SAVED BY HOPE

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SAVED BY HOPE

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"SEEING DARKLY"

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TO THOSE IN BALTIMORE WHO RECALL HIS MINISTRY; AND TO HIS BELOVED PEOPLE OF CALVARY CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA THIS BOOK OF SERMONS IS DEDICATED. HE WHO PREACHED THEM LIVED HIMSELF BY THE LIGHT HE GAVE TO OTHERS, IN ALL PATIENCE, COURAGE, CHARITY AND HOPE.

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Saved by Hope

A LETTER OF COUNSEL

For thus saith the Lord, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place.
For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and ot of evil, to give you an expected end.—JEREMIAH 29 : 10, 11.

LETTER-WRITING like conversation is an art difficult to bring to excellence; and to achieve an approximate perfection in either, requires a natural gift by no means common. Anyone can carry on a correspondence, but to write Cicero's letters to Atticus, or the letters of Madame de Sévigné to her daughter, or those of Lord Chesterfield to his son, or those of Horace Walpole to some of his distinguished friends, calls for a peculiar talent, a blend of qualities, a vivacity, wit, knowledge of human nature, power and range of observation and description, a happy knack of putting things, all of which rarely meet in the same person. Hence those who are famous either for their conversation or for their epistolary productions, who are classics on these lines, may be numbered without counting very high into figures. Either one of them carried to a pitch

of excellence implies an unusual combination of traits. It is also true that one may succeed to admiration in one of these fine arts, without corresponding proficiency in the other. They do not go in company and are not inseparable. The fact that a person can do one thing well, grounds no presumption that he will be equally proficient even in a kindred study or department. People often make the mistake of assuming that a talented individual is good for anything, and would shine under any circumstance in which he was placed. Like other illusions, this one is likely to be dispelled by trial and experiment. Any kind of excellence is a lofty peak to climb, so toilsome and arduous, indeed, that he who can reach the top, or go near to it, ought to be satisfied, nor ought more to be expected of him.

Now this context reproducing a letter written by Jeremiah to the captives in Babylon is perhaps the oldest composition of the kind that has floated down to us. It might not be true to say that it was the example and prototype of the apostolic epistles written to the primitive churches, yet it is a very ancient document, of which unquestionably the Apostles were aware, and which at any rate furnished a precedent for their letters of instruction, advice and encouragement to the scattered Christian congregations of their age. It is pretty well agreed that a letter is the best vehicle or instrument of communication between persons separated by long distance. It enables one

to be full, explicit, detailed and confidential, and all under the seal of secrecy. To be sure, it may be unsatisfying, by reason of the omission of a material or interesting fact or particular, which the reader would like to know. By telling a part and not the whole, by stopping suddenly short and letting something that excites curiosity or wonder remain unsaid, a letter may be tantalizing and leave the mind in unpleasant suspense; nevertheless, it is obviously the approved and most perfect mode of intercourse yet invented between minds, short of a viva-voce conversation.

The inhabitants of Judah had been deported to Babylon in large numbers on account of their national apostasy from Jehovah the God of Israel. Jeremiah was the great public man of that era, an inspired seer into the future; moreover, a man who had a genius for righteousness and took sorrowfully to heart the fickleness and inconstancy of his countrymen in alternating between Jehovah-worship and idolatry. He foresaw and predicted the downfall of Judah, at the hands of Babylon, which happened about 585 B. C. Such was his own eminence, his personality of such large make and caliber, that the Babylonian conqueror did not carry him into the East, with the élite and flower of the people. The story of that black and dismal time reports that many of the aristocracy, as well as the most godly and zealous for the faith once delivered to the patriarchs, were led in a long, doleful procession by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylonia; but

Jeremiah was not among them. He had his option to stay or go, and he elected to stay. Ezekiel, a young priest, was deported with the others and exercised his ministry in the far, strange land among his homesick compatriots. It may be that Jeremiah, the older prophet, considered that he could render more effectual service by staying with those who were left behind, since Ezekiel, a man of the same spirit with himself and who held the same views, had gone with the other captives. At any rate, he accepted the immunity granted by the great conqueror, preferring to remain in the dear fatherland, although it lay desolate, scarred and empty, the best of its population winnowed out of it and the refuse and sediment alone left. His deep interest, however, in the welfare of the exiles and his definite opinion about their duty under their ignominious and distressing circumstances are clearly evinced by the letter addressed to the elders who were of the Captivity.

As to the event itself, the Babylonian exile is regarded by biblical scholars, and by those who have an eye for the philosophy of history and for the rationale and explanation of things, as being one of the great monuments or stadia in the unfolding of God's providential purpose for the world. Nothing had happened to Israel, since the Exodus, comparable to it for influence upon the future and for its ulterior consequences. It was a pivot upon which great changes hinged. It was a fork of roads and a new departure.

It was a catastrophe that was also a crisis in which an old order culminated and a new one set in. Just as a person sometimes meets with an accident or develops an illness or is overtaken by a sorrow or bereavement which he never really outlives, so, by analogy, the Exile made a radical change in the constitution, temper and prospects of the people of Judah. It engendered new ideas, beliefs, convictions; it made them over in important respects. It was a fierce fire that burned out of them some peccant humors, some bad, poisonous matter: for one thing, they never again returned to idolatry. The remnant who eventually found their way back to Palestine are not reported to have set up the image of any heathen god they had seen in Babylon, nor to have erected an altar to its worship. Moreover, the national consciousness was partly obliterated by the Captivity. Judah was no longer the theocratic state over which the Covenant God jealously watched. He had evidently suffered His people to become tributary to the heathen. Their temple had been profaned and destroyed, its services suspended, its priests unfrocked. The whole Levitical system was prorogued; they could not build a temple in Babylon and perpetuate the outward form of their state church there.

What happened in consequence? Individualism emerged. Religion became, for the captives, a personal matter, a personal relation between God and the individual soul. Instead of being institutional, an organi-

zation, an objective fact or entity, it took on another aspect, a somewhat different definition. It became more of an inwardness. The poor, heart-broken exiles learned by their sorry experience that true religion is not restricted to any one place, to any particular set of forms, to a prescribed ritual; that it is not a solemn office that must be transacted by priests canonically capacitated to do it. They could not think so any longer, now that Jerusalem had been sacked and was a heap, and the temple burned with fire. The stern logic of events drove them out of that position and revolutionized their views. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel preached this doctrine—as appears from the fragmentary reports preserved in the Old Testament—that God was not dealing with them any longer as a political entity, a community or commonwealth, but as individuals. Those great prophets of the Exile period anticipated that prophetic word of Christ spoken to the Samaritan woman: "The hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem worship the Father, but when the true worshippers shall worship Him in spirit and in truth." The conclusion, indeed, of the whole matter is that the fall and Captivity of Judah, the destruction of its national and corporate existence, were a forward step and a long stride toward the Christian idea, under which God deals directly with the individual soul and holds every soul of man to a personal accountability.

This revelation slowly dawned on Judah under the

tuition of the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel during the seventy years of Exile. It was a splendid discovery in religion, as much so as Newton's law of gravitation in physics; it was the dusky dawn of Christianity, a pale gleam of the morning shooting up the sky and proclaiming the coming day. It made an epoch in the religious history, not only of Judah, but of mankind. A great Christian scholar has said that there are no weightier and more critical passages in the Old Testament than the eighteenth and thirty-third chapters of Ezekiel, in which the prophet expounds to the exiles this new doctrine,—new to them,—that God in His providence intended to handle them in their individual capacity, prince and commoner alike: "All souls are Mine, saith the Lord; . . . the oul that sinneth it shall die." It was not any longer a state question, a public question, a corporate matter. They had not been carried captive because the king's government had been untheocratic and had not followed the law of Deuteronomy; but because they personally had connived at prevailing evils they had sinned and they must suffer. This, then, among other things, was what the Exile accomplished for Judah. It pushed the individual man to the center of the stage and made his personal problem the crux. It was not only a political revolution—that was the smaller half—but a religious revolution unwittingly wrought by Nebuchadnezzar when he carried Judah to Babylon.

Notice further one or two particulars in Jeremiah's

letter to the elders and other captives. He counsels them to build houses, contract marriages and behave as if they had gone to stay for an indefinite period. "Seek the peace of the city . . . and pray unto the Lord for it," is his earnest injunction: not altogether what one would expect, considering that it was a land shadowed with the wings of ignorance, superstition and idolatry whither they had gone, and he himself one of their holy prophets who had a burning zeal for monotheism and the glory of Israel's jealous God. Yet this is what he wrote to them, and a sober second thought satisfies us that it was judicious advice. Jeremiah knew by a divine premonition that his countrymen would have to stay in Babylonia for seventy years; that the sons and daughters only of the original captives would eventually become the Restoration. All of them would leave their bones in that foreign land, save a few of those who went thither as very young child en, and who, perchance, by the grace of an unusual longevity, might find their way home again on sticks and crutches and litters, sadly broken and wrinkled with the hard lines of care and sorrow and in the pale decrepitude of old age. Most of them, the majority, should make up their minds that they had found their last home on earth and should, *ex animo*, adopt Babylon as their permanent residence and identify themselves with it. They should become naturalized, as we say; throw their heart into its busy, manifold life and adjust themselves to its strange,

bizarre civilization, its customs, conventions and manners; their submission being subject, however, to their religious convictions; these they must not abjure or compromise. For substance Jeremiah counseled them not to be peevish sullen, irreconcilable, but to settle down quietly beneath the iron scepter of necessity; to be good citizens peaceful, orderly, law-abiding; to conserve all they ound established in Babylon that was a matter of indifference and not vital to religious faith, rather than to be an insurgent, incendiary and troublesome element of the population. "The better you behave," he said virtually, "the more you will be liked and the more likely you will be to prosper." I call it sensible advice for the exiles.

More than that, it is capable of being generalized into a standing rule, pertinent to all circumstances and conditions of life: the best thing to do is to make the best out of them. If uncongenial and unhappy, let them be ameliorated or cured if possible; but if apparently fixed and unalterable, a providential order, nothing is gained by kicking against the goads, by working one's self into a fever and lett ng one's disabilities and disadvantages eat the heart out of one and unnerve one for any good use. Cheerful submission to the inevitable is surely every man's strength. The important discovery is to find out what is the will of God concerning you: directly this is ascertained you cannot wheel too soon into line with it. So their great prophet told the Captivity to make themselves as

comfortable and happy as was possible in Babylon, not to give needless offense, not to become a storm-center of ferment and disaffection. Observe, this is not a doctrine of supine, passive contentment under a load that can be removed, under hard conditions that can be mitigated. Any hardship, injustice, oppression, that can be challenged to show cause for its being, and whose yoke can be broken and whose cords snapped asunder and thrown away, is certainly amenable to such treatment. It is surely no crime to improve one's worldly condition, if this can be done lawfully. I am not aware that the gospel kills natural desire or discourages self-help and personal initiative, and bids men take what comes indifferently or lie down slavishly under a mass of outrageous imposition and suffering. True, St. Paul enjoined upon the primitive Christians "be content with such things as ye have"; yet it is noteworthy that he did not tell them to condemn or decline better terms could they get them; doubtless he would have been pleased could the poor drudges, mechanics, peddlers, handworkers, wage-earners, hewers of wood and drawers of water, who made up the primitive church, have achieved an independence and freedom from their narrow limitations.

This virtue of contentment is susceptible of being misconceived and ought to be guarded against perversion. Probably it is true to say that a glorious discontent is one of the marks of a great soul. Here, as always, everything depends upon the circum-

stances and peculiarities of the case. A contented attitude of mind is hardly a supernal grace, looks more like moral cowardice in the face of a flagrant evil, a downright wrong, an unnecessary burden that can be lightened or modified or quite abolished. There is such a thing as righteous indignation, and whatever fact or state of facts rouses it and wakes up the dissenting conscience to protest, creates a situation where contentment is a crime, and agitation, antagonism, war to the death, if necessary, are divine duties. The world has only made its brave headway by acting upon this belief. Only so have brazen impostors and cruel tyrants and oppressive governments and imperiums and absolutisms that have lain like lead and adamant upon subject peoples and well-nigh crushed the life out of them, been cast off, and the nightmare of nations been broken. Verily, the caravan of mankind would not yet have got far on its long pilgrimage had it not been for this restless, tumultuous, impatient, active principle of dissatisfaction with fixtures, institutions, traditions, precedents, no longer workable, that had become too burdensome to bear, that restrained freedom of person, of speech, of trade, of contract, and threatened civil and religious liberty. So it is clear that we must guard this virtue of contentment from misconception; evidently it cannot be imposed as a moral commandment and binding obligation, indiscriminately and under all circumstances, for this might encourage injustice, oppression, tyr-

anny, arrogance, selfishness, any intrenched, inveterate abuse of power and wickedness in high places, or it might tend to perpetuate a straitened and impoverished lot which a little exertion, a determined resolve, would soon remedy and remove. Indeed, if we look at it narrowly, discontent appears to have been the mother of invention, of discovery, of progress, of improvement and enlargement. It has pulled the world, from age to age, out of conventional ruts, out of obstinate prejudices and the cake of custom, out of ignorance and obscurantism and the brutality of fact, and the grip of immoral power, and the slaveries of different kinds that have shut up men's souls and bodies in prison and riveted them as by "the wedges of Vulcan." Oh! yes; man's dissatisfaction with what is, has always, we may believe, been a vivid dynamic, that has shaken the foundations and toppled the towers of many a fortress of pride and refuge of lies since the world began. But while this is so, it is necessary to draw a distinction, and to this effect: that the main thing to ascertain in any matter is the will of God, and to rest in that as a finality. That discontent which spurs us on to effort and makes every present seem ineffectual and mayhap insupportable, compared to the bright ideals of the imagination, is well enough and quite legitimate if it run parallel with the lines of divine purpose; otherwise it is time and labor lost. Man's ambitions and desires are boundless, endless; everything good and beautiful and attractive

solicits him, excites cupidity and disturbs his equilibrium; but the real question is, Can he get the coveted object, the glittering prize, lawfully; will heaven smile upon his effort and adventure; are the stars and the angels and the broad currents of the universe on his side? This is what everyone needs to find out. In other words, one's duty and happiness alike, consist in accepting the providential order when it appears to be absolute, and doing one's best under that rule. Here lies the sphere of contentment; this is what limits it, manifest destiny, the will of God, as declared by events; what is possible and practicable and lawful. See how patriotic, pious Jeremiah applies this principle to the condition of the exiles: "Be industrious," he says, "be diligent, be happy in Babylon, seek the welfare of the great city, contribute to its prosperity; because it is settled in heaven that you must stay there for seventy years." Clearly the teaching is that what everyone needs to do is to discover, in so far as he can, the plan of God for him—what he is to do and to be—and to adjust himself contentedly to that.

The other topic touched upon in this prophetic message to the Captivity respects the ulterior purpose of God which would develop in due time. Speaking for the Most High, Jeremiah adds these wonderful and healing words: "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, . . . thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end." This is characteristic of

Hebrew prophecy, that however dark and stormy and ominous and wreck-laden the cloud it paints, there is always a silver lining to it; a fringe of glory round the big black portent, showing that the sun is shining full behind. Judaism was a religion of hope, it was one long prophecy of better things and a brighter day. This was its prime advantage over the ethnic religions, and this sweet, mellow, optimistic note was taken up by Christianity and is filling the whole earth with its soft music, with its blessed prediction of a coming kingdom of God. See how hopeful Jeremiah is; he advises them that their foreign servitude is an episode in their national existence; they shall return to Palestine and have a chance to retrieve their shattered fortunes. And so, history reports, it actually came to pass. Cyrus put an end to the Babylonian monarchy and Babylon became a subject province under a Persian satrap, and the prophet's forecast was vindicated. And if we are permitted to generalize this comfortable message of the great Jeremiah, then it contains a truth of the first order, and one which the world could not easily spare, to this effect: that behind every particular Providence there is a larger Providence, and that, like the moon, only a segment, or at most a hemisphere, of the vast orb of divine purpose is visible. It is a magnificent thought that no present is ultimate. God is evermore moving out of every present into a wider, more opulent future; His plan for the race of man is slowly maturing and

will be approved by the intelligent universe when it is finished. We must believe that what He said by His prophet, to the men of Judah, is equally true of generic man—of the children of men: that "His thoughts toward them are thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give them an expected end," and that where "sin has abounded, grace will much more abound."

Through all the darkness of time God is working toward light, through all its confusion and disorder toward harmony, through all its sin and misery toward righteousness and peace. Our natural faith in the essential benevolence of the divine nature makes it necessary for us to believe that as to Israel there came a restoration, so also, to this world of man, now exiled from the vision and knowledge of God, there will come a day of restitution and return. It will in some coming age find its way back to God. It cannot be—the religious mind, rational thought, cannot think—that God will suffer sin and wretchedness and drastic disorder to perpetuate themselves on earth to all eternity. They must, in the nature of things, reach their term and expire by limitation. What a splendid, affluent truth this is, what an enrapturing prospect, that God has a secret, so to speak, a great surprise, which He is keeping close; did not tell it all to His prophets; did not tell it even by His Son Jesus Christ, in its fullness; but which, after a while, when the "seventy years" are accomplished, when the centuries are told and the time is ripe, will suddenly break and

empty its cornucopia upon the world! This high prospect is our anchor of hope amid gloom and storm. The universe is at the core good and making for good. The divine idea for man is perfect and flawless, and sin and suffering will fade "like a cloud-speck from the azure" as the great ages move onward and God's thoughts become more legible.

Nor is it a straining of the prophet's language to say that, as individuals, those things of which we complain as irreconcilable with the eternal goodness of God, will yet by a wondrous and skillful strategy be turned to the ultimate advantage and advancement of all who accept them in a filial and religious spirit. God will interpret the mystery of your earthly experience, howsoever baffling and inexplicable it may be. There be many, an innumerable multitude, who are unhappy, bewildered, distracted, anxious, hopeless; they are not what they would be or where they would be. The only recourse for such is this truth that came to the captives in Babylon. There is a larger Providence behind the particular one; there is a wider view than the pinhole view that we take of the world and life and time. In the last resolution of the matter, we must cast ourselves upon the heart of God. We must believe that His thoughts concerning us are good and not evil, and that He who gave us His Son, shall with Him also freely give us all things.

GOD'S HOPE

For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope.—ROMANS 8 : 20.

NATURE, both the earth and man, the whole terrestrial system, animate and inanimate, lies in a state of imperfection and disability: this is Paul's meaning, probably, in saying that "the creature was made subject to vanity." And the proposition is unquestionably true. It is also true to say, as he does, that this came about without the consent of man or nature. Nature certainly has no moral will or intelligence and was not consulted. Nature is a system of laws and uniformities that appear to act mechanically, propelled by some original impulse or energy. No one blames the nature of things for being what it is; it is not held responsible for any blemishes or faults which the observer thinks he detects. A naturalist may say that he could have made a more economical earth where there would be less waste and more general satisfaction, which is very likely, from his point of view. And St. Paul himself indirectly admits that he could conceive a more perfect order of nature, abstractly considered, but not on the broad controlling principle that he ascribes to the Creator—

hope. Certainly, we can imagine that its Architect might have bowled our planet into space, complete at a stroke, and left it to spin along its orbit a fairy palace of light and music and intoxicating odors, a place of orchards and vineyards and enchanting landscapes and flashing fountains, with nothing to offend the most fastidious taste; but what room would have been left for hope in such a system of arrangements? There is relative perfection as well as ideal and absolute perfection, and relative to the great, underlying conception or category of hope, nature may be perfect; whereas absolutely considered it may be manifestly imperfect. Paul certainly allows this premise, that we are living in an incomplete state, and one open to criticism and complaint, judged by even the highest human standards: it is "subject to vanity." And this is obviously true. The explorer goes abroad and reports, upon his return, strange tidings. He tells that he found morasses undrained, volcanoes spouting flame and lava, swampy jungles, boggy acres, desolate steppes, lands of ice and avalanche, of arctic night where vegetation dies and man dwindles. Tropical belts also he reports, where sun and rain waste their strength in rearing rank, gigantic growths, and man, overpowered by his surroundings, grows timid and lazy and superstitious, and cannot thrive or build up a civilization. Besides, he tells of huge beasts ramping and bellowing through fair garden spots, of malarial regions and arid lands that can get no irrigation, of

cataracts plunging and thundering down abysmal deeps and breaking in foam and spray upon nothing, turning no water wheel, running no machinery, fertilizing no meadow, unutilized, unseen by the eye of man, just enjoying their own frolic and roar in solitude. Of a thousand acorns, one becomes an oak; the rest are trampled by oxen or crunched by swine or rotted by rains. There are soils not arable, climates not salubrious, lands that lie locked in polar snow or scorched by equatorial heat. Surely Paul is right—subject to vanity is written large over the planet.

Mankind reminds one of some poor family huddled into one or two rooms; certain narrow zones only are eligible or greatly desirable. The civilized races have settled the temperate and genial parts of the earth, but there are vast outlying areas where the ax of the pioneer has not yet penetrated, and where the white man cannot be comfortable and contented by reason of frost or heat or some inimical influence. It so happens that in the fairest sections of the globe, where the bloom and verdure break forth most profusely, where the groves are filled with the song of birds, and their splendid plumage flames afar, where sunsets are unspeakable and nature puts on her beautiful garments, you will not find man at his best estate, because the environment is not such as to contribute to his perfection. It is quite obvious, as Paul broadly hints, that God did not intend, judging by appearances, to launch a world that should stand high and dry above

objection; that could not be criticized or amended; a world in which there should be no waste of power, of light, of fuel, of water, of room, and no tendency to decay and destruction. And the reason assigned is that the divine idea involves the element of time and the principle of hope. It has taken shape and substance through the lapse of ages and has not yet reached its full orb and amplitude. Moreover, it seems true to say that each successive platform of progress already reached is vanity compared to the plenitude and glory of God's thought gradually unfolding before the intelligent creation. The age of the reptile, of the fish, of pachyderm and monster, the age of iceberg and glacier, the age of carbon and coal formations, the time when trees and plants and luxuriant flora had it their own way, all these were vanity—a low stage, compared to the type of life for which they were the preparation. Over the fog and ferment, over the slow risings and submergings of lands, and all the increasing stages of advance, brooded a divine hope, patient and inexhaustible, waiting until a creature would step forth upon the scene who would be able partially, at least, to "justify the ways of God" and to see some good provisional reason for all the muddle and misery of a pre-Adamite world.

If this has been historically the course of things, if the earth has ripened slowly through ascending phases, instead of rolling forth from the hand of Omnipotence tapestried and upholstered as we find it, it is easy to see

how the whole process has been conducted under the power of an eternal hope; that thus, in this slow, secular manner, the disposition and purpose of God could be best exhibited to intelligent moral creatures. For, according to Christianity, this is the fundamental question: How can God reveal Himself most surely to mankind? Can this end be accomplished by making the earth a wide, easy hammock, swinging loose in the breeze? Shall man be rocked in the sunlight and balmy air, like a high-born infant in an imperial cradle? Shall the earth be a trough to feed his animal appetite, or shall it be a school for the training of a moral will and for the instruction of an intellect that may eventually come to an apprehension of God? And St. Paul seems to say that God chose the latter alternative. He said virtually: "I will not create a set of ideally perfect conditions; I will not seal up all sources of pain, of trouble and toil and danger; I will not gather out the stones and prepare a road for the incoming race. I will come at this consummation gradually, I will commit the blossoming of My purpose to time, I will wait and hope." Not the quickest, shortest route it is true, if the idea was to realize immediate results; but incomparably the best, if the moral education of a creature capable of divinity and of "thinking God's thoughts after Him" was in question. And so, in fact, the human family found almost everything waiting to be done, and in this way, room was made for patience, for skill, for constructive im-

agination, for sustained effort and industry and for moral qualities.

We can interpret the whole front of bristling difficulties and hardships which nature opposes to man under this rubric or conception of hope, which Paul declares underlies the universe, or as much of it as we know. It is a grand picture he sketches—that back of all the dispensations of time lay hope, as the great, broad undercurrent, the primal impulse and energy by which the earth and its cargo and contents were carried fo ward through revolving cycles until man was reached, who could, at least, dimly understand and trace the process and expound the situation. We can see that this gradualism was the wisest policy. A scene like this is not altogether what we would like it to be; it is not wholly adapted to gratify our indolence, our appetite, our selfish instinct; but it abounds in provocations to effort, temptations to virtue and opportunities for experiment and trial. It is a scene that obviously makes room for hope. Hence there is nothing incredible or unscriptural in the thought that vast periods elapsed before the crust of the earth was cool enough for the tender foot of man, provided we add the complementary clause that this subjection to vanity was not an end in itself, not a finality, but a stage in a great progress, a degree on a vast scale, and all done under hope and in anticipation of something better. I call this one of Paul's most splendid, affluent ideas, that God has been

steadily working, so to speak, toward human perfection, through dateless ages and through all the chaotic disorder of time, sustained by hope. It obviously has been the divine method, not to finish anything at a stroke, not to project any great creation outright and suddenly, but to approach it by ascending steps, bit by bit, here a little and there a little, throwing out hints and types and adumbrations, and so advancing by slow yet sure stages toward the complete embodiment of His idea. The history of our globe seems to teach that such has been God's treatment of it; His characteristic has been to move from less to more, from the imperfect to the perfect, from darkness toward light, from fins and wings to the human arm and hand. It has not been His plan to bring in and set up any final, finished form, all at once. On the contrary, there have been antecedents, anticipations, antitypal rudiments of the thing, partial realizations pointing toward the rounded whole and accomplished fact: this has been the way of God in nature. It has been "made subject to vanity," because each lower form, stratum, stage, dispensation of the world is vanity, compared to that which is higher, more complex and complete. Hence it comes to pass that the spectacle of the globe is one of continuous struggle toward loftier levels, higher categories of existence, more perfect creatures and more glorious realizations.

This word "creature" in the text may be given a wide comprehension. It includes man and beast, as

well as nature; and means that all alike were subjected to imperfection and discontent, not of their own accord but for moral reasons of sufficient weight. Quite true, we do not know what the brute is capable of; at present he is not a hopeful case, nor susceptible apparently of great improvement. He seems to move in a circle; he is certainly "subject to vanity," and that not with his own consent. But does St. Paul intend to say that, after all, the animal tribes below man are in a promising condition? Very likely; the term creature or creation is large and loose and widely inclusive. At any rate it is not easy to ascertain what collateral effects would be produced by a regeneration of the human heart and of human society. A wave of righteousness and morality that would lift the rational creature man, might quite conceivably carry the whole sentient creation higher up as an incidental effect. Isaiah foresaw a day when the wolf would dwell with the lamb and the leopard lie down with the kid; and if anyone say this is metaphor, oriental imagery, he might find it as difficult to defend this view as one who would insist that Isaiah predicted a literal fact yet to be realized. Certainly, Apostle Paul employs here a broad general term, the creation, the creature; he does not particularize, but leaves it vague and indeterminate; simply saying that all that lies under observation, the total phenomenon, the entire cosmical process, this mundane economy, is on trial, so to speak, waiting for a verdict, waiting to see what

can be done for it, into what it may grow, and what higher conditions it may realize.

But if the lower levels of life and nature fall within the scope of Paul's vision, much more and chiefly does it contemplate mankind. For man is the most significant creature on earth; nor can there be any doubt that he is subject to vanity. He awakes to self-consciousness without having been consulted, without his assent or the slightest reference to his wishes; he does not bring himself hither and he will not take himself hence. Moreover, upon arriving at the stage of reflection, he discovers that he is in an estate of pain, unrest, anxiety, hardship, and daily threatened with dissolution and death. True, there are offsets, rebates, compensatory advantages connected with his earthly condition; nevertheless he perceives the force and appositeness of Paul's statement that he came into these present temporal relations without the choice of his will. For, unquestionably, there are fixtures of this world he would not allow to stand if he had his way. There is much indeed with which he has no quarrel,—possessions, sources of enjoyment and profit which he would let stand, since they contribute to his pleasure and increase his self-importance; but now and again comes a death's-head at the table, there is a skeleton in the closet, the slime of the serpent is found trailed across the flower beds; the knell of a departing hope, the bursting of a gay bubble, the wreck of a name or of a fortune, the

blighting of a great affection, the irrevocable loss of something one would dearly love to keep—such common experiences as these cause life to be a subjection to vanity. Man did not choose this world to make his great experiment here; he came by natural law, which is the expression of the supreme will. And as he grows in age and stature and in experience, he realizes that he is subject to circumstances and stifling limitations of which he cannot quite see the final end and purpose. There are so many passages in mortal life of which we fail to catch the meaning and object that they may aptly be described as under vanity; for a thing is vain when one cannot see the use of it, the practical ultimate toward which it tends and which explains and justifies it. Your feeble constitution and poor health; the hereditary taint or tendency that handicaps you; your failure in business; your prodigal son; your inability to make headway in the world; the hedging up of your path, so that you have not been able to do the things you would, or to arrive where you want to be; your private griefs, disappointments, heartaches—all the toil and tragedy of life,—what are these but a subjection to vanity, and that unwillingly? Does not every pilgrim through nature experience a personal history of which he cannot see the bearing and ultimate reason? Would not everyone say, in a sober hour, that his way through the world has not been of his choosing, and if he should live it over again, he would want to arrange beforehand,

and definitely, for certain rejections and exclusions. Paul is certainly right; God does not ask men to make a better scene than that actually provided; but simply to accept it and do the best with the accommodations and opportunities furnished. It is at this point that human accountability sets in. One's birthplace, parentage, physical constitution, his land and age, his traditions and antecedents, of all kinds—for these he is not responsible; high above the range of his choices certain finalities were settled forever, and had back of them the irresistible might of the universe, which is only another name for the omnipotent will of God. By whatever name—Calvinistic, agnostic, scientific—you choose to call it, man is provided for and handled, up to a given point. He is treated as an infant, a minor, who has no right to speak or to be heard. Thus, he opens his eyes in Patagonia instead of in England; he is endowed with intellectual power of high order, or is of low, sluggish mentality; he starts out on his life journey with a full outfit, or like a threadbare tramp with all his worldly goods in a wallet hanging on his back. He is born into these external conditions, he did not deliberately choose them. The elements of his life have been concocted in the great crucible of divine Providence, and he has not had the mixing and blending and balancing of them. All this is notorious. St. Paul's dictum is correct. We catch hold of the mighty levers of the universe, not by their handles, but lower down; the origins and

reasons of things are hidden in darkness. God did not stoop to my soul and whisper, "Where shall I put you? What location in time and space do you prefer? Will you dwell among antediluvians or postdiluvians? among ancients or moderns?" Ah, no; this has never been the way of God with man; for each generation, for each individual, it is now or never. Our part is to use what is provided and to ask no questions; for of how many hard, stubborn facts may we speak this word of Paul, "not willingly." "I did not choose this"; "I came in after this was decided"; "I did not agree to this arrangement." It is quite evident that there is "a power, not ourselves," that makes tremendous assumptions on our behalf. But we are encouraged to believe that there is something more and better coming; there is a larger, more comprehensive fact that roofs all others in; the creature was made subject to vanity "in hope"; that thus, in this way, the finest results might be reached. Paul believed in the primal apostasy; but, in this sentence, he does not look backward, but ahead; he sees "light at evening," he beholds the sun going down amid a pomp of crimson banners, he says that God has hope for man. What a bold figure it is! What an intensely human way of representing a supernatural truth! It seems to mean that God has been conducting through ages a long and tedious process; waiting, watching, hoping that human nature would prove fit to live and reign in a divine, immortal kingdom. And there is good reason

to think that this hope will not be disappointed, inasmuch as it is God's hope. This is one of the great, prolific ideas of the Christian revelation, that God is waiting for men. What an immense, unspeakable thought it is, that crowned and glorified saints may issue out of the brittle clay of humanity! Do not disappoint God's hope for you by apathy and unbelief. Do nothing that will make God despair of you.

OUR BROTHER

If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?—I JOHN 4 : 20.

HERE and there one finds a statement or proposition in the Bible which does not appear self-evident, and in which the conclusion does not follow necessarily from the premise. In such cases one needs to introduce a principle or law that will reduce the autonomy or seeming contradiction and make acceptable sense out of the sentence. Taken at its surface meaning, it may not commend itself immediately to the understanding, but underneath there lurks a central and vital truth that harmonizes and binds up into a unity the discordant members. This pronouncement made by St. John partakes of this character. It does not seem to follow logically and of rigorous necessity that a man who loves God must also love his brother man, because there lies an infinite difference between the divine perfections of God and the human imperfections of finite man. At first glance, it is quite conceivable that the soul might be drawn out in admiration and worship and moral sympathy toward the image of supreme Excellence, while it is exercised by

no such feeling in the presence of defective human nature, which, for the most part, stands at an immeasurable distance from the divine character. Even although St. John meant not generic man—not man as such—but a Christian brother, still his declaration would seem to be too sweeping, for even good men in the evangelical sense often exhibit traits and characteristics that are far from amiable and attractive. It is clear that some distinction or explanatory clause must be applied in order to clear up the apparent contrariety between the text and our experience, for it certainly seems possible to love God without thereby committing one's self to the love of man. Nevertheless St. John affirms boldly: "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" But that is exactly the difficulty; we see so much, too much, of "the brother"; *i. e.*, of human nature and its limitations, imperfections, perversity, selfishness, unreasonableness. Our intimate knowledge of it seriously qualifies our kind feeling for it, whereas the invisible God is the sum of all spiritual perfections. In other words, there does not seem to be any standard of comparison between God and man, no common measure, no arguing from the one to the other. Yet it is not likely that St. John would be so categorical and decided if he had not seen that the two clauses of his proposition held together and that there was no radical incompati-

bility between them. Underneath the seeming conflict he sees a peaceful solution and a philosophical principle which will simplify the issue and adjust the difference. So bold and absolute a statement must have had fundamental granite to rest upon.

In order to get at this and exhibit the truth which the passage really enshrines, it is important to inquire as to the nature of this love of man here enjoined under such tremendous sanction. And it is material to remember that love is a word which, like other words of a spiritual content, has no uniform, determinate meaning; it means differently according to the capacity and sensibility of the individual who uses it. It is not a common form having a fixed significance; it is a metempirical or metaphysical word, and hence somewhat vague and capable of degrees. Thus it is correct to say that an epicure loves savory food; it is also correct to say that a good son loves his mother and a patriot his country. But the love is of a different kind or quality in each case. There is no hard and fast definition of it, save that it is of an emotional character, a matter of feeling and not purely of intellect. Moreover, as between human beings, this is an affection capable of discrimination. There is the love of simple benevolence, the love of man as man, what is called humanity. Higher up the scale is the love of congeniality, of complacency, of character, of some virtue or congeries of virtues which makes their appeal to one's nature as beautiful,

attractive, irresistible. This phase of the affection is what draws souls together as by a magnet, and founds friendships and clamps kindred minds with bands of steel. They may be totally different in most respects, yet in each there is a nameless, potent charm which captivates the other. This is a singular fact of our constitution, that we may love a person of whom we do not altogether approve, to all whose opinions we do not subscribe, whose conduct we would not imitate in every particular. The affinity cannot be defined or described; it is strictly anonymous, but constraining and mighty.

Observe further that love is a state of feeling or an attitude of the soul that cannot be commanded and is not subject to the will. It does not spring up in obedience to a behest of the conscience. You cannot love either a person or a duty or a calling, or even an animal, because you wish to do so, or think that you ought to do so, and reproach yourself because you do not feel as you should in relation to the particular object; love is an affection which, if it exist at all, must well up like water that cannot be pent, but bubbles and spouts out of hidden springs.

It is obvious, then, by this analysis that the love of man is not easy; indeed, requires to be carefully defined and delimited. If, as matter of fact, this faculty or sentiment of the soul is a potentiality that must be roused and kindled by an appropriate object that makes an irresistible appeal to it, then evidently

human nature in the mass cannot satisfy this condition. You cannot love your race, the whole family of man, in that high, supreme, peculiar sense in which you love individuals whose character and attributes and personal charm directly and inevitably set up a relation of sympathy and mutual understanding betwixt you and them. What then shall we do with St. John's sentence? How is it true that if "one love not the brother whom he hath seen, he cannot love God whom he hath not seen"? At first hearing, it sounds like a *non sequitur*, a conclusion not implicit in the premise. Yet it is not so if we take a broad, comprehensive view of the subject and consider it philosophically. For, in a large way, and thinking in large units, the Apostle's proposition amounts to this: that all sound morality rests upon the basis of religion, and that anything purporting to be religion which does not issue in just, kind, humane, honorable treatment of one's fellow-man is false and counterfeit. True religion unquestionably determines one's attitude and relation toward the world and everything and everybody in it; so that from this higher standpoint St. John is undoubtedly right in his contention that "if a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar." His pronouncement is practically equivalent to that of St. James, "faith without works is dead." This is a matter of the first importance, that morality assumes religion, is really predicated upon it, and that true religion infallibly issues in moral conduct as its

expression and outward sign. A really religious man cannot live in this vast, intricate plexus of personalities, or system of persons and things, and their complicated relations without taking serious account of his environment. For the world is one of the chief ways by which we reach the idea of God, and it is the only place, thus far, where man has had a field and opportunity to glorify Him. This world of humanity is a thought of God. You cannot expel religious ideas and make anything intelligible out of it.

Quite a debate has arisen, and a collision of contrary opinions, as to whether morality is possible without religion; there is no question as to whether vital religion can exist without morality—this is generally conceded to be strictly impossible. But it is alleged that one can discharge all duties and fulfill all righteousness in respect to one's fellow-men, that one can be honest, just, considerate, generous, faithful and true without implying any conviction as to God and the unseen and eternal. One can stand in a right relation to man while occupying a wrong relation to God. Now, this very widespread and popular view seems to be negated by St. John's definition in the text. Taking the larger and profounder conception of this world and its ultimate meaning, it is impossible to deal with man in a right and adequate spirit unless we believe him to be a child of God, a creature who has personality and may have a splendid destiny. Certainly one can be civil, pay his debts, meet natural expectations, be

fair in his dealings, a good citizen, a good neighbor, without being a transcendentalist in any sense of the word. And unquestionably there is a great multitude whose lives are irreproachable and a pattern for imitation yet who are ready to make no deliverance touching religion, and confess their agnosticism in reference to it. This indubitable fact leads to the inference that there is no necessary connection between morality, which concerns itself with men's relations and obligations toward one another, and the specifically religious experience which deals with the divine Being and enters into communion with Him, implores His favor, contemplates His character and seeks His fellowship. Nevertheless, as the text hints, a deeper and wider view of the vexed question tends to set up suspense of judgment and modify this plausible opinion. It is undoubtedly true that men can get along in this world and prosper materially without reference to God and His requirements or to any alleged self-manifestation He has made to mankind. At the same time, when we come to look at the matter carefully, critically, St. John's position in regard to it gathers formidable strength: "He who loveth not his brother whom he hath seen cannot love God whom he hath not seen." Why not? Because, after all is said and done, man implies God, this world is a garment or manifesto of God, time is only a fraction of eternity, life means moral accountability and points toward judgment-to-come; this world is

only the segment of a vast, infinite system whose dome sweeps out of sight, and of which we merely see the foundations. We must take a comprehensive, synoptic view of things; we must go behind and below the temporal, tangible and conventional, and strike the ground of existence, and trace this terrestrial ball and all it contains and carries, and its strange, chaotic history, to its unseen source and cause. Everything depends upon one's definition and standpoint, and St. John is evidently looking down upon man and this secular process, called the world, from the high sanctuary of religion. His contention for substance is this: that man is a spiritual being who has a capacity for the knowledge and enjoyment of God. He belongs to God's universal family of intelligent and progressive natures; he was made a little lower than the angels—even although he may seem to have fallen far from that ideal altitude—and if you would transact with him as he deserves and as his case demands, it must be under the religious definition of him. If you believe in God, you must also believe in the higher possibilities of man; if you love God, the Fountain of life and the sum of all perfections, or desire to love Him, you must love man also; not for what he actually is, but because of his origin, lineage, sonship to God—a relationship not yet explicit and openly acknowledged and perfectly evident, but implicit, latent and undeveloped compared to what may be. In this sense and with this understanding I think it is true to say

that the best morality involves and necessitates religious belief and feeling. Or, as St. John puts it broadly, "if any man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar."

You perceive there is considerable to be said for that paradoxical position, owing to the fact that battered and defaced as man is in many specimens of him, by virtue of personality, he becomes, in a real sense, a partaker of the divine life. Although planted in nature, he stands above nature, because of his mysterious constitution, and requires to be considered accordingly. There can be little doubt that men are often treated as though they belonged to the brute kingdom or to the world of inanimate things. In practice this mystical, solemn fact of personality is often overlooked, and men are regarded as tools, hands, for promoting the interest or pleasure of their fellows. This conduct is as damaging to those who practice it as it is to the helpless, unhappy victims subjected to ignominy or insolence. Take even a hard, coarse, inferior nature and address such a one or transact with him in a gentle, generous, humane spirit, and directly he will respond to it; he will instantly recognize it as a tone or strain to which his ear is not used, something uncommon, unearthly about it, and a fine, deep instinct within him will rise to meet it. This is the meaning of the Hebrew proverb, "A soft answer turneth away wrath." No one can compute the change that would set in upon human society, if

men would approach each other and deal one with another under the second great commandment: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." It would be like sunrise on a stormy sea; for every man has a secret chamber that can be unlocked by the key of kindness, by good will, by the practical recognition of the fact that he has personality. Moreover, is this not also true, that although the love of God comes first, is the first article in the Decalogue, yet, as a matter of fact, we can only climb up to the idea of God by means of man and through our knowledge of him? He is an image of the divine, a sort of shekinah, in which deity dwells. At any rate man is, at last, even with all his backwardness and blemishes, the major premise in the argument for the being and nature of God; this much is generally conceded. And it goes to fortify St. John's position, for how shall we know what it means to love God, if we do not understand what it is to love man?

Logically then, and with fine propriety, the Apostle lays it down, with a dogmatic emphasis, "he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, cannot love God whom he hath not seen." The fact is, he cannot so much as reach the idea of the invisible God, the Soul of souls, the infinite Person, save through the medium of humanity. And this is a cogent argument for the Incarnation, which, according to Paul's definition, is, God manifest in flesh. The first great commandment, the love of God, would

hardly seem to be even possible, if we did not know and experience the love of kind, the love of the human heart for father, mother, child, human friend—the love of man. Religious thinkers have well drawn attention to this distinction. True enough, the world is filled with odious people, in a most unattractive, deplorable condition—ignorant, vicious, mean, contemptible; this is the appearance, and it strictly forbids the love of complacency or of congeniality or companionship. But even so, this is not the whole case. Man at his lowest and meanest is still not an utterly negligible and despicable being. If Christ's opinion about him is correct, he has fine possibilities and may have a great future; and this mystical germ, element, principle, potentiality, is what we have got to look at, what we have got to remember and treat with consideration, with a certain reserve and deference as a thing that has intrinsic worth and dignity.

Surely this must have been what Jesus intended in proclaiming the fatherhood of God, that men are His children, and as such capable of receiving of His fullness. Much of Christ's time was taken up in showing that He was not ashamed of men and women even when they had sunk down into rags, disease and dilapidation, both physical and moral. Now, it is not likely that He loved these outcast, disheveled people, the refuse and sediment of Judea, with the love of complacency. Naturally He and they were not congenial companions; they were separated by a whole

diameter and dwelt in different worlds. Despite this disparity He consorted with them, until He became a scandal to the optimates and élite of Jewish society. The reason of it is to be found in that great saying of His, "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" He above all the sons of time had the perception to estimate the infinite worth of human nature, could it only be extricated from the coils in which it is caught. This, I take it, was why He loved man, not for what he is, but for what he may become, under favorable auspices and influences. We cannot understand by what spiritual analysis Jesus reached this conclusion. To our common and cursory glance, human nature as a whole does not present a beautiful or hopeful spectacle. Our intuitions are not penetrating and do not go deep enough to seize the ultimate truth about the human spirit. But the luminous insight of Jesus pierced below the crust of untoward appearances. Beneath the rags and squalor, behind the infallible signs of a dissolute and undisciplined life, under all the rough, outer rind, He saw essential and enduring worth. And so, looking out upon the motley crowd of broken, woebegone, vagabond humanity that surged around Him, He cried, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden." It was because He saw that in their measure and to a degree they too might become sons of God and heirs of eternal life. Amid the dust and débris and shavings of human

nature He caught the gleam of a priceless pearl. This is the way to love men and to help them. The service of man, about which so much is said and written in this our age, is no substitute for religion. On the contrary, it needs to be buttressed and supported by religious certainties. Whatever you do for your world, in whatever way you help a forlorn or needy brother, in whatsoever form you give yourself to the service of man, remember well that he is the pilgrim of the universe, and moving on with you to a day of reckoning. No other creature we know of is traveling the same road or is on so long a journey. Try to look upon men as having essential value, eternal value, unspeakable value for God. He sent Christ to declare this message and confirmed it by His cross and Resurrection.

MICAH AND HIS LEVITE

Then said Micah, Now know I that the Lord will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest.—JUDGES 17 : 13.

THIS chapter, and its story of Micah and his Levite, opens a casement of light into the disjointed times of the Jewish judges. Society was apparently in an unhinged and unhappy condition; insecurity and private feuds prevailed; each man redressed his own wrongs; a crude, tumultuous, anomalous state of things weltered on every hand. The ordinances of religion reflected the secular side of life and partook of the same contradictory character. Thus, the context introduces the reader into the country of Ephraim, one of the most fruitful sections of Palestine. A woman and her son Micah with his household dwelt there among the hills, and it occurred to them to use some of their means to set up a private religious establishment, and install images to represent the God of Israel and to facilitate his worship. They had, besides "teraphim," small images—answering to the tutelary household gods of the heathen—whose function it was to procure good fortune to the family. It is not necessary to suppose that they added to these any of the idol-gods of Canaan—Baal or Ashtaroth—but undoubtedly they

seem to have felt the need of a visible symbol of the unseen and eternal God, who had appeared to Moses at Sinai. Micah's neighbors also frequented his chapel, finding it convenient to visit a local sanctuary: for although Shiloh, where the Ark of the Covenant stood from the days of Joshua, was not far distant, many doubtless felt it irksome and a hardship to take the journey thither. Perhaps this was one of the reasons that prevailed upon Micah to start a service of his own and to set up a shrine. At any rate, the incident shows that religion and its observances were in a somewhat chaotic and cloudy state; nothing, in this respect, was yet definitely and authoritatively settled. The Jerusalem temple was far away in the future, and although the Ark, that sacred chest, in which the tables of the Law had been deposited, was near by at Shiloh, covered with a purple mantle, and reminding the people of an heroic age—of the marches of their forefathers through the sea and the desert and across Jordan—nevertheless, there appears to have been no compulsion of duty, and no Levitical law, commanding them to attend and present themselves before that venerable piece of furniture, redolent of glorious, heart-stirring memories. Consequently Micah, the man of Ephraim, upon his own responsibility built his chapel among the hills, whither not only he, and his household, but also his friends and neighbors resorted to pay their homage to God, to inquire His will in their perplexities and dis-

couragements, and to get such spiritual satisfaction as might be forthcoming. But Micah directly began to feel the need of a priest or some celebrant of sacred offices: some person must be found to conduct properly and reverently the forms of divine worship, and to ascertain, if possible, the mind of the Most High in any hard matter or casuistical question. So the pious man bethinks himself of one of his own sons to supply this felt want; probably he had one well fitted, in his judgment, to fill the mystical office. Without thought for the moment of any doctrine of "Aaronic succession" or imposition of holy hands to this young man, he constitutes him master of religious ceremonies and has an ephod or short cape made as his official dress.

It all goes to show the unripe, irregular state of society and that religion and its worship had not yet culminated in any established order, imposed by authority and enforced by sanctions. Had this been the case, Micah, it is to be presumed, would not have had recourse to such a hasty, homemade arrangement for the satisfaction of his devotional instincts. He realized that he must give expression to these, he would not live a wholly secular life without any recognition of the Jehovah of Sinai and the Exodus, and this was the best he could do, ordain one of his sons to the sacred ministry. But it transpires in the sequel that he was not quite at ease in his mind; the young man had no other consecration than he could give him, no

higher authority than he could confer, and this did not seem to Micah sufficient; he craved something more, was enough of a high-churchman, as the modern phrase runs, to desire the services of some one who belonged to the ecclesiastical order or caste, a lineal descendant of Aaron or a Levite. A person of this description and pedigree he thought would better comport with the dignity and sacredness of the calling into which he had inducted his son, for lack of a better candidate. And, fortunately, such a one appeared on the scene, a Levite straying through the hill country of Ephraim, seeking employment, encountered Micah in his suspense and unsatisfied frame of mind. Doubtless it looked to him like a veritable providential event, a heavenly vision to which he must not be disobedient; for he quickly unfrocked his son, and covenanted with the Levite for ten shekels annually, beside clothing and board.

By the terms of the Levitical revelation, the Levites had no territorial allotment, except that forty-eight cities in different parts of Canaan were set apart for their use, and they were entitled to one-tenth of the produce of the soil. Those cities were likely their base of operations and rendezvous, but they wandered through the length and breadth of the land, staying or moving on according to circumstances, and acting as tutors, pedagogues, private chaplains, advisers, or in similar useful capacities. Under the monarchy, it appears, they took their turn as porters,

police, vergers, musicians, in and about the temple; in fact, their occupations seem to have undergone considerable change in process of time, as is the case with all callings and professions of men. It is clear to every reader of the Book of Judges that neither the civil nor church life of the times was settled; people made shift to live as they could and patched up temporary and provisional adjustments to answer the exigency. Deliverers, dictators, captains, arose when a crisis and deadlock of some sort occurred, to do what Alexander did with the knot—cut it. What time invasion or disturbance threatened, some man or woman, an individual of extraordinary faculty, vigor and dispatchfulness, would come to the agitated surface of society and act as the case called for, most often in a whirlwind fashion and without asking leave. The nation of Israel had not reached the securer forms that came in with the kings. Pillage, high-handed outrage, highway assault and robbery, private war and retaliation, were the order of that stormy era, and men administered justice and dealt revenge according to opportunity and power.

The times were dark and boisterous; still the candle of the Lord had not been quite blown out—was burning or smoking here and there in Israel. This Micah of Mount Ephraim had genuine religious instincts and evidently believed in an overruling Power and in a supernatural world. Rather than have no priest, no official ecclesiastic, he would as a temporary expedient create

one outright. In fact, the priest, or mediator of sacred mysteries, has been from the first a permanent fixture in the world; the artisan, the trader, the physician, the lawgiver has not been esteemed more necessary than he who was thought to transact between man and the invisible God by symbolic acts and ritual observances; nor has the time yet come when the human heart can dispense with religious signs and symbolism, either gross and grotesque, or refined and appropriate. Some person, posture, object, that reminds men of an unseen sphere, and flings over them the shadow of its silence, has seemed to be a permanent need of human nature and gives no sign of waning. Fear, curiosity, wonder, speculation, reverence, hope, the moral affections and sentiments, are strong motive powers in man, and out of them, or at their impulse, have grown temples and altars, rituals, priesthoods, sacred vestments, sacred seasons and the dim cathedral gloom of mediæval Christendom. All these things have come about to symbolize and satisfy the religious feeling, that grave suspicion in the human heart that behind the seen and temporal lies a prodigious mystery, that "the riddle of the painful earth" is a real thing, and that there are more things in heaven and earth than man dreams of. Out of the soul of Micah we see leaping this world-old instinct as soon as a genuine Levite comes straying through the mountains. He directly demands his credentials: the Levite replies that he

comes last from Bethlehem in the tribe of Judah, and is looking out for a place; whereupon Micah professes his satisfaction in the man's story, disrobes his son and installs the Levite, who stood in a direct line of descent from the font of authority. It is all quite true to human nature.

Commercial enterprise has taken the room of old patriarchal and nomadic customs; the ten silver shekels given to the Levite annually would not now suffice for one week's board and lodging; the great world has cast those early pastoral simplicities, as the insect its shell when the vital functions have completed its organization: a dim antiquity intervenes between us and those far-off days in Palestine;—yet for all that, the priest, the prophet, the minister in holy and mystical things, still stands erect in the world, still holds his ground, has not been expelled, his part is not yet played: not by reason of his own personal ability, character or merit, not because he is necessarily holier than other men, and more sagacious, not because he actually knows any more about God and unknown realms and the gateway of eternity than others do, or has been called out from the crowd by a voice or a vision, or by some indicative, infallible sign to exercise his office, but simply because the religious sentiment or presentiment is still alive and smolders on deep in man's heart, flashing and crackling now and then and mounting up into white heat under the provocation of somewhat unusual and mysterious, or formidable

and alarming. The human family has not been able to dispense with signs and miracles thus far; that is, things which stand as tokens and reminders of a higher dispensation than this present mundane one.

All subsequent centuries have substantially agreed with Micah: they have called for a Levite, a priest, an altar, a sacrament, a sermon; some object, some exercise, some person standing in relation to that infinite mystery which enwraps man's life on earth. Organized religion has burnt very dim at times; but has always flashed up again and tricked its beams afresh and got oil and fuel even out of its hollows of depression. There be many who say that it will be outgrown and superseded after awhile, in some coming illuminated age, by the advent of universal education, by science, by art, by a skeptical leaven and the spirit of inquiry, or by some yet undefined, undiscovered gospel of human improvement; but if so, this will be a new thing under the sun; it has not been the history of the past. The institutions of religion have often been depressed to the lowest term; they have been flouted and trampled under foot; they have been discounted and disgraced by their alliance with superstition, credulity and cruelty; they have been turned into engines of torture and have discouraged and retarded the advance of the human intellect, the study of nature and the knowledge of those laws necessary to emancipate men from ignorance and fear

and squalor and misery. That which was in dark ages called religion has confessedly done immense mischief, has inflicted awful sufferings and punished as criminal and damnable intellectual opinions which have turned out to be absolute truth and have long since become undisputed axioms. A bad theology has done a great deal of damage in the world and made havoc of human happiness. And yet, although these somber facts are perfectly familiar, organized religion has survived them, has not suffered sensibly on account of them; its empire has not been curtailed or impaired, it is still erect and ebullient, it seems to possess an inextinguishable vitality. Like the tossing sea it rises and falls, ebbs and flows, sometimes running dark and high, sometimes flashing and rippling along the shore. It seems that one might as well think to keep the ocean and its tides out as to destroy the religious idea and hope. The world consents thus far, with Micah of Mount Ephraim, that the Levite supplies a want, is a necessary fixture, is worth his ten silver shekels, would be missed if he were to drop out, stands for something deep, mystical, solemn, which men would better remember and not forget.

Observe, further, the sense of security betrayed by Micah in view of his successful venture. Upon concluding the bargain with the Levite, he soliloquizes, "Now know I that the Lord will do me good." He congratulates himself, having secured the services of

an efficient person; this he believes will put him in a more hopeful condition before God and go far to procure the divine approbation. What shall we say of Micah's logic? This depends largely upon his definition of good. If he meant that because he had hired a Levite to pontificate for him, to officiate at sacrifices and other holy offices, to instruct his household, to read prayers, to do what a Levite could canonically do, that therefore his barn would be full, his cattle fat and sleek, his crops prompt and plentiful, his vintage ripe and luscious, and his goods in peace—if this was his definition of good, his logic was faulty, the inference did not necessarily follow from the premises, as the melancholy event proved; for the Danites came later and carried away his property and his Levite.

Evidently there was a flaw in his reasoning if he thought that high secular prosperity must follow in the wake of spiritual sentiments and religious exercises. This is one of the skeptic-making facts of human experience. There appears to be no strict causal tie between piety and plenty. Vile men prosper in this world and holy men fail. Vice is clothed in purple and virtue in rags; it is a familiar sight, and perhaps as much as anything, makes many think there is no God. Religion, however, lies on a separate plane, has its own ends and uses and its own rewards, and these are not of the economic and terrestrial kind.

But Micah's affirmation does hint at a general truth, worthy of all acceptation, that they who honor God and live with reference to His will, He will eventually honor. This is surely a valid inference and a true attitude of mind, a seaworthy principle amid the storm of time to which men may tie and trust. Whoever sincerely desires to make the will of God his will, who holds his ear alert and his conscience quick and responsive and his soul open and hospitable to any heavenly vision or intimation that may come to him, that man has reason to believe that God will not be unmindful of him, that somewhen and somewhere he shall be openly recognized and receive the seal of his faith and fidelity. Broadly considered, the reasoning of this man of Ephraim was correct: "If I honor God, He will honor me; if I follow my best light, I shall not lose my way." This is a prime argument in favor of the immortality of goodness, of spiritual excellence, that it is too divine, too much like God, to perish. Hence it is lawful to say with Micah, if this was part of his meaning, "I know that God is with those who fear Him, who do Him reverence and obey His commandments."

But Micah's observation on procuring the Levite may mean that he relied too much upon this acquisition; in other words, that he substituted formalism and ceremonial righteousness, an external, perfunctory performance, for genuine conviction and real interest.

This mechanical theory has crept into all religions more or less and empties them of reality and power. It is the soul of idolatrous forms; it got into Judaism and has invaded Christianity. When Jesus came into Judea He was scandalized by it. He saw that it had overlaid the higher ethical element and intent of the law, and had issued in a laborious trifling about insignificant matters. He denounced the church leaders of His day for carrying on such a wretched parody of divine things, and called them hypocrites; by which He did not necessarily mean that they were dishonest, insincere persons, acting a feigned part of set purpose, playing a shrewd game on the credulity of the ignorant; although something like this is what the name hypocrite imports. In its accepted sense, a hypocrite is one who puts on the appearance of what he is not without the reality of the thing, and conscious he has not got it, seeks industriously to create by his language and manner and general bearing a false impression. Now, commentators are not unanimous that this was Christ's indictment of the Pharisees. For it may be that they believed heartily in the value and efficacy of their pious parades and performances, in their casuistry and moral philosophy and microscopic refinements and punctilios. It is not certain that their phylacteries and other gear were a cloak for mean or base designs; probably the vice lay deeper —in their very conceptions of true religion. Their

view of it was essentially formal and false. They were, it may be, sincere in their beliefs, but what they believed was a lie. Their religion was a painted shell, a mask and mockery of the true. It was a religion that permitted them to do wrong under cover of certain idols of the mind, traditions, definitions, dogmas of their own patent and creation. And this is a disease that may be called epidemic; it is a universal tendency of men to put something plausible and imposing in the place of true conviction and holy living and a genuine experience. We try to find an easy groove and conventional rut along which we may roll back and forth and so satisfy the conscience; we seek some invention that will relieve us from reflection, watchfulness, self-examination, self-control and a constant endeavor after a new and higher obedience; anything to save care and trouble, self-culture, self-denial, vigilance,—this is our quest. It is the core of all superstitious faiths and it has blighted Christianity,—this tendency to rest upon some external fact or fixture or arrangement, such as that one has a Levite and consequently it will go well with him. How many there be who allow themselves to do anything they list, provided only they have a Levite to absolve and cancel it. But this is not the gospel, not the Christian idea. It insists upon the state of the heart, upon truth in the inward parts, upon pure affections and tastes, upon moral dispositions and the spiritual mind. True religion does

not stand in having a Levite; it is nothing outward, ceremonial, mechanical; it is such a faith in eternal things, and in a divine kingdom, as cleanses, controls, commands, fashions our will, orders our conduct, and consecrates our life to the service of God. Nothing short of this can be called a religious conviction; it must have vitality, aim, direction. Have you, then, that for which the Levite, the church, the Sabbath and all sacred symbolisms stand—inward purity and rectitude, faith in God, a hope of eternal life, through Jesus Christ?

THE POWER OF CONSCIENCE

But when Herod heard thereof, he said, It is John, whom I beheaded: he is risen from the dead.—MARK 6 : 16.

HEROD the Great was confirmed king of Judea by Octavius Cæsar about thirty years before the Advent. He was the son of Antipater of Idumea, a country lying south of Palestine, and was somewhat Gentile and cosmopolitan in his tastes and notions. Both by his novelties and cruelties he gave offense to the Jews and was out of sympathy with them in several respects. Judea was a sunny, fat, fertile land and one of the most desirable of the provincial governments. By making favor with Octavius, Herod the Great managed to acquire and keep power in Judea, for he was a clever and supple as well as an unscrupulous, greedy man; it made little difference to him who reigned at Rome, provided he held office in Judea. He died about the time that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and his government was subdivided among his four sons, who reproduced his moral image. They were not men easily disturbed by the proddings of conscience or restrained by considerations of gratitude, decency and honor. They belonged to that large class of mind that believes pretty much what it is expedient to believe, for the time being, and whose

convictions and course are as unstable as the weather. Personal aggrandizement and pocket-prudence are the lamps which guide the feet of such men as Herod and his sons. The physiological law of heredity got well illustrated in this family. Among his other exploits Herod Antipas persuaded the wife of his half brother Herod Philip to marry him; but as he was already married to the daughter of Aretas—a kinglet in Arabia—this arrangement naturally produced an ugly complication; a war, in short, was waged by Aretas upon the perfidious Antipas to avenge the divorce and disgrace of his daughter. Nor was this all, for the base conduct of Antipas provoked the trenchant rebuke of John the Baptist, which resulted in the subsequent decapitation of that intrepid and just man.

It appears clear that the Herodian family had been cradled in an atmosphere of chicane and degrading sensuality; they were men of coarse passions and despotic temper; but corrupt and conscienceless as Herod was, he could enter speculatively and imaginatively into religious themes. The New Testament states that he listened often to John and always with a curious interest. The questions that emerged in the Jews' religion were not unfamiliar to him, and although he was no Moses for meekness, no Daniel for integrity and no Joseph for virtue, yet he had heard of them all, and had some preparation to enter intelligently into the issues and interests that were fermenting in that troubled age of dawning Christianity. Bad as Herod

was, he could appreciate earnestness, courage and fidelity and knew a great man when he saw him, which probably was not often. The record supports this view; it reads thus: "Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and kept him safe. And when he heard him he was much perplexed and heard him gladly." This is high praise for a preacher, and the more so, coming from a man like Herod Antipas. It means that he was both interested and pushed upon inquiry. There was evidently a mysterious, mighty property in John's make-up that somehow wrought upon the guilty tetrarch; made him feel, perchance, that it is not the whole of life to live; set up in him for a season good resolves and earnest aims; rebuked his avarice, lust, cunning, cruelty, craft and all his sordid principles and immoral laxities, and aroused his conscience, seared by self-indulgence and physical excitements. Indeed so profound was the impression made upon Herod by the personality and preaching of John that he never really forgot him, and as soon as he heard rumors of Jesus of Nazareth and the stir he was making in the Jewish world, he said within himself—and audibly, too, in the presence of his courtiers: "Ah! this surely is John. That stern, uncompromising, upright, downright, tremendous man has returned upon us clad in his camel-skin; he has come back to castigate our vices, to expose the pretentious shams and pompous fooleries that pass under the name of religion; he has come to baptize the penitent, to curb the insolence of

publicans and soldiers and to preach his doctrine of an impending Messianic kingdom. This is John risen from the dead!" exclaimed Herod. Surely an odd theory to account for the facts, and one quite untenable in our day. That a man whose execution he had himself ordered had come to life,—this was a singular explanation of the activity and fame of Jesus of Nazareth. Nevertheless, it appears to have been Herod's supposition and sober belief.

Speculatively, at least, Herod probably held the traditions and tenets of Jewish theology. Many a man whose life is far from correct accepts intellectually the doctrines of religion. They do not practically control him, but he assents to them in theory rather than to their opposites. He will say that he believes in a personal and holy God, in heavens and hells, in the immortality of some souls, at least, in the divinity of Christ, and in the Bible as containing an authoritative revelation from the Supreme Being. It would not be fair to set down every bad life, like that of Herod, as being necessarily the product of an atheistical temper. Multitudes of men in Christendom are models of outward decorum who yet have no faith in supernatural religion or even in the bare possibility of such a thing, whilst there be others who are blotched by vice and hurried along by tempestuous passions, who have a very decided and obstinate opinion in favor of Christianity. You can never judge with absolute certainty by what appears on the

surface. It is difficult, in this matter, to draw a hard and fast line that may not be obliterated by some exception. Look at Herod Antipas, a colossal criminal who wrought iniquity with greediness, the spawn of a profligate parentage, and yet this bold, bad man arrives at a solemn hour wherein the old, buried doctrines of resurrection and immortality begin to stir and rumble and wax warm and finally take shape and break forth, and he pronounces Jesus to be John risen from among the dead! There is no reason to suppose that he was not honest and did not mean to be taken literally; or that his utterance was a hyperbole of rhetoric and licensed figure of speech. I interpret it rather as a capital instance of the vitality of religious ideas. He must have had such. Somehow they had got foothold within him. They were in that Jewish air, he had imbibed and assimilated them, and suddenly he is confronted by a crisis which nothing will explain save a religious doctrine. This is the only key he can find to the situation, and behold the guilty man begins to talk about the resurrection of John from the dead. An abject bit of superstitious credulity, we say, and yet superstition is only the excess of a religious truth or hope. I cite it as an effective illustration of the fact that men are prone to take to religion in the last resort. There is a cry out of the deeps of human nature for some certitude beyond present possession. With all the sunlight that floods the earth, the moonlight and the starlight, thick darkness encompasses man's steps,

and when our frail, ignorant, timid nature reaches certain turns or nodes of experience, when the sky darkens and storms lower, and the earth heaves and the lights go out, and the clouds fly low and leaden and the trees shed their leaves untimely,—then instinctively we rise to truths higher and diviner than those which concern this mechanical world. There come seasons in every man's career when he grows serious and reflective, the current of ordinary thinking is broken up into eddies and rapids, he is arrested by some epochal event, startled by a strange providence, led up to an emphatic occasion, confronted by a sudden emergency for which he has no resource, overtaken by a sorrow, a duty, a responsibility, a crisis; a state of things, in short, supervenes for which he finds no explanation in the natural order, and in view of which he can get no aid and comfort out of natural laws and probabilities. Instinctively man then flies to the thought of a higher control and of eternal Providence. Ordinarily we move on through life without any conscious, deliberate recognition of religious truths. But now and then there comes a cataract, an abrupt break that shivers our apathy and induces serious reflection. A handwriting starts out upon the wall, there is "the sound of a going in the tops of the . . . trees," something unusual, solemn, suggestive, alarming intrudes itself into our humdrum routinary lives and calls a halt; we begin to think about God, Eternity, the winding up of mortal things, a possible life beyond the grave, the necessity

of repentance, vigilance, preparation, of setting our house in order and the expiry of our stewardship. All this sometimes happens. It is as when Herod on hearing the fame of Jesus exclaimed, "This is John risen from the dead."

Again this remarkable incident indicates indirectly the influence of great men. Thomas Carlyle remarks in his "Heroes" that "universal history—the history of what man has accomplished in this world—is, at bottom, the history of the great men who have worked here." He had a boundless admiration for those executives, pioneers, captains, and thinkers who stood on the hinge of affairs and directed them. Unquestionably great men have had their function, have left a mark upon their age, have voiced the popular unrest and discontent, and have uttered the word or done the deed which others would like to have uttered or done but could not. Their force has not been interred with their bones, but has survived their natural life. And even although they may have been born out of due time and so undervalued and disrated in their day, yet if their character was sincere and their work genuine, they have lived after their setting, and have "flamed again in the morning sky." Great men do not lose much by death. It rather conceals their foibles and consecrates their virtues. Once in a while a human spirit gets tabernacled here in time who has somewhat to say or to do, relevant to the circumstances and general condition of things, an indi-

vidual of keen and rapid insights, of indomitable will, of unabashed courage, of incorruptible integrity, a strong, safe, luminous, oracular soul, who seems to carry authority and to understand, with a large comprehension, what is wanted and how to supply it. Such a one becomes an unspent inspiration, so that when the world arrives at a crisis that recalls his worth and services, he starts to recollection, takes form and movement and lives again as a rule or referee. Herod, when he heard of Christ's miracles, cried, "This is John." What an unconscious, splendid eulogy it was! Here was a man whose public life covered only one year, and yet in that short space he produced such an impression upon a king, living in scarlet sins, that coarse and heartless as that king was, when another arose treading in the footsteps of the dead prophet, he, in whose ears were still ringing the stern rebukes and trenchant invective of the murdered preacher of righteousness, imagined that he had returned to earth and had come out of the ghostly glimmer of the grave to rebuke him. What a volume of conclusive evidence for John's intrinsic greatness and simple fidelity! It shows that singleness of aim, fearless devotion to principle and moral earnestness are not thrown away, are indeed elemental forces in this world. They who rise above the belt of appetite and self-interest, and self-reference and its urgencies and live along the higher ranges of the soul need no stone nor epitaph. They leave a trailing light of

nebulous splendor to show where they go down; the influences they start flow onward into the future. You must take high ground, if you would effectuate anything, even a little; you must live under the power of convictions that transcend the passing hour; you must be faithful and true, if you would at all survive. Solomon's proverb says that "the name of the wicked shall rot," he has no claim upon the race; but there is vitality in goodness, in high example, in moral courage and consistency, in a pure and holy life. I believe in a higher immortality than this, but this is the mundane side of it. The self-denials, the heroisms, the unselfishness, the gentleness, the generosity, the meekness, patience, humility—all the great spiritual qualities of consecrated characters come up, now and again, in the remembrance of those who knew them; they are cited; they exert a profound, enduring influence. John the Baptist rises from among the dead. Have you not found it so? Do you not often think of one or another who is gone, but who still rules you, affects your decisions, shapes your course, sustains your courage, and hovers around you like a presence?

Mark again that this theory of Herod respecting Jesus illustrates the power of conscience and its function of rebuke. Behold here a significant phenomenon, a torpid conscience galvanized into a flutter of life by the bones of a dead prophet! The existence in man of moral discernment and of the categorical imperative "I ought," is a notable fact. It carries a

strain of prophecy. Discrimination is the ground form of human thought and the first attribute of the mind. First of all we must be able to tell one thing from another; this is the beginning of knowledge and of moral accountability. And in the sphere of moral ideas and issues, discrimination is a notch higher than the general discernment of differences between common things. Some have sought to deduce it from utility as its principal and origin. Utility is that property in an action or thing which tends to increase the benefit, advantage or happiness of the person concerned in it. So that when philosophers undertake to generate the moral sense from the idea of utility, their doctrine is, that the reason why men feel that they ought to do this, and ought not to do that, is because certain acts and courses of conduct in human experience and through long ancestral ages have been found on the whole beneficial to mankind, whereas the opposite courses have, according to average and secular experience, been productive of pain, discomfort and evil, in some shape. Out of this pretty uniform experience, say some ethical thinkers, has grown the moral mind, "the ought and the ought not" of moral philosophy; and so man, in the evolution of ages, got what he calls a conscience. This plausible version does not, however, satisfy all the conditions of the case, in the opinion of other thinkers. Immanuel Kant called instinct the voice of God speaking below the equator of reason and pointing the animal to its

proper end and the preservation of its species. In like manner the unique faculty of conscience in man is, *a fortiori*, the authentic voice of God—the Supreme Good—in the soul, approving or reproving and making man a free, accountable will, not a link in a chain of causation, a puppet on a wire, or a bead on a string. Man is set down here a bundle of powers and passions, and among them the power of choice, and the necessity for choice, amid the motives and materials with which the scene abounds. And this moral power may be stone-dead, comatose, partially instructed, or illuminated, quick and alert. Everything depends upon the use one makes of it. Observe the play of it in Herod. When the right stimulus was applied it rose up and responded with energy; it fluttered with fright and beat wildly like a bird against its cage. But while it acted normally, Herod's was not an enlightened conscience; he erred in the application of a sound principle. No promise is binding, in morals, when the keeping of it would involve a higher criminality than the breach. This distinction would have relieved Herod's embarrassment had he applied it. True, he had made a large, unconditional promise, but Herodias' daughter had no moral right to demand the head of John the Baptist. Herod could easily have evaded the insolent challenge of this woman had he reflected that no promise, no stipulation or contract, can authorize a violation of the fundamental laws of morality. But he lacked either the percep-

tion or the courage to take this ground, probably both—certainly the latter.

Yet, callous and morally incrusted as the tetrarch undoubtedly was, he still was not totally insensible to the twinges of an indignant conscience, not wholly narcotized and incapable of comprehending the true status of affairs. For when he hears of Jesus, he says, "This is John whom I beheaded." What a solemn record it is! Behold the luxurious Herod—a skeptic touching many high truths, a selfish, hard man, whose law was appetite, whose life was shame—awaking suddenly to discover that Almighty God has intrenched in man's nature a law, an oracle, that may issue its decrees irrespective of our convenience or comfort, and break in muffled thunders around the soul. Herodias and her charming daughter, the birthday festival, the flow of wine, the fantastic evolutions of the dance, the inspiration of the music, the military with flashing helmets and nodding plumes, the beauty of the women and the stalwart strength of the men, all the coquetry and repartee, the laughter and frolic, of that giddy rout had faded before his eyes; but when he hears of Jesus, then out of the guilty chambers of memory John the Baptist stalks like a gaunt, formidable specter into his affrighted presence. Is it not a vivid picture? Is it not a wonderful scene? The banquet hall deserted, the echoes of it long died away, the last footfall long departed, the foolish jests and voluminous oaths of the company now forgotten, the

costumes all folded and laid aside, John himself, the intrepid herald of the new era, slain—and yet, behold Herod, the imperial sinner, shaken as with an ague fit, tormented by superstitious forebodings, and declaring as his deliberate opinion that the rugged, righteous prophet of the Jordan had returned to earth, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth! If you would see the power of a bad conscience; if you would know whether in this world men are ever reminded of their sins, call for Herod and ask him how he came to think of John when he heard of Jesus. You may call him a superstitious Jew living in a twilight time, but those words "whom I beheaded" are significant. Not simply "this is John Baptist," but "this is John Baptist *whom I beheaded*." There lies the emphasis. Not Herodias, the prime mover, not her bewitching daughter, but *I*—*I* beheaded him. While one said of the newly risen prophet "He is Elijah," another "Jeremy," and others this or that old Hebrew censor who hurled his caveats and anathemas at the license and corruption of his age; while public rumor had its theory concerning Jesus, Herod Antipas cries, "This is John whom I beheaded, risen from the dead." The truth is, a guilty soul is liable to constant irruptions. Anything may remind us of our sins. The night winds, as they creep from leaf to leaf, seem to rustle with them; the innocent stars in their lofty stations seem to know them; the silent forests, the haps and mishaps of the great world, anything, at any time, may find a tongue and

recall them to us. How true to nature is Herod's experience! The sudden appearance of a young Nazarene preaching with wondrous originality and directness and working strange cures,—this is enough to quicken Herod's memory and arm his conscience. It is the same with all of us. Beware of any folly, imprudence or crooked way. Beware of any act which you cannot approve, for such things have a monstrous longevity. Like the writing of flame on the wall of Belshazzar's palace, the letters glow and burn and start ever afresh into coherence and legibility. We carry within ourselves the odious materials of remorse and retribution. An unseen Hand with magic brush may touch up, at any time, the faded lineaments of long-departed years, and cause them to live anew before our uncomfortable gaze. Remember Herod Antipas!

The death of John Baptist fell in with the supreme purpose and did not delay or frustrate the world's hope. The world and its destiny are safe. The race will slowly ripen. No weapon whetted against eternal Providence can prosper. God rolls on the planets and the ages and they revolve securely around His throne, but we may co-work with Him. We may stand with the kingdom of light as against the kingdom of darkness, with John as against Herod, with Christ as against Mammon.

PETER'S QUESTION

Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.—JOHN 6 : 67, 68.

MORE explicitly than was usual with Him, Jesus publicly announced, one day, the nature of His errand to the world. The language He held offended certain and was the procuring cause of a secession among His adherents. A number, how large is not stated, who had followed Him withdrew, and for a while His popularity seemed shaken. Like almost all great public men and influential minds, Christ experienced in His day, indifference and even desertion, where formerly there had been enthusiastic loyalty and unbounded admiration. It may come early or late, but it is given to few to hold power and influence without a break to the end. All successful workers—in any material or direction—must lay their account with occasional reverses; they may esteem themselves happy if they do not utterly fail. What we call popularity is a quick gourd growing out of the fickle whim and impulse and the passing need of the hour. When the hour passes and the particular hunger is fed, and the reigning fashion makes room for its successor, then that

which satisfied it must depart also. The next delirium that seizes upon the general mind will call for some other treatment—another prophet, a different policy. No one is wise who builds confidently upon such a fluctuating, changeful, stormy element as human prejudice, passion and self-interest. You had better get ready to decrease gracefully and with good humor, for that reverse process may set in, at any day—it is a wind that veers suddenly. It is not solid, thick-ribbed ice you tread on, but a thin, papery crust, full of air holes and uncertainties.

Thus, the Evangelist states that the enthusiasm which Jesus created was wide and deep and moved all Palestine. Nevertheless, it too had its "solution of continuity," and an occasional thaw that threatened to break up the hopes of His friends and to overwhelm His cause. One of these critical moments is reported in the context. Christ had been drawing a parallel between Moses and Himself, and that too, somewhat disparaging to Moses. This, of course, was a bold stroke in the citadel of Judaism. For Moses was the founder of the Hebrew commonwealth; a nimbus girt his brow, he was a colossal figure, a saint, a hero, the greatest name in Israel. But Jesus, in the hearing of the crowd, takes higher ground than Moses stood on, and affirms His own preëxistence, which naturally led some to inquire whether His father's name was not Joseph, and how then He could come from heaven. Furthermore, He reminds them that

their ancestors who ate manna in the desert had been long dead, and that any who would live that life which is life indeed, must eat His flesh and drink His blood. This astounding information also startled the bystanders, who remarked, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" All this, and likely much more, took place in the Capernaum synagogue in the hearing of many who had been temporarily drawn within the circle of Jesus' influence by His originality, charm and strange, potent magnetism, or by that perennial craving in human nature for the loaves and fishes, which His miracle-working power occasionally gratified.

Most probably it was this type of character that was piqued and repelled by Christ's large assumptions. They were not the original college of the twelve disciples, but others, well disposed at first, who, fascinated by the wonderful personality of Jesus, eager to see and hear what He would do and say, carried along in the broad current of the crowd, astonished by His genius and courage, pleased, mayhap, by His tremendous invectives against the pomposity and cant of the Pharisees, waited to see whether He would set up as another Judas Maccabeus, and warrior figure of an heroic era. It is easy to comprehend that if such were their views and ambitions, if they were essentially shallow people, they would be sorely disappointed by a manifesto like this at Capernaum. The world always abounds in

those who do not care to take things seriously, who want to be pleased, to have their sensations fed, their curiosity slaked, their interests promoted, but who instinctively shrink from probing deep into a matter and alight, like the butterfly, on the surface, ready to leave at a moment's warning if the situation gets inconvenient or uncomfortable. Such do not really want to learn, to improve, to correct their faults, to amend their lives, to make religious progress; they merely want excitement, self-gratification, pleasure in some form; so the tide of their loyalty will slacken and become refluent, should anything happen that they do not like and that offends their vanity or self-love. Such, doubtless, was the case of those people who finally forsook Christ. They were not in real sympathy with Him; they had no spiritual sentiment or insight; He was too mystical for their material minds, too contemplative for their impatience. His doctrine about being greater than Moses, and coming out of heaven and from God in a unique sense, and about His flesh as being more nutritious than the historical manna that had body enough in it to carry the old Hebrews to the pasture lands and milch kine of Canaan—all this was not what they wanted to hear, did not suit their tastes; they were chagrined, shocked; their political hopes —if indeed they had a shrewd suspicion that Jesus was the Man of Prophecy—were blighted, and so they quietly withdrew. And it may have been a

deep disappointment to many of them. It is never agreeable to anyone to awaken, as from a dream, and find that a great affection, ideal or hope has faded into the light of common day, that the bread or the apple has turned to ashes in one's mouth: this is never a pleasant experience—albeit a common one. Very often it is safer to make such a discovery in time, but the awakening, the disillusioning process, the melting and thawing season, the crumbling and falling of the idols, the withering of the flowers, the setting of the stars and suns,—this is likely to be dispiriting. Many a one has been unstrung and ruined by it. Many a man has cherished some glittering ambition, and ardent hope, and has come within a handbreadth of it, but, missing it, has disappeared forever. We assent to the general abstract truth that all is vanity, but the actual ascertainment of this certainty in any concrete case lowers vitality and flings a yellow hue over life. For the heart of man lives chiefly by hope, by imagination, and when these fires are damped or drawn and the golden future becomes the leaden present, and our millennium turns out to be a mirage, infested by lantern flies, it requires both fortitude and faith to bury the dead past, and make a fresh and cheerful beginning. Many have not been able to do it, but have sunk down into a world-weary pessimism and skeptical despair. Other things beside revolutions do not go backward. You cannot quench any bright, shining

light and not leave the place darker than before it was kindled. No one of common clay can see his visions of creature-good, in any kind, contract and shrivel without serious thoughts about this system of things amid which he lives. So, it must have been a disheartening process to which those adherents of Jesus were subjected, when in place of affirming their immense expectations and coming forth as a political Messiah and simple Jewish patriot, He fell into mystical, incomprehensible meditations concerning God, His Father, and His own relation to the world. They were deeply disappointed. Nor was He, any longer in their opinion, the man for the national crisis. It is not surprising, considering what flimsy stuff human nature is made of, that they forsook Him.

There are two bonds that hold men together: one is the cohesive property of a common interest, common plunder or booty, the fact that by standing together they can get more and keep more than by standing apart and alone; and the other principle is the law of congeniality, of moral sympathy and mutual understanding. This is the more dignified and honorable motive of the two, because it rests upon moral and not material grounds, it creates lifelong friendships, it often results in sacrifices, self-denials, heroisms, high consecrations to which mercenary and selfish unions are unequal. Individuals, between whom there subsists that nameless thing which we call intellectual or moral sympathy are

held together by a stronger cement than money value, or even blood relationship. It is an instinctive, spontaneous drawing of the soul of one to another; it is a true elective affinity.

This lack of penetration and insight it was which made for alienation between Christ and certain of His earlier admirers. They stood on different planes; their ideas and ambitions were disparate; their remedy for dissolving Judaism was not the same; their eye for proportions and perspective was not His; so that, not being able to account for Him, they gave Him up. The sudden departure of these dissatisfied people cast a passing shadow over the spirit of Jesus. For a moment He seems overtaken by alarm lest their example should be infectious and the whole body of His disciples slip out of His grasp. The human mind occasionally behaves like the brute mind. Just as a drove of cattle, as by an atmospheric or inexplicable influence, is sometimes seized with panic and goes rushing and crashing along over rocks and brush and slough, so, too, bodies of men, parties, communities, whole nations, appear to be bitten at times by a mania, and break out into some folly or fanaticism—an Eastern crusade, a French Revolution, a speculative bubble, or financial or economic heresy—a craze of some sort, that must run its course before sober reason can return and resume. Not a constant, calculable quantity is man, but easily affected and warped by his surroundings.

Hence the rise and reign of transient fashions and the temporary dominance of some ruling idea or custom. The contagion of example is widespread and subtle; man is imitative, fickle, full of envy and emulation, and the most senseless, inconvenient form or ordinance will get a standing, if only society—through its leaders and chief fuglemen—sets the copy. You can no more account for it than for the fright which falls upon a run of stampeding steers. The fever is on and must accomplish its course. The human brain is a delicately hung organ, easily overset, full of vapors and feathers, not broad-based and steady, but liable to be unhinged and fanaticized. This notorious feature of our frail humanity, mayhap, had something to do with the gloom that settled upon Jesus. How deep the canker of disaffection had eaten, and upon whom He could surely count, of this He appears to have been in doubt, for upon the heel of the vanishing malcontents the great Teacher turns to the Twelve with the anxious inquiry, "Will ye also go away?"

It is a moving scene; there is a tenderness, a tear in the voice, a tremor and state of suspense depicted, as though He were really apprehensive lest He should be quite abandoned and left alone. As if He had said, What shall I do, if you all go? You are my choice friends; you did not choose me, I chose you out of all whom I might have selected to stand by me in my great contention: should you leave me,

whither shall I turn? With whom can I share my cares and sorrows and hopes? There is a stroke of pathos here; it was evidently a moment of intense feeling. At the same time, observe the grand and fearless inconsistency of the gospel. Jesus had just said that it was not possible for anyone to receive His doctrine cordially, except he were divinely influenced. "All that the Father giveth me, shall come to me." Yet He descends directly out of that great firmamental principle into the kingdom of second causes and free moral agency, and betrays solicitude lest His mission be wrecked by the defection of the twelve disciples, as if the organization of religion and the eternal purpose of God depended upon the fidelity of Peter, James, John, Bartholomew, Andrew and Thomas. A piece of inconsistency, one would say. Nor does Jesus clear it up; He leaves both statements standing.

The fact is, all great truths lie open to objections. All interests cannot be harmonized. No high doctrine is perfectly bomb-proof and flawless. Truths of the first magnitude, supernatural truths, are too large and voluminous to be crammed within the compass of narrow human definitions and finite experience. They are diffused, dim, nebulous, vaporous, elastic, decline to be poured into molds and vessels and set to stand intact. He who thinks to make all his highest beliefs fit snugly into each other will likely find that there are antinomies he cannot

reduce and contradictions he cannot reconcile, and that much of his line is open to attack; there is a weak and exposed point somewhere at center or circumference or along some diameter. You need not hope to explain all that you believe and feel must be true. It is not worth while. Men can afford to be grandly inconsistent when it touches matters that pertain to God, to the higher reason, to the best hopes of our race. These are huge, transcendent, divine, unspeakable, cannot be stuck like penny candles in our lanterns, cannot be carried without overflow in our shallow pans.

Even Christ was careless about harmonizing fundamental truths; He let their antagonisms stand. At one moment He declares that His cause is absolutely safe, that God is with Him; He leans against the granite of eternity, He has no fear, He will win as many hearts as God wills. The next, He turns, like a dejected, defeated man to His disciples, and inquires anxiously whether they too intend to leave Him: What shall I do, when you have gone? How can I ever replace you? An unreconciled discrepancy, we say; but what of it? The world is not yet finished. It is not yet a rounded system. There is no music of the spheres save what poets feign. Storm, ice, earthquake, tidal waves are still licking the earth into shape and modifying its contour; everywhere are sharp curves, shaggy edges, raveled ends, tangled skeins, dark passages. Unity, symmetry, completeness, are not yet reached.

And this same rough-hewn, inorganic, unfinished aspect of things is impressed upon the Bible and Christianity. In Christ Himself a dualism is apparent. At times He is intensely human, again superlative and superhuman. Now the peculiar affections and liabilities of our common nature assert themselves forcibly in Him; at another time He becomes deep, mystical, unearthly, enigmatical, announces His close relationship with the eternal, feels mysterious flutterings of a divine life within Him, and soars toward the cloud regions of transcendental idealism. It is impossible to expound these contradictions. Doubtless there is a narrow neck and foggy isthmus where the infinite continent joins our human mainland, but no Argo, no brave vessel of discovery and no Columbus has yet set foot or planted flag upon it. We must leave these high metaphysical matters where the Bible leaves them. On the one part, Jesus says, My doctrine will win; its sound will go out into all the earth; it will sanctify souls, as many as God wills. Then, turning to His disciples, He adds: But you must not leave me; you must stand with me and help me. It is a capital illustration of the system of things amid which we live. God is a mind, a will, a person, and has a plan; there is a splendid destiny in store for the earth and man; but, owing to our intellectual limitations, even this certainty seems to be suspended upon conditions. For it is a significant circumstance that while Christ

had boundless faith in the spread and victory of His gospel, He yet vehemently deprecated the loss of His twelve disciples. But if God can raise up children to Abraham out of the stones in the street, why be particular? Why should those identical fishermen be essential to the settlement of religion and the inauguration of the new era?

The discrepancies which emerge in the sphere of religious inquiry are like the inequalities of the globe. This planet is a spheroid notwithstanding the high mountains and the deep basins, the Alps and Andes and Sierras, the Connecticut Valley and Yosemite Valley and all the other valleys and wrinkles in its crust. By parity of reasoning, when men object that one doctrine or precept in religion cancels another, this is not necessarily more true than in the physical constitution of things. We stand too low down—yet awhile—to behold the sweep and sphericity of the system. In the view of God, there are no flat, inexorable contradictions, and not a shadow of inconsistency. There is surely an answer somewhere in the universe for all our intellectual doubts and perplexities.

Turn now to Simon Peter's solution of his Master's painful suspense. The honest, blunt, ingenuous man spoke out in his brave, impulsive manner, assuring Jesus that this was only a back eddy in the stream. His language and tone are very fine; it is one of the noblest of his recorded utterances. He was usually bold and manful and vigorous, and magnificently

so upon this occasion. He saw that this apostasy among the ranks of his former friends had smitten Jesus with a sharp shock of surprise, and the consolation he administered in view of it is notable. He does not merely bid his dejected Lord take heart, does not simply remind Him that this is one of the little casualties that always beset important enterprises, but he throws his soul into an impassioned challenge, flung out at those very people who were flocking from the synagogue in a state of irritation and disgust: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." This was really splendid in Peter: it was a genuine inspiration. It was a word fit to live and has actually lived. It is a word fit to lie at the base of the Christian religion—for all time. He looked upon the conduct of those malcontents as simply absurd: "Where are they going?" he cried. "Are they going back to the synagogue? What good can they get there? What help, strength, impulse, in the dry, tedious explanations of the rabbis?"

Virtually, he puts the question, What will you substitute for the gospel of the Son of God? This is the pith of it, and it is a standing challenge to all comers and to all centuries. It is not hard to destroy, to pluck up, to pull down, to undermine by ridicule, by satire, and by skeptical objections. But when the house is down and dismantled, what next? What and how shall we build? We want a shelter, a roof overhead, a doctrine, a hope, a promise, a prospect,

in view of the dark future that confronts us. Men obliterate creeds, cast miracle and prophecy out of the world, and declare that the young, lusty Samson of modern thought will not be bound by the tattered traditions of antiquity in an age of scientific experiment. They talk about intellectual emancipation; the abolition of intellectual servitude to a set of ideas that originated with an insignificant Semitic tribe who once lived in a corner of the earth: but whither does this new exodus tend? I would know where I shall land before I embark. It is easy to carp and criticise, to deal in shadowy negations; men may demonstrate the absurdity of prayer, the impossibility of miracle, the antecedent unlikelihood of the Incarnation; they may call the Resurrection of Christ a myth; they may account for Isaiah, Ezekiel and the Apocalypse and all moral inspiration upon natural principles: but meantime all this does not feed men. We need something positive, some great spiritual affirmation, a ray of hope, a word of promise, as we stand huddled, frightened, shivering on this sand bank of finite existence. And where shall we get these, outside of the Christian revelation? "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

Simon Peter did not guess it, but he put an argument of incomparable force into the mouth of Christian apology in every age. If you do not want the gospel, what will you have? Some one may say: "Let us have nothing. Whither shall we turn?

Why, let us go no whither; let us be content with our ignorance; let us behave decently, prudently, civilly, and let metaphysics and supernaturalism alone." But this is hardly possible. The religious question will obtrude itself. There are struggling hopes and unutterable groanings, curiosities and conjectures, dim presentiments, serious moods, secret, silent histories of the human heart. Men come to times when they instinctively call out for light to see by and for peace of mind. Religious ideas are the highest we can apprehend; no one is completely human who has not got them and does not sometimes revolve them in thought. All secular interests finally abut on them; all other questions ultimately empty into the question of religion as rivers into the sea. The whole life of man on earth is escorted and over-canopied by religion; it emerges constantly in some shape; occasionally it lifts its tongue of iron and thunder and subdues the soul and makes men feel that all else is empty and vapid. Evermore it pushes to the front and becomes vivid and imperative by some awakening event or personal experience. You will not be able to get out of the way of religion altogether. It will pass near you, it will fling its shadow across your path, you will some time hear its step close behind you, you will become aware of its august presence. It may be a sorrow or a joy, a light or a darkness, a trivial or a significant occurrence, but by some means the great question of religion will confront you. If you have

got a soul fit to be saved, an infinite potentiality, anything fine, deep, earnest, oracular, it cannot but be that, now and then, you will ask of yourself, "Whence do I come?" "Whither do I go?" "What may I hope for?" "Where shall I find authority and satisfaction?" "Where can I build and rest secure?" And these are essentially religious questions. Moreover, there is no answer for them at all comparable to those facts and finalities that make up the Christian gospel.

The word of Simon Peter still stands true. The race has traveled onward nineteen hundred years and picked up divers informations, but has not yet discovered a substitute for the Galilean gospel. It has a peculiar property. It is steeped in mystery and is full of wonder, but it is the best solution of the universe, and of man's life as part of it, that has appeared. There are features of it which raise incredulity, bring on suspense of judgment, offend pride; there are ideas and elements in Christianity which, if pushed to their limit, might land one in fatalism or drive him into fanaticism and superstition. But probably no system of religious thought can be offered to the human mind which is not susceptible of perversion and a false development. The subject matter is of such high, transcendent, indefinable quality, as not to lend itself to adequate expression and easy accommodation to the human understanding. If you insist upon making an intellectual system or

a philosophy out of it, there will be disappointment, for there is much it does not explain. But take it simply as the fragment of a mighty voice from Heaven, God's wish for man, a poor child of sin and sorrow, a belated traveler through nature to eternity, a hireling accomplishing his day, a prisoner without an advocate, an orphan without a friend, a mariner launching on tumbling, treacherous deeps without a polestar; take the gospel as God's way of saving men, by giving them Christ for their faith, imitation, obedience, love; His spirit the law of their life, His cross the symbol of their sin and shame, His Resurrection the pledge of their immortality, and where will you match this thought? "To whom shall we go?"

THE THUNDERS OF HOREB

And they said unto Moses, Speak thou to us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.—EXODUS 20 : 19.

ALARMING phenomena accompanying the giving of the Law—more particularly the Decalogue—were the immediate occasion of this outcry. The book of Deuteronomy refers again to the panic of the people who witnessed the blazing splendors and terrors of the scene and who deprecated loudly a repetition of them. They were ignorant, squalid and superstitious, had just escaped out of Egypt, and were ill-prepared for such a demonstration as that which opened the new career to which divine Providence called them. By lurid signs and portents, by the vibrations of the earthquake, chaotic darkness, rolling thunders, columns of smoke and sheets of flame, Jehovah apprized them of his presence. The theocratic idea was the core of the Hebrew religion, *i. e.*, that Jehovah was their king who had brought them out of the Pharaohnic bondage in Egypt and would conduct their national migration to new lands and send them prosperity, upon condition that they hearken to His voice and worship Him alone. This was primary and fundamental; infidelity to the God

of Sinai was the one unpardonable sin, they must put away all other gods and all images of them and cleave loyally to Jehovah and He would care for them. Here evidently was a new doctrine, a new revelation, a new era, opening upon these people and through them upon the world. The scope and significance of it can only be properly appraised by these modern centuries that have seen Judaism culminating in Christianity, the religion of the Incarnation. And even we, doubtless, do not see all that was involved in the Hebrew Exodus. It will probably exfoliate still further and unfold more meanings than the modern world yet dreams of. The Hebrews had arrived in the peninsula of Sinai before the purpose of the movement was definitely disclosed to them; it was there that this electrical, heart-shaking display took place, and they were set apart and isolated as a peculiar people—a holy nation.

The Red Sea is another name for the Arabian Gulf, which sets into the land from the Indian Ocean and separates between Arabia and Africa. At its northern extremity this sea divides into two arms or branches, between which lies the wild, rugged region of Sinai. Two lofty summits, the one Horeb, the other Sinai, tower up out of the mountainous group or ridge that runs through that section, and of these, Horeb is believed to have been the theater of divine manifestation to the Hebrews. It was convulsed, as the record states, by physical commotions so frightful that the poor, timid people prayed Moses to intercede for

them: "Speak thou to us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die."

Fear, under which they were suffering, is an emotion fundamental to man and of which everyone becomes aware in the course of life. It runs through a progressive scale of degrees, from the anxiety and care that come upon everyone from day to day and the suppressed consciousness that something distressing and disastrous may happen at any time, clear up and along to its extreme manifestation in fright and ungovernable alarm. It is a bank of many keys; it is a susceptibility or emotion that may be aroused by various causes; by ignorance and suspicion, as well as by some imminent peril, formidable shape or situation.

The Hebrews, congregated around Horeb, were both ignorant and superstitious, and consequently in a condition highly favorable to the access of fear. The prodigious forces of nature, the raven-wing of the storm, physical portents, are always alarming even to civilized man; much more to those on a lower level who do not know their origin and character or how to interpret them. By such, they are regarded as the threat of an angry god, ready to break out upon them and consume them, unless placated. There is a large deposit of superstitious feeling in human nature, to which omens, auguries, striking coincidences, dreams, fortuitous events of various kinds, make a powerful appeal. Even the enlightened and cultured

cannot always and altogether cast off the spell and rid themselves of these strong presentiments; though the progress of science has done a great deal to scatter ghostly forces and astrological superstitions and figments and falsities that have benumbed and paralyzed the human mind. Many fears have fled before the waxing light of investigation and research, as blinking owls and night birds retire before the rising sun. Man is, and ever will be, under earthly conditions, a timid animal and easily frightened; nevertheless, he has already laid many specters that in other ages loomed big and black, destroyed his happiness and broke in upon his peace. One great outstanding fear, of course, survives—the fear of death. This is organic and constitutional, stronger in some than in others, but probably strong in all who are sound and sane, because in an eminent degree it is associated with mystery, darkness and the unknown. Did man know as much about it and its sequel—the great beyond—as he does about the nature realm, it probably would not disturb him any more than do the portents which affrighted antiquity. But as our case stands, the human family will have enough to be afraid of, to pray to be delivered from, for an indefinite time to come. Only as the God of Peace draws nearer to our race, and sheds more of His light and love upon the world, will the dispensation of fear pass by into the twilight and be replaced by greater trust, confidence and composure, until at length, when Paul's

fervid vaticination is fulfilled, and death "the last enemy" is destroyed, fear will vanish and man will be happy as a joyous child in his father's house.

Returning to the record, it is clear that the Hebrews at Horeb were frightened to consternation. They had seen great wonders—the sore plagues of Egypt, the passage of the Red Sea; their march, thus far, had been marked by stormy and changeful phenomena; but nothing so sublime, solemn and tremendous had confronted them as the flame and smoke and thunder and seismic shocks that betokened the presence of Jehovah. So they said to Moses, "Do thou speak to us, for we are afraid of God." And in this cry the Hebrews gave voice to a human instinct. They stood for mankind at large in their terror at the supernatural and their clear preference for the ordinary routine and humdrum of daily life. They knew Moses; he was no stranger, but a man of like passions with themselves; they could understand him; he spoke their vernacular, he had all the attributes of their own humanity and was perfectly intelligible and acceptable; but the blaze of Deity, the coruscating portents that played around the summit of Horeb, the equipage of the Almighty rolling heavily through the firmament, the clouds and darkness, these were unwelcome signals,—showed that they stood too close for their comfort and composure to the mystical realm of the unseen and unknown. They much preferred empirical facts to supernatural signs. "Speak thou to us, . . .

but let not God speak with us, lest we die." It was a highly human cry; we feel our brotherhood with those frightened, fugitive Hebrews, on their road to Canaan.

Mystery throws a dark shadow over the soul; human nature shrinks from it instinctively as from something unfamiliar and uncongenial. Man has a sense of the supernatural, by which token he is distinguished from all the sub-kingdoms of sentient life. He believed in earlier ages that the river, the field, the forest, the home and hearth each had its presiding god; he somehow got at the conception of spirit, apart from sensible matter, and of an unseen realm outside of nature, which needed to be taken account of, and prudentially arranged for. The origin of this belief is among the insolubilities, unless we hold that it is the inspiration of the Almighty, one of the signs of man's exceptional, miraculous nature,—that he has within him a principle of eternity that may outlive the ephemeral, evanescent things of time. It is not easy to explain, as philosophers and anthropologists have suggested, how it has come to pass that entire races of men, living on a low intellectual and moral level, have reached the idea of a supernatural system, transcending this material sphere. It would seem that the outside pressure is too great; that the universe is so vast, mystical and solemn that even degraded tribes have been obliged to posit some such conviction in order to satisfy their feeling and account for what exists. But, whatever may have been the origin of this presentiment, it is

well-nigh universal, and, more than that, it becomes big, emotional, oppressive, and strikes gloom and fear into the heart of man upon emphatic occasions and when it becomes a vivid realization. The fact is that man does not desire to have the mechanical routine of life broken in upon by any strange, unaccountable interruption; least of all by a discovery of God and unseen reals to him, in unwonted shapes. "We will talk with you," said the Hebrews to Moses, "but we do not want to hear the voice of God." They spoke a word we can all understand. So true is this that, without question, most men would be willing to live on upon the earth forever, or indefinitely, carrying their aches, pains, limitations, liabilities of all sorts, were that possible, rather than try the unknown, the undiscovered, the infinite beyond. There is a great deal of grumbling and fault-finding heard on every hand; but, on the whole, man is contented to stay here, even in rags and starvation, and with quite dim and slender outlooks. He is intensely tenacious and conservative; dislikes and fears change—unless it is demonstrably for the better; would rather bear the evils he has and knows than make experiments, and clings to his mother earth, whose form and features he loves. Dull, yellow, commonplace as our days are, we would rather have them proceed along that monotonous level than have them startled and convulsed and thrown into confusion by a bolt out of the blue; by some sudden emergency, formidable front of

dilemma, or difficulty which compels us to retreat, or to reform our forces, or to dispose of ourselves differently from what we had anticipated and counted upon.

"Speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak to us," cried the Hebrews. How human! Translated into our own feeling and experience it means that we can manage to carry the common burdens and cares that fall to us, and meet the things that come along from day to day, by way of natural consequence; but that we do not wish to have the even tenor of our lives broken in upon and upheaved and unsettled by revolutionary events, notably such as bring to the surface the underlying mystery which is at the base of things. The majority of men are averse to the somber, solemn aspects of life, and tremble before its dark and tremendous experiences. These, since they seem to have more of God in them than the common contents and ongoings of daily existence, are less intelligible, and so offend and affright us. There can be no doubt that the world at large is shy of any fact or occurrence that raises the religious question and rumbles with eternity. Men and women ordinarily do not care to dwell upon the serious side of things, to ponder the old gray questions of God, duty, immortality, holiness. These transcendental topics break into our careless, laughing, rollicking lives like a harsh discord. There be many who never go below the surface or reflect upon great cate-

gories, or entertain any thoughts save such as connect with these mundane surroundings. The deeper meanings of life, its profound seriousness, its basic realities, its mystery, the "divine dark" that overspreads it, the infinite horizons into which it rolls away, the hints, omens, intimations, flashes as from a higher firmament—all such salutary suggestions and lessons, with which our earthly existence is rife,—seem quite lost upon many: they prophesy unheeded. Men of affairs, immersed in the business of this world, are often too much preoccupied to think about the great question of religion; it sounds to them unpractical, unprofitable, unreal. The lovers of pleasure, in the swirl and hot breath of great cities, have already found their career, and look upon anything that brings God nigh to them as an interruption, an impertinence.

Moreover, it is to be feared that much of our popular religion, so called, is conventional, mechanical, ceremonial, and does not take vital hold upon God and beget a consciousness of His presence. The tendency of the average man, who worships at all, is to make an ecclesiastical apparatus do his religion for him. He assists and participates as a spectator at a pageant or procession, but receives no impulse, no inspiration, no new insight, no spiritual gift or guidance; there comes no discovery of God to his soul. Is it not true that we finger the fringes and phylacteries of religion? We dwell in the region of phrases and shadows, and are afraid of going too deep, afraid of the voice of God,

reproving our sins and calling us to repentance and a better obedience.

Unquestionably there is a lack of vitality, of reality, in the religious consciousness, even of most of those who profess to have any. How few, comparatively, live by metaphysical convictions, by great hopes, by a strong faith. We are embarrassed by these solemn things. And when some one occasionally appears who seems possessed by them in a larger measure than most, he strikes us as a curious phenomenon, something out of the common course of nature; we call him saint, mystic, enthusiast. But it is worth remembering that life is only great and noble and instructive in so far as one can hear God in it. The crying need of the human spirit is to come into communion with God, the Father of spirits. That was indeed a mighty utteranc of the Psalmist, expressing at once the deepest need and the infinite potentiality of our nature, when he said: "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God."

By all means we must find a principle of eternity in time, the supernatural in nature, the infinite within the husk of the finite. We must live by the power of spirit, by great beliefs and great expectations and great intuitions. We must trace divine tendencies running like golden threads through the world and hear a heavenly music above the tumult and hurly-burly of life. We must see and hear God in order to save our temporal experience from being a deep of confusion, an in-

scrutable enigma. The truth is, so far from religion being indifferent and immaterial, it is the incomparable interest of time, because it takes hold of that which lies behind time and nature and is necessary to explain them. To walk with God, to be apprized of His perpetual presence, to see all things in Him, to meet Him alike on common days and holy days—this is the only kind of life worthy of man, because it rests upon a spiritual basis, it assumes things not seen and eternal.

And so I conclude that the prayer of the ignorant and frightened Hebrews was not a wise and good prayer; certainly not the right one for benighted pilgrims in a world of darkness and mystery. On the contrary, what we need is to have God speak to us, in omniscience, in the Christian revelation, by the communications of the Holy Ghost, by His moral providence, in any and every way whereby it is possible for us to get an assurance of His love and mercy and gracious intentions and final purposes. We need to get speech with Him. We want to feel that He is real, religion real, the life to come real, the gospel of the Incarnation a real message, a sublime, inspired prophecy,—and God alone can tell us these things.

THE WAY

And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.—ACTS 9 : 2.

FROM this, and several similar statements in the book of the Acts, we learn what was probably the first name given to the Christian religion—the way. Other names, such as Christianity, the one now most in use, or the gospel, or the Christian revelation, were not the earliest titles prefixed to the doctrine or message brought by Christ. A simpler, more pictorial and descriptive appellation was applied to it, judging from quite a number of passages in this treatise called the Acts of the Apostles which outlines the beginning of the church. The cursory reader might easily overlook this, but attention has been drawn to it by New Testament students, and their position is well sustained by sufficient citations. The earliest reference to it occurs in connection with the career of Saul of Tarsus. Not satiated with the blood of Stephen, he proposed to Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin to furnish him letters of introduction to the synagogues in Damascus—the capital city of Syria, where a large colony of Jews resided—authorizing him

to arrest any disciples of the Man of Nazareth who might be propagating His doctrine in those parts, or, as the record runs, "if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem." Later, and subsequent to his wonderful conversion, when he was surrounded by a brutal, fanatical, howling mob in Jerusalem, he said, in the course of his explanation and defense to the crowd, "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus, of Cilicia, but brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and being zealous for God, I persecuted this way unto the death." Still later, when arraigned before Felix, he remarked, in reply to Tertullus, the prosecutor, "This I confess, that after the way which they call a heresy, I serve the God of our fathers." Of Felix himself it is written that, "having more exact knowledge concerning the way," he deferred the case until Lysias, the chief captain, should come to give his narrative; the presumption being that Felix, although a pagan Roman, living at Cæsarea where Cornelius the centurion had been converted to the truth, and where Philip the Evangelist resided, may thus have become acquainted with the Christian way. Again, we read that the preaching of Paul, at Ephesus, instigated a certain Demetrius, who made silver shrines for the goddess Diana,—and thereby drove a lucrative trade,—to incite a riot; and so, the statement is made, "about that time there arose no small stir concerning the way." And in the synagogue of that great city of Ephesus, it is written that

Paul "reasoned and persuaded and preached" for several months; but that when "some were hardened and spoke evil of the way before the multitude, he departed and taught in the school of one Tyrannus."

Other passages might be cited in which this word "the way" appears as the name by which the new religious phenomenon, the gospel that sprang up in Galilee, was popularly known. It was the way of the Nazarenes, the way of Jesus of Nazareth: this, in all likelihood, was, so to speak, its baptismal name, the first which it bore. As disciples were called Christians first in Antioch, so the opinion, the doctrine, the faith they professed was, at its inception and start, called the way. And while more elaborate and ambitious names have been invented and applied to it, perhaps it is questionable whether one more apt, appropriate, terse, significant, and true to fact has ever been broached.

It is conceivable that this original name was suggested by that great declaration of Jesus concerning Himself, "I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Certainly this same image of a way is employed by Him to express His relationship to mankind, and the office He had come to discharge. He calls Himself the way of access to God. It may possibly have been a reminiscence of this fact which led the first disciples to speak of the person, authority and services of Jesus Christ as "the way of life"—"the way of salvation." In any case we can see that the name was happily

chosen; it is graphic and realistic, it brings a picture before the eye.

Everyone knows what a way is and how indispensable it is, whether the word be used in a natural sense or metaphorically; whether one is speaking of the way home, or the way to reach London or Calcutta, or the way to an intellectual conclusion, or the way to demonstrate a theorem in Euclid, or the way to conduct business upon sound economic principles and accumulate wealth. In whatever context the word be used, it has one general meaning, applicable to any subject matter whatever; it always connotes a destination, an objective point, a goal, a concrete accomplishment and a certain best method or direction to take, in order to reach it. The picture is that of a pilgrim or pedestrian on the road towards an end, more or less distant, which can only be overtaken and attained by keeping to the track and following the way that leads to it. And, obviously, simple and homely and familiar though it be, no word so descriptive and accurate could be spoken of that which in more formal phrase we call Christianity, or the gospel of the Incarnation, than this, that it is the way of life, the way to God and blessedness. In the last analysis, this is what the great Christian fact essentially is, stripped of theological and technical entanglements, and subtle, wire-drawn distinctions, and scholastic definitions. The revelation that came through Jesus of Nazareth is the way God has appointed by which man may find Him and enter into His life.

It is different from other ways that have been surveyed, so to speak, and laid down and recommended, and that have been historically traveled throughout all the human centuries.

The desire to be happy, to attain to blessedness, to fulfill our nature and to become as rounded and complete and harmonious as is possible, seems to have the force of an instinct. Mankind, for the most part, so far as we know, has never contemplated extinction, the loss of personality, with equanimity and as a desideratum. Man wants more life, not less; a larger, richer, more powerful, more secure existence, and not a diminished and depauperated one. He would increase, not decrease, and this innate, universal longing has blossomed into cults, creeds, ways, by means of which it has expressed itself and has thought to realize its hope. A great portent, a most significant clause, is this of man's constitution, that he wishes to go higher, to go ahead, to augment his being, to know more, enjoy more, accomplish more. The deep thinkers, the founders of religions and of philosophies and ethical systems, those who have brooded over this mystery of being and who have tried to expound it, have proposed different ways for the satisfaction of their human curiosity and human aspiration.

Truly it is a great sight this: man standing before the sphinx of existence, trying to solve the eternal riddle, to find his way out of confusion, contradiction and uncertainty, to assurance and serenity

and peace. And in this age-long, ever-during endeavor he has cast up and defined several ways of coming at a provisional settlement of his speculative and moral difficulties. These are the great religions of the world, the systems excogitated by men of speculative power and religious imagination, who could not contentedly wake and sleep surrounded by a universe of such mystical obscurity as this, without making an honest attempt to read some intelligible meaning into its huge cloudy symbols, and eternal processes, as well as into the baffling, inexplicable chances and changes of human life. These guesses, conjectures, hypotheses, prescriptions, have been simply ways of finding God and getting relief from the stress and strain of the universal, of this whole environment, that lowers around us, and bristles with doubt, fear, suspense, hope, and is so problematical. This, fundamentally, has been the end of all religions, of all philosophies of the universe and of life—to discover the true way to the first cause of things, the anonymous, inexorable energy that rules and controls the all, and to come into right relations with that. So, you see, that although men disguise the truth by big, swelling words, technical terms of high complexity, ponderous theology and metaphysical speculation, reduced to its lowest terms all man's transcendental theorizing and all the dust of systems and creeds that bestrews the track of the race, have been and are merely the search of the human mind in its serious moments, by its

prophetic souls, for the way that leads to inward peace, to a sense of the unseen and divine, to a spiritual interpretation of man and his world.

By a fine insight the Christians of the apostolic age called faith in Christ the way. It was a golden word, realistically true, for that is exactly what it purports to be—the way to a higher life in unison with God, the way to the highest good for mankind. Now, if this be so, it is worth while to consider its peculiarity, its differentia, its characteristic note, for Christ came in the fullness of the time and at the end of long ages. Many oracular, inspired men had preceded Him, many experiments had been made to get at the heart of things, to enucleate the kernel of truth from its shell and husks and arrive at finality. There had been analytic thinkers, silent, meditative mystics, glorious dreamers, moral censors and preachers, and there was a large deposit of truth in what they taught. The candle of the Lord at least flickered within them. That is to say, there was an element of moral truth in certain of their insights and conclusions, and by this saving clause they have survived. Truth alone lives, and every falsehood or figment that gets wide vogue owes its longevity to the amount of truth and reality it contains.

I need not describe at length the various ways by which the religious consciousness has approached the eternal problems. We recall the many forms in which it struggled to express itself in the old civilizations that

centered around the Mediterranean, till it finally came to flower in elect souls that thought out those great systems of philosophy that helped to prepare men's minds for the Christian ideal. The Stoics, for example, approached the religious question through the theory that the universe is always what it ought to be, is always right, reasonable and ethical, and the part of man is to adjust himself to it; happiness does not consist in having things, but in controlling one's desires, in finding one's life within and not without. The Stoic had unbounded faith in the will of the universe revealed in events, in what actually happens. Outward goods, he held, are comparatively indifferent; there is nothing good but the good will; that is, a will conformed and agreeable to nature and to fact, to what is appointed and inevitable. It was a doctrine of apathy, of subjectivity and retirement within one's self. It suppressed the emotional nature and trained the will to stand erect and unterrified whatever might happen. Stoicism was the religion of the educated classes in the old Mediterranean world long after faith in the poetical mythology of Greece had perished. It had something good in it; it was ethical. It exalted virtue, reason, fortitude, courage, the idea of duty. It was one of the ways by which man sought spiritual satisfaction. It finally approached the standpoint of Israel, and men like Epictetus and Seneca spoke of the divine personality exactly as a Hebrew theist would, and in similar language.

Passing into the East, we meet with Buddha's way. He was profoundly impressed by the pain and misery of existence, and the root of it, he taught, is human passion and desire. Kill desire and you kill distress; the cure of all the evil under the sun is the extinction of personal being, a daily self-discipline and dying unto natural feelings and appetencies, until, at last, self-consciousness is lost in the absolute, as a flake of snow melts in the sea. He taught, in order to this consummation, some high ethics—such virtues as patience, temperance, chastity, almsgiving and universal benevolence to man and beast.

In the East and in the West, before the advent of Christianity, were monks and eremites, who, crowded by the pressure of life, sick of its hardness, greed, violence, vexation, its wars and fighting, its barbarism and brutality, betook themselves to solitude and silence and ascetic austerity, if perchance they might in that way get a vision of the infinite and find rest for their souls. Verily, the ways have been many along which men oppressed by the burden of the world's problem, and of human destiny, have tried to get out into light and freedom, and ascertain what is the ultimate reality and ground of things. The vice that cleaves to most of the ways by which man has sought to solve the great mystery is, that he has not separated sharply between God and nature; he has confounded the two. He has personified the great forces and phenomena of nature. He

has worshiped the sun, the moon; he has consulted the stars and the flight of birds; he has worshiped the earth and its prodigal fecundity, the Nile, the Ganges. He has put a god over the harvest, over famine, disease, life, death; over every object and event. Nature has been too strong for him, and he has become a polytheist or else a pantheist, identifying God with the totality of things; making God the world-soul that comes to personal consciousness in man, saying that every man is God in some power or degree. Impersonal being has evolved him, he is its product and transitory expression; consequently sin, accountability, personal immortality, a supernatural revelation, are all impossible. Everything is necessitated as by an iron fate. It is indeed a great and impressive spectacle, this search of the human mind in all generations after the way to arrive at the vision of absolute truth, of ideal beauty and supreme perfection, and to solve the autonomies and contradictions that beset thought upon the highest themes.

Now, the grand assumption of the Christian gospel is that it is the only way by which man can come at peace and satisfaction touching these final questions that began early to vex and importune human thought. This is the splendid audacity of Christianity, that it is the way of life, compared to which there is no other. No one can read the reported words of Christ and fail to receive this impression, that He regarded Himself as an authentic messenger from God, whose work here was

a finality, and dispensed forever with all other mediators and their messages. Whether He had ever heard of Plato, of the Stoics, of Buddha, of Zoroaster or Confucius, whether He was acquainted with the mass of pre-Christian and pagan speculation, is highly doubtful, but He speaks as one whose consciousness of God and of having been authorized by Him, is so profound, indelible and inexpugnable, that it does not matter who preceded Him, how brilliant their genius or mighty their voice. The sublime egotism of Jesus Christ is a characteristic which has not escaped universal notice. His self-assertion, His positiveness, His lonely grandeur standing up singly before the world and all its centuries as the Son, who knew His Father's mind and had come to declare it, is one of the prime arguments for Christianity. Nothing like it has ever been seen or heard in the world. The great teachers of mankind have been rather tentative, cautious, inquiring. They have speculated, reasoned, argued inductively from their data; they have not been so categorical, so daring and dogmatic as Jesus. They have confined themselves to recommendations, recipes, rules, rituals, precepts, by compliance with which men might receive more light and put themselves in a more hopeful condition; whereas Jesus said: "Follow me"—"I am the way"—"Take my yoke"—"Come after me, bearing the cross"—"Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly." It was a new idea. The sages, the world's wise men, its prophets and great souls, had not re-

quired men to imitate them, to believe in them, but rather to do certain things, to practice abstinences, to keep commandments, to be patterns of this or that virtue. To the contrary of this, Jesus seemed to teach that there was an inherent force, residing in Himself, capable of lifting men to His point of view, and to His sense of sonship to God.

People often talk of Christianity as one of the world's great religions, probably the finest product of the religious imagination thus far. But this is not the standpoint or conception of its Founder. He paid scant attention to any other supposed religious revelation save that which came by Moses, and this He modified by discarding its ceremonial parts as peripheral and subordinate, and insisting upon its ethical content. Meantime He offered Himself to the faith and loyalty of men as a self-revelation of the Father. It is a unique peculiarity of Christ's method that He calls upon the world not to do things, not to go through a prescribed round of exercises and thus acquire a ritual or ecclesiastical righteousness, but rather to rise to His elevation, to share His spirit, and to nourish a secret life of communion with God. This, presumably, is what He meant by faith. You are said to have confidence in a person when you take him for what he claims to be. He offers himself, let us say, in such or such a capacity or character,—as teacher, physician, counselor in difficulty, friend in adversity, mediator in some matter,—and you believe in him. What does that mean? It

means that you trust yourself unreservedly to his friendship, veracity, judgment, ability, wisdom, knowledge of men and affairs. You bear your whole moral weight upon him, assured that he will do the best possible for you. This is what faith stands for between man and man, and in the secular concerns of life. It does not mean other or differently in the great matter of religion and in the soul's relation to Christ. It is the cordial acceptance of Christ in the character in which He offers Himself. It is a posture of mind, it is an act of the will, it is a moral attitude that we take up every day of the world.

Of recent years a cry has arisen in Christendom: Back to Christ! There is much in it. After all, and in the last resolution of the matter, religious faith contemplates a person, not any particular doctrine or system of doctrines. Of course, doctrine is indispensable and necessary. You cannot believe in your friend or servant without some doctrine about him. People who inveigh against doctrines talk undavisedly. Doctrine, of some sort, is necessarily implicated with all our thinking and actions; it is flooring and foundation and substructure, and quietly underlies and undergirds all our life and its activities, as the rocky ribs of the planet clamp it together. And yet, practically, it is doubtless true that one does not need to define God accurately and completely in order to believe in Him. Jesus did not define God; He knew Him by a rapid, luminous, fervid

intuition; He lived in God as in a surrounding atmosphere; He said, "the pure in heart shall see God"; He did not require the various arguments for theism expounded from professorial chairs—the ontological, cosmological, teleological arguments—because for Him God was an immediate presence, and did not need to be approached and apprehended as much by the intellect as by the heart, the conscience, the affections. And the same is true in reference to Jesus Christ Himself as man's everlasting hope. It is certainly important to define His place, His person, His dignity, so far as possible. The Councils of Nice and Chalcedon were not officious and unnecessary, or their conciliar decisions of no value and importance. Yet one may believe in Christ as the way to the Father who never heard of them, because faith is, ultimately and in its best sense, a moral attitude toward a person, not toward a doctrine, definition or theory. It is the soul precipitating itself upon Christ, out of a sense of destitution and poverty, ignorance and disability. It takes Him as He offers Himself when He declares, "No man cometh unto the Father but by me"; "I am the way"; "I am the resurrection and the life"; "He that believeth on me shall never die." It is a cry of the soul out of its darkness and doubt: "Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief."

THE POOL OF BETHESDA

The impotent man answered him, Sir I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me.—JOHN 5 : 7.

NEAR Jerusalem was a curative pool of water, famous and frequented in New Testament times. "Bethesda," or House of Mercy, it was called; and around it, sheltered in stalls and porches, gathered the palsied, paralytic and forlorn to avail themselves of its remedial property. Generally the pool lay placid and calm, but there were strange intervals of commotion, when the waters were stirred. A vagrant rumor obtained that an angel periodically brooded over it, skimmed its surface with his glistening wings and vanished; after which miraculous visitation whosoever first stepped in was likely to be cured. This alleged descent of the angel upon his benevolent mission does not occur in some of the ancient and authoritative manuscripts of the New Testament, and the probability is that his intervention was a report current among the Palestinian Jews of that day. No one, probably, would have been willing to aver that he had actually seen this phenomenon. The likely supposition is that the famous spring was charged with chemical properties or com-

binations, and that under appropriate conditions they were excited to unusual activity and became superheated and effervescent, which was a token that the supreme moment of efficacy had arrived.

Whatever the fact, the truth abides that a merciful Creator has here spread a scene abounding in benevolent provision for man. Marks of intelligent preparation are everywhere perceptible, calculated to put him upon thinking of the wisdom and goodness and power that fashioned his dwelling place. So that while we may agree that the Bethesda phenomenon does not imperatively call for an angel, it does not follow that this opinion expels supernaturalism from the Bible or from the world. If man be a spiritual being capable of understanding spiritual truths, we do not know in what strange fashions God may have revealed Himself to such a creature, especially in the elder ages before there was temple, priest or prophecy, and before the rise of institutional religion or ritual.

The Hebrew Bible makes mention of theophanies, visible shapes and audible voices, by means of which selected individuals were apprized of the divine presence. What exactly happened upon such rare, emphatic occasions may be matter of surmise and conjecture, but, in some way, God the infinite Spirit can surely find a point of contact with the finite spirit of man and teach him through his imagination, through his sense of wonder, of awe, of reverence, of mystery. If there be a living God

and if man be cast in His image, there is no antecedent impossibility of commerce between them. The biblical miracles in both Testaments assume an infinite element in man and a capacity in him for intercourse with God: they are big with meaning, and are hints and preludes of a grand development in store for human nature. Nevertheless biblical interpreters have properly availed themselves of the law of parsimony; they would not make miracle cheap nor usher it upon the stage in a case where it is not called for, for the chief end of miracle is not to create a commotion, to set up a spectacle, and gather a crowd of groundlings to stare and gape at it. Miracle is no quick fire of straw, roaring and crackling for idle boys to shout over. It is of the nature of testimony; it is a witness connected with some spiritual law or principle, and designed to support it. It is the broad seal of Almighty God, set upon some eternal truth. It is a John the Baptist crying, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." As the mariner hangs out a thermometer to test the atmosphere or detect the proximity of an iceberg, so miracle notifies of an impending fact or order out of sight.

It is clear, then, that by multiplying the miraculous element superfluously, wastefully, one runs the risk of belittling the essential, native grandeur of the thing. Because where there is no eternal verity at stake, no great moral law needing emphasis, no new revelation of divine purpose, no fresh era or economy of divine

administration about to dawn,—in such case miracle would look like pyrotechnics. Man's higher spiritual nature is the main interest; to fashion, ripen, train that, is the end of all the ages and their different gospels. The education of the human soul, the progress of mankind, the growth of heavenly principles in man's dark underworld, the proclamation of a higher law, the turning of a new leaf in universal history—such events may well be escorted by thunders and portents, and signalized by an overflow of Almighty Power Look at miracle upon that side, and it is perfectly possible, if not probable. All depends upon one's theory concerning the earth and man; whether it be a moral system, a divine thought, or merely an accident thrown up by caprice and the rude horseplay of blind, impersonal force. Does the world mean anything deep and serious? Has man latent possibilities? Is time the theater whereon he may unfold and train them for higher flights? If so, then we are not in position to say that God may not teach and encourage him, should occasion arise, by what in our ignorance we call miracle.

Moreover, this consideration tends to explain why doubt and suspense of judgment, at least, have settled upon this account of the angel at the Bethesda pool. It is not a fact that illustrates any great moral truth or vindicates any high claim or opens any new horizon of hope for mankind; it merely relates to the cure of bodily ailments.

True, one may reply that the mighty works of Christ were largely concerned with the same phenomenon; but this would be a low and inadequate view to take of them, to confine them exclusively to their physical aspects and effects. It would be a total misconception of the errand of Christ to say that He came into this disjointed world for no other purpose than to ease pain, and to touch lepers and lame folk and blind eyes. People sometimes speak as if the function of Jesus Christ were exhausted by this humanitarian work of His. Whereas this was only incidental, the concomitant of a larger fact. Christ's miracles remind one of the passage of the earth in its orbit, through a shower of meteors or fragments from another orb—they speak of firmaments beyond human ken; their moral design, their didactic, prophetic character is their main ingredient. Reduce them to an exhibition of philanthropic feeling and you cut away the spiritual sense, which is their best meaning. The Son of man, and Son of God, touched only man's sensitive physical nature, as one runs one's fingers over a keyboard or strikes the strings of a harp, not for the sake of the thing itself, but to draw from the deeps of the instrument an intelligible meaning, a sweet melody.

The special circumstance of this case was that of a diseased, stranded sinner, lying forlorn and disconsolate in one of the porches surrounding the pool. There for the space of thirty-eight years, according

to his pathetic narrative, he had been hovering hopeless, being so poor that he could hire no man to carry him to the spring at the ripe moment, and so decrepit that he could never reach the spot in time. Often he had hobbled and lunged along with might and main, thinking he might make it; but at the last critical moment some one else always managed to get ahead and snatch the benefit. So he had settled down into a chronic despair when the great Prophet of Nazareth happened to pass along and inquire if he would be cured.

Now, this cripple and his doleful tale set forth an apt picture of human condition in more aspects than one. For observe that he is waiting for something to turn up to his advantage and the decided betterment of his estate, but, for some reason, he is constantly put off; the good time does not come, the hope is deferred. This is an old story, as old as the race; with photographic accuracy it hits off universal human nature. Man awakes here on earth and finds himself full of appetites, ambitions, cravings of all kinds; he wants a great deal more than he can get; he reaches out in all directions; he will pluck the fruit from the tree, the berry from the bush; the fish that swim the sea, the birds that fly the air, he looks upon as his prey; he seeks the gold and iron hidden in the hills, the silks, gems, furs and plumage of every clime; he would levy on all things of beauty and value and utilize them to satisfy his de-

sire; meantime he is never quite satisfied, cannot get enough, is lured farther afield in search of treasure. Before the gaze of the individual seeker, and of the race at large, has ever hung the flickering image of something vast, splendid, superior to any present realization. Man in all his generations has been saved by hope. There is a fire in his bones, a fever in his blood, speculation in his eye, a hunger in his heart that unsettles and disquiets and pushes him out into fresh fields, looking for new conquests. Like the impotent folk at Bethesda, he is waiting for some strong angel bearing the proclamation of a new and better era. The Edens, Utopias, golden fleeces, golden apples and enchanted islands, the Pactolian tide of Midas, old pagan fables as well as the millennium of the Hebrew prophets, all testify to this ineradicable hope, this yearning in man for something better, richer, more complete and harmonious than has yet been reached and realized. So I call this scene at Bethesda a striking likeness of generic humanity; those ricketty, wheezing, dilapidated, broken creatures waiting for the angel. What an apt picture it is of our struggling, scrambling race, peering into the darkness, watching for every windfall, clutching at any straw or sign that promises good, or better than it has! Well considered, it is really a prophetic trait, a hallmark of greatness, a regal attitude, that the human spirit has always been waiting, hoping, expecting, on the outlook for enlargement,

and franchise and better conditions. Oh, yes; those cripples at the pool watching for the descent of the angel are a perfect parable of mankind. This is the ready explanation of the wars of conquest and colonization, of the migration of nations, commercial rivalry, and expansion of trade. This explains the altar of Mammon, and its crowd of worshipers, and the frantic struggle of both nations and individuals to get the market, the monopoly, the mastery.

Moreover, this cry, this clamor, is significant, for it is an intimation of immortality and of the infinite nature of man. It is his blind, blundering way of expressing his profound, internal disquiet and dissatisfaction in view of extant arrangements, and his belief that something better may be effected. Above all beneath him, man is the creature who waits; he has ever stood in an attitude of expectancy; his literature, in all tongues and times, ever since he began to think and to record his thoughts, has been loaded with complaint of what is, of current conditions, of the extant civilization, of the low pulse at which life beats, of the corruption and decay of manners and morals. Large tracts of his splendid literature are a Jeremiad, deploring the evil present and longing for an age of Arcadian simplicity and for golden years to bless mankind. It is an argument of high import. Base and criminal as have been the ways by which the world in every century has sought to right itself, to procure better terms and accommodations and to

move into a celestial country, the impulse, the instinct itself, is doubtless sound, a divine implantation, and grounds upon firm fact. For the soul of man is essentially progressive, and holds limitless possibilities, and all that art, culture, education, money have yet effected through the ages and dispensations of human history have not cured this sacred hunger for more light, more power and higher perfection.

Then too the cry of this cripple suggests another reflection. In order to explain his poor success in taking advantage of the curative properties of the wonderful pool, he tells Jesus that upon every occasion he was forestalled and hindered by some other companion in misery who forged ahead and got the benefit: "While I am coming, another steppeth down before me"; in other phrase, he missed his opportunity. Opportunity, as everyone knows, is defined as a fit or favorable time for the execution of a purpose; it usually depends upon a conspiracy or confluence of circumstances, and if any one circumstance be absent the opportunity is not ripe. Thus, the time may be propitious, but the place inconvenient; or, conversely, the place may be favorable to the carrying out of one's design, but the time most inopportune. In order to constitute a complete or capital opportunity all the circumstances or elements should conspire to point it out. The danger is that we may force it, to our own mortification and failure; thinking that because an occasion has offered, the ripe time has come for

fulfillment. Hence comes much of the blundering, bungling and botchwork of our lives; running before we are sent, overleaping the mark and falling on the other side; with much else that is awkward and crude.

Truly a great study it is, this of opportunity. To do the right thing at the wrong time may turn out to be even worse than not to attempt it at all. Perception, judgment, wisdom, which are the fine adaptation of means to ends, these qualities are indispensable to the safe conduct of life; the lack of them has wrecked many a person of unimpeachable motives and good intentions. Opportunity, like the atmosphere, like the elastic ether that fills infinite space and transmits impulses throughout the universe, is a universal bounty, from which, probably, no one is absolutely excluded. Everyone has a day, a chance, an opening into a larger liberty. Not many such critical epochs, it may be, befall the same individual; but at each door a few knock and make their overtures. As those who wander through a dim, dense forest, once in a while catch sight of a trail or a clearing, or see light beyond, so likewise to us pilgrims of time, come moments when a new hope is born, and an upward path is blazed and demarked for our feet.

Indeed, life is full of chances of all kinds, so that no one who has the instinct to apprehend and the heart to improve, need grovel and stagnate. Life itself, properly considered, is one splendid, opulent opportunity to make the most of one's self, to realize

one's possibilities, to augment the volume of one's being, to train the spirit and enlarge its capacities. There is always more to be had by those who want it; the world is built upon this plan; it is stocked with a wealth of facts, of knowledge and of values, and only awaits exploration.

We sometimes imagine, and querulously complain, that all the chances are gone, that we were born too late, that everything within sight has been preëmpted or bespoken, that all the ore veins have been worked and the pockets and gulches of gold discovered and on the way to exhaustion, and that very little of worth or significance is left to tempt or to reward our pains; but this is a mistake. There is always something to study and to learn; new questions to discuss, fresh issues to settle; unexpected complications,—political, social, religious,—constantly emerge; epoch-making books now and again issue forth from a cunning brain.

Oh, yes; the world is eternally young; it is not bankrupt or worn out. God doubtless has secrets to divulge which are not ripe yet a while; new and marvelous discoveries will break forth out of His word and providence, hidden from even the wise and prudent of elder ages; no generation of men, until the mystery of time be finished, but will have something to learn, to acquire, to enjoy; something fit to excite curiosity, wonder, gratitude and praise.

But the personal equation may be at fault; the indi-

vidual himself may be handicapped and hindered and fail of attainment. This was the case of the cripple at Bethesda: "While I am coming," he complained, "another steppeth down before me"—he could not avail himself of his chance. And, generally speaking, the hindrances men meet in actualizing their desires and ambitions are past computation. These may arise from untoward outward circumstances or from a native inability, but whatever their origin and seat, as matter of fact a countless multitude fall short, and their chariot wheels never graze the goal. Indeed, this makes a large part of the pathos of life—our failures to see and to estimate opportunity, and to turn it to the best account. Who is so wise, so sagacious and alert, so provident, as not to err here?

By consequence, it becomes a serious matter and of high practical import for us to consider what we are making out of our life history, and whether we are actualizing its possibilities. Because it abounds in opportunity for the enlargement of the spirit, for its enfranchisement and education and growth. Yea, verily, there is no investigation which, if honestly pursued, promises richer fruit than this. What is it that hinders me, gets the start of me, heads me off, so that I cannot reach the real goals of life, cannot make much of substantive value out of it, or fulfill the best tendencies of my nature? Here is a brief, breathing, conscious spell of existence, wherein a mortal man may look abroad upon the infinite splendor of the universe and hear the

deep boom of eternity in his ear and get an inkling of human capacity and destiny; here are noble literatures, high examples, great traditions, fine heroisms, religious truths, solemn presentiments; here are Hebrew prophecy and the Christian gospel; here are wayside opportunities of doing good; here are splendid chances for self-development and of becoming conscious of a soul fit for the realm of angel and Deity. What hinders us from realizing these celestial visions? What is it that steps down before us? A critical inquiry this! Why is it that more of humankind do not come to higher planes of consciousness, of activity, of achievement, of faith, of character? Something must prevent them; some tyrannical habit, some strong passion, some fatal inertia. Each must find out for himself what it is.

Know, O man, the day of your visitation! You have intellect, time, strength, some one talent or power; you have a reasonable soul, a spiritual self. Let nothing obscure or hinder you; let nothing make your life a disappointment and a failure; let nothing while you are coming, step down before you.

THE INSPIRATION OF THE ALMIGHTY

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?—LUKE 11 : 13.

ALL the reported sayings of Christ, His entire teaching, are characterized by modernity, or adaptability to human thought and need in every age; and of all His utterances, not many possess this quality in a higher degree than the text, apparently suggested by the request of the disciples to furnish some directions in respect to the important practice of prayer. As usual, He resorts to illustrations, in order to show the success which attends upon asking. Thus, He narrates the experience of a man who wanted three loaves at midnight, and notwithstanding the unseasonableness of the hour succeeded in borrowing them. He also inquires whether, in their judgment, a sane man would give his son a stone instead of bread or a serpent for a fish.

By these homely similitudes the great Teacher lays a foundation for the practice of prayer to God, implying that it will not be fruitless. He takes a conspicuous trait of our common humanity and thence infers a

truth transcendently higher and more valuable. The argument is from the less to the greater; it is an implied judgment and not an example of reasoning proper, where two judgments or propositions are compared by means of a third, and a conclusion deduced. The text is an inference rather than a demonstration. This was quite a favorite method with Christ,—to take a generally admitted premise and shut His hearers up to a necessary conclusion resulting from it. Analyze the present statement and it comes to this: human nature is confessedly selfish, yet men are not so exclusively devoted to themselves and to their own interests as not to provide for their offspring. Now, if they being self-centered and self-regarding do this, shall a supremely benevolent Being fall short, and fail to supply the deepest needs of those who seek His interference on their behalf? It is evidently the argument *a fortiori*, from the weak to the strong.

Consider this analogy which Christ sets up, between human instincts and affections and the disposition of God. He reasons from the one to the other; He takes the human heart in some of its large general tendencies as an image of the divine, of the heart of God, and so humanizes our conception of Him. The world of that age, the Mediterranean nations, had long pictured the supreme powers of the universe by rude human analogies and types, and the Hebrew prophet Isaiah furnishes a striking description of the way the idolaters of his time went about to fabricate their deities. Ever

since the human mind undertook to represent and embody its conceptions of the invisible and eternal, man has had recourse to natural things and earthly images, more or less inadequate, often ridiculous and revolting. He has not always been able to picture to himself the supernatural without defying probability and insulting common sense. He has erred by excess; he has been too minute, too circumstantial; he has pushed the comparison too far and has conceived of God and the unseen realm as patterned after the contents of present experience and current events. Observe, however, that Christ, in this reported interview with His disciples, authorizes in part this familiar method: only it is to be carefully noted that His gospel is peculiar in this respect, that it is restrained, temperate, cautious in its representations, deals in generalities, thinks in large units, moves along broad leading lines, does not refine and overspeculate.

Here it is that even Christian thinkers of high mental power and deep insight have sometimes been a trifle too exact, systematic and thorough. They have made a wholesale transfer of the elements and laws of the present order of things to the unseen and ineffable, without knowing that these would fit. But all that Jesus says on this dark subject is rational, consistent and devoid of technicality and minute definition. Thus, in the case under consideration, He uses a fundamental human instinct as a hint of

what exists in God and of what He may be expected to do. There is no extravagance, no improbability, nothing undignified or derogatory to the Deity in the representations which He makes of Him. In fact, He employs the only method available by us in constructing a clear, coherent, tenable conception of God, by deriving it from our own nature, emotions and activities. For we cannot find anything in the natural world that prefigures God half so distinctly as our own mental constitution and its processes. The obvious reason of this is that all upon which we look seems inferior to ourselves. Within the circle of his vision man finds nothing so great and honorable as himself, or that stands as high in the scale of being. Somehow he feels himself more important than the sun or moon, the earth, the cataract, or the mountain, and while all nature is a symbol or mirror of the great Creator, and contains some trace of Him, still man finds in himself, being a rational will, the supreme argument for God, and in his own equipment the most suitable materials out of which to construct a picture of the Perfect Mind. So that we are authorized to believe that until a higher revelation dawns our race will not acquire a more definite or satisfying idea of the Holy One than that for which the data are already at hand. In the order and sublimity of nature, in the constitution and products of the human spirit, and chiefly in the person, lofty inspiration and supernal excellence of Jesus the Christ, all of the eternal God

that can possibly be disclosed to mankind has been brought nigh.

Now, observe that in this sentence of the text Christ singles out an intensely human characteristic and makes it the hint of a corresponding attribute in God. He takes it for granted, as a familiar fact, that parents are disposed to grant the reasonable requests of their children for good things, and, building upon this basis, He proceeds to bring God within the range of our apprehension by the affirmation that He is equally willing to bestow upon mankind what He considers to be the best thing He has to give. It is clear that, according to Christ's representation, God, their Maker, is generously disposed toward the children of men. He wishes to help them, in the highest sense; He would enlighten, enlarge, elevate, enrich them. This statement of itself is equivalent to a revelation. It announces this splendid truth, that benevolence, generosity, helpfulness, are basal and underlying attributes of God. It is His nature to communicate of His life, of His fullness and exuberant richness, to the moral creatures He has made. He wishes to impart to them, so far as they are able to receive it, His own point of view, His own contentment and repose, His own moral perfections.

While this is inferable from the language of Christ, it is also true, and we are constrained to admit, that the kindly dispositions of God toward men are con-

ditioned by their own capacities, by their power of receptivity, by their ability to appraise and to accept His overtures. Of course, there are commodities and conditions that are supplied to all indifferently. Having ushered sentient life upon this globe, God virtually pledged His inexhaustible resources for its support. But the natural gifts that come out of the earth are not the costliest, most valuable that the Almighty has to bestow. What man, with his narrow definition, calls good is, according to the supreme standard of measurement, the crude elements and prime necessaries of life, the crumbs from the table. God, the universal Nourisher and Supporter of all life, scatters them with free, bountiful hand. But the best He has to bestow upon any child of man is not outward, sensible, material, calculable good; rather is it an interior, invisible, spiritual gift. All that is external and imposing, that accosts the sense, and stirs ambition, and provokes envy, and quickens the pulse, and thrusts us upon exertion to capture and possess it, is only a shadow of the higher and imperishable good, which is unseen, mystical, divine—the Holy Ghost.

Our ordinary estimates, the scales in which we weigh our vision for reality, are for the most part fallacious and wrong. People look upon one who has been extraordinarily successful in the ways and works of this world, and they say, "God has been wonderfully kind to him." Then they turn and look upon men of spiritual girth and stature, who have understood

something of the raptures of saints, of the visions of seers, of the oracular certainties of faith, and concerning these the secular world falls suddenly silent, has nothing to say, does not understand them, has no calipers to measure their greatness. Whereas if this dictum of Jesus be true, these latter are really the favored men, the men who have got the best things and to whom God has broken His chief secrets; while those who are in full cry and tumbling over each other after the food and the drink, the cattle and the corn, the oil and the wine, the thrones of power, the bowers of ease, the pavilions of pleasure, the things they call good, are merely seeking pale images of the unspeakable powers and influences that come trooping out of the wide, divine kingdom of God. At any rate, whatever you and I think of it, this is unquestionably Christ's doctrine. Over against those fleshly fevers for what we call good, over against this immense, glittering, seductive world of sense, which feeds our appetite, captivates our imagination, astonishes our sight, excites our cupidity, spurs our efforts, Christ places a body of convictions, aspirations, hopes, a frame of mind, a peculiar consciousness, which He names the Supreme Good—the Holy Spirit.

And this mysterious and mighty influence is essential to the higher life of man and to religion in the soul. There is a sublime and unspeakable side to religion; its superlative attainments are not the outcome of our native powers, but require an impulse, an initiative,

originating in another sphere. Of course, knowledge, intellectual apprehension of its doctrines, duties and expectations is a material element in it, but it does not exhaust the subject. There enter into it certain frames of feeling, a certain attitude of the will. It embodies the emotional and voluntary nature. There is considerable religious knowledge; the creeds of Christendom are well known; multitudes apprehend intellectually all that is important for them to know at present; but does this do much perceptible good? Do our pious, orthodox, abstract convictions give spring, courage, enthusiasm? What is wanted to make them vivid, dynamic, controlling, compelling? The truth, in this obscure matter, seems to be that the soul of man needs to be moved upon, illuminated, energized from above. In order to come into close and fruitful relation with religious truths and ideals, these should be made to pass before the imagination with such port and majesty, to commend themselves to the conscience with such convincing demonstration, to appeal to the affections as so intrinsically lovely, that the soul shall spontaneously espouse them. But our nature cannot develop such enthusiasm. We are swayed by other desires and ambitions. To get a sense of God as a perpetual presence, as a mighty inspiration, as an abounding joy,—for such high achievement the natural man is not equal. The great mystics, the great religious natures in every age have felt this to be true. They have agreed with St. Paul that

they were "wretched men," and did not find it in themselves to be much better; could not overtake, nor come abreast with their noblest aspirations. The potent, ineffable influence, the Holy Spirit, appears to be indispensable in order that man may realize his highest possibilities and come to the crown of his being.

And, beyond controversy, this mystical, anonymous, divine energy is at work in the world in a diffused, imperceptible form, carrying truth, driving conviction, loosening prejudice, arousing conscience, conciliating attention. Look at the vast, heaving, tumbling sea of human life, with its lusts of all kinds; its fevers, its greediness, its fears, its hopes and cravings; all its elemental passions and mighty tossings, and hungers, and thirsts, that are insatiable as Molech—the wild beasts of the human heart, as they have been named—the insolent, insubordinate, incendiary, disorderly traits and elements in human nature; and what keeps them tolerably quiet? What holds men back from frightful excesses? There surely is a mighty restraint somewhere; there is a ubiquitous, efficacious influence at work, balancing antagonisms, steadying the moral system, speaking peace to the stormy winds, pouring oil on the waters, holding the world compact lest it fly the track and leap into the abyss.

Besides this, there is reason to believe that this same spiritual influence is also present in some measure in

each individual. Anyone who does a good deed out of a pure motive, anyone who bravely resists a strong inducement to evil, anyone who carries himself justly, nobly, patiently, magnanimously, under irritation or provocation, accomplishes this by virtue of a divine suggestion and succor. Whatever is mean, unlovely, unworthy in him is for once, at least, subordinated; he rises above it, puts it under his feet, acts manfully, admirably, heroically under trying circumstances; it is God touching the secret springs of the soul, lifting the man above his ordinary level, and empowering him to do what he could not be trusted to do in all moods, and at all times.

Oh, yes; men are encircled, escorted, played upon unconsciously, by invisible, divine influence. Around all of us pulses and plays this strange spiritual force; our world swims and rolls in this ambient ether. Everyone who has not by long continuance in evil-doing waxed callous and dead as to moral sensibility, everyone in whom the light is not become darkness, finds himself acting concurrently with, or in opposition to, an indefinable sentiment, an inner light, a profound persuasion, either accusing or excusing him. It is the spirit of God. Well does the Apostles' Creed bid us say, "I believe in the Holy Ghost." We must believe in a divine power of suggestion, remonstrance, inspiration, that is able to lay hold upon the human soul and lift it to higher altitudes, and lead it on to larger truths and blessed certainties. And upon one occa-

sion Jesus told His disciples that God "will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him"—a bold statement, but He knew enough of the Eternal Father to make that large promise. Nor is there a more splendid, hopeful one on record. The Holy Ghost has made all the prophets, mystics, saints, martyrs, all those of whom the world has not been worthy. Nothing else has raised men so high; nothing else has given such inward peace and outward radiant prospect. In some ineffable manner, God, the Infinite Spirit, has moved upon human souls from age to age, has convinced them of the poverty and transitoriness of this illusory world and lit up new and better hopes within them; He has swept and garnished their hearts and lifted their forlorn eyes to a happier and serener sphere.

If any among you crave more religious faith, more humility, more self-control, it is the office of the Holy Ghost to bestow these gifts. You must ask. This is the dictum of Jesus:—"If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?"

What amazing language it is! How comfortable and encouraging! Behold the confidence, the intimate familiarity Jesus displays in speaking of God. He pledges the Eternal Father, so to speak; He bids men draw boldly upon the resources of the Infinite; He declares that God is more willing to impart of Himself

to those who seek, than you are to grant the reasonable requests of your child. Is it not a wonderful sentence? Is there anything Christ said more full of hope and promise? If you want the highest good; if you want doubt and fear undermined, and your sorrows blessed; if you want inward peace and an assurance of God's love amid the alternations of life—ask for the Holy Spirit, the inspiration of the Almighty, that giveth men understanding.

RELIGION—A PROPHET

And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?—MATTHEW 11 : 7.

TIDINGS from the outside world reached John the Baptist in the castle of Machærus near the Dead Sea. His disciples appear to have had access to him and to have kept him informed concerning the work of Jesus of Nazareth. One day, the record runs, he deputed a few of his friends to wait upon the rising Prophet and inquire of Him touching His relation to the Jewish people, and whether He were the man of prophecy. What led him to do this is not altogether clear. He had already proclaimed Jesus one whose shoe latchet he was not worthy to unloose, and had called Him the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world, and the greater Man who was to come after him. Why, then, he should send to ask Him as to His official character and expectations, has occasioned perplexity and diversity of opinion. He may have fallen into despondency and doubt, shut up by Herod Antipas in a grim, desolate fortress, and with small prospect of release; or he may have intended to give the Messiah an opportunity publicly to declare Himself and to link His name and fortunes with those of

His forerunner. But, whatever his secret motive, the interview took place.

After his disciples had withdrawn, Jesus began to praise John, reminding the bystanders of his popularity at the zenith of his fame; how the people swarmed into the desert region of the Jordan to see and hear him and to submit to his baptism. Suddenly, in a quick, dramatic manner, He turns upon the crowd and inquires of them whom they take John to be, and why they had thronged into the wilderness to catch sight of him. Was he like a reed growing out of the mire on the banks of the Jordan, and nodding in every passing breeze? No, replies Jesus, he was of tougher fiber than that—a robust, stalwart man; dogmatic, peremptory, absolute, and not to be shaken by the shifty winds of public opinion. Or, continues the questioner, was he a delicate, effeminate, artificial creature? No; persons of such fastidious type and sensitive organization reside in kings' courts; they do not subsist on locusts and wild honey, in barren solitudes. Well, then, if neither of these, asks Jesus of the crowds, Was John a prophet? Yea, verily; he was all of that and more, he held a special commission, was the very man of whom Malachi spoke four hundred years before, who would arrive and announce himself on the eve of the Messianic age. If the nation would accept him in that capacity, he would be the Elijah whose return the prophet made into a foresign that the kingdom of God was at the door.

By this series of questions Christ defined the position and office of John, now that his star had set, in the hearing of the populace. Evidently He held a high opinion of His forerunner. He puts him among the splendid names of Hebrew history, in a line with heroic souls who had been faithful unto blood. In native force, in nobility of soul, in moral courage and sincerity, in the genius for rebuke, correction, command, in loftiness of purpose and in the ability to arouse the torpid conscience of a jaded age, yon lonely, beaten man, imprisoned in Herod's castle, was fit to be named with mighty Elijah. John, said Jesus, take him all in all, is the peer of any man whose achievements have glorified your annals.

Clearly no praise, no encomium, could be more exalted than this. Besides, it shows that Jesus was not governed by the material standards that impress most men. John was now a spent force, a dying echo, a fading memory. While he moved amid the commotions of his time, the coil of difficulties, the tangle of intrigue, the oppositions of vested interests, many thought him the builder of a new age; in his hand an ax to clear away the dead roots and jungles of old abuses; but he had signally failed, was now sunken and vanished, his commanding figure no longer to be seen. And yet, at this nadir of his fortunes, Jesus does not desert him, stands nobly by him, does not let him pass out of sight without notifying the Jewish world that he is a greater man than they had imagined—great in his own magnifi-

cent manhood, and great by reason of his office; and that while they were calling Abraham their father and David their typical king, there lay in the custody of corrupt Herod one who was the peer of the best, an elect and rare soul in all that goes to make genuine, superlative excellence. The current adage success succeeds, although an empirical fact, did not hide from Christ the moral elements in a case and all ulterior considerations. He could sympathize with failure and defeat in a good cause and a just contention. John was jailed, but what of that? He was on the right side—on the winning side; he was related to the most hope-laden revelation of history, as would eventually appear; he could afford to lie just where he was and await the march and evolutions of divine Providence.

Observe the splendid courage of Christ. We do not all find the strength to follow Him in this direction. We are profoundly influenced by what we consider the profitable and temporarily expedient. We are not usually desirous to be identified with an unpopular doctrine or policy or with a losing cause. We want to train with the big battalions, we want to be found on the winning side. Most men have not got vision and the gift of prophecy, and cannot see the long result of time, and have not patience to await the slow justice of time. Hence we are in bondage to appearances and externals, and judge all things by the shrewd calculations of a worldly wisdom. This lack of insight, of a

prophetic idealism, makes men narrow, parochial, peddling and contemptible. Look at the robust faith of Christ. His brave herald was thrust into a dungeon and His own prospects thereby overcast, yet He shows no trace of timidity; He knows that God is with Him, that He has a work to do and must be about His Father's business. So He pauses for a moment to eulogize John, and then takes up His own burden, not daunted by the Baptist's apparent failure or shaken by his sorry fate.

How aptly too, these queries addressed by Christ to His hearers represent the moral attitude of men in reference to religion. He inquired of them what precisely it was in John that took them out in such vast numbers to the Jordan: whether they had conceived of him as a bowing bulrush, or whether, when they found him, and heard his trenchant rebukes and lurid warnings and pungent exhortations, he reminded them of the fragile reeds growing by the river. Did he resemble a weak, fluctuating creature of no resisting power or stability?

Now, adapting this question of Christ concerning His precursor, does it not quite accurately symbolize a great deal of current opinion respecting religion? Is it not true that religion is practically regarded by a multitude of people as a weak thing; not strong, manly, virile; but pensive, visionary, melancholy; a thing that has no relation to this solid world and to the actualities of experience? Somehow

we do not grasp it as a reality, do not conceive of it as an energetic, passionate force, a restraining property, ransacking and overturning and going to the roots of our nature. Is not this the popular conception of religion, that it is a reed shaking in the wind? Men of the world think it a capital discovery for women and clergymen; it may also have some use in seasons of sickness and sorrow; but it is not adapted to a day of action, is not a sound commercial principle. Religion a quivering reed, a vague aspiration, a sigh, a tear? Surely, it is more than these. Let it into mercantile life, public life, political life; give it its rights, give it free course, let it do its perfect work, and men would not choose a shaking reed as its type, but rather the earthquake, tornado,—anything drastic, uncompromising, thorough, tremendous. Once let individuals, corporations, governments, model their conduct upon religious precepts and principles, and who does not see that it would cleanse the air, and abate long-standing nuisances, and extinguish oppression and injustice, and banish frauds and lies and trickery and jobbery, and make the world as fragrant as a summer evening after a storm is spent! Ah, no; religion is not a reed shaking in the wind! It is not only the affair of the weak, desolate, distracted, dying; it is a reality to live by, a prodigious force, a renovating, constructive principle. Anyone who does not find it so, has not applied it; he holds it theoretically, as a respectable form, a venerable tradition, a curious survival, a great

Perhaps, and not as an instant, imperious, imperative, masterful truth of fact, with which he must reckon and whose requirements he must meet. No man who sincerely strives to lead a religious life in a world of corruption, temptation, provocation like this, will be likely to call the Christian ideal a weak, limp, languid thing—a reed shaken by the wind. He will be more apt to say that it is too strong for his weakness; an athletic virtue he cannot cope with and that makes demands he cannot satisfy.

Observe again that Christ inquired of the crowd whether they had expected to find John a man clothed in soft raiment. Here also, without unduly straining the language, we may detect another prevalent idea or definition of religion, which is likewise inadequate. For as it is not a feeble, passive thing, so too it is not properly described as a soft, graceful thing, agreeable to the eye. There are æstheticized natures, in whom sensibility and emotion largely preponderate. Such temperaments show a tendency to lay stress upon the outward husks and flourishes of religion. They associate it with an ornate and elaborate service, with ecclesiastical furniture, symbolical colors, emblematic designs, impressive forms and æsthetic effects. This is well, up to a set limit, and may be of spiritual use to a multitude of souls. One of the clamant needs of the Protestant Church to-day is to defend itself from vulgarity and to maintain dignity and decorum in the conduct of public worship. And while religion is

certainly not an affair of vestments, lights, and pictured windows, it is quite possible to push to the opposite excess and to alienate from the church persons of education, taste and refinement, who believe in order and the proprieties, and cannot stand the unworthy conduct of religious service. Men are coarse, hard and sordid enough, and they ought to find in the church something to exalt and enrich and deepen their natures. At the same time religion is not soft raiment. It does not consist in admiration of the carved work of the sanctuary, or its dim, mystical light, hieratic pomp and evolutions of gorgeous ceremony—in anything ocular and outward; these may sometimes help the spirit to ascend, but they are not of the essence of religion.

It is entirely possible also for one to launch out with the fervor of a seraph upon the billows of a favorite hymn, and yet to-morrow drive a hard bargain, join an iniquitous combination, take an unfair advantage, show one's self as mean, small and contemptible as a man need care to be. Religion is not soft raiment; it is not merely singing about holiness and heaven; it is not a shallow sentiment, a melting mood, a venerable tradition received from parents or descending like silver plate, an affair of flowers, music, spectacle and elegant appointments;—these adjuncts may be present and may be of use, but should be carefully distinguished from the thing they enshrine, the reality they symbolize.

Nor should men object to direct, practical, per-

sonal preaching, that searches one's life and enters like iron into the soul, that rebukes silly customs and fashionable lies, pompous shams, political jobs, and social evils—all the venality and vileness that stalk abroad. The Hebrew prophets evidently did that kind of preaching. They all tried to prod and rouse the dormant conscience of their times. And in every age it is undoubtedly the function of preaching to make men realize acutely that they are not what they ought to be; to probe and expose the dry rot and moral decay that honeycomb society and threaten to bring it down now and then in tumbling confusion. But there be those who object to the use of this fire and hammer that strikes and shatters; and, confessedly, it needs to be used cautiously and in the spirit of love. Nevertheless religion is not a tune all in the minor key; it is not simply a homily about heaven, forgiveness, meekness, charity; it is masculine and aggressive, and requires truth in the inward parts; it divides asunder joints and marrow, and discovers the thoughts and intents of the heart. Let us not, then, criticize preaching if sometimes it disturbs, interferes, interrupts, agitates, puts us on the defensive, is not agreeable, is not always as soothing, sweet and consoling as we would like—for it is not a man in soft raiment.

Once more Christ inquired of those present whether they took John for a prophet. And to this He replied affirmatively, and added that he was a prophet of a

high order, exceptional even in that line, in that he was the last of the prophets and herald of the Messiah. And is it not evident that this language also can be accommodated, and will serve as a description of religion? Is it not also a prophet—a voice crying in the wilderness, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"? What is there more prophetic in the world than the religious sentiment in man? What else is there so deep, mystical, solemn, supernatural on earth as this, that man can think about God and worlds to come! Religion as a fixture of this sensual world is the most suggestive and sublime fact in it. It points beyond nature to the supernatural; it tells us that we are drifting toward a splendid mystery, toward unknown realms, a more abundant revelation. It suggests the possibility that we may put on a finer organism, a more complete nature, and that death is only the birth cry of a new life akin to the eternal life of God. It teaches us that God is holy, just and good, the sum of all perfections, and that to dwell with Him and enjoy Him we must be like Him. Religion is truly a prophet; it has the promise not only of the life that now is, but of one to come. All man's other faculties and capacities can find fulfillment here; his intellect, appetites, will, active powers, get scope here and materials to feed upon; but there is an infinite element or potentiality in him which predicts a higher and fuller existence, and he feels the pull upon him of the unseen and eternal.

Probably the most comprehensive, compendious word that we can use about religion is, that it is a blessed hope, which if one have, he will purify himself accordingly; it is a prophet in the soul pointing toward a diviner world, and bidding men get ready for it by keeping themselves unspotted from this one. Religion, of necessity, has a large element of prophecy and of hope. It was this fact that made the Jews, by preëminence, the religious people of antiquity. Besides them, there was no nation in the Mediterranean world that consciously hoped. The Roman world, the heathen world, was profoundly depressed and despairing respecting the eternal problems of thought; Israel alone had prophecy and hope; and they are integral to religion in any real sense. This is the most general account we can give of it, that it brings this present life under the power of a life to come.

Oh, yes; religion is a sublime prophecy! It is concerned with ideas, promises, possibilities, truths, that lie at present below our horizon, yet by which we may shape our course and govern our lives. It speaks of God and immortality and spiritual perfection; it reminds us that the things that are seen are temporal; it encourages us to cherish high ambitions and great expectations, and to live worthy of them. It instructs, exhorts, rebukes, comforts, inspires. Like John, by the Jordan, it is a prophet, foretelling a coming Messiah, a kingdom of Christ, a kingdom of

righteousness and love. What, then, went ye out to see? What do you think of religion, what do you take it to be? A pious tradition, a respectable form, a doctrine, a priest, a sacrament, a bit of poetry, a beautiful parable, or an unproved hypothesis, an idle tale? Is there indeed a God, a heaven, an eternal salvation from sin and suffering, an eternal life of progressive growth in all the best elements of personality, an eternal Christ? Religion says so. What do you think? Is it a true prophet, do you believe its message, and do you live as though you believe it?

THE SIGHT OF THE SOUL

And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.—II KINGS 6: 17.

THE spiritual succession passed over to Elisha after Elijah had been removed from the public stage. No reader of the Old Testament can fail to observe the immense influence exercised by these two mighty masters. In their time, the schools of the prophets founded by Samuel, and composed of young men who proposed to devote themselves to the prophetic office and to submit themselves to the necessary discipline and training, touched their high-water mark. Both Elijah and Elisha appear to have been followed and attended by these candidates for holy orders, to use a current phrase of our own day. For, albeit the power of prophecy could not be imparted, but was a divine gift or calling,—not a thing to be taught out of books or communicated orally,—it was still an inestimable privilege to be admitted to the companionship of a great prophet, a man of religious genius and commanding personality, and so to be put in the way of getting, by his infectious influence and enthusiasm, a fraction, at least, of his singular power.

Elisha was the acknowledged spiritual leader of his day in Israel, some 850 years B. C., as Elijah had been before him, and as Samuel was in his time, and Moses in his. He had received his call or ordination from Elijah, who doubtless perceived that he was the man for the hour, had a genuine ring, and was duly qualified by a robust and virile nature, as well as by religious faith, to stand for order and righteousness and for the ancient covenant made with the children of Israel. And he abundantly justified the choice and achieved a moral ascendancy and leadership in his age.

The Hebrew prophets were public men and gave their judgment on public questions,—social customs, diplomatic relations, dynastic successions, political revolutions, declarations of war and treaties of peace. They rebuked kings, they publicly denounced or approved the royal policy, they preached against idolatry and warned the people against false prophets and false priests. They constituted a unique order, the like of which has not been seen since. There have been exceptional individuals, men of splendid courage, and moral elevation and heroism, who have been pathfinders and have made epochs in history, but there has been, outside of Israel, no long succession of men, with a genius for moral ideas, who have claimed to stand as God's accredited messengers.

It was in northern Israel that Elisha plied his ministry. Jehoram, son of Ahab and Jezebel, was king at that date, and had his hands full by reason of

wars with the Syrians, whose capital was Damascus. Like all the prophets, Elisha thought it quite within his right to take a hand in public affairs and counsel Jehoram in his difficulties. By a preternatural insight he revealed to him the military maneuvers and moves on the chessboard of war by which Benhadad of Damascus hoped to outflank and entrap him. The continual failure of his best-laid plans naturally puzzled the Syrian monarch, who suspected there was a traitor in the camp, playing into the hands of the king of Israel for a consideration. But upon inquiry of a responsible person, he was told that Elisha was at the bottom of Jehoram's apparent omniscience: "The prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber." Such being the situation, the only remedy was to arrest the prophet and thus put a period to his pernicious activity. Learning that he was at Dothan, a town not far from Samaria, Benhadad invested it, intending to bring him a captive to Damascus. So it came to pass that one morning, Elisha's servant awoke to discover an army of Syrians girdling the town, and instantly reported to his master the alarming intelligence and their desperate straits. The great man did not take the same gloomy view of the crisis, but heartened his servant by the confident assurance of invisible reenforcements, and prayed God to open his eyes to the sight of them. And the record reads: "The Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and,

behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."

This old Hebrew narrative is suggestive in several directions. Elisha's young servant was furnished with the organs of vision, but it appears that he did not see all that there was to be seen, he did not see what his master saw. He got a set of sensations, or mental impressions, resulting from the action of external forms upon him, and these in his case were the Syrians encamped before Dothan. But behind them was another and mightier host, for the recognition of which natural sight was not sufficient; he needed a more powerful organ than the eye of flesh to bring it within range.

Indeed, this whole question of seeing and perception is a very interesting one. One person sees more than another. The logician can see a fallacy lurking in a statement which the average man would let pass unchallenged. The metaphysician, the theologian, can detect the implications and tendencies and logical issues of a proposition which one ignorant of the history of doctrines, and whose mind is not trained to make fine distinctions, would fail to apprehend. It is abundantly evident that there is more in the world and in the great universe to be seen than the sense of natural sight is equal to. Everyone sees just so far and so deep as he is prepared and educated to see. And it has been a chief endeavor of philosophy in every age to explain the connection that

exists between the human mind and the external, visible universe. What do we really see? What is it that the mind comes into immediate contact or commerce with, when we look out upon space and the material objects that occupy it?

Several systems of thought have attempted to answer this question. There are those who defend the reality of the universe. These are realists, and hold that in sense perception we know things directly as external to ourselves and seize reality at once. This is the so-called school of common sense. A slight modification of this view affirms that what the mind sees is not the thing itself, but a vicarious image of it—the impression which it makes upon the sense, some intermediate form between the object and the percipient self. Then there is the famous theory of idealism,—that nothing can be perceived except ideas; that matter and things exist only in mind and for mind, and that without mind the idea of matter would be absurd. What we call body, material substance, what we see, is nothing real in itself, but only a complex of ideas or images which the mind is obliged to create and which would not exist without it. Conscious, thinking persons alone exist; everything else is a mode of the mind's existence, a projection of mind. Then there is a philosophical skepticism, which holds that if there be an external universe, it must be something very different from what it appears to us to be; that everything is relative

to the mind that looks at it and cognizes it. An ancient Greek philosopher remarked that oxen or lions would certainly worship a great ox or lion, and Spinoza said that if a triangle could make a creed, it would assert that God is eminently triangular. In other words, absolute truth is unattainable—the man is the measure of his universe.

Unquestionably, for creatures constituted as we are and armed with only five organic senses, the world of objects and things is practically what we take it to be. It would be dangerous for anyone to assume that it is other than what it appears. Yet it is also perfectly thinkable that if man had a sixth sense, or was implemented with two or three more inlets or organs of sensation in addition to those he already has, the universe might take on a very different aspect. What this world looks like to beings of larger intellect and finer penetration and deeper insight, and who occupy higher altitudes than man does; how it appears to the angelic hierarchy, and to rational creatures such as we can imagine, who expatiate through unknown realms and other places of God's universe—this is, of course, matter of pure conjecture. But it may easily be, as everyone must acknowledge, that to such, this revolving globe and these secular ages which we call time, may offer quite a different front and compose a totally different spectacle from that which daily salutes us mortal men, who can only get knowledge of it through five narrow inlets.

At any rate this conclusion is supported analogically by reference to the lower animals, the subhuman creation. Surely, the earth and the world which the ox or the horse looks out upon from the meadow is not the world which you see. And, by parity of reasoning, if there be loftier, nobler, more splendid and powerful beings in the unseen universe—angels, archangels, seraphim, sons of eternity, equipped with faculties and energies of which man has no present experience—it is easy to see, and one is forced to admit, that such magnificent creatures may, yea, must, see the world and time, this whole secular process of which we are a part, in a somewhat different light, under a different form and aspect from what it shows itself to us with our stringent human limitations. And this also may be, probably is, true of those whom we call the dead.

It is this line of argument which has led some thinkers, in their reflections upon the problem of being, and the meaning of existence, to preach the doctrine that man is not in touch with reality. What he sees and finds out and knows is practically sufficient to guide him and keep him out of danger, but it is not the whole truth of fact. The essential, underlying absolute truth he is unable to apprehend on his present level. To this point moved the famous illustration of Plato, that man is like one who sits in a dimly lighted cavern with his back to the mouth of it and stares at shadows flitting across the wall. The world of sense, he held, is a world of shadows, but

behind and above it there is a world of ideas, archetypes, patterns, of which the things we see—all particulars, all sensible objects—are only a dim and imperfect copy. These ideas and forms according to which God made the world are the true and real existences, while what men see and apprehend are merely fragments, adumbrations of the true and eternal. It is a fascinating hypothesis. Probably there is truth in it, though undoubtedly there is something solid and substantial, as our senses report to us, upon which we plant our feet and build our houses. For practical regulative purposes this is all we need to know; nevertheless, the great spiritual thinkers are right in reminding us that we walk amid shadows, phenomena, appearances, and are not in contact with the ultimate fact and essential truth or being. We do not know what matter is, or mind, or the mode in which they interact, or how God exists and fills all spaces. Our life is a limited, defective one, good for the present distress, adequate to the present exigency; but could we open our eyes, could we get more powerful and far-reaching vision, could we look underneath the showy, superficial crust of life, and behind the curtain of the phenomenal universe, we might soon see that what we take for reality is, so to speak, a dance of shadow shapes, a play of phantasms. What befell Elisha's servant might quite conceivably happen to us. We might see the air full of horses and chariots, the very equipage of the Almighty.

Consider, further, that our life in this world and its content of experience may be aptly described by this language of the prophet, as an opening of the eyes to what is hidden and unknown. This, fundamentally, is what life signifies for a rational and reflective being like man. His constitution indicates that he was intended to be a progressive, ever-advancing creature. He has been endowed with the precious gift of intellectual curiosity and has been set down amid a world of wonders, of mysteries, of insolubilities, that challenge him at every turn. The universe and man are correlated; it holds the secrets, he is here to find the clue, to fit the right key into the lock. This is one of the chief arguments in favor of a supreme thinker, a divine reason, a designing mind as the prius and author of all existence. We infer that the universe is rational, the product or effect of reason, because man, who is himself rational and a thinker, can discover its laws, observe its nice adaptations, and perceive its teleology, and how means and ends are adjusted and balanced. He perceives that the laws of geometry underlie the frame of nature; his mathematics satisfies him that something of the sort was implicated in the construction of the all. There must be a rational, consecutive mind behind the universe, because he can follow its operations and calculations. This is a very cogent argument for theism. If the universe were a muddle, a babel, an unbounded deep of inextricable confusion, man could make nothing out of it. He might well

conclude, if he could survive at all amid such a mingle-mangle and chaos of incoherencies and cross-purposes, that it was indeed the result of blind chance, a toss of dice. But such is not the case. The world of nature is a rational and ordered whole. Its very intelligibleness founds a presumption that cannot be easily rebutted in favor of a rational and designing mind, as the responsible author of it. This fact has been recognized by all religious thinkers and cannot easily be evaded by irreligious ones. It certainly calls for explanation how and why man, who is a mind, can understand the universe and perceive its rationality if there is no mind in it, no God who spread out the heavens and made Arcturus and Orion, who causes the day-spring to know his place, and has hung the earth upon nothing, and has set bars and doors to the sea, and said unto it, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further."

And, considered in its deepest meaning, this is the chief end and highest privilege of man, to get his eyes opened that he may see God behind the mechanism of nature and in every event of life, like as Elisha's servant had his vision unsealed to see behind and above the Syrian army, horses and chariots of fire, hovering in the still air, round about Elisha. For this, after all is said and done, is the great thing—to get vision, insight, metaphysical convictions, a faith that is the substance of things not seen. This is really the supreme good, the finest result of living in this dim and troublous world. "Open the young man's eyes that he may see,"

prayed Elisha. Surely this is the great desideratum. What man wants, what he needs above all else, is to see the world in just ratios; to see life as it is, what it means, what it involves, whither it tends, its prophetic quality, its criticalness, its solemnity, the eternal element in it.

Oh, no; we have not got the right vision yet. Man walks in a vain show and amid dissolving views. He lives upon the conventional, ceremonial crust; he mistakes large things for small and small for large; he is concerned with names, forms, formulas, phrases, fictions, shadows, and has not got a grip of reality, does not know a great soul when he sees one, but shouts himself hoarse over some clever demagogue or mountebank. Vision, discernment, the power to discriminate and divide between the good and the evil, the temporal and the eternal, that which is temporarily profitable, but eventually and eternally unprofitable and inexpedient—this rapid intuition and sure instinct is not a characteristic note of mankind, has not been developed to anything like its highest power. Hence result the false standards and false measurements that abound, and the inverted estimates we put upon men and things. Market values thus come to loom larger and more important than moral values, and men are rated by what they have and not by what they essentially are. It is all because our eyes are not opened to see the basic realities, to distinguish between the genuine metal and the counterfeit. Look at this

matter narrowly and, if I do not err, it will appear that here lies a fundamental defect that is answerable for much of the perplexity, anxiety, skepticism and rebellion there is in the world. Every human life is full of turmoil and trouble, change and disappointment. Defeat, overthrow of one kind and another, failure to get, or to do, or to be what one would like, the collapse of fond hopes and great ambitions—these are common experiences. And if a man rests in it as ultimate and final, life must seem to him a chaotic darkness, a hopeless muddle, a dirge, a place of skulls.

In order that he may be reconciled to the dark things of his experience, he must find a soul of goodness in things evil, honey in the lion's carcass, light in darkness. This is the only saving clause, the only sign of promise and star of hope for any tossed and troubled voyager on life's sea. He must get his eyes open to see, beyond the drifting clouds and hurly-burly and racket of his unprofitable years, something better, something satisfying, for which they are the necessary preparation, and which will fully interpret them. Devoid of this divination, this sight of the soul, no mortal man can rest satisfied in such a shifting scene as this, battered by the shocks and storms that break over him. It is absolutely essential to his peace that he look beyond, and see something there fit to expound all that puzzles and appalls and confounds him now.

Moreover, it is probably true that if we had this deeper and keener vision, the things which now fret and

vex and disturb us would cease to worry, and would take on their true proportions and be seen and recognized to be what they are—incidental, peripheral, comparatively indifferent. This is really a fundamental lack of our nature, a clamant need, the power to see what is essentially valuable and desirable and enduring, and to live for that. This defect accounts for the multitudes who are trying to extract out of this perishing world what it has not got and was never intended to give. It accounts for the many who run greedily after some inferior good, as though that, once attained, their cravings would be quieted, and their aspirations satisfied. Their eyes are not opened to see something better than material gratifications; that is, the inward, intrinsic worth of the individual himself, his destiny and how best he may achieve his perfection. What an empty chase much of our striving and straining would seem to us to be, could we see life stripped of its sensuous accompaniments, its blaze and blare all subsided, and over against and beyond it the city of God, the domes and spires of the Apocalypse!

And Elisha prayed the Lord, "Open the young man's eyes that he may see." It is the only cure for our secularism and materialism, to catch sight of the spiritual world, the outer infinite, the sphere of Deity, the throne of God, the sea of glass, and the rushing splendors of that inconceivable estate. This is really the supreme question for us: Do we see anything beyond these temporalities, this world of eye and ear,

its trade, its politics, its fugitive fashions? Do we live under the power of great convictions? Whosoever habitually does this is the spiritual man as distinguished from the natural man, concerning whom Paul writes, that he "judgeth all things." His citizenship is in the heavens, he walks with God, he looks for the kingdom of God.

So then, I conclude, Elisha's prayer for his young servant should be our prayer. For what could possibly give more breadth and elevation to any child of man than just this, to bring eternity into time, to make little of small things and much of great things, and to endure as seeing God, who is invisible. "And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."

FROM MAN TO GOD

He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see?—PSALM 94 : 9.

THIS statement is argumentative. The Psalmist was living evidently in a troublous time, when judges were corrupt and suitors could not get justice, when human rights were outraged, and the weak and defenseless lay at the cruel mercies of the unprincipled and powerful. The state of society roused his moral indignation, and he inquired of the oppressors what kind of being they took the God of Israel to be, and whether they supposed He was not cognizant of their insolence, arrogance and injustice. Suddenly he took a philosophical turn: "He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see?" In other words, if men can see and hear, *a fortiori* shall not God apprehend and know what is going on upon the earth, and the high-handed way in which those tyrants, whom the Psalmist denounces, are behaving? The language is plainly inferential; it argues from effect to cause. It implies that whatever is in the effect, must somehow, and to a sufficient degree be found in the cause. It does not necessarily mean that because man has an organ called the ear God must be also furnished

with a similar organ; it only means that God can hear. It does not mean that the human eye is exactly reproduced, so to speak, as a feature of the divine Being; it only means that God can see, that He is aware of what is being done in His universe. It advises the unconscionable men who abused their power and were "strutting in their little brief authority," that God who had made them and their faculties was surely greater than they and knew all about them.

The text, then, is an example of argument from effect to cause, from the less to the greater. It is perfectly obvious that we are largely beholden to this instrument of inference in our passage through life. Probably most of the conclusions we arrive at are reached by this route. Much, of course, is made of what is called experience; it is properly rated high, and held to be the only lamp by which any reasonable person will be guided through this dim contingent world. Yet it is important to remember that the chief factor or element in experience is the faculty of drawing correct inferences from it. The things that happen to you, that fall under your notice, that enter into your life history, would be of no value at all, would have no didactic property, were it not for the reaction of your mind upon them, by means of which you infer the future from the present, and what will be from what already has been, and is. We are continually talking about our experience as though that were a finality, what we have seen and suffered

and been part of, without always reflecting that mere facts, happenings, sensations, the impressions made upon us by the impact of external things and events, can only acquire significance and meaning from the intellectual construction we put upon them. Without mentality they would be like the grand spectacle of nature that passes before the cattle feeding in the meadow,—sunrise and sunset, the shadows chasing each other over the hills, the pomp of clouds, the reddening dawn, the dusky twilight, "midnight on her starry throne." What do the ox and the sheep know about the "myriad-voiced organ of nature"? They know as much about it as you would, if, back of your experience, and entirely independent of it, there were not a constructive, interpreting, illuminating mind capable of reacting upon what you see and feel and observe, and turning it to practical account. This is our human distinction. This is really the vital core of our experience. It is what a man means when he says, "my experience has taught me thus and so"; the fact being that it has not taught him anything save as he has taught himself out of it, by collating, and generalizing, and concluding from its contents and data, what he ought to do, what he ought to be, and how he may adjust himself to his situation and use that wisdom which consists in adapting means to ends. This is what is intended in the case of an incurable fool, so called. Such a one has all the experience, mayhap, of Socrates or Benjamin Franklin;

plenty in that kind to keep him out of blunders and trouble and humiliation; what he lacks is the power of reacting correctly upon it, of coördinating and generalizing it, and steering his course by facts and concrete actualities.

Experience taken by itself, simply as a name for what happens to one, as a procession of events that files across one's field of vision, as a temporal succession of occurrences, as a set of sensations, sights and sounds, is perfectly sterile and meaningless. Its total value stands in what one deduces, concludes and learns from it.

It is easy to see, then, that the field of inference is immense. We know very little absolutely, but we believe a great deal; that is to say, we infer from the little that we do strictly know, to more beyond. Pretty much our whole life is guided by probability, by belief, by what we call moral certainty. You are morally certain of a thing when you are sure enough to act upon your impression or information; it is not absolute certainty, or complete presentative knowledge, it is paler and thinner than these, but it is sufficient to go upon, to justify action. And our human lives are, for the most part, governed and directed by the candlelight of inference, of moral certainty, of probability, and not by absolute and perfect knowledge.

There are many who name themselves agnostics, notably in relation to religious ideas and metaphysical truths, but, I suppose everyone is, of necessity, an

agnostic, to this extent, that he would not attempt a strict demonstration of scarce any Christian doctrine or of any article of what is called revealed religion. The most earnest and convinced theist would not probably succeed in proving even the existence of the living God. The devoutest Christian could not demonstrate that an incarnation of the divine and eternal has taken place in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The right question is not what we know or do not know, but what we believe, what we are morally certain of, *i. e.*, sufficiently certain to act upon, to bear our weight upon, and trust and use for practical purposes. These words of the Psalmist corroborate this position: "He who planted the ear, shall he not hear? He who formed the eye, shall he not see?" There is no irrefragable chain of proof, nothing that has mathematical stringency, nothing that the lawyer might not throw out of court as irrelevant, nothing that compels belief in a personal God and in His providence and care; nevertheless, there is prodigious force in the argument, it is a highly pertinent consideration.

Here is man, the primate and paragon of animals, with his senses and intellect, his thoughts that wander through eternity, and his endless aspirations and inextinguishable hopes. If man has a seeing eye and a hearing ear, if he is percipient and rational and intellectual, can he think less of his Maker? Is it reasonable to suppose or believe that there is more in the effect than lay originally and implicitly in the cause? The argument

is extremely cogent; not a plenary argument, not conclusive as to the existence of a personal God, yet one that arrests attention and calls loudly for an answer, and which one would find some difficulty in refuting.

Indeed the method taken by this biblical writer is the only one by which it is possible to get satisfaction in reference to some of the ultimate questions of thought; nor ought it to be pronounced invalid and insufficient in the sphere of religious inquiry, when, as matter of fact, we have to invoke and apply it constantly in other connections. How do I know that you or any man with whom I converse is a reasonable soul? I never saw a soul; it is strictly true that I do not see you, nor you me. All we can see are practical manifestations and sensible signs; the rest is inference. We judge of others by what we know of ourselves. How do men collect a verdict from a line of evidence? They infer the truth of fact from the total impression made upon them by the mass of conflicting testimony. It is clear that we are quite familiar with the canon or rule propounded in this text: "He who planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that teacheth man knowledge, shall he not know?"

No one need object to carry this inferential method into the realm of religion, since we are straitly shut up to it in other departments of thought. We look out upon the universe from our far little isle afloat on vacancy, and we detect order, balance, system, adaptation, mathematics—what

looks like purpose in the vast fabric; there seems to be a mind—somewhat akin to our own—immanent in it. It is a spiritual universe. We can understand it in large part. By consequence, it is a fair inference that a designing intelligence adequate to the product is responsible for it.

This surely is a critically interesting subject. What are we entitled to believe concerning the eternal problems, God, the world, the soul—what may we be morally certain of, that is, certain enough to act upon, to take for granted as true? Although we may not know or be able to demonstrate, is there not enough at our disposal to ground some practical conclusions on, to control our conduct, and direct our lives? This is virtually the argument of the text: it rises from man to God: it assumes that man and his world require a cause and an author not lower than themselves, but higher, more powerful and more divine.

People continually object: "We do not know anything about religion; we do not even know that there is a personal Providence over the world; we have not the means to verify any religious idea or hope. All these highest things are involved in a cloud of doubt; we must be agnostic in respect to them." Now, while it is certainly true that the nature of religious inquiry precludes the use of the surveyor's theodolite and measuring chain, or of the chemist's scales and solvents, or of the lawyer's stringent rules

of evidence, it is not true that the world and our life here do not yield a presumption in favor of religious faith and of righteous living. There are, at least, a few supreme verities that men have a right to assume and to act upon, growing out of their own constitution and condition. It is an egregious mistake to always insist upon knowledge and proof. These are not available even in matters of secular concern and in daily emergencies. We have to walk by the light we have, and mostly through the dark; we sail through a fog, we are liable to strike rock or shoal any day. We must be guided by probabilities and take our chances. So, likewise, there are a few religious truths which any man is justified in believing, upon the ground of his own nature and experience. He need not attempt to prove them, they are not susceptible of that treatment; but he is safer in acting upon them than in denying or ignoring them. One of these is that God, like himself, is a person, who can understand him and sympathize with him, who can hear his groans and sighs and prayers and interpret and answer them in such wise as to promote his best welfare. Man cannot conceive of anything in the universe higher than personality; this is the loftiest note he can strike. He discovers that he himself is compounded of intelligence, feeling and will; hence, if he can think of God at all, it is natural and unavoidable that he should make over to Deity his own most regal attribute, his finest faculties, though these are

but a candle glimmer and pallid ray, compared to their energy and amplitude and perfection in God, who alone has life. This is theism, and it is grounded in human nature. "He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know?"

Moreover, any mortal man is safer and happier in casting himself without reserve upon this assumption, than by taking up with blank atheism, or fatalistic pantheism, or even negative agnosticism. He has the warrant of his nature and constitution to go upon; he is encouraged to believe—poor, frail, frightened, dying creature that he is—that there is One in the universe who really loves him, listens to his cry and can save him and provide for him, here and hereafter.

Another idea or doctrine about which we may be sure enough to act upon, is, that God has made a partial self-revelation to mankind. This inference almost inevitably follows upon that of the divine existence and paternity. If man is indeed a son of God and capable of moral ideas and religious emotions and yearnings, capable of communion with conceptions and hopes that transcend this material world of sense, then it is quite thinkable that, owing to the kinship between them, the infinite Spirit has actually come into communication with a creature so constituted as to understand Him, at least in part. This makes room for all the solemn revelations that have been vouchsafed in every age to elect souls of our race—

idealists, saints, mystics, prophets, religious thinkers; and, last of all, it makes such an incarnation of the invisible God as Christianity postulates and presents entirely possible, if not even probable. Given an infinite Reason, and a finite reason that can partially comprehend Him and His ways, and the antecedent likelihood is that the two will approximate and enter into reciprocal relations. And this is what the Christian gospel declares has taken place: it purports to be a genuine self-discovery of God to His human family. Again I remind you there is no proof possible. You cannot prove a divine incarnation, or, for that matter, any article of the Christian religion. Nevertheless, taking the whole case together, there is quite enough to act upon. Considering man, a sinful, dying creature full of mysterious hungers and thirsts, who wants to be saved, to be eternally blest, and who can think about God and His perfections, and the pleasures at His right hand, it is not incredible to suppose that the Christian revelation is an authentic, articulate promise to him that his wish shall be gratified. No one, surely, need be ashamed to confess Christ, to become His disciple, to follow Him, to trust Him as the mediator whom God has ordained, and to live the filial life which He lived. There is enough in our circumstances, in human condition, in man's estate of sin and misery, in his anxieties, aspirations, discontent, in his conscious guilt and fear of death, judgment and eternity, in his longing for rest and

peace and happiness, there is enough in man's sorry case to make the gospel welcome, to make it an issue that ought to be acted upon.

I would mention one other religious idea or truth,—that of the soul's conscious survival into a higher life, into a superior mode of existence—what is commonly called immortality. In respect to this, inferential reasoning plays a large part. The question is: Has such a delicate, marvelous creature as man been brought so far, to go no farther? Does it not look like a wasteful excess to fit up a being with such fine furniture of abstract ideas, spiritual sentiments, great expectations, insatiable cravings, one who can build metaphysical constructions and speculative systems of thought, or, if not that,—save in exceptional instances,—who yet is profoundly conscious of the hollowness and futility of present satisfactions, and whose prophetic soul dreams of something better and more permanent, and then disappoint him? Is it not almost cruel to launch such a singular and gifted creature upon life, to do so much for him, to bring such spacious, splendid prospects before his eager eye, to whisper into his ear such rumors, surmises and possibilities, and at last snuff him out like the guttering candle that expires in final darkness?

Whatever anyone may be disposed to think or to say about all this, there can be no question that the confessed failure of this earthly life, its abrupt inequalities and crushing disappointments, its broken purposes and

small results, have grounded an argument in favor of a future state that will supply a solution for what is now unintelligible, and will vindicate the essential justice of God. Perhaps this coming adjustment is what Christ hinted at in His parable, Dives and Lazarus. He figures Abraham addressing Dives thus: "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedest thy good things and Lazarus evil things, but now he is comforted and thou art tormented." It seems to mean, taken in a large way, that things are to be equated eventually, and that under that equilibrating process it may turn out that the last shall be first, the first last. God will redress the disturbed balance, and every accountable soul will be put where he belongs, and get what he deserves. This is conspicuously not true under present mundane arrangements, but the long and patient justice of God will finally make it true, and show it to be one of the pillars of His awful throne. Probably something like this is what Christ meant to say. Yet it is perfectly clear that the doctrine of a future state rests largely upon inference from extant conditions and the notorious failure of man's terrestrial experience to satisfy his moral instincts. Hence, earnest thinkers feel that if this be all, and there is no further explanation, the world is not worthy of such a being as they conceive God to be, and life hardly worth the living. You see that the argument of the Psalmist is a standing, perennial one, has not been vacated by time, has not become obsolete or uncouth, is good and current and necessary to-day.

"He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know?"

I commend this method to you, in the conduct of life and in handling the sublime mysteries of religion. We walk by faith, not by sight. Carry this invaluable instrument of inference with you as you move on through the world; especially take it into the cloudy region of religious truth, and use it as the mariner does his compass in fog or storm, when he cannot get an observation from the sun. You are fully warranted to do this; indeed, it is all you can do, much of the time.

Look out upon the segment of the universe that you see; look at this sad world staggering under its load of sin and sorrow, pain and labor and grinding care; look at man, so small and mean, yet so darkly great, so potential and prophetic; look at the unsatisfactoriness of your own life, what few nuggets of gold in the pile of ashes and orts and ends you have scraped together; compare what you have and are, with what you covet and aspire after; contrast your ambitions with your performances and present plight; remember your private anxieties, doubts and fears and fluttering hopes and conscious weakness and sinfulness; take the whole case together—yourself, your race, the family of man dwelling amid such a wondrous, solemn, inexplicable scene as this—and judge, conclude, infer, from it all, whether the gospel of the Son of God—His teachings, promises, cross and resurrection—is not what you need, what the world wants, to give peace, contentment, and hope.

A NEW YEAR SERMON

Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.—MATTHEW 13 : 52.

AFTER delivering in rapid succession a chain of parables, Jesus, reports the Evangelist, turned to His disciples and asked them whether they understood what He had been saying. They promptly replied in the affirmative, speaking, of course, from their standpoint. Doubtless they understood the words and their surface sense, but not the deeper implications and the wealth of meaning which time would find in them and bring out of them. It is not likely that these men, who had got what religious knowledge they had from the synagogue and the rubrics of Judaism, fully appreciated and duly estimated all that was involved in the teaching of their great Master. So that, although they believed they understood Him, this their affirmation suffers a serious discount owing to their ignorance and inexperience, and their inability to forecast the future, its histories and the confirmations it would supply.

There are, obviously, different degrees of understanding anything, depending upon the mental capac-

ity, training and traditions in which a man has been bred, and the circles of ideas and interests among which he has moved and which are familiar to him. Hence he may think that he understands a matter, when, in fact, all he knows of it is a stream of words, for the reason that he has not the intellectual qualifications and perceptions necessary to a real and sympathetic appreciation of it.

Jesus did not question upon this occasion the stout assertion of His disciples that they comprehended His parables and had extracted from them all that they carried, and that lay implicit in them. He merely suggested that new meanings and applications might be developed from His sayings with the lapse of time and as the experience and knowledge of his followers increased. This truth He also set in the frame of a little parable, likening them to housekeepers who had accumulated, in the course of years, a large collection of various things, old and new. By the old, He intended their present and relatively imperfect understanding of His ideas and expectations; and by the new, the higher interpretations and larger meanings and the more occult sense which they would find in His instructions as these were illuminated and corroborated by events and by the advancing destinies of the world. Christ evidently throws out a hint that even His beloved disciples had not a vital hold upon the immense truths and hopes He announced. They too, like the Jewish populace, did not comprehend the genius of His

gospel, its profound significance, its perspective of centuries and all the bearings and issues that lay latent therein. These would emerge only gradually and upon occasion, as the world would be ready to receive them and able to use them. And this, which He knew would be the experience of His disciples, He foreshadows under the similitude of a prudent housekeeper, who, to provide against possible contingencies, has storeroom and cellars where he gathers articles and implements of all descriptions, arranging and classifying them, putting this on a shelf, that in a chest, hanging something else on a peg or nail, destroying or casting away nothing which he imagines may some day be of use and repay him for having given it houseroom. The whirligig of time may easily bring it about that he shall wish he had kept some piece, even though antiquated and out of date. So, by one windfall and another, he has got together a wide variety of things, both old and new.

Now, it is to such a forelooking, prudential person that Christ likens His disciples—in that and in every age. "Every scribe who hath been made a disciple to the kingdom of heaven, is like unto a man that is a householder, who bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old." One may see here a covert thrust at the scribes of the Jewish church as contrasted with a scribe who has been made a disciple to the kingdom of heaven. They were, in the opinion of Christ, not of the same kind. Nothing new, no fresh interpretation, came

from the Jewish scribes. What they taught was old, stereotyped, traditional, had no relation to the spiritual aspirations of living men. They were experts in microscopic distinctions and in hanging heavy weights on thin wires. They insisted largely upon punctilios and petty externalities and ritual observances, and had no food for man's hunger, no balm for his hurt. But Jesus here broadly hints that there is to be a new order of scribes, instructed and made disciples unto the kingdom of heaven. The old line was fast running out, and would soon give place to another school which He proposed to found, a school whose members would resemble the clear-sighted housekeeper and would be able to adapt themselves to a new world that was coming, and meet its demands. This new order of scribes would speak to the condition of men, they would serve their own age, they would bring forth out of their storerooms the new as well as the old, the old as well as the new, depending upon what was needed.

The thought that underlies this illustration is quite obvious. Their Master meant those disciples to expect that the result of observation and reflection, the actual experience of life, and especially the illuminating action of the infinite Spirit making them of quicker apprehension and more hospitable to new truth, would gradually shift their viewpoint, set them on a vantage ground and enrich them with acquisitions and ability to instruct, comfort and edify

men. Ideas and doctrines that now baffled them would then lie sunlit and clear; with the growing years their convictions would take deeper root; religious truths would fall into their proper place and order. They would collect, through a lapse of time, not odds and ends,—little trifles that might some day come into request,—but beliefs, persuasions, insights, that would be of incalculable value, and put them upon an equality with their circumstances and the occasion.

If this be a correct rendering of the mind of Christ in this remark to His disciples, it clearly implies that the years as they come, should, if wisely utilized, sensibly increase religious knowledge and faith, and make one progressively more competent to handle the problems and contradictions of life and to meet its exigencies in a victorious manner. Just as the provident housekeeper found every little while that some things he had saved and stored in his lumber room were exactly what he needed to meet a call, or supply a deficiency, or mend a rent, or take the place of something that had been lost or broken, so by analogy in the religious kingdom, it is perfectly possible to accumulate resources, powers, qualities, convictions, mental habitudes, which shall stand one in good stead in the hour of need, in doubt, in adversity, in trial.

This similitude, and little parable of Jesus, is evidently an apt one, and strikingly descriptive of what may take place in the sphere of religious experience.

And, as matter of fact, it was abundantly fulfilled in the history of those Apostles in whose hearing He first uttered it. They found it to be as He here predicted, for, after the Ascension of their Master, they understood His gospel as they had not done while He was with them. They perceived that it had connections, relations, ramifications they had not suspected. Vistas were opened out, horizons were rolled back, new prospects and hopes sprang up and the gospel took hold of them as a redeeming, comforting, sanctifying power, enabling them for all they were called upon to do or to suffer.

This idea then of the old and the new is forcibly brought to mind by the flight of years and the ever-changing conditions and environments they bring with them. It is of these two elements, in fact, that our present life is constituted. The new lies potentially in the old, and the old foreshadows and makes possible the new. They hang together and there ought to be no schism between them. If the new is deduced from the old by legitimate process, and grows out of it as the plant from the seed, or if it is necessitated by the logic of events, or by force of circumstances, this is akin to the sequences that take place in the realm of physics. It is a case of strict antecedent and consequent, for it is inevitable that the old, if it has any vitality, any seed of life, should reach out into new developments and adapt itself to changing times and conditions: only so can it save

itself from being shunted and sidetracked. If it would live over into a fruitful future, this can only be by virtue of a large, fluid, flexible nature or property that lends itself readily to some reincarnation or restatement of its essential, underlying principle or law. It is well to keep this important distinction in view, that there is a vital coherence and historic continuity between the old and the new, and that when properly managed there is an easy, imperceptible, natural evolution of the one into the other. Unquestionably times change; new issues, new crises, new perils, new opportunities, arrive from age to age, and the problem always is, to adjust the eternal law, ideal, truth,—the eternal right,—to the concrete case or practical difficulty, be it ever so novel or unprecedented. It is confessedly at this juncture that men are likely to botch and bungle; they often move too fast, they precipitate events, they push things, they are premature, and in the end are liable to be rebuked by some condition brought about by their wild, reckless haste, lust of innovation, iconoclastic zeal, and unwarranted faith in their nostrum to cure the ills of the world. Yet this need not be so. The old and everlasting truths have a latency and depth in them that no age can exhaust; they are perennial, resourceful, imperishable, indefeasible, and can never become uncouth or outworn. Moreover, there is always more of the old in the world of any time than of the new. If the old things were abolished outright, the

foundations would be destroyed, the taproots would be cut. Scrutinize any fact or event narrowly, and it will appear that it is little more than a transformation or recombination of elements already familiar. If this were not so, the new thing would be a startling phenomenon cut off from all that could explain it. Its only chance lies in what it holds of the old, the universal, the traditional. So that there is nothing absolutely new, as the author of the tract Ecclesiastes discovered in his day. The old is indispensable to keep the new alive. In every age, howsoever progressive, in every era of revolution and change, there is, of necessity, a large deposit from the past; the collective experience of the race, catholic consent touching fundamental truths, settlements, finalities, some mighty landmarks are presupposed in every new departure, in every new time. We may carry these categories of old and new with us everywhere, and it will develop that every present has historical roots in the past, builds upon it, adds only a small increment, a trifling deviation or distinction, while the great systems, creeds, establishments, doctrines, achievements, which make the new time or improved state of things possible, have already been, of old.

Here we stand fronting the last year of this first decade of the twentieth century. We call it a new year; but how new? Is it not plain that it will be the same old year with a few slight modifications; the same old story with a few surprises, grateful or otherwise, a

few unexpected joys or unlooked-for sorrows; the same round of work, of care, of vexation and suspense, of success and failure, of pleasures and pains? In what sense is it new? Is it not merely a small fraction of that infinite duration which we call time? And how old is time? And how old is man? Who can compute their age? What archæologist, geologist, historian, can tell us accurately about either? It is quite obvious to reflection that the new year will carry along with it more out of the old years that are fled than it will contribute of positive and surprising novelty, abrupt change or startling innovation. Something either of good or evil may easily happen in the course of it that will differentiate it from all others within your experience, and set it apart by itself as immemorial. But even so, nothing can befall that has not happened to others in the foretime, and cast its shadow upon other hearts or filled them with an exuberant joy. This was probably in the mind of St. Paul when he wrote to the Corinthian Christians, "No temptation hath taken you but such as is common to man." He would not have them think that they had been set up as targets for the Almighty to shoot at, and that no human beings had ever suffered as they had. So that, looked into carefully, these recurring new years are such in name rather than in fact. Whatever may turn out to be new in them has often happened before in other connections, and in the experience of those who have walked the way of nature

before us. Joy and sorrow, birth and death, gain and loss, poverty and wealth, happiness and adversity, these have been fixtures of the world from the beginning—there is nothing new in them; the setting, the circumstances, the incidence, those upon whom they fall—these elements of the case necessarily vary, but the content of any new year is practically the reproduction under slightly different forms, of events and experiences as old as man.

Yet while it is indisputably true that there is nothing new under the sun, it is also true and important that the future is to us an unexplored, undiscovered tract, and that to traverse it and meet its situations and emergencies we shall find, like the wise householder of the parable, that our stores of knowledge and experience, our moral convictions, our religious beliefs, all that we have gathered on our life pilgrimage, will likely be required and come into play. Man is the only creature of God we know of capable of moral experience, of laying up treasures of facts, memories, observations, informations, convictions, inductions and inferences, by the light of which he may move on into the unknown and untried. Nor, indeed, is life of much profit to anyone, save as he accumulates competence to meet its developments and dilemmas. This, after all, is the great achievement, the victory that overcomes the world. It is not a matter of cardinal importance where one resides, what material or element he works in, what his line of activity or his

fame and eminence in it, but rather, whether out of life and its complex of experience, its vicissitudes and alternations, its successes and failures, its triumphs and disappointments, he has derived strength, steadiness, a larger hope, a deeper trust in the divine Providence, power to live and reign as do the sons of God.

The true life is the life of the soul, and its increasing aptitude and ability to cope with the combinations that confront it, and the oppositions that threaten its peace. It is not the ephemeral things we collect by dabbling in the mud and quicksand of this sinking world that constitute life in the highest acceptation, but what we have learned from the solemn shifts and dispensations of our experience, the moral power they have imparted, the religious sense they have awakened, the disposition and character they have created. This is the thought that underlies Christ's parable of the prudent housekeeper. Such a one has accumulated so large and multifarious a stock of solid, important, available, comfortable truths, principles, conclusions, out of the hurry and foam of existence, out of its toil and tragedy, that by means of them he can accommodate himself to whatever happens, he can shout with Paul, "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors."

Let us then try to attain a right definition of what it is to live, now that we stand on the threshold of another year. We ought to be able to find something in the old gospel and something in our garnered experience

that will help us to meet the future, whatever burden or trouble, whatever perplexity, question of casuistry and conscience, whatever dejection and disappointment it may bring, or wherever it may cast our lot. Something old and new we should find among our spiritual stores germane to any situation, and that will fit in with it. Are you the wise householder of the parable? Have you laid up any sound maxims, profound persuasions and religious certainties? We must live, if at all, from within, by the power of faith, of hope, of love, by inward joys and assurances, by the things new and old we can bring out of our treasure.

LIFE IMMORTAL

JUNE 19, 1910

Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.—LUKE 10 : 20.

TOWARD the close of Christ's ministry, seventy men were sent out through Judea to announce the imminence of Messiah's kingdom. Jesus appears to have appointed two missions, that of the twelve and that of the seventy, but the latter seems to have been for a special emergency, while the former was a permanent body, to last for the term of life. The parish of the twelve Apostles was the world, so far as then known; their ministry was to be universal. That of the seventy disciples was a more temporary arrangement, had no such ecumenical reference or prospect, and did not run out into the future. It was simply intended to be an advance guard of heralds to proclaim the advent of their Master, who was to follow hard upon them and make His overtures before the last tragedy of the cross at Jerusalem. So as soon as they had finished their circuit they returned and disbanded, and were presumably resolved again into the undistinguished company of His followers.

Luke, who mayhap was one of them, reports that they were highly gratified with their expedition; their success had exceeded their expectation. They had found upon trial that their powers were so large and effective, that, at their command, malevolent spirits became tame and tractable. They told Jesus that they had fallen in with some pronounced manifestations of satanic influence and were surprised at their easy mastery of the situation. In short, they had made a victorious sally upon the powers of darkness, and had liberated many thralls, and restored many to reason and manhood. The possession and exercise of this strange, preternatural gift was, to those men, a topic of self-gratulation.

The consciousness of any kind of power is always agreeable; it gives a feeling of importance and gathers a following, and makes one more or less indispensable, according to the kind and degree of influence one can exert. Be it physical, intellectual, social or moral, power is always desirable, has been the immemorial search and endeavor of man. It is easy to understand that the seventy disciples passing through the villages of Judea, attacking all sorts of disease and deformity, must have attracted attention and created a notoriety that could not fail to be gratifying as human nature is made. Everyone loves praise and applause, secretly, at least, if not apparently and openly: this is part of our natural equipment. Take away the craving for admiration, for meritorious

mention or recognition founded upon some advantage or priority, and a potent factor would be withdrawn from life and much of the animus and stimulus that propel society would disappear with it. So we are prepared to read that the seventy disciples were jubilant over their victorious progress. It was a new sensation to them, for they had not been used to such wild ovations.

Observe their great Master's reply. He expressed no surprise; on the contrary, intimated that the results they had got were what He had anticipated: "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." Here, as so often, Jesus betook Himself to tropical, exuberant language and metaphor. It is not necessary to suppose that He alluded to the original fall of Satan as an angel of light, such as Milton describes in his stately epic, as though He had said that He Himself was present at that date and witnessed the meteoric fall of the great archangel. The statement probably was not a page torn from the histories of eternity; rather did it sum up in a vivid, powerful phrase His private certitude touching the final issue of the age-long conflict between light and darkness, good and evil, in which He was engaged. It is as if Jesus had said: "I foresee the time when the throne of evil shall be overturned and this world shall come to order and be reduced to a reign of law. Your ability to conquer distempers is a harbinger of that age and highly significant."

But mark that He adds a notable statement; He advises those seventy disciples that there is something better than exorcising demons, and that is to live under a constitution of things where there shall be no demons to cast out. It is worthy of attention that their Master did not congratulate them so heartily upon the cures they had wrought, but rather upon the more blessed fact that they were bound to a splendid destiny, of which this twilight stage and all its boasted achievements are merely a hint: "Rejoice, because your names are written in heaven." This is a golden sentence, prophetic, immense. Observe the artless simplicity of these men in contrast with the maturity of Christ. They talked as children do of what they had seen and done: "The very demons are subject to us," they cried; but Jesus transcended their point of view. "After all," said He, "what you narrate is no great thing; its value resides in what it implies and prefigures." He led them up out of the wandering stage of childhood, and expounded the philosophy of their success and whither it conducted.

And we can see, upon reflection, that this is the only complete and satisfactory treatment of any fact or event. The final question must always be, What does it mean? Whither does it lead? We need to know not merely the bare existence of a thing, but, more than that, its relations and organic coherence with other things and histories; how it came to be, what it will naturally ultimate in. The phenomenon

by itself is not enough, needs to be explained by its context. You may possess any kind of talent,—intellect, physical beauty, social charm, personal influence,—and the gift may be a curse rather than a blessing until it is ascertained what you do with it, what it is worth to you and to others. How often we fail to seize the essential, permanent element in life, forgetting that there is a kingdom of moral truth, a religious kingdom, great peaks of idealism that outsoar the low flats where we are scrambling and shouldering one another for the meat that perishes.

"In this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven." Jesus seems to say that even those extraordinary endowments, of the nature of miracle, that He had bestowed upon His disciples were valuable not so much in themselves, as on account of what they betokened. His remark implies that if there were no invisible kingdom of archetypes, ideals, spiritual forces, if their names were not written in heaven, their exploits would be of small moment. For authentic miracle is set upon moral foundations, it has to do with the kingdom of God, it is an echo in time of an eternal process. The signs and wonders that ushered in Christianity indicated the nearness of the spiritual realm to this finite and visible one. The light as of Deity that shone around Jesus and transfigured His person, the mighty works He wrought with the ease and spontaneity of nature, were hints and symptoms of an eternal

order, of a higher and diviner and more powerful life. This explains what He is reported to have said: "The Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works"; and again, "The works which the Father hath given me to finish, . . . bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me." Clearly, Jesus virtually says that His miracles were the hidings of omnipotent power; if they had not connected with an invisible sphere and a system of truths out of sight, they would have had no value at all, or, better stated, they would not even have taken place. The underlying, imperishable truth, that "God is in Christ reconciling the world," is the supreme fact from which the Christian miracles borrowed their luster. Behind the thing is always the thought; behind any movement is its constructive idea, behind the natural is the spiritual, behind the empirical is the metempirical. Nothing out of the common would have happened in the natural order had Christ Himself not been of a supernatural order. He is the great miracle. He is Christianity. And this for substance is what He told the seventy upon their return; that if there were no heaven, no celestial vision of God possible to man, no progressive future in store for the human spirit, no wide kingdom of eternity where virtue and knowledge and power and love may wax and come to even greater realizations, in that case, they might cleanse all the lepers and restore all the lunatics from Dan to Beersheba, and their work would have no significance, no divinity.

That which keeps the gospel alive in the world is its divine origin and essential truth. It does not depend for its perpetuity upon the continuance of miracles or upon external aids. The conservative principle of it is interior, intangible, unseen. It can dispense with signs and wonders; it has actually outlived them. This, probably, is what Jesus meant. Miracle was necessary as a credential to introduce and certify Him; He said so; but our main concern after all is to attain a religious hope, a spiritual vision, a growing sense of sonship to God; to find contentment, serenity, joy, in this autumnal world of deepening shadows and falling leaves. An assurance of God's love, a faith robust enough to purify the heart and overcome the world, this is the supreme good, not that the demons are subject unto us, but the transcendental element in religion, that in it which connects with destiny, eternity and worlds and ages to come.

Men and schools have sometimes posited the essence of the Christian religion in certain adventitious and immaterial circumstances. They have built around it a body of externals, upon which, often, undue emphasis has been laid. Sacerdotalism, sacramentarianism, or some dogmatic definition has been set up as an integral part of it, but nothing of the sort can keep it alive, if there be no inherent virtue, no self-evidencing light, no native authority in the thing itself. The great Christian hope should not be confounded with the visible church, or with some private interpretation

of a biblical text, or with a spectacular ritual or a time-honored phraseology; these are only accessories and shadows, and are not of the substance. The Christian idea cannot be penned up within such narrow limits; it is large, elastic, atmospheric; it transcends all hedging limitations and shallow channels that have been set for it. See how intuitively and firmly Christ grasps the effectual truth, for, after distributing to the seventy disciples extraordinary power, He adds: Do not think too much of it; there is something better—your ultimate salvation, and to have your names written in heaven. This, He declares, is the most splendid and affluent possibility within our reach, that we may be saved out of all the storms and perils of time into the spacious and endless kingdom of the heavens. No feature of man's condition is so hopeful as this, that he is susceptible of expansion, exaltation, perfection. For, "this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." Your miracles, your fame, your medals of honor and stars of distinction, your patronage and power, your primacy whatever it consists in, what are all these compared to the ideal possibilities and altitudes of the spirit, and to the things which God has prepared for those who attain unto His resurrection?

The great men of the earth have had at times a dim suspicion of this truth announced by Christ. Have they not all been conscious failures? Have not the prophets, the heroes, the mighty captains, the

pioneers of humanity, called aloud like Elijah, now and again, "Let me die: I am no better than my fathers"? Which of them did not feel that life is a subtle, doubtful game; which of them won his whole contention, which of them was satisfied as he looked out, for the last time, upon his world? Why talk of successful men? Why glory in our miracles? What little we get done here! How little there is to be said about anyone when death comes, and the hireling goes forward to receive his penny at sunset! As Jesus said to those Evangelists, the thing to be most desired is to have one's name written in heaven.

Surely, this is a magnificent outlook opened up by Christ, that there is an immortal life, a range of activities and attainments compared to which the most successful life here, the one that has had most of its ambitions satisfied and hopes fulfilled, is like the dawn upon the hills. Reflect upon Christ's estimate of this world and its honors and triumphs, its amarants and ovations and all its secular greatness. How unworldly He was! What little store He laid by the glittering temporalities which captivate us, and the materialisms that are so clamorous, and absorb us. He must have seen far into the heart of things, for the power and glory of life do not seem to have had any attraction for Him. Neither Jewish politics nor imperial politics detained Him long nor interested Him much. He looked through and beyond them; He appeared to be entranced by the vision of something more stable

and splendid, and to hear the distant bells of the city of God. Such was His religious genius, so luminous and penetrating, that these stabilities upon which men build, He regarded as sinking sand, and this whole world of time and the panoramas of its history, as a passing phase in the eternal process of God's kingdom.

All that Jesus said and did, proclaimed that His citizenship was not here. Even when His disciples returned, flushed and impatient, to tell Him what they had done in the way of miracle-working, He pointed them away toward the great beyond. And the inference is that whatever we may accomplish in this world is merely a fragment, a hint, a prelude of what shall be possible to those who are worthy of eternal life. I care not how useful, honored, diligent, effective, any human life is or has been, it is only a beginning, the bungling work of an apprentice who is trying to learn the proper use of his hands and tools. It is a great thing to live, to serve one's generation, to play one's part ably, to help forward the world, if only a little; but what makes life important and critical is not so much what it gets actually accomplished here, but what it prefigures and prepares for, what it makes out of the toiler, what it confers upon him in the way of fitness for that which lies ahead, for some riper stage and larger opportunity. "Rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven."

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