserve its blessed privilege undiminished and unimpaired. The Lord "hath *given* the Sabbath;" and it is because He *has* given it, and because He wishes those to whom it is given to have the full advantage of it, and cannot bear to see them throwing it away, that He here describes Himself as taking such precautions to guard its hallowed rest from secular encroachments.

In this respect, the view of our text is in full accordance with that of other passages of Scripture. Thus, for example, Nehemiah, in recounting various instances of God's kindness to His ancient people, mentions *this* as one of the most notable, "Thou madest known unto them Thy holy Sabbath." And the Lord Himself, when reminding them through the Prophet Ezekiel of those manifold tokens of His love which they had in time past so ungratefully requited, alludes to His having favoured them with this ordinance as one of the most important of their privileges: "Moreover also," He says, "I *gave them my Sabbaths*, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them." In these passages, as well as in the text, the institution of the Sabbath is represented in the light of a great blessing for which we ought to be thankful, rather than of a peremptory requirement to which, as a matter of mere duty, we are

obliged to yield. And in prescribing the regular observance of it, the Lord of the Sabbath seeks the promotion no less effectually of our good than of His own glory.

That this representation is a just one, must be apparent, if we consider, however slightly, the nature and purposes of the hallowed institution itself.

I. Even *the secular advantages of the Day of rest*, apart from all consideration of its spiritual benefits, are of themselves almost sufficient to bear out the view which is given of it in the text. For although the Sabbath were to be regarded in no higher light than as a grateful interval of repose from the ordinary cares and pursuits of human life, it would still commend itself to every reflecting mind, as an eminently wise and salutary institution, most worthy of that God who taketh care of man and beast, and whose "tender mercies are over all His works." The primal sentence, by which man was doomed to eat bread in the sweat of his brow, meets in this beneficent ordinance with a needful and pleasing alleviation. We have here a regularly recurring intermission of that continual drudgery of daily toil, by which otherwise the over-stretched energies of body and of mind might be enfeebled or exhausted. A blessed season of relaxation is afforded us, a refreshing pause, a grateful breathing-time, in which our wasted faculties may be repaired, and the dull routine of life varied and enlivened. The toil-worn labourer or artisan can hail the weekly return of this season, as a period which, so far as man is concerned, he feels himself entitled to *call his own*. When he rests from the labours

of his calling, lays aside the implements of his industry, changes his apparel, unbends his weary limbs, enjoys repose in the bosom of his family, and takes sweet counsel with those who are in this world the nearest and dearest to him,—he has good cause, as all will readily allow, to bless God for having “given him the Sabbath.” Nor is it only to the more humble and laborious part of mankind that the day of rest is in this respect beneficial. Those whom Providence has exempted from manual toil are likewise in an equal degree,—except in so far as they wilfully forsake their own mercies,—indebted to it. For the mind, no less than the body, requires its stated seasons of relaxation, and cannot retain its vigour unimpaired, without some variety in its pursuits, and some relief from the pressure of its wonted cares, such as the weekly return of the Sabbath brings along with it. Of every class of the community it may be said, that their bodily health, their intellectual energy, their personal comfort, their domestic happiness, are all eminently promoted by the rest of this hallowed Day. Great, certainly, are the social and civil benefits that result from it, by placing the rich and the poor upon a common footing, promoting peace, encouraging charity, cultivating habits of decency and order, and tending to establish among all ranks of the people those principles of pure and undefiled religion, which are the surest bulwarks of national prosperity. Who then, we may well ask, would be so foolish or so malignant, even in a worldly sense, as to wish this salutary institution done away? How heavily and cheerlessly would day after day revolve, without those grateful intervals which it

affords us! In losing it, how much would we also lose of that which is most conducive even to our temporal welfare! Truly may it be affirmed that the most enlarged philanthropy could not have devised any means, at once so simple and so efficacious, of promoting the comfort and happiness of human beings, for the life that now is, as the Lord has Himself done in giving us the Sabbath. And great cause have we, in this respect, to bless Him for setting apart each seventh day as a day of rest,—a day in which some respite may be given us from that toil which is the ordinary portion of humanity,—when the hand of the labourer may cease from his work and the foot of the traveller pause in his journey,—when the schemes of the enterprising, the researches of the studious, the anxieties of the public official, may all alike be laid aside;—when, in short, the ordinary business of life may be suspended, its tumult hushed, and its cares awhile forgotten.

II. In estimating the value of this gift of God, however, we ought not to confine our view to the merely *secular advantages* attendant on it: we must bear in mind that the purposes for which the Sabbath has been “given” are chiefly of a *spiritual* nature, and that *peculiar and pre-eminent spiritual benefits accrue from the possession of it.*

There are too many persons to be met with at the present day, who are quite ready to prize the Sabbath as a season of *Rest*, while yet they have no estimation of its importance as a season of hallowed worship and of religious improvement; nay, there are some who are very much inclined to exalt its subor-

dinate far above its highest ends, and actually to urge their anxiety to secure the full benefit of that relaxation which the Sabbath-day affords them, as a ground for adopting or for tolerating practices which may amount to the grossest profanation of its sanctity. They seem to think that men should have every facility given them for seeking their own pleasure on this holy day. And as often as this facility is withheld, or any restriction is proposed to be put on certain prevailing modes of Sabbath profanation, they murmur as if their civil liberty were invaded,—they complain of every such restriction as a grievous hardship to all, and more especially to the labouring classes, as hindering them from the enjoyment of those pleasures and recreations, in which they are supposed to be naturally anxious to indulge on the only day when they have leisure to partake of them.

Let us ever remember, however, that the Sabbath, though a day of rest from the ordinary cares and occupations of human life, is not intended to be a day of mere *idleness*, far less to be a day of unhallowed amusement or carnal gratification. It “was made for man,” not as a sojourner in this present world merely, but above all as a traveller to the world that is to come. It is to spiritual, immortal, and accountable creatures that the Lord has “given the Sabbath.” He has given it to *the soul* rather than to the body. Indeed He may be said to have taken it from the body in order that it might be given to the soul. He has rescued it from the concerns of time that it might be appropriated to the interests of eternity. And His design is, that mankind should promote the welfare of their souls by the right use of this day, even

more diligently than they are accustomed to provide for the sustenance of their bodies by the labour of the other six days. For it is then, wherever the true God is known, that men are privileged to lift up their minds from the dust,—to withdraw from that stir and bustle of the world, in which God and religion are apt to be forgotten by them, to enjoy those opportunities of social worship and of religious instruction, essential to the institution, which cannot at any other period be regularly, conveniently, and efficiently observed in common,—and thus to attend, without distraction, and with all their spiritual powers and affections in fullest exercise, to those more important things which belong unto their peace. The prevalence of pure religion throughout the world is, under God, to be ascribed in a great degree to no other cause than the institution of the Sabbath. And it cannot be doubted that were this Divine ordinance, with all its attendant means of spiritual instruction, to be abolished, or even in any material degree to be widely and systematically profaned, the form as well as the power of godliness would speedily disappear from the earth. Mankind would then, even in Christian countries, have no counteracting influence adequate to check the corrupting tendency of earthly cares, and employments, and gratifications. Amid the continual and unintermitted secularity of their whole lives from day to day, they might for a while, perhaps, catch at stray moments in order to give heed to the welfare of their souls, but soon would the fitful effort be abandoned,—soon would the concerns of sense and of time assume the entire and undisputed dominion over them, while the claims of God and the

interests of eternity would be altogether excluded from their thoughts. We know by experience how mighty is the influence which the world and the things of the world exert upon us,—how powerfully they tend to draw us from God,—to efface all serious impressions from our hearts,—and to impede us in the pursuit of spiritual and heavenly blessings. The most devout Christians will readily admit, and find constant reason to lament, the proneness of their own deceitful hearts to be occupied too much with what is visible and temporal, and too little with what is unseen and eternal,—and the difficulty they experience, even with all the aid which the stated recurrence of the Sabbath affords them, in keeping alive a sense of religion within their souls. But if so, then how vast an accession of power would worldly objects obtain over them, were the counteracting influence of the holy Sabbath taken away! What then could be looked for, but that in the midst of an uninterrupted round of business or of pleasure, the spirit of the mind should be thoroughly secularised, and that the fire of Christian principle and feeling kindled in the sanctuary of the heart, should either expire for want of proper fuel to support it, or be smothered beneath the constant accumulation of the dross and rubbish of the mere earthly life? But thanks be to God who hath given us this holy Day, we are called at regular intervals, as it returns, to withdraw from that engrossing pursuit of worldly gains or pleasures which else might have proved so fatal to our best interests, and to join in all those sacred exercises of prayer, and praise, and instruction, and meditation, by which our languishing graces may be revived and our heaven-

ward progress quickened and advanced. We are powerfully reminded of that God whom we must serve,—that Saviour on whom we must rely,—that work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope, in which we must engage,—that endless portion of blessedness and glory which it so greatly concerns us to secure. And instead of labouring, as at other times, for “the meat which perisheth,” we are then summoned to labour still more assiduously for the meat “which endureth unto everlasting life.”

Even to ungodly men this sacred institution is not without its value, though they know it not. It is to *them* in an eminently emphatic sense “the accepted time and the day of salvation.” It is a continual witness to them in behalf of God. It addresses to them, from week to week, a solemn though silent appeal on the subject of their highest concerns. Its very peacefulness may be said to speak to them, as with a still small voice, inviting them to serious and devout reflection; and the various means of grace which it places within their reach are in a peculiar manner fitted, by the Divine blessing, to turn them from the evil of their ways, and to build them up in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation. But it is more especially to believers that the value of this precious “gift” of God commends itself. To those, indeed, who are earnestly striving to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling,—who are deeply alive to the importance of religion, and feel, from day to day, the common concerns of life to be not only matters of utter insignificance in comparison with the one thing needful, but even vexatious annoyances and serious hindrances in the way of their

spiritual advancement,—to such persons, truly, the institution of the Sabbath has a value which it would not be easy to over-estimate. To *them* it affords the most favourable opportunities for prosecuting that all-important work, in which their whole hearts are earnestly and fully engaged, and on which they feel their true happiness, as well in time as through eternity, to be dependent. It frees them from those impediments of a worldly nature by which at other times they are prevented from running the race set before them with all the alacrity and steadiness that they could wish. It is to *their* souls a season of reviving, in which they may repair those injuries which have been sustained in the conflicts of the past, and in which they may prepare for the endurance of trials yet to come. It is their time, not of rest only, but of nourishment,—affording them by its varied exercises, whether of the closet, the family, or the congregation, that rich provision for all their spiritual wants by which they may be cheered and strengthened in their pilgrimage. It is pre-eminently the day of their *souls'* gain,—their golden season for growing rich in all that truly constitutes riches,—their special day of merchandise for the kingdom of heaven, in which they may store up those incorruptible treasures, in comparison with which the wealth of worlds is insignificant. I put it to all who are spiritually-minded, whether such be not really the character, and such the tendency, of this day of hallowed rest,—whether it has not been found to be one of the most efficient means, by the blessing of God, of confirming and advancing in their souls the principles of vital godliness,—whether it has not been singularly instrumental in enlarging their

knowledge, establishing their faith, enlivening their hope, inflaming their love, and quickening their diligence,—and whether, on considering how greatly they are benefited by this most wise and beneficent institution, their souls, and all that is within them, be not stirred up to bless the Lord for having “*given them the Sabbath.*”

III. But, in estimating the value of the Sabbath as a gift of God, we must take into account, not only the spiritual improvement arising from the use of it, but also *the spiritual comforts and delights which it is still more directly fitted to administer.*

Apart altogether from the tendency of the Sabbath to promote, in all who faithfully observe it, their growth in grace and preparation for eternity, it affords them, even now, such pure and exalted pleasure, as they would not part with for a thousand times the gain that might be acquired by perverting it to worldly uses; insomuch, that from a regard to their own present happiness, they would choose the observance of the Sabbath as a blessed privilege, even did not Scripture and conscience prescribe it as an incumbent duty. By all those whose hearts are right with God, this holy day is prized as a time of especial refreshing from His presence. Amid all the anxieties and troubles of life they find in it, not only a quiet resting-place, but a source of the fullest consolation and support. It calls them to the enjoyment of privileges the most exalted, and to the discharge of duties the most congenial and delightful. It brings the most pleasing recollections before their minds, and opens up to them the brightest expectations. It invites

them to the most intimate fellowship with that God whom they supremely love, and that Redeemer in whom they confidently trust, with no intervening secular distractions to mar the peace and happiness of their communion with Him. It affords them the fullest opportunities they could wish of pouring out their desires at a throne of grace for all those inestimable heavenly blessings which God's unlimited power and never-failing wisdom and matchless love embolden them to ask. It gives them leisure for perusing with delight those lively oracles of God which are able to make them wise unto salvation, for pious converse with their fellow-Christians on those Divine subjects in which they feel a common interest, and for serious meditation on those blessed truths with which their richest comforts for the present, and their highest hopes for the future, are connected. And summoning them to go up into the house of God, it gladdens their hearts with the joyful sound of the Gospel, and affords them in the solemnities of social worship their purest foretaste on this side the grave of the exercises and enjoyments of the redeemed in heaven. One would think, that even were there no commandment on the subject, a bare *permission* to spend one day in seven in a manner at once so pleasant and so profitable, would be regarded as a singular privilege, deserving our warmest returns of gratitude and praise. Such must have been the judgment of the devout Psalmist. How glowing are *his* expressions of delight in the services of the Lord's Day and the solemnities of the Lord's House! "This," he exclaims, "is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it!" "How amiable

are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God;" "When shall I come and appear before God?" "Thou art my God; early will I seek Thee: my soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see Thy power and Thy glory, so as I have seen Thee in the sanctuary;" "A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand;" "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in His temple." In these devout expressions every true child of God, according to the measure of his sanctification, is more or less enabled to concur. For, indeed, there is no surer test by which the character of a person may be tried, whether he be a child of God or a child of the world, than the manner in which he stands affected to the spiritual exercises of the Sabbath. It is perfectly evident that he cannot be of God if, instead of a relish, he feels a decided aversion, for the day of God and the services connected with it. One thing we may affirm with all confidence, that those who have no delight in this hallowed season—those who are not disposed to rejoice in it as one of the most inestimable "gifts" which God of His infinite goodness hath conferred on them—cannot be "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." For what, indeed, is the nature of this inheritance but a perpetual enjoyment of those spiritual blessings which such men are wholly incapable of relishing? The Scriptures, in describing to us the na-

ture of the heavenly bliss, tell us that “there remaineth a *rest*” (the word in the original means a *Sabbath-keeping*—the enjoyment of a Sabbath rest)—there remaineth a Sabbath rest “for the people of God.” And the saints in heaven are frequently represented as deriving their chief happiness from dwelling in the presence of the Lord, and serving Him day and night in His temple. It is, then, a most unquestionable sign of a carnal heart that is utterly unfit for heaven, when men disrelish the services of the Sabbath-day, regarding as drudgery that which is the employment of angels, the rest and joy of the spirits of the redeemed. How can *they* expect to be happy in quitting earthly cares and pleasures and occupations *for ever*, who cannot contentedly lay them aside now for so much as one day in a week? How can *they* relish an eternity to be spent in celebrating the praises of Jehovah and enjoying communion with Him, to whom even a single day, or a part of the day, thus spent, is intolerably irksome,—who had rather be in any idle company, or engaged in any trifling pursuit or frivolous amusement, than in the house of God, and in fellowship with Him? Assuredly those who cannot enter with all their souls into the spiritual joys of the Day of rest which hath been given them in this world, are much less capable of entering into the rest that remaineth for the people of God in the world to come. But to all who are truly sanctified by the grace of God, and qualified for inheriting His heavenly kingdom, His holy day is a source of the purest happiness. It is an emblem and foretaste of the celestial bliss,—a portion of heaven already given them to enjoy on earth,—a cluster of grapes from the vines of that pro-

mised land,—a few drops, as it were, allowed to run over from that perennial fountain of pleasure which is to be found at the right hand of the throne of God. And viewing it in this light, as an earnest of the inheritance to which they are looking forward with delight, as the consummation of all their loftiest hopes,—nay, as the nearest approach that can be made by them in this present world to the enjoyment of that inheritance,—those who are thus realising its inestimable preciousness even here, cannot do otherwise than warmly praise and thank the Lord for having “given them the Sabbath.”

But some may be disposed to ask whether the text, with all that it implies, be really applicable to *ourselves*? It was originally spoken to the Israelites: may it be extended to people who belong to other countries and to other ages of the world? May *we* now say that God *hath given us the Sabbath* also, and that we have still *His* Divine warrant for the observance of it?

No man who really takes that view of the Sabbath which we have been endeavouring to illustrate, will be anxious that this question should be answered in the negative. If you had a rich estate in your possession, and had been always accustomed to consider it as your own, you would feel no interest in the furtherance of an attempt to call in question your title to the enjoyment of it. And even so, if you appreciate the Sabbath as a precious gift which God has once conferred on man from a gracious regard to his nature and wants, it will be with no complacency that you will listen to the arguments of those who would en-

deavour to persuade you that this precious gift was not intended for such as you are.

But, in truth, such arguments as they advance are altogether inconclusive. It does not by any means follow from the statements that God "gave" and "made known His Sabbath" to the Israelites, that therefore the ordinance is altogether a Jewish one, and was not intended for other nations and for other times. For we find the same modes of expression used with reference to many other matters of a religious nature, which are known to be of universal human obligation and concernment. Indeed it is often stated generally of *all* the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, that they were "given" or "made known to Israel;" but no one would ever think of drawing thence the inference that these commandments were not designed for, and are not still prescribed to other nations. We cannot, on this occasion, go into this important question in detail. The truth is, however, that no one who reads with candour the account of the creation of the world as given in the Book of Genesis, can doubt that the Sabbath was instituted at the beginning. It has been alleged indeed that what is there stated regarding the sanctification of the seventh day refers, not in the way of narrative to what the Lord did when His great work of creation had been accomplished, but rather, by way of anticipation, to what He was yet to do on instituting the law, some thousands of years afterwards. This allegation, however, is altogether gratuitous. It puts a forced construction upon the passage, which does not accord with its plain and natural import. For surely, when we find the inspired historian stating that "God

rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made," and adding immediately after, in close connection, these words: "And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it,"—the only conclusion which can be come to by unprejudiced readers, who have no particular theory to support, is that God sanctified the seventh day *at the very time* of His resting from the work of creation. It is perfectly true there is no after-notice taken of the Sabbath in the Sacred History until after the departure of the Israelites from the land of Egypt. But neither is there any allusion made to it throughout the Books of Joshua and Judges, which embrace a period of at least 400 years after the solemn ratification of it at Mount Sinai. The silence of the Sacred Narrative, therefore, in regard to it is not in the former period, more than in the latter, any ground for supposing that the ordinance did not exist. The truth is, that the inspired historian does not profess to enter minutely into the manners and customs of the times to which he alludes, or to give us anything more than a brief and cursory notice of such great transactions as were worthy of especial record. The case of the Sabbath, besides, is not the only instance in which a like silence is found in Scripture in regard to prevailing ordinances. For a period of 1500 years, from the death of Abel till the time of the Deluge, no mention is made of the rite of sacrifice; and for a similar period of 1500 years, from the entrance of the Israelites into Canaan till the birth of Christ, there is no mention of circumcision as an existing rite in any of the narrative parts of the Old Testament, although there are certainly some allusions to it, chiefly of a

figurative kind, in the writings of the Prophets. Yet it is not to be questioned that both of these Divine ordinances of sacrifice and circumcision were in regular course of observance by the Lord's people during these periods. We are warranted to hold, therefore, from such parallel instances, that the mere circumstance of the Book of Genesis making no after-mention of the Sabbath, is not to be viewed as any contradiction of the conclusion drawn from the statement so plainly and expressly made in the commencement of it, that God "rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made; and God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it." As the Sabbath did not originate with the Mosaic dispensation, neither did it terminate with it. The observance of it has been solemnly enjoined in one of the ten Commandments of that Moral Law, concerning which our Lord has expressly said that He "came not to destroy but to fulfil;" and that "till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass till all be fulfilled." And although, in opposing those superstitious views which the Scribes and Pharisees held regarding this ordinance, our Saviour cautioned them against such an overstrained adherence to the mere letter of the Fourth Commandment as would prove destructive to its true spirit and intention, yet the very language He uses in so doing—"the Sabbath was made for *man*, not man for the Sabbath"—is such as to imply the universality of the ordinance, as an ordinance meant for *every member of the human family*—not merely for the Jew, but "*for man*," to whatever nation he may belong, and whatever region of the world he may inhabit. It is true that, under

the dispensation of the Gospel, the first day of the week has been substituted in commemoration of Christ's resurrection from the dead, for the last day of the week, as observed in former ages. This change, however, is only of a circumstantial nature, and does not affect the essence of the institution. It is still, as before, every seventh day that is hallowed, although, in compliance with the practice of the Apostles, we sanctify the first of the seven, and not the last. And indeed this very alteration of the day, instead of lessening, does, on the contrary, *greatly increase its claim* to our observance, as being now commemorative, not only of the finished work of the Creation, but also of that higher finished work of redeeming Love on which all our hopes of salvation are built.

Let us not think, then, that the gift of the Sabbath as conferred on the Israelities, has been exclusively bestowed upon *them*. It belongs, by right of Divine donation, to men of every kindred and of every clime. Neither let us imagine that the Saviour has, in respect of this blessed institution, lessened and curtailed the privileges which God's people enjoyed before His coming. He has, on the contrary, extended and improved them; so that *we* who now live under the fulness of the Gospel have even greater cause than those whose lot was cast under that less perfect system which preceded it, to rejoice that "God hath given us the Sabbath."

Since, then, Brethren, the Sabbath is still the Lord's "gift," see that ye *be thankful for it*. Regard it not as a restraint imposed upon you, but rather as an immunity conferred upon you. View it as a day of

real freedom to your nobler nature,—a day when the body is indeed circumscribed, but only in order that the soul may be emancipated,—a day when your temporal business is indeed suspended, but only in order that your everlasting interests, which are of far higher moment, may be promoted. Bless God for having favoured you with an institution which marks His loving-kindness no less than His sovereignty,—His regard for your welfare no less than for His own glory.

Further, if the Sabbath be “the gift of God,” *be careful that you improve it with all diligence.* Apply it faithfully to those gracious purposes which it is so admirably calculated to promote. Seek to be ever in the spirit on the Lord’s Day. Endeavour, with the help of God, so to sanctify *it* as that *it* may be effectual in sanctifying *you*. Jealously turn away from profaning its holiness by doing your own ways, or speaking your own words, or seeking your own pleasure. Guard it from every secular encroachment just as you would guard your own property from being invaded. And consider every suggestion that would induce you to violate its sanctity or to neglect its holy duties, as tempting you not only to rob God, but to defraud yourselves, by forsaking your own mercies and prejudicing your highest interests.

To stir you up to the performance of this duty, remember that if the Sabbath be the Lord’s gift, you must be answerable to Him for your use of it. It is a most important article of that stewardship for which He will ultimately call you to account. And of those to whom so much has been given, a proportionate extent of improvement shall be required. I fear

we do not sufficiently consider how much on this score we owe unto the Lord. Numberless Sabbaths come and pass away without our taking any notice of them at all. Not being fully alive to the value of them, we reckon not of the serious responsibility connected with them. But though *we* forget them, we may be sure that *God* does not. There is not one of them that *He* has lost sight of; and on the latter day He will confront us with them, and searchingly examine how far we have improved them. Bethink you, my dear Friends, how vast an amount of privilege you have to answer for, in having enjoyed from week to week the stated return of the day of hallowed rest. The man who has reached his seventieth year has lived *ten* years of Sabbaths, when they are summed up into one whole. The man who has reached his thirty-fifth year has in like manner spent (with what improvement it is for God and his own conscience to judge) *five* entire years of Sabbaths; and at every other period of life there is the same proportion of Sabbath-time in the age of every individual. Consider, then, each one of you, how you have been using that portion of Sabbatical time, with which a long-suffering God has been favouring you, and what account you will be able to give Him of it on the great and final day of retribution. If hitherto you have been wasting it, be persuaded to waste no more of it, for its every hour is incomparably precious. Now, even now, take advantage of the gift of God, lest ultimately He have to condemn you for abusing it. Walk circumspectly, redeeming the time, because the days are few and evil.

Finally, while you rejoice in the Sabbath as being

itself consecrated by being the gift of God, be careful to *look beyond it with the eye of faith to the everlasting Sabbath* in the kingdom of heaven, of which it is a sure pledge and earnest to believers, and for which it is meant by the Divine blessing to prepare them. You know that "there remaineth a rest—a Sabbatical rest—for the people of God," when, freed from all the encumbrances of the flesh, and from all the cares and allurements of the world, they shall dwell for ever in the presence of the Most High, and serve Him day and night in His temple. It is but a faint though still an appropriate emblem of this heavenly rest that is afforded by the earthly Sabbath. Here we serve an unseen God; but *there* the servants of God shall see Him face to face. Here we worship only with a few; but there we shall join the whole Church of the First-born—a mighty host, which no man can number. Here we have often cause to lament our unsuitable thoughts and feelings, and to deplore the sins that taint our best services; but there our serving shall be pure as those of the unblemished spirits that have never fallen from communion with the all-perfect Being to whom they are presented. Here our Sabbaths are soon over, and we must withdraw from fellowship with God to mingle again in the vexing and engrossing and oftentimes debasing pursuits of this world; but there our Sabbath shall be an unending one, and we shall be as pillars in the temple of our God, never more to go out.

Cease not, then, Brethren, to cherish the hope of this blessed Rest which yet awaits you in the heavens.

Let your earthly Sabbaths, as often as they return, lead on your thoughts to the confident expectation of it; and let them be so improved as to fit you for the enjoyment of it when it does come. Thus shall you have cause, not in time only, but through eternity, to adore the Divine goodness for having "given you the Sabbath."

XVIII.

FAITH, HOPE, AND CHARITY.

“And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.”—I COR. xiii. 13.

THUS does St Paul conclude the eloquent encomium, which this remarkable chapter contains, on that most excellent grace of *Charity* or *Love*. He had spoken of it as incomparably superior to the gifts of tongues, and of prophecy, and of miracles, with which, for the diffusion and confirmation of the Gospel, the Christian Church at that early period was endowed; and as so indispensable to the character of a true disciple, that without it the most wonderful of these supernatural gifts, united to the deepest knowledge of Divine mysteries, the most burning zeal, and the most bountiful liberality, would prove, in the judgment of Heaven, to be of no avail in furthering the ultimate welfare of those who were possessed of them. He had mentioned some of the most prominent qualities by which this grace of Charity is distinguished,—such as its patience, kindness, and disinterestedness; its meekness, candour, humility, and generosity, and other good properties, so varied in their character as

evidently to show that the "charity" thus described was not regarded by him so much as *a single subordinate virtue*, but rather as the crown or culmination of *all the virtues*; or, as what he has elsewhere called it, the "fulfilling of the Law," the "end of the commandment," and the "bond of perfectness." Having then resumed his former comparison between that excellent grace and those miraculous endowments, which the Corinthians appeared to be in some danger of preferring to it, he specifies *one* respect in which it greatly surpassed them, as being destined in all ages unfailingly to continue, while *they*, having served their temporary purpose, should pass away. And *then*, after a brief digression, into which he was naturally led, regarding the imperfection of all our present attainments as compared with those which are ultimately to be reached by us, he once more reverts to the subject of Charity, and pronounces on it the crowning eulogy of the text, in which, you perceive, the palm of excellence is assigned to it, over no mere occasional and transient endowments, but over those graces which in union with itself may be held to be most vitally essential to the Christian character. "Now," he says,—"*now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.*"

I. Let me shortly turn your attention, in the first place, to *the importance here attributed by the Apostle to all the three Graces* to which he is alluding. "Now," he says, "*abideth Faith, Hope, Charity, these three.*"

In thus speaking of these cardinal virtues of the Christian character, it is evident that St Paul means *to distinguish them from one another*. He speaks of

them as "*these three*," and thereby represents them to us as *three several virtues*, each holding its own place, and serving its own purpose, to which it is peculiarly adapted, and in which the others are incapable of superseding it. Each one of this blessed triad of Christian graces has its own proper province in the spiritual life allotted to it. And each has important functions to discharge, which none but itself is capable of executing. *Faith*, for example, can be no substitute for *Love* in the way of fulfilling the great duties of practical religion. And as little can *Love* be any substitute for *Faith* in the way of appropriating the merits of the Saviour, and thereby securing our justification in the sight of God. What St Paul has elsewhere said of the several offices in the Christian Church is equally applicable to the leading graces of the Christian character—that all of them are useful and needful in their respective spheres, like the various organs and members of the human body; and that no one among them can set aside another, any more than the hand can dispense with the services of the foot, or the eye undertake to perform the functions of the ear.

But while in this statement Faith, Hope, and Love are thus represented as *numerically distinct*, they are notwithstanding *very intimately associated*, as having the closest mutual affinity and dependence. *All three must abide together*, in order to the perfection of each other, as well as of the whole character into which they enter. God has joined them; and man must not attempt to sever them. *Faith*, for example, must animate the mind with *Hope*, and "*work by Love*," in order to show its genuineness as that *living and operative* Faith which the Scriptures have alone approved

of. *Hope*, again, if it do not rest on the good foundation which *Faith* has laid for it, is altogether visionary and unwarranted; and if it do not elevate the soul unto the unfeigned *Love* of God and man, it is spurious or hypocritical. And, in like manner, we may say of *Love*, that if it be not originated by *Faith* and sustained by *Hope*, it is merely an instinctive impulse of *nature*, accidental in its attachments, and limited to the sphere of visible things, and thus differing most essentially from that evangelical Love of which it is written, that "the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart and of a good conscience, and of *faith unfeigned.*" Thus you perceive that these three excellent graces, though individually distinct, are yet mutually dependent. They cannot exist apart. Each of them is necessary to the full and orderly development of its associates. And only when they are combined in just proportion do we obtain the completeness and consistency essential to the Christian character.

The chief point, however, to be noticed in this statement, is the *permanence* it ascribes to those graces of which it speaks. It represents "Faith, Hope, and Charity, these three," as all alike *abiding*. Formerly the Apostle had said this of Charity in particular, declaring in the 8th verse that "*charity never faileth.*" But now, in repeating the statement, he extends it to the other two, ascribing to *them* also the same durability which he had previously noticed as an attribute of Charity. No doubt it was the design of the Apostle to point out in this respect the very striking contrast between these three essential graces, by which at all times the Christian character must be distinguished, and those extraordinary gifts bestowed on the early

Christian Church, which, however remarkable and useful while they endured, were only intended to continue for a season. "Whether there be prophecies," he had before observed, "they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge" (that is, special, supernatural knowledge), "it shall vanish away." But contrasted with these temporary endowments, Charity is spoken of in the 8th verse as *never failing*. And I see no reason to doubt that a like contrast was present to the mind of the Apostle when substantially the same statement is repeated by him, with a somewhat wider application, in the text. The supernatural gifts conferred on the primitive Church, though useful and important with a view to its first establishment, were not indispensably necessary to its continued subsistence, and were therefore, when they had served their temporary purpose, to be withdrawn. But Faith, Hope, and Charity are *absolutely* essential at all times. "These three" must *ever* continue as long as the Church endures. It cannot dispense with them; for they constitute its very life. With respect, again, to individual members of the Christian Church, they might not in all cases be endowed with miraculous gifts, or continue at all times to enjoy these in the same measure; but yet they might be very sincere and very active Christians notwithstanding. And the same thing may be *now* said with reference to those natural attainments of learning, wisdom, eloquence, and the like, to which in modern times we have to look as our substitute for the primitive endowments. *These* are not vitally essential to the Christian. Many a one who is most poorly

furnished with them—yea, many a one who is utterly destitute of them—is rich in grace, and an heir of glory. But Faith, Hope, and Love are *indispensable* to the spiritual life in the case of every Christian. Without these we may have a name to live, but we are really dead. Whatever else may fail us, *these must abide with us*, so long as we have any sound claims to the Christian character.

But it may be asked, Was it really St Paul's intention to ascribe *the same* permanence to all the three Christian graces of which he here speaks? When stating in the 8th verse that "*charity* never faileth," it appears from what follows that he alludes to the continuance of Charity, not only in all succeeding ages of the Church *on earth*, when prophecies shall have ceased and miracles shall have passed away, but also throughout the endless ages of the Church *in heaven*, when all our present and partial endowments shall be superseded by the more excellent powers and capacities of our perfected state.

Is it, then, the Apostle's meaning in our text, where his former statement is substantially repeated and extended in its application to the other graces of Faith and Hope,—is it the Apostle's meaning to ascribe to these other graces of Faith and Hope the same permanence, not only here but hereafter, which he had previously declared to be an attribute of Charity?

As I regard it, this question must be answered in the affirmative. It is true the word "*now*" occurs in the passage before us. But that word has here no necessary allusion to one particular period more than to another, and may be properly enough viewed as a mere connecting particle. Of this use of it we

meet with frequent instances both in our English Bible and elsewhere. That such is the right view to take of it in the present instance, is shown by the circumstance that the word in the original (*νῦν*) is *not the same with that which Paul had been twice employing, with an undoubted reference to time, in the previous verse (ἄρτι)*. In that verse he had thus written: “*Now* we see through a glass, darkly; but *then* face to face: *now* I know in part; but *then* shall I know even as also I am known.” Here the word “*now*” is twice opposed to the word “*then*,” so as to denote the present time in contrast with the future. But in the text which follows immediately after, the Apostle is careful to avoid repeating this word; but adopts in its stead another which is less definite in relation to time, and which is often used merely to indicate the continuity, or to mark the result or summing up of a discussion, or to point an antithesis.

Apart, however, from any such verbal criticism, you cannot fail to see that the word “*now*,” in whatever way it may be interpreted, *affects the whole sentence to which it is prefixed*. It cannot be considered, therefore, as limiting the continuance of Faith and Hope more than that of Charity, inasmuch as it is applicable to all the three without distinction. You will further observe, that when specifying in the 8th verse the things which shall pass away, while Charity shall still continue, the Apostle makes no mention of Faith and Hope as among their number. And yet further, in the text itself, all the three are spoken of—without the least variation in the mode of expression—as alike abiding; and though it be added that

“the *greatest* of these is charity,” it is neither stated nor implied that Charity is *the most enduring*.”

No doubt we are very much accustomed to speak of *Faith* as destined in the future world to give place to *vision*, and of *Hope* as destined, in like manner, to end in *full fruition*. This view is taken in the last verses of our 49th Paraphrase, of which the chapter before us is the groundwork. And by frequently using that beautiful Paraphrase, we have probably been led, without much consideration, to assume *that Charity alone shall exist in heaven*, while Faith and Hope shall be altogether superseded. But is there any solid Scriptural ground for such an assumption? There is, as we have seen, nothing in the text itself to warrant it. Nor am I aware of any other passage that has ever been formally brought forward to confirm it. No Faith in heaven! What, then, are we to make of those texts which speak of the glorified saints as “eating of the hidden manna,” partaking of “the fruit of the tree of life,”—“following the Lamb of God whithersoever He may lead them,”—and as “guided by Him to living fountains of waters.” Surely these expressions are as significant as words can be of a life of unceasing faith in the Redeemer. It is quite true that many of those things which are now objects of Faith, shall hereafter be objects of Sight. But it would be a very rash and sweeping conclusion thence to infer that in a future world there shall be no room and no occasion for Faith at all. Unless, indeed, we are to be made absolutely *omniscient* at the very first moment of our entrance into the heavenly mansions, there must still remain a field, though not indeed the

same field with that which we now have, for the exercise of Faith. And then, in so far as Faith can be held to consist in *confidence towards God or dependence on the Saviour*, we may surely venture to say that instead of *ceasing* in the world to come, it will be *more fully developed* and *more perfectly maintained*. With respect to *Hope*, again, it is not to be questioned that many of those things, to which it is for the present directed, shall in our future state be *actually possessed*, so that they cannot then be hoped for any longer. But does it thence follow that, after this life is ended, the Christian will absolutely have nothing whatever to hope for? Will it be nothing for the departed spirits of the faithful to anticipate the resurrection of their bodies, and to look forward to the triumphant issues of the coming judgment? And even when these glorious events have been consummated, will there not still remain the animating prospect of continually augmenting knowledge, unceasingly advancing happiness, and progressively increasing spiritual excellence to all eternity? We must either suppose that *all that heaven has to give is to be enjoyed at once* by the spirits of the redeemed when first they are translated thither, and that there is no progress of any kind to be afterwards made by them from glory to glory; or else we must allow that there is still something in reserve for them, besides what they at first attain, as a fit and proper object of *Hope*. It appears, then, on closer examination, that the idea, however commonly entertained, of Faith and Hope being limited to this present life, has no real warrant either from the text or from the general doctrine of Holy Scripture. St Paul does not, in this

respect, disparage these excellent graces of Faith and Hope by any preference over them which he here assigns to Charity. He speaks of "these three" in the same terms as all "abiding," and evidently means to ascribe to them without distinction the same continued subsistence both in this life and in the life to come.

II. Let us consider now, however, the meaning of the very decided preference which the statement of the Apostle assigns to one of these Christian graces when compared with the other two. "The greatest of these," he says, "is charity."

It cannot be necessary, I think, to guard you against supposing that St Paul, when he assigns this pre-eminence to Charity or Christian Love, has any intention to depreciate the value, still less to dispense with the necessity, of those other graces to which he thus prefers it. For it is remarkable that he, who in this passage extols *Charity* in a strain which none of the other writers of the New Testament, in discoursing on it, have ever reached, is the same who has also dwelt more largely and more forcibly than all the others on the truly inestimable preciousness of *Faith and Hope*,—attaching, indeed, to these two principles, and more particularly to *Faith*, a measure of importance which unbelieving men have grievously objected to as, in *their* judgment, altogether inordinate and unwarranted. Nor is he in this respect chargeable with inconsistency. For without in the slightest degree detracting from the excellence, or underrating the influence, or questioning the permanence, and the necessity of *Faith and Hope*, there are various grounds

that readily occur on which they may be held to be essentially inferior to Charity.

1. *In point of order Charity is pre-eminent, as occupying a higher position in the scale of those results, which the grace of God is intended to accomplish.* "Charity," as we are told, "is the end of the commandment." It is so, whether by "the commandment" we understand the Law or the Gospel. As for the *Moral Law*, what is its sum or substance, but love to God and love to man? And as for the Gospel, what is its grand design but to rescue men from a state of enmity against God and against one another,—to restore them, not only to the Divine favour, but to the *Divine image*, of which *Love* is certainly the characteristic and prevailing feature,—and by writing upon their hearts that great *law of Love*, in which all the Divine statutes are summarily comprehended, to bring them into cordial submission to the will of God, and to win from them a cheerful and thorough obedience to His commandments? This is unquestionably the ultimate design of the Gospel. Finding men "without hope" and "without God in the world,"—living in enmity, distraction, and alienation, it aims at raising them from their sin and selfishness to the love of God and of the brethren. As necessary means for the accomplishment of this purpose, Faith and Hope are of inestimable importance,—bringing as they do the Gospel to bear upon us, with all its sanctifying and love-inspiring influences. But still, as being mainly *means*, they are subordinate to the *end* or *final result* to which they are conducive,—just as the scaffolding, though necessary, is less valuable than the finished

building that is erected by the use of it,—or as the sowing of the seed, however indispensable, is of less consideration in itself than the reaping of the precious and abundant grain. Faith is the leaf, Hope is the blossom, but Love is the fruit of the tree of righteousness; and here, too, the leaf and the blossom are for the sake of the fruit. Only we are not to think of these as giving place to each other in time; but as flourishing together on the same eternal stem. Faith may rely on the mercies and promises of God, and Hope may anticipate their full and final enjoyment; but *Love* is that actual consummation of blessedness, begun on earth and to be perfected in heaven, to which these other excellent graces are subsidiary, and from their subserviency to which they derive their chief importance.

2. *Charity is farther entitled to this preference in respect of the extent or diffusiveness of its influence.*

Faith and Hope may be said to centre in the *individual*. Every individual believer has them “unto himself.” And though they be much to him, they are little to others, at least in their more immediate agency, being primarily concerned with the man’s own spiritual welfare. Their objects no doubt are outward and widely extensive, but are all referred to the individual who contemplates them; and however boundless may be the range of his excursions among those things unseen and hoped for, which are surveyed by him, the light, and strength, and consolation thence derived, are brought home to himself, and exclusively applied for the furtherance of his own personal happiness and advantage. Not so with

Charity. *This* excellent grace is emphatically described in the context as “seeking not her own.” While equally boundless with the others in its views, it looks constantly abroad, without any regard to self,—opens the heart and hand to all whom it can benefit, and makes it its sole aim and never-ceasing vocation to promote the glory of God and the welfare of all mankind. Unlike the two kindred graces here compared with it, it leads the Christian to regard himself not as an isolated being, whose chief concern is to secure his own spiritual interests, but as a member of that great family, of which God is the Father, and all men are brethren, and in which the members ought ever to be linked together by the sacred bonds of amity and peace. No wonder, then, that St Paul should so decidedly assign to this grace the pre-eminence over the others, inasmuch as its agency is wider and more diffusive. While Faith and Hope pertain to *individuals*, and are chiefly exercised by them with reference to their own welfare, Love is that great *social* principle which unites the creatures of God to Him and to one another,—binds together all holy beings in a blessed confederacy, and tends to secure in the most effectual manner the harmony and prosperity of the whole universe.

3. *But yet further, Charity claims the pre-eminence in respect of its superior dignity and excellence, as a virtue which most of all conforms us to the image of God.* Faith and Hope, from their nature, are recipients, while it is of the nature of Love to be communicative, and thus to be possessed of that higher blessedness which the Lord Jesus ascribes to giving

above receiving. Faith and Hope, too, are necessarily expressive, in all who exercise them, of imperfection and dependence, and as such can only be attributed to subordinate creatures. We cannot ascribe to God anything that resembles them. He who knows all things, and can do all things of Himself, has no room for relying on the testimony or aid of others. And He, who is infinitely blessed in the possession of a Divine fulness, cannot be said to hope, or to lack anything that could be hoped for. But *Love*, on the contrary, is the attribute of superior natures. It is held by the highest creatures in common with their Creator. It belongs to the character of Him in whom all fulness dwells. Indeed it is His pre-eminent and crowning attribute; and the more we attain of it, so much the more do we approach Him in His Divine excellency,—so much the more are we fitted to share in His unutterable blessedness. “Beloved,” saith an Apostle, “let us love one another; for love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God; God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.” Assuredly, then, of all the virtues Charity may be justly esteemed the greatest. For by it we are most of all partakers of a Divine nature. And though it be unquestionably an excellent and a blessed thing to trust in God, and to look to Him for all that He has promised, it is still a higher and more glorious attainment to share with Him, however humbly, in that diffusive Love, which sheds its rich beauties and blessings over the wide creation.

Let us, then, “covet earnestly the best gifts.” Let

us follow after Love, and seek by Divine grace to abound more and more in its generous dispositions and heavenly affections, as well as in its outwardly beneficent and godly fruits. While we do not undervalue that most precious Faith whereby we partake of the benefits of the great salvation, and that lively Hope which entereth within the vail, and cheers us with joyous anticipations of the coming glory; let us carefully remember that a greater than these is *Charity*, without which all professions of Faith and Hope are spurious. And let *ours* be that earnest prayer of the Apostle, that “our love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that we may approve the things that are excellent; that we may be sincere and without offence, till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the praise and glory of God.”

XIX.

THINGS NOT SEEN AND ETERNAL.

“While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen : for the things which are seen are temporal ; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”—2 COR. iv. 18.

Two kinds of objects—“ the things which are seen ” and “ the things which are not seen ”—are here contrasted with one another, as meriting and receiving, on the part of all true Christians, a very different measure of attention and regard.

The “ things which are seen ” consist of such sensible objects as are placed within our reach, or are subject to our observation. We must understand the expression as including the riches, honours, and pleasures of the present world,—its cares and toils,—its fellowships and connections,—its hard struggles and eager competitions,—its joys and sorrows,—its losses and its gains,—its cheering successes and bitter disappointments. These, and the like things, are easily discernible by us. Go where we will, they are constantly around us, attracting our notice and soliciting our regard. Our eyes can see them, our hands can grasp them, or some other of our senses can take cognizance of them. Hence, they secure from the

generality of mankind a very predominating interest and attention. Most men, indeed, appear to have no thought for anything else. There is something *tangible* and *substantial* about them, such as the grossest and most unreflecting minds can readily perceive and thoroughly appreciate. Indeed, they are commonly accounted the *only realities* with which a rational and sober-minded man has any cause seriously to concern himself. To think otherwise of them is not unfrequently denounced as a symptom of the weakest folly or the merest fanaticism.

Besides these things, however, there are others here contrasted with them, and referred to under the designation of "*things which are not seen.*" These are the objects and occurrences of the spiritual world, which, though our bodily senses are incapable of discerning them, have at least as real an existence as anything in the present visible world. There is the invisible God, for example, whom no man hath seen at any time, or can see, although to the reflecting mind His existence and His agency are clearly discoverable from the things which He hath made. There is the Saviour too, who once dwelt with men on earth, but hath now ascended to the right hand of His Father in heaven, and of whom believers can only speak here as of one "whom not having seen, they love." There is the Holy Spirit, sanctifying the hearts and enlightening the understandings of the faithful; but yet, like the viewless wind, which bloweth where it listeth, discernible only in its operations and effects. There are Angels also, ministering to the heirs of glory; and evil spirits, tempting them in ways which we cannot trace, and by an agency of which we have

no perception. And there are the all-important realities of a future life, to which more particularly the Apostle alludes, both in the preceding and in the following verses,—heaven, with its matchless felicities, and hell with its unutterable miseries,—both alike veiled for the present from mortal eye, though plainly set forth in the oracles of Divine truth as objects of ultimate expectation in the world to come.

These and the like objects are, as I have already said, not the less real for their being unperceived by the senses. To no small extent may the certainty of their existence be established, even by the light of natural reason, while the clearer and fuller light of revelation has still more satisfactorily assured us of their unquestionable reality and of their incomparable importance.

It must be owned, however, that notwithstanding all the certainty and importance which really pertain to them, the mere circumstance of these things being for the present "*not seen*," lessens greatly the practical influence they exert upon us, as often as they are brought into competition with the visible objects by which we are surrounded. These last are constantly present to our view, and pressing themselves unbidden on our attention. No effort is needed to ascertain their reality or to feel their influence. We have but to open our eyes, and we at once behold them. We have but to stretch forth our hand, and they are within our grasp. We have but to follow the natural bent of our carnal minds, and we are thoroughly engrossed with them. The *things invisible and eternal*, when contrasted with these, are thus prevented from gaining from the mass of mankind that serious concern

to which they are pre-eminently entitled. The most weighty matters pertaining to religion, and bearing on the interests and destinies of the immortal soul, are too often regarded with apathy and indifference, while the veriest trifles and vanities of the passing hour arrest the fullest attention, and excite the keenest interest. The "things which are seen" thus become to most persons the only things which they deem it worth their while to "look at." These form the grand aim and object of all their doings, till to attain and to enjoy them is the sole end for which they live; and though *such a life* is found again and again to be fraught with no real or permanent satisfaction, but, on the contrary, to be frequently productive of the most wretched mortifications and disappointments, yet is there no remission on that account of the energy and zeal with which the mass of mankind devote themselves to it. And, in the all-absorbing interest with which secular schemes and occupations are thus pursued, need it be wondered at, that the great truths and animating promises of religion, as having respect to the things which are invisible, are so recklessly and habitually neglected?

There are some persons, however, with whom, happily, it is far otherwise; some who have the eyes of their understanding enlightened to discern the reality, and to appreciate the excellence, of those spiritual objects which others are despising, and of whom it may truly be said, in the Apostle's language, that "*they look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.*"

This statement indeed may appear, on a hasty reading of it, to involve a contradiction. For how

can we possibly “*look*” at “things which are *not seen*” ? The seeming contradiction, however, is easily removed by considering that the act, which is here described as “looking,” is an act not of the *bodily eye*, but of the *mind*, by which the great realities of the spiritual world are believingly recognised and earnestly regarded. We are told of Moses, that he “feared not the wrath of the King, because he endured *as seeing Him who is invisible* ;” that is to say, the power and grace of the invisible God were manifested to his mind with somewhat of the same force and vividness, as if he had actually beheld them, so as to bear him up in the endurance of those outward trials to which he was exposed. And what indeed is the description of Faith which has been so plainly given, and so beautifully illustrated, in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, but just a counterpart of the statement in the text ? “Faith,” we are there told, “is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” In other words, it is the confident anticipation of things yet future as if they were already possessed, and the realising persuasion of things unseen, as if they were actually present to our inspection. This Faith is to the believer *instead* of sight. It brings the unseen objects of revelation with clear and convincing certainty before the mind’s eye, and places the future blessings of revelation presently, as it were, and substantially, within the mind’s grasp. It is not that indolent acquiescence in revealed truths, which multitudes are accustomed to admit without being in any way practically influenced by it ; but a lively, steady, heart-impressing persuasion of them, which keeps them habitually

present to the thoughts, and secures for them their proper and prevailing power over the conduct. And thus may it truly be said of the sincere Christian, that "he walks by faith and not by sight,"—that "the life which he now lives in the body is a life of faith,"—or, as in the text, that "he looks not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen."

This statement of the Apostle implies, with reference to "the things that are not seen," much more than a mere *conviction of their existence*, however lively and sincere. It implies also an earnest and steadfast *contemplation* of them,—a turning of the thoughts to them—a fixing of the affections on them—and a bending of our aims and efforts to the attainment of them. The word here translated "look at" (*σκοπούντων*) is in other passages translated by the expressions *take heed, mark, consider, or observe attentively*, and sometimes it means to *aim at or pursue*. Indeed, as has been observed, our English word "scope" is derived from it, which signifies the *general drift or purpose* of a man's conduct,—the *mark he aims at, or the end he has in view*. When Christians, therefore, are said to "look at the things which are not seen," the meaning evidently is, that they *look at these things with earnest attention, with eager desire, with steady contemplation*, "as the marksman looks at the target which he seeks to hit, or the racer looks at the goal which he is striving to reach." But St Paul, when thus speaking, does not mean that a believer is *utterly regardless* of the visible things which are surrounding him. So long as he continues in the world, the business of his calling, the interests of his family, the duties of his

station, and other secular matters, have claims upon him, which cannot be overlooked,—claims which necessarily must, and actually do, demand from him a considerable portion of his time and of his attention. But these are not the things at which *emphatically* he can be said to “look.” For they are not the *main objects* for which he is habitually living,—the centre of his most earnest wishes,—the aim of his highest efforts and aspirations. He has other and far nobler ends to prosecute than any which this world is able to propose to him. The God with whom he has to do—the Christ who came to save him when lost—the judgment-day on which he must be ready to give his account—the glorious inheritance he must seek as his everlasting portion,—these are the main objects for which the Christian concerns himself—the mark at which he aims—the end for which he lives—when he looks “not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.” He “sets his affection on the things which are above, and not on the things that are on the earth.” He “labours, not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life.”

Nor let it be thought that the Christian, when thus acting, is justly chargeable with folly or enthusiasm. His conduct, on the contrary, is marked by the most consummate prudence. For it is of a truth the “good part” that he has chosen. And whatever may be thought of him by other men, he has most solid and satisfactory reasons for all that he does.

There are various grounds on which the believer’s preference of the things unseen to things visible may be justified,—as, for example, their *superior excellence*,

—their *greater suitableness* to his moral and spiritual nature,—or their *higher claims* to his dutiful attention and regard. But to *these* the Apostle makes for the present no allusion. The simple and sole consideration that is suggested by him, is, that “*the things which are seen are temporal,*” while “*the things which are not seen are eternal.*” And truly this ground of preference is of itself sufficient. To a creature who is himself destined to immortality, the *permanence* of the things he is to aim at is one of the most essential of their requisites. No matter what may be their qualifications in *other* respects,—*will they endure?* is a question that must needs be answered. *We* are to last for ever; can as much be said of *them*? If not, then assuredly we cannot and ought not to make them “our being’s end and aim.” If we would worthily sustain our character as immortal creatures we must have something to aspire after, something to live for, that is destined to be as undying as ourselves.

Now, the statement here made, that the “things which are seen are temporal,” is true in the broadest and most absolute sense of the expression. The mightiest of visible objects, as well as the most minute,—those to which we are wont to ascribe the greatest permanence—the towering mountain, the trackless forest, the spacious continent, the unfathomable ocean,—are no less certainly doomed to dissolution than the most fragile and perishable of the creatures that inhabit them. “This great globe itself,” and those countless worlds which shine above us in the firmament, although they may continue for ages to come to be exempt from all appearance of decay,

have yet their appointed period assigned to them, at the close of which they shall assuredly be dissolved by the same almighty *fiat* which called them into existence.

But while it is thus true of all visible objects, even of the most enduring, that they are "temporal," this statement may be emphatically applied to that class of visible things which most of all concern us,—to the scenes and circumstances of our own earthly condition, with which, as closely affecting our personal happiness, we are all apt to be so deeply engrossed. It is matter of common remark, *how* changeable is our earthly state, and *how* insecure and uncertain is our tenure of its most highly-valued and fondly-cherished advantages! Our health may by some insidious malady be undermined; our fortunes by some unforeseen disaster may be ruined; our most promising schemes may be unexpectedly frustrated; our dearest friends may in a moment be snatched away from us by the unrelenting hand of death. So little can we tell how soon or how suddenly we may be deprived of those earthly blessings which hitherto we have been accustomed most fondly to love, and most fixedly to cling to, among "the things which are seen." On the other hand, our sorrows and calamities are no less transient in this world than our blessings. It not unfrequently happens that our worst fears are disappointed as well as our brightest hopes. Events which we are ready to regard as all against us may, notwithstanding, be all concurring for the advancement, not only of our spiritual welfare, but even of our secular prosperity. And though weeping endure for a night, joy may come unexpectedly in the

morning. Our sorrows as well as our joys bear evidence to the transient nature of "the things which are seen."

But of all considerations in reference to this subject, it is, I think, incomparably the most affecting, that the permanence of all visible objects, *with respect to us*, is limited by the term of our own existence. Although they were *ever* so durable in their own nature, they are not, as regards *our* interest in them, or our connection with them, more durable at the most than the period of our life on earth. And what *is* our life? "It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."

Yes, my dear Friends, the time is not far distant—in the case of some of us it may be very near—when "the things that are seen" shall be *to us* as if they were not. The sun may then shine as brightly; the earth may bloom on as richly; the busy crowds of men may still follow their accustomed courses of occupation or enjoyment as unweariedly; but for *us* there will then be no portion in anything that is here below. Our cares, and toils, and hopes, and fears, and joys, and griefs, shall have been for ever ended. The grave shall have closed on our ashes; and the very remembrance of us, though cherished for a while by those who were wont to love us, may ere long have utterly perished from off the earth.

Surely *this* reflection, that "the things which are seen are temporal,"—fleeting in themselves, and still more fleeting as regards *our* personal interest in them,—ought to rebuke that dotting infatuation which would choose them as the portion of the soul, and cling to them as if they were capable of ministering to its solid

and permanent satisfaction. We ought unquestionably to build our happiness on something more durable than that which the events of a few days may overthrow. It is not easy to conceive a sadder spectacle than that of a creature formed for immortality confining his aims and efforts to the acquisition of such perishing pleasures and possessions as the world can give him, and utterly neglectful of those weighty matters which tend to his everlasting welfare in the life to come.

For be it remembered that while "the things which are seen are *temporal*," "the things which are not seen are *eternal*." Yes; we have some better things provided for us—some nobler objects to aim at and to live for—than the sphere of sense and time is able to supply. We have the invisible God to look to as our sure portion, though heart and flesh be ready to fail us; and He is for ever the same, without variableness or shadow of turning. We have the blessed Jesus to trust in as our Saviour, of whom, though now we see Him not, we are yet assured that "He liveth to make intercession for us," and that He is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." We have as our sanctifier that Eternal Spirit whom the Lord hath given to abide with us continually, and whose gracious influences are able to support us in all the most trying vicissitudes of this mortal state, and to comfort us in the endurance of its severest afflictions. And as our ultimate destiny in the life to come, we have, if we are true Christians, a blessedness awaiting us greater than tongue can describe or heart conceive. The inheritance we are taught to look for is "incorruptible," our crown "unfading," our kingdom "im-

movable," our habitation "a building of God eternal in the heavens," our portion a "fulness of joy" at God's right hand for ever.

If these things be so, what more need be urged to show the incomparably stronger claims to our regard possessed by "the things which are not seen" than by those which are seen? *Eternity* is of such importance that it gives infinite weight to what might else be insignificant. Even a small degree of happiness or of misery, if it were to last for ever, must, in the estimation of every rational being, be held to exceed the very greatest degree that is destined soon, and perhaps suddenly, to come to an end. But when it is considered that *eternity* in the present instance is combined with other interests equally transcendent,—the joys which await us in a future world being as exalted in their nature as they are permanent in their continuance,—we can have no hesitation in admitting that the Christian's is the wisest, or rather the only wise course, when he "looks," as the main scope and object of his being, "not at the things which are seen and temporal, but at the things which are not seen and eternal."

And mark, I beseech you, *how blessed are the consequences* with which this course of action is attended. St Paul tells us in the context of some of its results, as exemplified in his own personal experience. It reconciled him to the endurance of the severest hardships. It led him to consider all the sufferings and persecutions with which he had been visited as only a *light* and *momentary* affliction. It enabled him so patiently to bear them, and at the same time so profitably to improve them, as to render them, under

Divine grace, instrumental in working out for him “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” And such, in all cases, will be its result. A steady contemplation of the “things which are not seen” will sweeten the bitterest cup, and lighten the heaviest burden, and teach us to “reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” And while it will thus reconcile us to our afflictions, it will no less effectually arm us for the resistance of all the allurements and temptations which now encompass us. The pleasures of the world will be powerless to entice us, or its riches to bribe us, or its honours to dazzle us, when we bear in mind that they are fleeting and contemptible, and look beyond them to those purer pleasures, and more precious riches, and far brighter honours, which shall form our everlasting portion in the life to come. “Having respect to the recompense of the reward,” we shall learn to *esteem all earthly considerations* as less than nothing and vanity in comparison with it; and “knowing that we have in heaven a better and more enduring substance” than any which this world is able to supply, we shall take meekly every loss, and bear patiently every trial, and brave cheerfully every danger, and resist sternly every temptation, and discharge faithfully every duty, and make it our constant study and endeavour, by growing in grace and in godliness from day to day, to render alike clear our title to possess, and our meetness to partake of, the inheritance of the saints.

And now, my dear Friends, let me ask you, in conclusion, how stands the case in this respect with *you*?

Which of the two classes of objects we have been considering receives the chief portion of *your* interest and regard? Are you living for time or living for eternity? Are you seeking as your chief portion the things above or the things below? Is earth, with its fleeting pleasures and possessions, or heaven, with its endless glories and felicities, the grand object on which *your* desires have been fixed, and to which *your* aims and efforts are directed?

Are there some among you who cannot sincerely adopt the Apostle's language,—some, on the contrary, whose hearts witness against them, that “the things which are seen and temporal” are engrossing them, to the utter exclusion of all serious concern respecting the “things which are not seen and eternal”? All such we would most affectionately admonish of the wretched and fatal delusion that is possessing them, while we pray for them that God of His great mercy would deliver them from it. Consider, I beseech you, how slight a hold you have of life itself. And as regards all those temporal things with which the frail thread of life alone connects you,—remember to how many unforeseen contingencies they are exposed! how easily you may lose them! how soon and how suddenly *they* might be for ever removed from *you*, or *you* from them! how incapable they are, even for the present, of administering true peace and contentment to your hearts! how powerless to support and comfort you in those trying times of sickness and of sorrow, and of approaching death, when comfort and support are most sought for! But above all, be-think you, how utterly unprofitable is all that the world can hold out to your attainment, in the pros-

pect of that unchangeable and eternal state of bliss or of woe that is awaiting you hereafter! The world may bid high, and promise fair to obtain the full devotion of your hearts. But what can it bid, that is not a thousandfold *outbidden* by the great and precious promises of the Gospel? Believe me, dear Brethren, the time is approaching—to some among you it may soon come—when the vanity of all things temporal, as compared with the infinite importance of things eternal, will be clearly, fully, and convincingly displayed to you. But oh, do not wait until you be thus taught—when, alas! it will be too late—the folly and danger of slighting your eternal interests, for the sake of things that perish in the using. Learn to think *now* of this world and of the world to come, as you *must* at last think of them at the hour of death and on the day of judgment. For of this you may be confident, that whatever will appear to be their relative importance *then*, such is in truth their relative importance *now*. If the world, and all the things that are in the world, will *then* appear to be utterly inconsiderable in comparison with the everlasting welfare of your souls, you may rest thoroughly satisfied that they are so *even now*, and that they would *even now appear* to you to be so, were you capable of seeing them in their true light, and of estimating them according to their real value. Wherefore I pray and beseech you to walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil, and giving heed to those things which belong unto your peace, before they be hid from your eyes. I hope better things of you, however, dear Brethren, and things which ac-

company salvation, though I thus speak. I trust that there are many to be found among you, who are able in some measure to say with the Apostle, that you are "looking not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen," and are cherishing, as *he* did, the constant and constraining conviction, that "the things which are seen are temporal, while the things which are not seen are eternal." If such be the case, the path which you have chosen is worthy of all the diligence and earnestness with which, by the help of God, you can persist in your adherence to it. For surely you cannot be too eager in your desires or too vigorous in your efforts to lay hold on eternal life. With all the attainments you may have already made, there is much more that still remains to be accomplished—much knowledge to be acquired, many graces to be cultivated, and not a few weaknesses and sinful tendencies to be overcome, before you can be warranted to think that your course is finished, your labour ended, and your meetness for the coming glory fully perfected and matured. . .

Nor is it only by diligence in the discharge of duty, that it becomes you to show that you are "walking by faith and not by sight," but also by your meek and patient endurance of affliction. Whatever trials and distresses may befall you, it is your blessed privilege to believe that they are sent in love and fraught with mercy, and to view them as light and but for a moment in comparison with that far exceeding weight of glory, for which they are intended and fitted to prepare you. Leave it to those who are seeking their portion in this life, to be overwhelmed

with despondency and deep dejection, when the sources of their earthly happiness are dried up, and the cherished objects of their earthly affection are taken away. But *you*, who are seeking the things which are above, have sources of peace and comfort still remaining, which none of the calamities of this life can in the least impair. While you do well to mourn, you have no cause to be disconsolate, even for the loss of the dearest friends you had on earth. In truth they are "not lost, but gone before." They have but outstripped you a little on the way to heaven; Christ has only called them home before you. If you truly be partakers of their faith, you shall ere long be restored to their society in a better world, where "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain."

Nay, Brethren, you ought to be all the more strengthened and quickened in your Christian walk by the removal of them. It ought to wean you more thoroughly from a vain world, and to make "the things not seen" all the more attractive to you. For, is it not comforting for the believer to reflect, when one Christian friend is taken from him after another, how his store of friends is just multiplying in the heavenly mansions? "Earth's losses are heaven's gains;" and earth is always thus losing and heaven gaining. For God is ever and anon gathering into His house above, all that is fair and excellent and well beloved of those of whom the world was not worthy. We did well to prize them and love them while they continued with us, as rare jewels, kindly lent us for a season. But let us not repine, now that they are

with equal kindness, though it may be for ends which we cannot fathom, reclaimed and taken from us. They are lost to us on earth, but they are gained for us in heaven, as fresh accessions to that company of friends, who will welcome us ere long into the everlasting habitations. They have left us behind to mourn for them awhile,—but, blessed be God, not to mourn as if without hope. If *our* dwellings be cheerless and desolate in their absence, our Father's house, where they now occupy their appointed mansions, is all the more brightened and cheered to us by their presence *there*. And what if they shall never more return to *us*? Suffice it to know that we, if alike faithful, shall go to *them*. And assuredly, both for us and for them, *that* is far better.

Wherefore, Brethren, comfort one another with these words, that the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, may keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. And unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

THE END.

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