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THE SERVANTS OF SCRIPTURE



J. W. BURGON



SERVANTS OF SCRIPTURE.

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THE  
SERVANTS OF SCRIPTURE.

BY  
JOHN WILLIAM BURGON, B.D.  
DEAN OF CHICHESTER.

“Ourselves your servants, for JESUS’ sake.”

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TO  
MY BROTHER-IN-LAW  
AND LOVE  
CHARLES LONGUET HIGGINS, ESQ.  
OF TURVEY ABBEY :  
IN MEMORY OF  
MUCH BROTHERLY KINDNESS  
THROUGH MANY YEARS.







THESE short Discourses (with the single exception of the seventh) were addressed in the first instance to the afternoon congregation of St. Mary-the-Virgin's, Oxford (1871—1875); because it was perceived that domestic Servants of either sex largely frequented the church at that hour,—viz. 4 p.m. The “Blue-coat Girls” (destined mostly for Service) were also present. They are now published, partly as a memorial of the ministrations of very happy days, but chiefly with the desire that the words delivered originally to a little handful of persons may obtain an extended sphere of usefulness.

The writer even ventures to hope that two or three of these Discourses (as the second and the tenth) will not be found undeserving of the notice of some who are proficient in sacred Science.

THE DEANERY, CHICHESTER,

*Lent, A.D. 1878.*



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THE  
SERVANTS OF SCRIPTURE.

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I. ELIEZER :

FAITHFULNESS IN FULFILLING A TRUST.

S. MATTH. xxv. 21.

*Well done, good and faithful Servant.*

OF all the Servants spoken of in Scripture, if one were called upon to say *which* most nearly comes up to the idea one forms to oneself of a "good and faithful servant," it would be that eldest servant of Abraham's house, whom Abraham sent into Padan Aram to take a wife for his son Isaac. The history is set down at great length in the xxivth chapter of Genesis, and is familiar to us all.

It will be remembered that in the xvth chapter Abraham, with reference to his childless estate, expostulates thus with ALMIGHTY GOD,—“Behold, to me Thou hast given no seed ; and lo,

*one born in mine house is my heir ;*" for, "the steward of my house is this ELIEZER of Damascus." We are reminded by this of the entire difference between the manners and usages of that remote age and the present. In case Abraham were to die childless, a servant born in his house would—in the ordinary course of events—succeed to Abraham's vast property, and become his heir.

Of course, if *this* was the servant spoken of in the xxivth chapter, the man's conduct and demeanour becomes dignified marvellously. Then is he the very pattern of disinterestedness: a Servant who deserved to reign in the world as a King. But although I do for my own part entirely believe that it *was* Eliezer whom Abraham sent into Padan Aram; Eliezer who met Rebekah at the well of water; Eliezer who brought Rebekah back as a wife for Isaac;—I shall build nothing that follows on this presumed identity. I cannot prove it. I may be mistaken in my opinion. I will therefore not build upon it: but confine myself entirely to the evidence of a "good and faithful Servant" afforded by the narrative in the xxivth chapter,—whatever that person's name may have been.

And, by way of making my remarks practically useful, I propose to narrow the issue yet farther. I shall invite you to attend specially to the feature of character which this narrative discloses,—viz. *the faithfulness of a good servant in fulfilling a commission.* All servants have had, or are to have commissions,—trusts of importance,—to fulfil; and it is for those who read to consider with themselves secretly whether, in the discharge of such trusts, they resemble Abraham's servant or not.

Abraham was old, and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. And he took an oath of the eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all he had, making him swear by the LORD, "the GOD of Heaven and the GOD of the Earth," that he would not take a wife unto his son of the daughters of the Canaanites among whom he dwelt. "But thou shalt go" (said he) "unto my country and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac." Very strict was the charge he gave to his servant that on no account might he bring Isaac his son back to the land of his fathers. If the woman would not consent to follow him back, then was the servant to be held clear from the oath. But in truth, Abraham



was acting under Divine guidance,—and he knew it. “The LORD GOD of hosts” (said he) “which took me from my Father’s house, and from the land of my kindred, and that swore unto me, saying, ‘Unto thy seed will I give this land,’ *He shall send His Angel before thee.*” Accordingly, the servant took the oath prescribed him, touching Abraham’s thigh while he took it. The meaning of this is plain when you consider that, according to the idiom of the sacred language, descendants are said to come *from the thigh* of their remote ancestor. In token therefore of the Patriarch’s certain conviction that MESSIAH should in after-ages be descended from himself, he employed this ceremony in taking an oath of his servant.

It follows :—“And the servant took ten camels of the camels of his master, and departed ; for all the goods of his master were in his hand : and he arose, and went to Mesopotamia, unto the city of Nahor. And he made his camels to kneel down without the city by a well of water at the time of the evening, even the time that women go out to draw water. And he said, O LORD GOD of my master Abraham, I pray Thee, send me good speed this day, and show kindness unto my

master Abraham. Behold, I stand here at the well of water ; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water. And let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink ; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also : let the same be she that Thou hast appointed for Thy servant Isaac ; and thereby shall I know that Thou hast showed kindness unto my master. And it came to pass, before he had done speaking, that, behold, Rebekah came out . . . . with her pitcher upon her shoulder. . . . And the damsel was very fair to look upon, a virgin. . . . And the servant ran to meet her, and said, Let me, I pray thee, drink a little water of thy pitcher." Her willing compliance, (for, "Drink, my lord," she said, "and I will draw water for thy camels also, until they have done drinking,") and the servant's adoring wonder, (for "the man wondering at her held his peace, to know whether the LORD had made his journey prosperous or not,")—you cannot have forgotten ; no, nor how the servant put an ornament of gold upon her face, and bracelets upon her hands, and asked her name, and inquired if there were

room in her father's house for him and his men to lodge in. She satisfied him at once about every particular ; "*and the man bowed down his head, and worshipped the LORD.* And he said, *Blessed be the LORD GOD of my master Abraham,* who hath not left destitute my master of His mercy and His truth. I being in the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master's brethren." <sup>1</sup>

I. What I admire so much in all this is the beautiful admixture of piety, and obedience, and trust in GOD ; the walking in faith, "as seeing Him who is invisible ;" the confident and trustful walking, which the narrative displays. In choosing a sign and praying the LORD to fulfil it in a certain way, Abraham's servant (you may be sure) acted by some higher guidance than the light of natural reason. What is quite certain, GOD was in all his thoughts. *That* at least is plain. The work which he did was begun—continued—and ended in GOD. And this is our first lesson. Nothing, I say, can be more unmistakable than this,—the way the man refers the whole of his errand to GOD. "O LORD GOD of my master Abraham, I pray Thee, send me

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xxiv. 10—27.

good speed this day, and show kindness unto my master Abraham. Behold, I stand here by the well of water ; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water,"—and so forth. . . . When the sign has been vouchsafed, and Rebekah has been spoken with,—“ *Blessed be the LORD GOD of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of His mercy and His truth. I being in the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master’s brethren.*”

2. How the damsel “ran and told them of her mother’s house these things.” how Laban her brother came out and constrained the servant to come in, and the men that were with him ; gave them water to wash their feet, and ungirded the camels :—all these beautiful and life-like features of the Eastern story no one can ever forget. The act of hospitality which is common to East and West alike—the offer of food—comes next. “There was set meat before” Abraham’s servant “to eat. But he said, *I will not eat until I have told my errand.*”

Now I am sure I need not enlarge on this. After a long and fatiguing journey ; at the close of the day, and *that day* a day in Syria ;—*who* but a servant good and faithful indeed would

have postponed the refreshment of a meal to the delivery of a message? Of *whom* is one so much reminded as of Him who at the well of Samaria declared that He had meat to eat which His Disciples knew not of: for that His meat was to do the will of the Father who had sent Him, and to finish His work? This forgetfulness of self; this prime regard for duty; this supreme care for the thing committed to his trust; this finding of his soul's refreshment and his spirit's sustentation in the faithful delivery of the message which he had brought ("I will not eat until I have told my errand"): all this marks the "good and faithful servant." It was a long message which he had to deliver. At the close of it,—(and it was a rehearsal of all that had happened, and of a vast deal more than is set down, as I could easily prove),—at the close of it,—“And now if ye will deal kindly<sup>r</sup> and truly with my master, tell me: and if not, tell me: that I may turn to the right hand, or to the left.”. . . .

“Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, The thing proceedeth from the LORD; we cannot speak unto thee bad or good.” Jewels and gifts were given: the contract, as it were, was sealed: *then* and not before “*they did eat and*

*drink*, he and the men that were with him." . . . So true is it that one faithful servant makes many: that goodness propagates itself, is infectious, extends from the superior servant to those who are placed under him!

3. I shall make only one point more out of this narrative. "Send me away unto my master," said Abraham's servant in the morning. Laban (the brother of Rebekah), and Rebekah's mother, requested delay; the interval of at least the third of a month. But, "Hinder me not"—(said the servant)—"Hinder me not, seeing the LORD hath prospered my way. Send me away, that I may go to my master." Such earnestness wrought compliance. The servant set off at once with Rebekah and her maidens, and Isaac meets his bride as he "went in the field to meditate in the field at the eventide," when he had "come from the way of the well Lahai-roi."<sup>2</sup>

There are in all this tokens unmistakable of that earnest and strenuous zeal which identifies itself with its work, and finds its service perfect freedom. O how unlike *that* temper and disposition which ask chiefly how little is required and then do that little grudgingly! in other words,

<sup>2</sup> Ver. 62, 63.

leave that little half undone. There can be no faithful service except there be love. And the form love takes in a "good and faithful servant" is sure to be the form which meets us here:—I mean, an eager, anxious love,—identifying itself with the welfare of those it serves: a self-sacrificing, self-denying, self-forgetting love:—a love like that of Abraham's servant for his master Abraham.

*Faithfulness* then *in fulfilling trusts*:—*this* is the lesson we carry away from the xxivth chapter of Genesis; and our pattern is a Servant. And why? Because servants we are every one of us, and a trust is committed to us all. Verily, He who took upon Himself the form of a servant for our sakes, hath sanctified the relation I speak of, and sublimed it, and perfected it likewise. But His example may seem,—as it is,—above us: not so, at least, the example of the Syrian servant, or rather slave, of Abraham. And the characteristic graces of his example have been shown to be threefold:—(1.) His calm trust and confidence in GOD, and reference of all he says and does to Him:—(2.) His self-denying earnestness and zeal, which postponed the very refreshment of nature to the discharge of duty:

—lastly,—(3.) His making his master's interests his own, and acting throughout as if it were *for himself* that he acted,—for himself that he toiled and strove! . . . . And thus he hath won for himself a place on the imperishable page: and few have ever reached the end of the narrative which is the close of the chapter, without exclaiming secretly,—“Well done!” “Well done, good and faithful Servant!”



## II. DEBORAH :

## LONG AND FAITHFUL SERVICE.

GEN. xxxv. 8.

*But Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died; and she was buried beneath Bethel under an oak: and the name of it was called Allon-bachuth.*

I PROPOSE to speak next about "DEBORAH, Rebekah's nurse." Some of you may require to be reminded of certain details of sacred story, which are to supply me in the way of necessary inference with almost all I have to say. You are therefore requested to attend closely to those details. They shall not occupy us long.

1. When the servant of Abraham went to Haran to take a wife for his master's son, Isaac, and brought Rebekah back with him, it is expressly related that the brother and the mother of the maiden "sent away Rebekah and *her nurse*, and Abraham's servant and his men."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xxiv. 59.

There were other female attendants of the bride, for we read of damsels of hers who rode on "the camels," of which there were ten. But Deborah was evidently no common attendant. She is styled emphatically "Rebekah's nurse." I venture to call her already by her name; but her name ("Deborah") does not transpire till in fact her death is recorded. The word employed in the Hebrew for "nurse" implies that Deborah had done a mother's part by Rebekah; had suckled her, I mean: so that if we reckon Rebekah's age when she married at 15, (and we need not set it down at less,) we must put Deborah's birth, in round numbers, some twenty years earlier. You will see by and by *why* I go into these details.

You remember what followed. Rebekah remained childless for twenty years: after which, Esau and Jacob were born. Their respective characters, you know very well; and, you call to mind how Esau's roving life and profane marriages vexed the soul of his parents. Rebekah in particular was distressed; "weary of her life," as she phrased it. She loved her younger son Jacob passionately. Not a syllable is said about Deborah all this time. The domestic servant of

course remains in the shade. But it is not hard to divine how *she* must have felt, in respect both of Jacob and of Esau.

At the end of seventy-seven years comes the deadly feud between the two brothers. Esau, at the age of thirty-two, had sold his *birthright* to Jacob. When forty-five years more have gone about, Jacob is persuaded by his mother with subtlety to possess himself of the *blessing*. There can, of course, be no more peace in *that* household. It is all Rebekah's contrivance. Can you doubt that she confided her plan to her "nurse," who was of course her own special *friend*,—assigned to her a part in the domestic drama?—took her into all her counsels? You may be as sure as if you had seen the transaction, that when at last Isaac sent away his son Jacob at Rebekah's instigation—(for a few days only, as the fond mother chose to believe)—to the house of her brother Laban; and when Jacob departed from the old ancestral home with his father Isaac's blessing; you may be quite sure, I say, that his cheek was wet with other tears besides those of his doating mother. The old nurse was there—(I am sure she was there!)—already a woman of 122 years at least. I see her, overcome with grief,

as much on her own account as on that of her mistress. *She* is standing by. *She* has heard the passionate farewell of the agitated Syrian Mother:—"Behold, thy brother Esau as touching thee doth comfort himself, purposing to kill thee. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice, and arise: flee thou to Laban my brother to Haran, and tarry with him a few days, until thy brother's fury turn away, until thy brother's anger turn away from thee, and he forget that which thou hast done to him. *Then I will send and fetch thee from thence.* Why should I be deprived also of you both in one day?" . . . . She meant by *that*, that of course, as sure as Esau did slay Jacob, Esau would be himself speedily slain. It is an allusion to the ancient law of vengeance for blood-shed, which is set forth in the xxxvth chapter of the Book of Numbers.

Well. The mother parted with her favourite son; and never beheld him with mortal eyes again. We are not told under what circumstances she died: how,—or when,—or where,—or who was by. But she clearly *was* dead when Jacob at the end of eight-and-twenty more years came back to Mamre, that is Hebron, to the home of his father Isaac. She had died during

his absence ;—died, with *him* in her heart,—with *his* image before her closing eyes,—with *his* name on her faltering lips. Yes, and she had been buried by Isaac in the sepulchre of Abraham and of Sarah at Hebron.<sup>2</sup>

Jacob, in the mean time a fugitive from his Father's house, after his vision on the field of Luz goes on to Haran, and for twenty years served his unnatural kinsman ; first for a wife, next for cattle. And now he has grown into a multitude. He has sons and daughters, sheep and cattle, and whatever else goes to make up vast patriarchal wealth. He flies from Laban. He comes homeward,—moves at least in the direction of Canaan,—and twenty years have fled. Pass eight years more, and Jacob still journeying homeward reaches Bethel. Here it is that the verse which furnishes us with a text, comes in abruptly, “ But Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died ; and she was buried beneath Bethel under an oak : and the name of it was called Allon-bachuth.”

1. Now, the question obviously arises, *But how did Deborah come to be with Jacob at all?* What had brought her to him ? and when had she come ? She was a very aged woman. She

<sup>2</sup> Gen. xlix. 31.

must have been upwards of 160 years old when she died. Her place,—in the ordinary course of things,—was surely in *Isaac's* household. What had brought her to *Jacob*? How long had she been with him? It cannot have been for long! How is this incidental mention of the woman to be explained? We have two notices of her,—and two only: her accompanying Rebekah from Haran when her young mistress became Isaac's wife; and her burial by Jacob under "the oak of weeping," at the end of an interval of 125 years. It requires to be explained, I say, *how* this aged woman came to be domiciled, as it were, with the patriarch Jacob after so long an interval. She has been severed from him by a long span of years. To all appearance she is severed from him still by several hundreds of miles of barren wilderness.

2. And we are furnished by the very course of the narrative with so satisfactory, so abundantly sufficient a clue to the matter,—that it is idle to affect perplexity. When Jacob reached the border of Canaan, he will have sent to inquire after the fortunes of his family; that is, after his Father's and his Mother's welfare.

(As for Esau, he knew right well what had become of *him*.<sup>3</sup>) I am persuaded that Deborah, aged woman as she was, insisted on repairing back to Jacob with his messengers. She had a heavy tale to tell him of his Mother's death ; and she would not—she could not!—entrust such a message to any one ; and she longed to behold him again with her eyes ; and she had some dying message from Rebekah,—at least her blessing and her prayers,—to deliver. But I think it was something more particular than *that* ! And so, she went herself,—a woman of 152 years,—the faithful old Nurse,—the attached old servant,—the affectionate, true friend of the whole patriarchal family. She made light of the toil and the travel, I say, and repaired to the spot where Jacob was. And O, the old-world greetings ! O, the old-world tales ! and the surprise on her side at seeing what Jacob had grown into : and the curiosity on Jacob's side to know a hundred things about his ancestral home, the dwelling-place of his boyhood, and of his manhood, and of his mature life ; not least of all, to learn all the circumstances of his beloved Mother's departure.

<sup>3</sup> Gen. xxxii. and xxxiii.


3. Rachel and Leah must also have had not a little to say to her, must have been not a little glad to see her. They were the daughters of Laban, remember ; and Deborah—the old nurse—had been in Laban's household all the days of her youth ; so that *she* knew full well their dwelling-place in Haran, and all about their kinsfolk and their acquaintance ; though she belonged to an older generation, and talked to them of their Father, as she remembered him—117 years before !

4. And then, how she must have been herself affected when she learned that the LORD GOD of her master Isaac had indeed been with Jacob, with Israel ; had been with him in all his wanderings ; had blessed him indeed,—had conducted him forth in love,—had brought him back at last in peace !

5. Deborah ends her days with Jacob and his family. Of course she does. She dies ; and he writes the tale of his sorrow,—the record of his own tears and of the lamentation of his household,—on the place of the aged woman's burial. "She was buried beneath Bethel under an oak : and the name of it was called Allon-bachuth : " that is, "the oak of weep-



ing." *That* must have been no common sorrow, *that* must have been no ordinary lamentation, which imposed a name on a hitherto unknown locality ; a name which carries with it to this hour the memory of a Patriarch's tears and the mourning of his mighty household ! . . . Ah, ye who read the Bible fast ; and do not care for the little details of the story ; and let your Imagination slumber while you read—(as if Imagination were not one of GOD'S divinest gifts !)—ye who think scorn of the humbler characters ; and perhaps have never taken the trouble to gather up the first and the last link in the story of such an one as Deborah the aged ; and to clasp them together, and to recognize the exquisite beauty of the result ; the tender outline of a long life of faithful service, personal devotion, reciprocated love:—ye are at least invited to note that, in the annals of the chosen family, second only to the burial of Jacob himself, is the burial of Deborah, his Mother's nurse,—in respect of the particular record of the mourning which attended it. Of *him* it is but said, that "when the Canaanites saw the mourning in the floor of Atad, they said, 'This is a grievous mourning of the Egyptians.' Wherefore the name of it



was called *Abel-mizraim* :”<sup>4</sup> and of *her*,—“she was buried beneath Bethel under an oak : and the name of it was called Allon-bachuth :” that is, “*the oak of weeping*.”

Now I am sure I need not occupy many moments of your time while I seek to point a moral from this ancient tale. But I will address myself to those who are, or who may hereafter become, domestic servants : for indeed such a story as the present is evidently set down in Holy Writ specially for *them*.

And what I have to say is so simple,—so common-place,—that I should be half ashamed to say it from the pulpit, if I did not know that it is such exceedingly good advice to give, as well as so very important. Take Deborah for an example,—an example of long and faithful service. *Try to keep your place*. Always put that detestable phrase, “*I want to better myself*,” into plain English : and if it only means that you want higher wages ;—(I do not say *better* wages, but *higher* wages ;)—then, remember, that you do not of necessity “better yourself” by getting them.

I will make this matter plain to you in a

<sup>4</sup> Gen. l. 11.

moment. If a servant stays with me and serves me faithfully for thirty years—ay, or for less—I cannot any longer forsake that servant. I myself may become poor : but *that* faithful old servant has a real claim on me which I should be a wretch if I were not eagerly to acknowledge. He or she must at least have a room in my house,—food and raiment,—sympathy and kindness,—medical aid in time of sickness,—an honourable grave after I have closed his or her eyes in death.

Now, the giddy and the restless and the conceited ones, every time they change their place, make such a claim as I have been describing less and less *possible*. They therefore do *not* “better” themselves, even though they may get a slight increase of wages every time they make a move.

But apart from this:—long and faithful service is right, for long and faithful service sake. Here is a sample of it embalmed in Scripture. And why? Because it *implies* a dutiful, and an affectionate spirit; long-suffering; meekness; patience; forbearance; gentleness; self-denial; the constant exercise of charity. Yes, to have served long in one and the same family is a sure

token of the presence of not a few Christian graces, not a little real goodness.

And ye masters and mistresses, be gentle and forbearing on your side ; be patient and considerate towards them ! remembering that there is something to be said on both sides of *this* question.

I will not waste your time, or my own, by multiplying words on such a subject. I have preferred setting before you the history and the example of Deborah, Rebekah's aged nurse. If any of you have felt interested in what has been related, and in your inmost heart wish that GOD would give you grace to enable you to be faithful, and attached, and long in your service as she was ;—write down on the blank leaf of your Bible the year, and the month, and the day of the month, and immediately after it, add these words from the xxxvth chapter of Genesis, the 8th verse :—“Deborah, Rebekah's nurse died ; and she was buried beneath Bethel under an oak : and the name of it was called Allonbachuth :” adding (from the margin), “that is, *the oak of weeping.*”

## III. PHURAH :

## THE PARTNER IN PRIVILEGES.

JUDGES vii. 10.

*But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host.*

LET us consider now what is related in Scripture concerning PHURAH, the servant of Gideon,—a Judge of Israel, whose name is second to none in that truly remarkable list of illustrious names. It is in fact the lustre of Gideon's name which so entirely eclipses that of Phurah his servant, that some of you may never have noticed so much as the circumstance that Phurah is mentioned at all.

It will not be foreign to the purpose in hand, that I should invite you to notice that something similar holds of Scripture universally. The larger, the more interesting and important statements, are strangely prone to overshadow and so to obscure the lesser,—however interest-

ing and important on examination these may prove to be. And so, I ever regard those writers as my benefactors who call my attention to the less prominent details of GOD'S Word, and show me that there are unsuspected lessons to be derived from minute circumstances which, in common with the rest of mankind, I had always overlooked.

Now, the single remark that He who traced the grander outlines of every Bible story, traced also every graceful detail and accessory, however subordinate, however seemingly insignificant,—this single remark, I say, shall suffice. Our subject is “The Servants of Scripture.” And for no other reason but because something is recorded concerning the servant of Gideon, I propose to ask your attention for a few minutes to what is related in Scripture concerning Phurah. It is wondrous little, certainly. But it is—what it is ; and I am as persuaded that it cannot have been set down in vain, as that no subordinate detail in the anatomy of the human body can be so trivial and unimportant as to be with safety overlooked.

First, you should be reminded of the beautiful story in which the text is found. It begins

(pray read it carefully for yourselves !) with the 33rd verse of the vith chapter. We are there told how “the Midianites and the Amalekites, and the children of the east were gathered together” against Israel, “and went out and pitched in the valley of Jezreel. But the SPIRIT of the LORD came upon Gideon,”—or rather, as it is in the Hebrew, “the SPIRIT of the LORD *put on Gideon* ;” clothed Himself with Gideon as with a garment ;—(a very remarkable expression !) “and he blew a trumpet.” There was a great rally of the people in consequence, and Gideon was willing to be a saviour to Israel in GOD’S hand. But he wanted to be reassured. He chose a sign ; (not a safe thing to do, by the way : Gideon, however, did choose a sign ;) and GOD complied with his servant’s infirmity. The dew was first to be on the fleece only, and it was to be dry on all the earth beside : next night, it was to be dry upon the fleece, and upon all the earth there was to be dew. And it was so.<sup>1</sup>

It was now the LORD’S turn to require something of Gideon. He bade him send away 22,000 of the people who had rallied round him ; and next, of the remainder to send away

<sup>1</sup> Judges vi. 36—40.

9700 men. There remained to him only 300. "And the LORD said unto Gideon, By the 300 men that lapped," (you remember the singular story of the means whereby discrimination was made), "By the 300 men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand." . . . So Gideon retained those 300 men. "And the host of Midian was beneath him in the valley."

Then came the incident in which the mention of Gideon's servant occurs. It is best to give it in the very words of Scripture :—"And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Arise, get thee down unto the host ; for I have delivered it into thine hand. But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host ; and thou shalt hear what they say ; and afterward shall thine hands be strengthened to go down unto the host. Then went he down with Phurah his servant unto the outside of the armed men that were in the host. And the Midianites, and the Amalekites, and all the children of the east lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude ; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the seaside for multitude. And when



Gideon was come, behold there was a man that told a dream unto his fellow, and said, Behold I dreamed a dream, and, lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along. And his fellow answered and said, This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel; for into his hand hath GOD delivered Midian and all the host. And it was so, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation thereof, that he worshipped and returned into the host of Israel, and said, Arise; for the LORD hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian.”<sup>2</sup>

And so the LORD had. With the peculiar device to which Gideon had recourse to terrify the multitudinous host before him, I will not seek to interest you; but I request you to observe that it teaches us a famous lesson: viz. that while we believe and know that our success in every enterprise must come entirely from GOD and not at all from ourselves,—we must yet take as much pains to secure the success of that enterprise as if we knew and believed that

<sup>2</sup> Judges vii. 9—15.

the success must come entirely from ourselves and not at all from GOD. Amazed at the portentous lights around them, and the unexpected sound of so many trumpets,—terrified by the war-cry of Israel, “The sword of the LORD and of Gideon,”—the Midianites fled. “The LORD set every man’s sword against his fellow even throughout all the host.” . . . What need to add what followed? The Midianites fled, their kings were taken and slain.

Let us go back to the memorable night on which Gideon found himself the captain of only 300 men, with a promise from the LORD of hosts that, by means of those 300, He would deliver Midian into his hand. “Arise, and get thee down unto the host,”—was the Divine command: “but, if thou fear to go down, go thou *with Phurah thy servant* down to the host. . . . Then went he down *with Phurah his servant* ;” and they two overheard a soldier tell his dream to his fellow,—and his fellow explain to him the dream. The cake of barley bread (the coarsest, cheapest, humblest kind of food in use among the ancients,) had availed (so the sleeper imagined in his dream) to come, and smite, and overturn a tent of Midian; and it was a recognized

symbol of the humble instrument which GOD had raised up and was even now strengthening to chastise the pride of Midian. "This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash." And so "the sword of the LORD and of Gideon" (you observe the piety which in refashioning the phrase puts the sword into the LORD'S right hand first!) "the sword of the LORD and of Gideon" became a war-cry and a proverbial saying in Israel: while Gideon and his servant returned to their men built up and comforted; and by break of day Midian was smitten, and the LORD'S people were free.

1. On a renewed survey of the story, the mention of Phurah, Gideon's servant, seems somewhat extraordinary. For no other reason, as far as I can see, is any mention of the young man made at all, but because it was GOD'S pleasure to support and encourage Gideon by giving him that young man on the present perilous occasion for a companion. This it is which leads to the mention of the fact that Gideon *had* a servant. We should not have known it but for this.

2. I farther suspect that it may have been by all means necessary that what Gideon was to hear must have a witness. The talk of the two

soldiers in the tent must be attested by somebody ; and Gideon's servant is the divinely appointed witness of the memorable sayings on either side ; sayings by the way which were clearly shaped by a constraining power : so that, (like Caiaphas prophesying of the benefit of CHRIST'S death),<sup>3</sup> the men said more than they meant to say ; and were divinely right without in the least intending it.

3. But no reason, I suspect, can be given why *the name* of Gideon's servant should be inserted, and even twice repeated,—except the same reason which seems to have determined the mention of Deborah's name (Rebekah's nurse) in the Old Testament,—Rhoda's name in the New. We recognize a note of the condescension of GOD to the little ones of earth : an expedient also for drawing our attention to a matter which might else have escaped our notice.

Now, when I rise from this narrative, I tell myself that I have been reading of a highly favoured servant,—a servant who, on a most eventful and important occasion, shared his master's privileges ; and won for himself a place in the Book of Life in consequence. Phurah was

<sup>3</sup> St. John xi. 49—52.

appointed to accompany Gideon in his expedition to the camp of Midian by GOD Himself: and it was *because he was Gideon's servant* that he was appointed to accompany him. Let our lesson grow out of this circumstance.

Much is said,—and said with truth,—of the hardships of servitude. It is said that Service often leads to nothing: that Servants sometimes meet with thankless employers: that they are exposed to many hardships, many evils; and the like. All these things are true occasionally, no doubt. But then over against these several statements must be set the opposite set of equally undeniable truths: viz. that Service is often rewarded highly, even in this life:—that *some* employers prove to be friends to their Servants indeed:—and that if Servants share the evil consequences which are inseparable from badly conducted households, they also share the privileges which belong to well-conducted families. And this last is the special point on which I wish still to add a few words.

It is not, I think, sufficiently considered that a Servant who, having entered the service of pious and excellent people, conducts himself or herself well, enjoys advantages of an extraor-

dinary order. To illustrate this position from Scripture,—Deborah knew familiarly Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah. Gehazi had Elisha for his daily companion,—went where *he* went,—heard what *he* heard,—saw what *he* saw. As for Rhoda, she knew St. Peter so well that when she heard his voice outside, she ran in and for very joy forgot to open the door. Her mistress was the sister of Barnabas, the mother of John surnamed Mark,—S. Paul's friends. She lived in the midst of such a blaze of piety as it would have been hard to equal even in Jerusalem.

I will not enlarge on all this. It ought not to be necessary. There is no telling what advantages a labouring man's son or daughter for instance become introduced to immediately on entering a pious family. Daily example of purity of life and gentleness of character,—cheerful yet innocent conversation,—a share in the joys and privileges of the family as well as in their sorrows and their trials. And I will venture to add that there commonly comes an eventful day to all of us, a turning-point in the life,—to Servants and to Masters alike,—when the conduct seals the character and decides the subsequent history.

Such an occasion, I take it, was that remarkable night when the LORD said unto Gideon, " Arise, get thee down unto the host ; for I have delivered it into thine hand. But if thou fear to go down, go thou *with Phurah thy servant* down to the host : and thou shalt hear what they say ; and afterwards shall thine hands be strengthened to go down unto the host. Then went he down *with Phurah his servant* unto the outside of the armed men that were in the host." Thirty-one hundred years have rolled away since that memorable night : but behold, at the end of the years, side by side with *Gideon* on the imperishable page, and every bit as conspicuous, stands the name of the faithful servant who was his partner in privilege—*Phurah*.

IV. OBADIAH :  
THE GOD-FEARING SERVANT OF AN  
UNGODLY MASTER.

I KINGS xviii. 13.

*Was it not told my lord what I did when Jezebel slew the prophets of the LORD? how I hid an hundred men of the LORD'S prophets by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.*

EVERY attentive reader of Scripture remembers what is said concerning OBADIAH in the first Book of Kings : but because it is necessary for my present purpose that the one recorded incident of his life should be clearly apprehended, I invite you to consider that the narrative relates to the servant of the most impious King and Queen who ever ruled over the kingdom of Israel. Ahab and Jezebel were supremely wicked persons; Jezebel being no doubt the master-spirit for evil, —but Ahab lending himself to work out the designs which his partner contrived or imagined.



Over the household of this guilty couple (the good providence of GOD so willed it) was set Obadiah; a man whose character is given (as usual in Scripture) very briefly:—"Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly."

Then follows the record of the one characteristic event of his life:—viz. that "it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD, that Obadiah took an hundred prophets and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water." The HOLY SPIRIT gives this as the proof of the statement that "Obadiah feared the LORD greatly:"—"for it was so" that he had thus acted on a memorable occasion. I have several remarks to offer on this brief portion of narrative.

1. Before all things you are to notice the exceeding boldness of the transaction here recorded. It is absolutely impossible that such an act can have been performed without great personal risk and danger. It could not be kept a secret long; for here were an hundred men, conspicuous persons all of them, sheltered and fed in a time of wholesale slaughter and promiscuous martyrdom. And when the act was known, it must needs in the ordinary course of

events bring wrath upon its author. What had occurred to protect Obadiah, we know not. The wisdom of GOD, ever fertile in expedients beyond what man can even imagine, had evidently interposed and spread a shield over the head of faithful Obadiah. But at least the transaction had become generally known ; for, "*was it not told my lord, what I did ?*" is the way he opens his address to the prophet Elijah.

2. The next circumstance which calls for remark in this transaction is the proof it affords that Obadiah must have been no common servant: not a servant, I mean, in the ordinary acceptation of the word. In fact, the whole course of the story shows this : for (as you will remember) king Ahab and Obadiah his servant are declared to have divided the land between them to pass throughout it, in search of "grass to save the horses and mules alive." We are expressly told that he was "*set over all the house of Ahab.*" He must in fact have been a person of very great consideration. And yet I am persuaded that we shall do well to speak of him as *a servant*. The term is relative ; but the duties and the dispositions,—the temptations and the snares,—the vices and the virtues are always the same ;

whether the service be of the highest order, or of the lowest type of all.

3. The thought may possibly present itself to some one,—“But was it altogether right of Obadiah, being Ahab’s servant, to do that which was in effect the frustration of his master’s will? Ahab was bent on slaying the prophets of the LORD. But Obadiah saved them alive. How about the faithfulness of a servant who so acts?”

I feel persuaded that any one who will be at the pains to put such a suspicion into words, will also see at once that it is groundless. A servant is not bound by any law, Divine or human, to carry out the wicked intentions of his employer; for example, the deliberate resolve to shed the blood of the innocent,—yea, of the very prophets of the LORD. The duty which we owe to GOD is a higher duty than any which we owe to Man. And although it be true that in deciding between two conflicting claims lies the great trial of our daily conduct,—there is no conflicting claim whatever when the Divine command is express on the one hand, and human authority is clamorous for the violation of that command; is, in short, simply sinful in a very

high degree : cruel and senseless, and calculated to bring down the wrath of Heaven on every one who is implicated in its intended villany.

4. What then is the lesson which Obadiah's history presents? Even this :—that there may exist holiness in the Servant of an exceedingly wicked household. *This* I take to be *the moral*, so to speak, of what is here recorded. A most iniquitous Master,—a most profligate Mistress :—such were the persons to whom Obadiah was responsible ; and they found him a faithful servant, and worthy of offices of the highest trust. But they did not know that they had a holy man to their servant ; or, if they did, the circumstance was no recommendation. Their trade was to do evil ; and they would have made Obadiah their minister in crime if they had known how. But he clearly would none of their counsels. He had a higher Master to serve even than Ahab ; and he served that higher Master even while he served Ahab. He was a faithful and good servant in the midst of an unfaithful and very wicked household. He is the pattern of what any servant may be whose hard fate it is to serve the ungodly and profane.

5. There is an expression in St. Paul's epistle

to the Philippians (the ivth ch. the 22nd verse) which is in point, and presents itself at this moment. "All the Saints salute you," (he says,) "chiefly *they that are of Cæsar's household.*" . . . In the palace of the heathen Emperor therefore, —in the household of Nero, the worst of the Cæsars,—were "Saints." This very message of the Apostle is a homily in itself. I invite you to interpret it in connexion with all that has gone before, and to familiarize yourselves with the conviction that to be the servant of the very wicked is not *therefore* to be corrupt and profligate oneself.

6. I have already said as much as I desire to say on this subject. But because younger persons may be likely to say to themselves that at all events since Obadiah was a man of age, and rank, and experience,—he cannot be any pattern for *them*; I will in conclusion call their attention to one minute circumstance concerning Obadiah which they might easily overlook, and which really disposes of their difficulty effectually; as they will candidly admit, as soon as they have been reminded of it. I allude to the profession made by Obadiah to Elijah concerning himself, in the course of his remonstrance to the prophet.

“But I, thy servant,” (he said,) “*fear the LORD from my youth.*” Obadiah therefore, the GOD-fearing *man*, had been first Obadiah the GOD-fearing *child*. Lay this well to heart, all you younger ones! and be persuaded that in this brief statement lies wrapped up the secret of the whole matter. Obadiah was so faithful in his age, *because*, and *only* because he had been faithful in his youth. The race had been consistently run: and it had been begun in childhood,—(I speak of the GOD-fearing life,)—never to cease from bearing the fruits of good living to the honour and glory of GOD, even to the very closing day of his earthly service.

7. There is very little more to be added. You may some day find yourselves in households,—not indeed vile as that of Ahab and Jezebel his queen,—yet supremely wicked; and you may have to witness acts of injustice or even deeds of crime. Remember that you *need* not be partakers of either. Set before yourselves the image of that pious servant of old time who “hid an hundred of the LORD’S prophets by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water:” and seek, in your degree—according to your opportunities and after your measure,—to be as he was.

8. But that day will take you by surprise,—will come and will go,—without finding in you any disposition whatever to run risks of any sort for CHRIST'S sake and His Gospel ; to make any venture of Faith, however inconsiderable, unless you now learn above all things to FEAR as well as to love GOD. Yes, in so brief a record every word must needs be of supreme importance ; and you may on no account overlook the fact that as Obadiah says concerning himself that he had lived, *from his youth upwards*, in GOD'S "*fear*," so does GOD declare concerning him that he "*feared* the LORD greatly." The *fear* of GOD,—which is declared to be "the beginning of wisdom :"<sup>1</sup> the *fear* of the LORD,—which is declared to be "clean," and to "endure for ever :"<sup>2</sup> the *fear* of the LORD, which is "to hate evil :"<sup>3</sup> the *fear* of the LORD,—which "tendeth to life,"<sup>4</sup>—yea, which "prolongeth days ;"<sup>5</sup> that is, which hath the promise of "a long life, even for ever and ever :"<sup>6</sup> the *fear* of the LORD, in which is declared to be "strong confidence ;" and His very children are promised "a place of refuge :"<sup>6</sup> the

<sup>1</sup> Ps. cxi. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Prov. viii. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Prov. x. 27.

<sup>4</sup> Ps. xix. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Prov. xix. 23.

<sup>6</sup> Prov. xiv. 26.

*fear* of the LORD,—which is declared to be “a fountain of life:”<sup>7</sup> the *fear* of the LORD,—with which it is better to have “little, than great treasures and trouble therewith:”<sup>8</sup> the *fear* of the LORD,—by which “men depart from evil:”<sup>9</sup> the *fear* of the LORD,—whose reward (with humility) “are riches, and honour and life:”<sup>1</sup>—the *fear* of the LORD, I say, had been the great moving principle in Obadiah's life. And this, as it is the great secret of holy living, so is it the great secret of holy dying also. Hence, in so many of our Collects we pray to be kept in GOD'S “faith and *fear*,” continually, or else in GOD'S “steadfast *fear* and love.” GOD Himself is described in a certain place as “*the fear* of Isaac.”<sup>2</sup> . . . “Be thou in the fear of the LORD all the day long,” says the wise King; “for surely there is an end; and verily thine expectation shall not be cut off”!<sup>3</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Prov. xiv. 27.

<sup>9</sup> Prov. xvi. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. xxxi. 42.

<sup>8</sup> Prov. xv. 16.

<sup>1</sup> Prov. xxii. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Prov. xxiii. 17, 18.



## V. THE LITTLE MAID AND GEHAZI :

### USE AND MISUSE OF OPPORTUNITIES.

2 KINGS v. 2, 3, 20.

*The Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman's wife. And she said unto her mistress, Would GOD my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy.*

*But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of GOD, said, Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian in not receiving at his hands that which he brought; but as the LORD liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him.*

NAAMAN, captain of the host of the King of Syria, (a great favourite with his master, "because by him the LORD had given deliverance unto Syria") was afflicted with leprosy,—the most terrible and loathsome of all disorders. Now the Syrians had brought away captive out of

the land of Israel a LITTLE MAID, who waited on Naaman's wife. "And she said unto her mistress, Would GOD my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy." Some one told the King of Syria what "the little maid" had said: whereupon he wrote a letter to Jehoram, King of Israel, and Naaman departed taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment. Jehoram was of course wholly unable to do what the King of Syria had requested. "Am I GOD," (he said,) "to kill and to make alive?" Thereupon Elisha, who straightway heard of the matter, sent word, "Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha. A messenger was sent out to him bidding him "go and wash in Jordan seven times," and promising that straightway he should be clean. Naaman was not only disappointed but angry. He expected that Elisha would surely come out and heal his leprosy in person: in fact, he had settled in his own mind exactly how Elisha would act. The message sent him to go and wash in Jordan,—

what else was it but mockery and insult? "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the rivers of Israel? May I not wash in them and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage."

Naaman's attendants, more reasonable than their master, prevailed upon him to reconsider the matter. The prescribed remedy, as they pointed out, was at least wondrous easy. Accordingly, the soldier yielded; "dipped himself seven times in Jordan; and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child." He returned to Elisha's house,—as changed inwardly in disposition, apparently, as outwardly in body. "Behold, now I know," (he said,) "now I *know* that there is no GOD in all the earth but in Israel." After this confession of his faith, he offered to bestow a present on the prophet in token of his gratitude. "But he said, As the LORD liveth before whom I stand, I will receive none. And he urged him to take it, but he refused." Then came Naaman's singular request for two mules' burthen of earth; followed by the announcement that he would henceforth worship the LORD only. Sometimes (he said) he should be constrained to bow down in the house of

Rimmon, when his royal master leaned upon his hand ; but he prayed that for *that* he might be forgiven. He was directed by the prophet Elisha to "go in peace:" and so they two parted. . . . This whole incident, you are requested to observe, has grown out of the words which fell from the little captive Israelitish maid who waited upon Naaman's wife. It is all *her* doing. I have dwelt on the entire after-growth of the story so particularly, because it is all in reality so very closely connected with *her* ; as clearly grows out of what *she* said, as the oak grows out of the acorn,—the flower out of the seed. We live in the consequences of our words and of our actions, for good or for evil, long after we have many a time forgotten both.

Then follows the rest of my text. "But GEHAZI, the servant of Elisha the man of GOD, said, Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian in not receiving at his hands that which he brought ; but as the LORD liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him." You see the villainy of all this, of course. Gehazi ran. When Naaman saw Gehazi running, he lighted down from the chariot. "Is all well?"

“All is well,” (said the other,) but—and then came a feigned story of two travellers, sons of the prophets, who had suddenly visited Elisha, for whom Elisha desired “a talent of silver and two changes of garments.” Naaman insisted on his taking *two* talents as well as two changes of raiment. All was safely deposited, (and secretly too, as Gehazi thought,) in the house; and Gehazi “went in and stood before his master.” “Whence comest thou, Gehazi?” “Thy servant went no whither,” was the reply. “Went not my heart with thee,” (rejoined the prophet,) “when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants and maidservants?” The memorable sentence follows which (as all remember) is the last verse of the chapter and the conclusion of this very striking story:—“The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow.”

The most instructive feature of this narrative is the contrast which it establishes between the little Israelitish maid, and Gehazi the servant of

the man of GOD. Both, you see, are servants ; both are members of the commonwealth of Israel ; and this is the one essential feature of the story which you are requested throughout to bear in mind. But here, all correspondence between the two ceases. The one, a little maid,—the other, for all that appears to the contrary, a full-grown man : he, in honourable service,—she, in enforced servitude : he, dwelling secure within the Holy Land,—she, a prisoner in the enemy's country : she, so considerate for her lord and so true,—he, so unfaithful to his master and so false : she, so disinterested in what she said,—he, so vilely covetous and self-seeking in his recorded conduct : she, so pious in her ejaculation, (“ Would GOD my lord were with the prophet ! ” )—he, so profane, (“ As the LORD liveth, I will run after him : ” )—they are contrasted in every respect. Yes, *she* turns away the leprosy even from another,—while *he* brings that same leprosy, in all its loathsomeness, down upon himself !

But you have not yet been reminded of the most striking and instructive point of contrast between these two Servants. Quite evident is it,—you all have seen it already, or you will acknowledge it the moment I point it out,—that

the most marked feature of difference in the case of these two persons is *the use they have made of their respective advantages*. Consider only the disparity of their opportunities, and how they have respectively used them.

1. The little maid in her own native land had evidently heard of the miracles of Elisha, and had rejoiced in the story of them. Either some miracle of mercy which GOD had wrought by Elisha's hands had come to her knowledge; or else she had inferred his ability to heal leprosy itself (a disease pronounced incurable by the art of man) from his other acts of power. She had been taught this belief concerning Elisha in the school of her childhood, or she had acquired her knowledge in some less formal way. However it may have been obtained, she has affectionately cherished the memory of "the prophet that is in Samaria;" and though an exile and a captive,—nay, a slave in the house of the enemy of her race and country,—the thought uppermost in her heart finds vent at the sight of the first person who signally stands in need of Elisha's healing power. It is all she knows! It is her Bible,—the whole of her little stock of Divinity! *How* the poor girl came by her knowledge, I

repeat, the HOLY SPIRIT hath not seen fit to inform us; but He hath been very careful to exhibit her to us in her isolation, her feebleness, her faithfulness, her piety.

The forlorn, enslaved, exiled condition of the little maid, I say,—far away from her family kindred, friends,—is studiously set before us; together with the memorable speech which fell from her lips, and which proved the source of blessedness to Naaman and all his house. She clings to her recollection of “the man of GOD that is in Samaria,” and it becomes on her lips an instrument of healing and a channel of grace.

2. Not so Gehazi. It is his business to wait continually upon Elisha. He is with that holy man of GOD always. The prophet’s miracles he had seen with his eyes, seen habitually; and certain of them are found to have deeply affected his imagination.<sup>1</sup> You are seriously invited to picture to yourselves the spiritual and moral benefit which ought to have attended the habitual, daily walking with such an one as Elisha;—the example of consistent, unworldly goodness ever shining before the eyes; the influence of holy speeches upon the heart; the

<sup>1</sup> Consider 2 Kings viii. 4, 5.



benefit of reproofs, encouragements,—in short the helps and opportunities without number, which such an one as Gehazi must certainly have enjoyed. And then,—look at the man's profaneness; his covetousness; his duplicity; his many lies. It is worth your observing that his crime, which became the turning-point in his history, takes place immediately after he has been beholding with his eyes the healing of Naaman of his leprosy: immediately after he has witnessed Elisha's high-souled contempt of worldly pelf,—his determined refusal to receive from Naaman any reward at all:—"As the LORD liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none." And what effect has this conduct on Gehazi? How does the servant act immediately after he has seen how his master had repelled a solicitation to covetousness? He imitates him in nothing but in respect of his solemn adjuration. "As the LORD LIVETH!" (he exclaims). "As the LORD liveth"—Well, and what then? "*I will run after him and take somewhat of him.*" O strange! and O more terrible than strange! Gehazi has just witnessed the healing process in another; has just been made aware that Elisha is the depository of powers little short of divine.


Yet, from the sight of that healing,—the recent conviction of those powers,—he “runs greedily” (like Balaam) “after reward;” pollutes his soul with the terrible reality of which Naaman’s leprosy was but an emblem;—and finally seeks to cover his baseness with the thin veil of a gross and palpable lie!

Many a Christian heart which has attentively followed me so far will be prone secretly to exclaim,—Ay, but you might have found a better instance of the peculiar form of iniquity of which you are discoursing, in the person of a worse even than Gehazi,—a greater by far than Elisha. *Who* had opportunities if *Judas Iscariot* had not? *Who* neglected, rejected, profaned them, if not *he*?

Yes, it is so indeed. The pattern instance of misused opportunities is no doubt supplied by the history of the traitor. But what *he* rather sets before us is the terrible truth, first, that advantages the most extraordinary are powerless in themselves to change the heart and amend the life: secondly, that the downfall is the more tremendous, the recoil the more fatal, when the opportunities have been most transcendent, the example most holy. To speak accurately, the

fall of Judas seems to wrap up, to enfold within itself, the whole mystery of iniquity. Black ingratitude,—sordid lust of money,—hellish spite,—relentless hate,—consummate hypocrisy,—treachery the most base,—insensibility to warnings, reproofs, appeals without number :— all that is most revolting, most amazing meets in the person of the man who betrayed the World's Redeemer. But the very enormity of what he did,—the hatefulness of what he was, —(so to speak,)—seems to set the case of Judas all apart ; to sever him from us, and our lives from his life. I therefore introduce this allusion to his history, only because it is in a manner inevitable. But I return to Gehazi and the little maid in order to take leave of them both,—with the solemn declaration that Gehazi is in some respects a kind of figure of Judas, even as Elisha is confessedly a type or figure of our SAVIOUR CHRIST.

My chief object then in bringing these two servants of the Old Testament under your notice is to draw your attention to the essential difference between the characters which they respectively exhibit. Set before us in the framework of a single chapter, what are they but



two life-like portraits of persons whom it was evidently the intention of the HOLY SPIRIT that we should contemplate together, and straightway contrast in respect of their opportunities, and in the use which they severally made thereof? I have already drawn this matter out sufficiently in detail. Enough, to remind you that the slender opportunities were turned to the loftiest purpose: the priceless opportunities were more than neglected, worse than spurned. They seem only to have paved the way for the more conspicuous, the more tremendous downfall. And this is a matter which there is little need,—none, in fact,—that one should enlarge upon. But I desire to offer a short meditation on all that has gone before, which you might not perhaps be able to make, at least not readily, for yourselves.

1. A right disposition then; an honest and good heart; a renewed spirit: *these* are evidently the one essential thing! I am not doubting that some are exposed to more temptations, some to fewer; that some enjoy greater means of grace, some less; and further, that to keep temptation out of others' way and out of our own,—to bring others, to bring ourselves within every possible

influence for good ;—that *this* should be our constant endeavour. But, then, we have been reminded that *no* amount of external helps, *no* advantages that can be named, will avail in and by themselves to make the life holy.

2. This first. And next, we have been reminded that it will sometimes happen that a holy disposition will triumph over all disadvantages, all hindrances ; and pick out for itself opportunities for serving GOD,—somewhat as, I dare say, the bee sucks honey out of poisonous, or at least out of noxious blossoms. When I see roses growing thick on a thorny briar, even so (I tell myself) do bright and frequent opportunities abound amid sharp discouragements, and difficulties apparently the most untractable. On the contrary, a heart bent on sin,—a boy or a girl inclined to mischief,—make for themselves opportunities for breaking GOD'S law amid every help to holiness which a thoughtful master or a prudent mistress can invent. And this goes through life. And why ? Because “the boy is father to the man.”

3. And the practical shape which what I have been saying is sure to take, may well be thrown into the form of anxious self-inquiry, which

every sincere person should be prepared to put to himself, herself :—O my soul, what use are *we* making of *our* many and great opportunities? The heathen men who inhabit India, or China, or the Islands of the Sea ;—those forlorn races who never knew the SAVIOUR'S name, nor received the sign of His Cross upon their foreheads, nor have been nourished by His life-giving Word, or fed at His Table ;—If these wander wide, and sink deep into the abyss of sin,—what wonder? And will not the good LORD have great compassion on them, and make vast allowance,—yea, and also show them mercy? No doubt He will! . . . But thou and I, nursed in the lap of His Love from the day of our birth until now,—what hope will there be for us, if *we* show ourselves neglectful of our unnumbered helps, our splendid opportunities; prove *worse* than neglectful of them,—like Gehazi?

search is pretty sure to prove barren of result ; or to harbour a secret suspicion that such matters are in their nature undiscoverable ; and so forth. That *Commentaries* will disappoint you, is likely enough ; especially such Commentaries as were popular among us till yesterday. But the end is not yet, even though the approved oracle shall prove to be severely silent.

No. Let *me* rather believe that from the River of Life as it flows majestically on, there trickle down every here and there fertilizing and refreshing rills ; and that the present, however minute, may be—*must* be—one of them. Let *me* cherish the conviction that nothing in Scripture is without a meaning, without a purpose : and that I am never better occupied than when (as now) I make the humble, but earnest endeavour to persuade some jot or some tittle of the Divine Law to surrender to me the secret of its eternal purpose ; or to admit me to the depth of its unearthly and as yet undiscovered meaning !

1. First then, St. John may be thought in this place to intend to record that there was quick intelligence, as well as entire obedience, on the Servants' side. Some exquisite unrecorded circumstance may be here significantly glanced at ;

as, the amazement of the Servants at what happened,—and their promptness in recognizing it,—and their joy, which led up in the end to a hearty undoubting Faith on the part of them all.

2. Next, whether with intentional emphasis or not, a contrast *is* established in this place between the Governor of the feast, who did *not* know—and “the Servants which drew the water,” who *did*. And this conducts us to the obvious reflexion that the greater blessedness, the higher privilege, on this occasion was *theirs*. The “hewers of wood and drawers of water,” the little ones and the despised ones of the earth, doubtless have things “revealed” to them which are “hid from the wise and prudent.” Yes. Secrets are revealed to those who serve, and are careful to obey. And thus, Service under the Gospel becomes turned into a Beatitude; and the last are made the first; and those who have “abased themselves” for a moment, are abidingly “exalted.”

3. But a higher meaning, and (as I think) the Evangelist’s actual meaning is behind. “The Servants *which drew the water knew*.” St. John, remember, is describing a transaction high as Heaven itself in its sublime significancy: for here, besides the attestation that it is the



World's Creator who makes the wine "very good," and the token that HE who "in the beginning" instituted Marriage comes now to sanctify Marriage afresh;—the wedding-feast at Cana of Galilee sets forth nothing less than "the marriage-supper of the Lamb:" and "the water made wine" proclaims the fact that the weakness of the Law was henceforth to give place to the invigorating strength of the Gospel. Even this however is not all. The "drawing out of water" at such a heavenly entertainment as that, can represent nothing else but the ministerial work of those who wait upon GOD continually,—(whether His ordained Ministers or not, whether Clergy or Laity,) and "draw out water" whether for themselves or for others. And I invite you to consider whether St. John is not here declaring that *Knowledge* in such matters can only result from a blessed *Experience*. "The servants which drew the water:"—it is *they* who knew! To quaff of the beverage is not to enjoy this knowledge. No! *That* knowledge results from obedience to the Divine commands: active service: ministerial willingness. "The governor of the feast tasted the water that was made wine,—and *knew not* whence it was. But the Servants which *drew the water*"—*they* "knew!"

And so, the words before us vindicate for themselves a kind of typical character ; a larger significancy than they seemed at first to possess. They proclaim generally the soul's intimate and practical acquaintance with the source and the secret of its own strength. We are reminded of some occasion when the meekness and the patience,—the calm long-suffering and sublime endurance,—of GOD'S Saints, has astonished us. We are reminded of the contentedness we have sometimes witnessed under prolonged calamity ; the cheerful rising above the pressure of poverty ; the spirit's thankfulness under affliction. There is brought to our remembrance the image of one whose soul seemed to dwell unruffled amid the world's strife,—to move unsullied through polluting influences,—to come out unscathed from the furnace which consumed, or at least scorched the rest. Whence and how was it ? . . . . It was because these persons were the faithful servants of Him who manifested Himself at Cana's marriage-feast. "You little know,"—once exclaimed a young child<sup>1</sup> (she was dying of internal abscess) to a well-meaning neighbour who stood over her bed, loudly commiserating

<sup>1</sup> Caroline Aris, of Finmere,—1856.

her hopeless suffering state;—“*You little know how near this is bringing me to CHRIST!*” . . . Such persons have access to *the one* Treasury of refreshment and of consolation; and they eagerly avail themselves of their high privilege. But such benefits are secret, private, personal. They are always discoursed of in Scripture in language expressive of prerogative. Thus, we read of the song which “*no man could learn but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.*”<sup>1</sup> Even as He “on whose Head are many crowns,” “hath a Name written which *no man knew but Himself.*”<sup>2</sup> And,—“to him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden Manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new Name written which *no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.*”<sup>3</sup> “The heart knoweth his own bitterness,” (said the wise king of old time,) “and *a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy.*”<sup>4</sup>

And thus, though the World knew nothing of it, *they* knew full well whence came the good wine that did so invigorate their hearts, and fortify their spirits, and renew their strength

<sup>1</sup> Rev. xiv. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. xix. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Rev. ii. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Prov. xiv. 10.

from day to day. The World, I say, "knew not whence it was ; but the Servants which drew the water,"—full well *they* "knew" !

More generally yet. "There is a river the streams whereof make glad the city of GOD."<sup>5</sup> Parted is it into four heads ; and "on either side of the river is there the Tree of Life which beareth twelve manner of fruits ; and yieldeth her fruit every month ; and the leaves of the Tree are for the healing of the nations."<sup>6</sup> . . . . To that river of water of Life how free and how hearty, how loud and how often repeated, is the invitation ! "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money ; come ye, buy, and eat !"<sup>7</sup> "If any man thirst, let him come unto ME, and drink."<sup>8</sup> "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst ; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."<sup>9</sup> "And the Spirit and the Bride say, Come ! And let him that heareth say, Come ! And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take

<sup>5</sup> Ps. xlv. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Rev. xxii. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Isa. lv. 1.

<sup>8</sup> St. John vii. 37.

<sup>9</sup> St. John iv. 14.

the water of life freely.”<sup>1</sup> . . . . There are those who avail themselves of this gracious invitation ; and there are those who make light of it. In the scorching heat of noon, and amid the drought of summer, these last suffer lack. They faint. The others, not so ! The careless ones who never resort for refreshment and for help to Him who freely makes them the offer of both,—these, I say, do not even know *whence it is* that those who labour with them are partakers of a refreshment in which themselves have no share. But there ought to be neither wonder nor surprise. They know not, they will never know, whence the blessing came. But, (I say it for the last time,) their fellow-servants,—the men “which draw the water,”—full well *they* “know” ! “With joy do they draw water out of the wells of Salvation” !<sup>2</sup> It is the best knowledge ; the only knowledge which indeed deserves the name, and to be without which, (as the wise man declares,) “is not good.”<sup>3</sup> For why ? Because it is nothing else but the knowledge of *Him*, whom to know is—*Life !*

<sup>1</sup> Rev. xxii. 17<sup>2</sup> Isa. xii. 3.<sup>3</sup> Prov. xix. 2.

## VII. THE CENTURION'S SERVANT :

### AFFECTION FOR DEPENDANTS.

ST. LUKE vii. 2.

*A certain Centurion's servant, who was dear unto him.*

IT is one of the inconvenient results of our excessive familiarity with the Gospels that at last we habitually overlook the less prominent features of the history,—systematically neglect the less important personages. Thus, whenever the healing of the Centurion of Capernaum's servant comes before us, it is the *Gentile soldier* on whom we exclusively fasten our regards : and straight-way, either the sublimity of his faith, or else the largeness of his humility ; either the extraordinary use he made of his slender opportunities, or else the munificence of his disposition ; one of these points, I say, to the exclusion of every other consideration,—takes possession of our minds.

To not a few readers, the apparent inconsistency of St. Luke's account of the miracle, with that of St. Matthew ;—the (supposed) difficulty, I mean, of reconciling the earlier with the later narrative ;—*this* is held to be the point of prime interest in this famous incident ; is made the matter of chiefest account. Did the Centurion then come to JESUS in person ? or did he send to Him “elders of the Jews” ? How about that mission of the “friends” which St. Luke records ? . . . . In some such way, I repeat, we habitually fasten our attention on *the Centurion's* share in this sublime transaction,—overlooking any claims which the Centurion's *Servant* may possibly have on our regard. We suffer our minds to rest entirely on certain features of the Master's character ; to exercise themselves exclusively on certain salient points in *his* conduct. It seems never to occur to many of us to suspect that we act unreasonably in never bestowing an inquisitive glance on the humble dependant, who after all was the one occasion,—the cause, so to speak,—of the entire story.

Unhappily, Commentaries, instead of remedying the evil complained of, make it inveterate. They occupy themselves as a rule with the points

of chiefest moment : profess to explain acknowledged difficulties : follow in the wake of one another : seldom break up new ground. Let us be quite fair. It is not ordinarily held to be the province of a commentator to suggest what may perhaps rather be called *meditations* on Scripture. It is precisely the office of discourses like the present,—(if I may be allowed to say so,)—to supply this deficiency, and so to supplement the commentator's learned labours.

1. You are invited then to call to mind in brief outline the story before you. An officer in the Roman army, stationed at Capernaum,—having “soldiers” and “servants” under him,—is the owner also of a sick slave ; who “lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented,”<sup>1</sup>—“ready” in fact, “to die.”<sup>2</sup> Hearing that JESUS is returning to Capernaum,—(after delivering that “Sermon on the mount,” as we call it, which fills St. Matthew's vth, vith, viith chapters,—St. Luke's vith,) the Centurion sends to Him first “elders of the Jews” as ambassadors : the very individuals probably for whose convenience the synagogue had been built. The ministers of religion (he thinks) are surely the fittest persons

<sup>1</sup> St. Matt. viii. 6.

<sup>2</sup> St. Luke vii. 2.



to approach such an one as the Holy JESUS. From the roof of his house, (as one may imagine,) he watches for their return : and at last beholds them approaching, bringing our SAVIOUR with them. He is ashamed at what he sees : for the feet of Him whom the Centurion knows to be very and eternal GOD, are being toilsomely conducted in the direction of his own dwelling. The crowd throng Him, and will scarce suffer Him to advance,—*that* same multitude which already on the mountain has been listening to the Gospel from His lips. Thereupon, the Centurion despatches certain of the “friends” who happen to be with him, to stay those blessed footsteps. He gives them a message which they shall deliver to our SAVIOUR on coming into His presence ; a message of faith. But the Centurion’s impatience can at last be no longer restrained. He follows, he overtakes his envoys, and delivers his message in person. “LORD,” (he says,) “I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof : but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me : and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth ; and to another, Come, and he cometh ; and to my servant, Do this, and he

doeth it.”<sup>3</sup> The meaning is plain. “ Seeing that I, a mere man, and one under authority, am able to depend on having my commands freely executed by those who are beneath me,—how plain is it that Thou, ‘to whom all things in heaven, in earth, and under the earth do bow and obey,’ needest but to give the word of command, to witness the departure of this malady,—which must perforce be a mere creature of thine!” . . . A splendid confession, truly: and it won a glorious acknowledgment from the lips of Him who is our life.

2. I have now to ask you to do as men do when the light is dazzling and excessive. Be so good as to shade your eyes,—screen from your vision the rays of glory which surround an incident like this,—and attend only to the point I am going to bring before your notice. Ask yourselves first,—Why did not the Centurion, on hearing that JESUS of Nazareth had re-entered Capernaum, go to Him at once *himself*, and *in person* make his petition? You know why, for he has himself told us. (“*I did not think myself worthy* to come unto thee.”<sup>4</sup>)—But why, next,—having sent elders and friends,—can he not at

<sup>3</sup> St. Matt. viii. 8, 9.

<sup>4</sup> St. Luke vii. 7.


least wait until the great Physician reaches his dwelling? Again you know why, for we have just heard him say,—“LORD *I am not worthy that Thou shouldst come under my roof.*”—Here then (as you plainly see) is a character of exceeding humility. The Centurion,—Roman soldier as he was: accustomed to command and to be obeyed, and doubtless stern and self-asserting upon occasion;—was evidently one of those characters which, when religious regards come in;—when the thought of GOD,—GOD in His purity and His holiness,—is presented to their souls;—shrink into themselves with utter self-reproach and self-abasement. “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O LORD!”<sup>5</sup> It is the heart’s language, in the case at least of the guileless and the good, when they realize the awfulness of the fact that they are standing in GOD’S presence. “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”<sup>6</sup>

3. And yet,—as the course of the story shows,—there has evidently been *some* principle of action at work which has operated so powerfully as to

<sup>5</sup> St. Luke v. 8.

<sup>6</sup> Isa. vi. 5.

overcome all resistance. The Centurion has been induced by *some* constraining motive to do violence to the strongest instincts of his nature. What is its name? But I need not keep you waiting,—for you know as well as I do, that the one motive power in this case,—the instinct stronger than the soldier's very nature,—has been *his affection for his servant*. And thus, in thought, we find ourselves conducted from the open air; from the densely crowded street; from the admiring crowd; from the very presence of the Incarnate WORD;—to a private dwelling; and a darkened chamber; and a sick-bed; and the wasted form and wan features of a nameless slave—"ready to die." . . . You are invited to note that in all this I am not drawing on my imagination. The HOLY SPIRIT has guided us to this result by the express mention He has made that the Centurion's servant "*was dear unto him*." St. Luke's brief statement is discovered to wrap up the secret of the entire story. The Evangelist is traditionally held to have been a painter; and verily every stroke of his pencil tells. Let me state in passing that he employs here a somewhat unusual word, for which the nearest English equivalent is "*precious*." It



denotes that this lowly dependant was very "*highly prized*"<sup>7</sup> by his Master.—Significantly enough, though *the Evangelist* persistently calls him a "*slave*,"<sup>8</sup> *the Centurion* is observed invariably to designate him by a word which just as aptly designates a "*child*;"<sup>9</sup> and often means nothing else but a "*son*."<sup>1</sup>

But even if St. Luke had not let fall a hint on the subject, our reasoning would have been precisely the same: and we should not, because we *could* not have erred. When I behold at day-break a row of stately elms lying uprooted on the lawn, I tell myself,—It must have been a wondrous mighty wind which occasioned such an overthrow as *that*!—When, by the sea-side, I discover that the solid masonry of the harbour has been reduced in a few hours to a state of ruin,—How resistless (I tell myself) must have been the power of the waves which, in a single night, could effect such a phenomenon as *this*! . . . It is ever lawful thus to reason from effects to

<sup>7</sup> ἔτιμος. The word recurs in St. Luke xiv. 8; Phil. ii. 29; 1 St. Pet. ii. 4.

<sup>8</sup> St. Luke vii. 2, 3, 10.

<sup>9</sup> ὁ παῖς μου. St. Matt. viii. 6 and 8; St. Luke vii. 7.


<sup>1</sup> As in St. Matt. xvii. 18; St. Luke ix. 42; St. John iv. 51.

their causes. I hesitate not to add, (throwing out the remark, in passing, for the benefit of the studious in such matters,) that there are countless precious inferences to be drawn in this way from neglected statements in Holy Writ. Thus it requires no effort at all to convince oneself that for such an one as the good Centurion to act as *he* is related to have acted, he must have yielded to a marvellously strong influence ;—must have been swayed by the motive of an altogether extraordinary personal regard.

4. But it is lawful,—it is in fact inevitable,—to inquire further, what must have been the admirable gifts, what the graces,—how rare must the character have been which could thus prevail over every obstacle and induce the Gentile soldier to do violence even to himself! I am willing to put up with the simplest explanation of the matter imaginable, viz. that the palsied slave had proved himself a sincerely attached, a thoroughly faithful dependant. Let *that* be the sum of the matter, if you please. *Less*, the “Centurion’s servant, (as we call him, but he was in fact *his slave*,) *less* the man cannot have been, than a thoroughly devoted, a sincerely attached dependant. And behold we have reached the point I proposed to

myself at the outset. Attachment produces attachment: love begets love. The devotedness of this slave to his master had evidently awakened in that master a sentiment of strong personal affection for him in return. The humble dependant is "ready to die]" of a malady which is confessedly beyond the reach of medical skill: and his master is prepared to move heaven and earth to procure for him relief. And thus we have exhibited to us an aspect of the relationship between servants and their employers which is not nearly as much attended to as it deserves.

5. For is it not the plain truth, an every-day incident of our experience,—that we treat our domestic servants in their sickness very much indeed as we treat members of our own family? But let there have been long and faithful service,—let there have gone before tokens of sincere and devoted attachment,—and (surely I may ask the question boldly!), Is there anything we would do for a child,—a brother or a sister,—which we should not be prepared also to do for that member of our household? We are accustomed, (and rightly,) to attribute to the blessed influences of the Gospel of JESUS CHRIST these tender regards, these acts of sacrifice. Let us not fail to note that



here was one who, having disentangled himself from the darkness of heathenism, (verily, a "darkness which might be *felt*," ) stood as yet only mid-way, so to express oneself, between the shadows of the Law and the light of the Gospel ;—and let us be careful to admit that such an one as *this* exhibited in its highest perfection what I must needs designate as a characteristic grace of the best-taught of Christian households.

6. And this shall suffice. It ought not to be necessary to draw out such a pattern-case into precepts ; or to enlarge on the blessedness or reciprocated attachment between servants and their employers. Still less do I look upon it as relevant to the matter in hand that I should do more than admit, (which I do freely,) that what is meant by "*friendship*," in the strict sense of that word, does not properly describe the relation between Masters and Mistresses on the one hand, —Servants and dependants generally on the other. No. The sentiment is not "*friendship*:" and *they* will find out their mistake who neglect the word of caution,—which however I only throw out in passing, lest I should be thought to be forgetful or ignorant of the matter. But it is, for



all *that*, a wondrous deep and tender,—a wondrous strong and abiding regard, which prevails in Christian households ; when the Servants have proved themselves,—(notwithstanding what I have been saying,)—to be the friends, yes *the friends* of the family ; and the same sentiment is as sincerely reciprocated towards them in return. It grows up at last into an abiding principle of the daily life. It sublimates, as well as sweetens, the relation between the heads of the household and their dependants. Yes, and it sanctifies it also : bringing a reward with it even on this side of Eternity. Does sickness at last lay low the “servant who is dear” ? Then is it found that profoundest sympathy, the utmost tenderness are close at hand. Yea, and the Great Physician Himself,—not now in the crowded street, but in “the land which is very far off,”—speaks the comfortable word ; and there follows a blessedness “above all that we ask or think,—according to the power that worketh in us.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Eph. iii. 20.

## VIII. MALCHUS :

## SERVICE IN A SINFUL HOUSEHOLD.


ST. JOHN xviii. 10.

*The servant's name was Malchus.*

LET me say a few words to you about that servant of the high-priest, whose ear Simon Peter cut off; whose ear our SAVIOUR healed. "The servant's name was MALCHUS." He shall stand, if you please, for a sample of *service in a sinful household*. He is sometimes spoken of as if he were himself a villain. Let us beware of importing fancies of our own into Holy Scripture as if they were facts. There is no proof—no particle of evidence is there—as to the character or disposition of Malchus. He was the high-priest's servant; and he became engaged in consequence, (as a domestic servant is pretty sure sooner or later to become engaged,) in carrying out his master's designs. . . . There

may be built upon this slender substructure, as it seems to me, a short meditation which may be useful to us all.


The incident which brings the name of this individual into prominence transports us in thought to our SAVIOUR'S Passion. Judas had come to apprehend the Holy One in the garden of Gethsemane. He brought a band of soldiers,—“*the band*” or cohort of Roman soldiers which on such occasions kept order in the city; and he was attended by a multitude armed with swords and staves, as well as furnished with lanterns and torches. St. John especially notices that there were with him officials of the high-priests and Pharisees. After the traitor's kiss, some laid hands on JESUS and forcibly apprehended Him. “LORD, shall we smite with the sword?” asked the disciples,—(St. Peter certainly will have asked that question,)—and without waiting for an answer, the same St. Peter, yielding to the blameless instinct of self-preservation, regardless of the overwhelming odds against him, dealt at the foremost of his LORD'S assailants what was meant to have been a fatal blow. And fatal it would have proved, but for GOD'S watchful providence. The intention unmis-



takably was to cleave asunder the head of the assailant: but the other turns away, and a severed ear—the *right* ear—is the only consequence. Not that the ear falls to the ground. From St. Luke's statement that our SAVIOUR "*touched* his ear and healed him," it is plain that the member was still hanging to its place. And "Suffer ye thus far," He exclaimed, even before achieving this deed of mercy,—which by the way St. Luke, "the beloved physician," is alone in recording.

St. John displays his personal knowledge of all that occurred by a few singularly minute and picturesque touches. It is *he* who relates that *Simon Peter* struck the blow. It is *he* who informs us of *the name* of the wounded servant; and, as a further illustration of his subsequent statement that he was personally known to the high-priest, he displays his intimate acquaintance with the high-priest's household by remarking afterwards that it was *a kinsman of him whose ear Peter had cut off*, who assailed the same Peter with one of the questions which occasioned his three-fold denial of his Master. But what is better worthy of attention, besides healing the ear of Malchus, our SAVIOUR is found to have

commanded His faithful but overforward disciple to put back again his sword into its place: for that as many as take the sword, by the sword shall perish. Then, (with evident reference to the number of His followers,)—"Supposest thou," (He asks,) "that I cannot even now ask My Father, and He will place at My disposal twelve legions of Angels?" And then comes a question of surpassing interest,—“But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled that thus it must be?" . . . . I call this marvellous, because of the unearthly majesty of it: the solemn decree pronounced concerning resort to the sword; the leisurely reminder of the Speaker that at His command are the powers of the unseen World, the armies of Heaven; and above all, the reference made at such an instant to the Old Testament Scriptures, as destined to receive fuller and yet fuller accomplishment. It is not needful to pursue the sacred narrative any further. Indeed, I have said more than was absolutely necessary for my actual purpose. My business is only with "the servant," or rather "*the slave* of the high-priest,"—who obtains special notice at the hands of all the four Evangelists, although St. John alone records his



name. He was a conspicuous person therefore : and not so much one of those "servants of the high-priests" whom St. John mentions in the third verse, as a distinct official of Caiaphas, though of mean rank. Forwardness and zeal seem to have been characteristic of the man : for it was no doubt the conspicuous part he was playing, and his being among the foremost to apprehend our LORD in the garden, that occasioned what followed.

It is natural to inquire *why* we are told that this man's "name was Malchus"? But,—(as in the case of Rhoda, who is particularized in a similar way by St. Luke in the xiith chapter of the Acts,)—only a conjectural solution of the question can be produced. It is clearly tantamount to citing a witness—the most competent imaginable—of a case of healing without a parallel in the Gospels, that St. John should particularize the object of our SAVIOUR'S mercy in this way *by name*. I am inclined to suspect,—(you will excuse the suggestion if it is distasteful to any of you, but I entertain the suspicion very strongly),—that the man thus mercifully dealt with by the World's Redeemer, like the repentant malefactor on the Cross, will have been one

of those who from being a persecutor became a believer in the holy JESUS. For weal or for woe, it is surely a great matter that the name of *any* should be recorded in "the Lamb's book of Life." And when I find the name of a little one of the earth, (such an one as Lazarus the beggar, for example,) set down deliberately, (as here the name of Malchus,)—I tell myself that it is a token that names forgotten here on earth are written in Heaven and will be remembered there eternally:—and that the name of many a domestic servant, yea of many a *slave*,—(for "*who* maketh *thee* to differ?")—will be found recorded *there*!

To conclude.

Malchus was the servant, the slave of an evil master. He may have copied his master's faults, or he may not. Let us believe that he was one of those who fall into the snare which circumstances lay for them. He shall stand for all Servants (whether male or female) of evil Masters.

And I invite you to attend to this one point:—The service in which Malchus had the calamity to find himself engaged,—fraught with danger as it was,—did not exclude him from participation in GOD'S mercies in CHRIST. His position was


alarming : but he was still within the sphere of their operation.

And having shown you *this*, I am content to let the matter drop. There are bearings of the case of course, not a few, into which I cannot pretend just now to enter. You, on your side, are disposed to insist, (I know you are ; so it is useless denying it ;) that the drawbacks of the household where you find yourself domesticated, the faults of the Master or of the Mistress, are insurmountable obstacles in your own way. I only insist that they are *not* insurmountable. Behold a healing hand is extended towards you even now. It is not my own that I speak of (be sure of *that!*) : it is GOD's. And it rests with yourselves, and *with yourselves only*, to determine whether the healing virtue shall extend to your souls ; and whether you shall become followers of the LORD JESUS ; and whether *your* names also shall become written, (like that of Malchus,) in the Lamb's book of Life.

Let no one be so unreasonable as to pretend that according to this showing, it may become a gain to be the servant of an evil person : and that, at all events in the preacher's account, it would appear to make no difference whether one



were engaged in the service of a godly or of an ungodly household. There is, on the contrary, no telling how many risks are run by the servants of the lawless and profane. They who make *choice* of ungodly service, knowing what they do, are the contrivers of their own downfall, and deserve nothing but GOD'S anger. It is a very different case that I have been supposing and considering all along. I am supposing the case of one who finds himself, to his own infinite dismay, implicated in a crime,—involved in a perilous errand,—and all because (nothing intending it himself) he is the servant of an evil Master. And my message to such an one is but a reminder that GOD'S mercy and GOD'S favour do not forsake domestic servants even *there* and even *then*. "GOD knows them" still "by name." And He can, if He will, put forth a discriminating hand to touch them, even amid the lawless crowd. In the darkness of the night, it may be theirs to discover that healing virtue has gone out from Him to remedy their own peculiar smart; and if it should so happen, then will they carry about with them all their life long a token that



verily it was none other than GOD Himself against whom they went out so violently ; and "obtained mercy," but only "because they did it ignorantly, in unbelief."


## IX. RHODA:

## THE FRIEND OF THE FAMILY.

ACTS xii. 13.

*And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda.*


IT is marvellous how much of beauty and pathos St. Luke has contrived to throw into six short verses of Scripture, when he is describing so simple an incident as the arrival of St. Peter at the house of "Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark." A scene of unearthly grandeur had gone immediately before,—I mean, St. Peter's delivery out of prison by the Angel of the LORD. . . . The Saint, bound by two chains, was asleep between two soldiers; while two others were guarding the door without. The cell was suddenly filled with glory; and an Angel, striking St. Peter on the side, bade him rise up quickly. His chains fell from his hands.



“Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals.” The other obeyed. “Cast thine outer garment about thee, and follow me.” The Apostle followed the Angel, imagining that it must surely be all a vision of the night. But when the iron gate of the prison which led to the city opened to them of its own accord ; and when, in addition to the two soldiers whom he had left in his cell overcome with a deep sleep from the LORD, he beheld the two other soldiers similarly overcome with slumber outside the door ; and lo,—beneath the stars,—the two walked forth together the length of one street, and at last the Angel departed from him ;— *then* Peter was convinced that it was a glorious reality. “Now know I of a surety,” (he exclaimed on coming to himself,) “that the LORD hath sent forth His Angel and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.”

St. Peter, after holding brief debate, repairs “to the house of Mary the mother of John surnamed Mark : where there were many assembled together praying.” You should attend to this. We were told in the 5th verse that earnest prayer was made by the Church on behalf of the im-

prisoned Apostle, prayer for his safety. Here then is *a specimen* of what was going on. In a private dwelling, the abode of a faithful and devout matron,—the sister, it may be, of Barnabas and the mother of Mark,—the saints are assembled, and they have met for prayer. Right earnest are they ; for these prayers of theirs, it is evident, go on till long after midnight. And still the night wears away, and still their orisons proceed. How literally their prayers have been answered,—answered beyond anything they are able to ask or think,—we have seen already : but to know how little they expected to have their prayers so literally granted, we must attend to the rest of the story. And it is impossible to tell it more intelligibly, than in the very words of St. Luke :—“And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named RHODA. And when she knew Peter’s voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel. But Peter continued knocking : and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished. But he,



beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the LORD had brought him out of prison.”

There is very little here that requires explaining ; and though one feels inclined to make some remarks on the singular slowness of heart (as it seems) shown by these early Christians in believing that their prayers had been heard, I shall pass that part of the subject by. It seemed to them more likely, we see, that a Spirit,—St. Peter’s Angel,—should stand before them, than that the thing they have been praying for shall be literally granted. The power of Prayer seldom comes more conspicuously into sight than here ; and it is obvious to remark on the coming into sight too of a Law for which philosophers have no name ; so efficacious that it can cause “ the iron gate ” of the prison to swing open noiselessly on its hinges, of its own accord. The ministration of Angels also claims attention, as well as the manner they discharge their office. From all these tempting subjects, however, I turn away. I wish you to attend to the plain domestic incident which next comes to view, and in which those for whom the present sermon is specially intended will probably feel a very special interest.

Note then, if you please, how,—side by side with *that* outcome of the powers of the unseen World which has been hitherto engaging our attention,—stands (not in vain, be sure!) the record of a purely domestic incident; and how the form which occupies the very forefront of the picture and chiefly attracts our attention is the form of a maid-servant,—a female slave probably,—whose office in Mary's household it is *to attend to knocks at the door*.

The ancient custom requires explaining, in order to make the narrative before us quite intelligible. There was to every better kind of house an outer gate or porch, the door of which was locked; and any person seeking admission had to hammer at this door. The noise brought a servant; who, instead of *opening* the door (as with us), asked Who was there? and listened for the answer,—opening or not, according as she judged expedient after the person outside had given his name, and explained his errand. St. Luke accordingly says,—“As Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel *came to listen*, named Rhoda.” This is exactly what the Greek signifies. But if you will look into a “reference Bible,” (as it is called,) you will find this explained

by the following note,—“Or, *to ask who was there:*” which is nothing else but an explanation, volunteered by some ingenious person, of the office of the female servant who kept the street door; in which moreover he is perfectly accurate. Rhoda made the customary inquiry. I suspect that for a very good reason Simon Peter did not give his name, but *said something* instead, such as that he was ‘a friend of the family,’—or that ‘she had better open the door at once,’—or that ‘she must beware of speaking too loud.’ For you will observe that St. Luke says,—“*And when she knew Peter’s voice;*” which shows that she recognized him by *his voice*.

Then comes the affecting record,—“she opened not the gate because of her joy.” In other words, she was so delighted that she forgot to open the gate: (a true picture of excessive happiness,—which forgets to eat, or drink, or do any necessary thing:) “but ran in, and told how *Peter* stood before the gate!” “Thou art mad,” said they, rising amazed from their devotions. But she persisted in her story, adding perhaps some trivial detail in confirmation of the truth of what she said. They could only explain the matter in one way. “It is his Angel!” they exclaimed.



. . . . We think we see that perplexed company, (incredulity and alarm depicted in every countenance), after short debate issuing forth in a body to ascertain the truth of the matter for themselves. Furnished with many lights, they proceed in the direction of the knocking (which still continues); and on opening the street door, behold to their amazement Simon Peter standing before them. The Apostle with signs enjoins silence: enters, and relates to them what has befallen himself; and "Go," (he says,) "show these things unto James;" meaning thereby the first Bishop of Jerusalem, who was also our LORD'S cousin.

The point of special interest in all this, is the abundant indication afforded that Rhoda was one of a thousand: yet not a specimen of an extinct species by any means. We all have known such persons; have respected, or rather have loved them; have reckoned them, in short, among our personal friends.

I. You note, of course, how completely she had identified herself with the family she served: making *their* sorrow, *her* sorrow,—*their* joy, *her* joy. This is always the token of a noble nature. It comes singularly to sight on the present

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occasion. A child of the family could not have acted more naturally, more gracefully.

2. You note also that she knew St. Peter by his voice; and that she was straightway transported with joy. How came she to know that voice so well? How came she to care for the speaker so much? Simon Peter must have been a frequent visitor at the house,—a man beloved by all the household; and it is evident that the servants, down to the slave who kept the door, loved, as well as revered him. . . . I am reminded by this that Servants, to some extent, share the privileges of their masters and mistresses. While they wait upon their guests, they learn in a manner to know them, acquire an interest in them: get inquired after, and become cared for by them, in turn.

What think you of the suggestion,—(it pretends to be no more than a suggestion,)—that Simon Peter at Mary's house had many a time discoursed to the assembled household concerning his LORD and ours? had delivered to them passages from that oral Gospel which must needs have preceded in point of time the written page? had exhorted all, many a time, to holiness, humility, faith, constancy,—after the manner of his own

Epistles? had spoken special words of exhortation to *the Servants* of the household, as in the iind chap. of his First Epistle—where he addresses eight memorable verses, all to *them*?

3. It is worth your attention that *the name* of this young person is set down: which is the more remarkable when it is considered how many important names are industriously withheld. We do not know the name of the good centurion, or of his servant: the name of the munificent widow, or of the repenting malefactor, or of the woman of Canaan;—or indeed of any of the persons on whom our LORD wrought a miracle,—except Lazarus and Bartimæus, Mary Magdalene and Malchus. Neither the owner of 'the colt,'—nor the persons chiefly concerned at the marriage in Cana of Galilee,—nor the widow of Nain: of none of these persons are the names recorded. The person at whose house the paschal Supper was celebrated is kept wondrous close. Very memorable therefore is it that *Rhoda* should be singled out for the honour of mention. Her Greek name—which corresponds to our 'Rose'—reminds us that her memory will be for ever fragrant, throughout eternity as well as in Time.



You are invited to dwell in thought on this picture of one who though filling a humble place in one of the earliest Christian households evidently won for herself a place in the Book of GOD'S remembrance : in token of which circumstance St. Luke is careful to introduce her to our notice as "a damsel named Rhoda." Her quick recognition of the Apostle by his voice : her *running* in : her excessive joy : her confident sticking to her story, which is mentioned with special emphasis :—are features of character which there is no mistaking. Two names alone of all that blessed household have survived—"Mary" and "Rhoda:" the mistress and the maid. Both are equally conspicuous in their blessedness. I am reminded that the good providence of GOD does not forsake a deserving Christian girl when she "goes into service,"—as it is called ; but conducts her to "the haven where she would be,"—I mean, to a Christian home ; where she listens to the voice, if not of Saints and Apostles, at least of the good and the wise ; the pure and the honourable ; the faithful, and the true. GOD'S eye is still upon her. He still "knows her *by name*." I will add that virtuous families in this particular above all others, (I

mean, in respect of their domestic Servants,) do not go unblessed : but are observed for the most part to be waited upon by those who are the flowers of their class,—“ Rhodas,” at least in nature if not in name. And when any choice privilege awaits the heads of the Family, lo, it is shared to some extent by the very humblest of their dependents : who suddenly emerge into notice and even win for themselves imperishable honour ; as well as are reminded that GOD “ *calleth them ALL by their names.*”

## X. ONESIMUS :

## THE OFFENDING SERVANT RECLAIMED.

PHILEMON, ver. 16.

*Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved.*

THE last servant I shall bring under your notice by name is ONESIMUS. As we have already remarked more than once, the servants of Scripture were in fact *slaves*. We can sometimes afford to overlook this circumstance. On the present occasion we cannot. It will be convenient that I should briefly rehearse the story to which your attention is about to be invited.

Onesimus was a runaway slave. He appears to have in some way defrauded his master,—(whose name was Philemon, and who lived at Colossæ a city of Asia Minor,)—and to have made his escape to Rome.

Onesimus reached that city at the time when St. Paul was there, and in bonds,—viz. about the

year A.D. 61 or 62. St. Paul's fellow-prisoner was Epaphras, himself a native of Colossæ ; and I suspect it was this holy man to whom the arrival of Onesimus became known in the first instance. But in fact several earnest missionary spirits were with the great Apostle during his enforced residence in the capital of the ancient world : John, surnamed Mark,—Aristarchus,—Demas,—St. Luke himself. Any of these may have been the means of making it known to St. Paul that there had arrived at Rome from Colossæ a runaway slave of their common friend Philemon. The result, at all events, is certain,—viz. that St. Paul himself took the man in hand and pleaded with him,—reproved,—exhorted,—encouraged,—persuaded,—corrected,—convinced him. You are to think of St. Paul in his own hired house at Rome engaged in this particular way. The heathen slave, Onesimus, became a disciple of the Crucified. Repenting and born again, what else was Onesimus henceforth but a new creature ? St. Paul accordingly speaks of him as if he had been his own very son, " My son Onesimus" (he says) "*whom I have begotten in my bonds.*"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ver. 10.

This man then, so converted to Christianity, St. Paul determined to send back to Colossæ. It would have been convenient and agreeable to the Apostle to have retained Onesimus at Rome on his own account :<sup>2</sup> but it was not to be thought of. The man must absolutely go back, must go home, must return to his master. You will perhaps ask me, *Why* must he go back? I answer, Because whereas a "servant" is a free man and his own master, a "slave" is not. Slaves were actually reckoned as property; held to be as strictly the property of those whose slaves they were, as house or furniture, land or estate. I have seen an ancient advertisement for a runaway slave of Alexandria, whose owner promised a reward of about seven pounds sterling to any one who should bring him back. Onesimus must therefore by all means return to Colossæ,—must be restored to Philemon. And it is discovered that St. Paul knew how to persuade his new-found disciple to submit to the penitential discipline which of necessity such a stringent measure involved. But, (as might have been foreseen,) he was careful to provide for the kind reception of Onesimus when he should

<sup>2</sup> ver. 13.



stand before his injured and offended master. I really think this part of the subject deserving of your serious attention.

Philemon has to be in some special way conciliated. It will not be enough to disarm his anger and prevent any act of violence. St. Paul will not be satisfied with *that*. No. Something quite different is his purpose. How shall it be effected? How shall he, in bonds at Rome, procure for the poor runaway slave a reception like that of the prodigal son in the parable?— You shall hear how it is to be done. And it is impossible not to admire, as well as love, the man who wrought so carefully for one so despised as Onesimus.

1. First, *he associates Onesimus with Tychicus*, (an honoured friend of his own,) and makes them jointly the bearers of the Epistle to the Colossians which he writes from Rome. You will remember what is said in the ivth ch., verses 7 to 9:—“ All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellow-servant in the LORD: whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate and comfort your hearts : *with Onesimus a faithful and beloved*

*brother*, who is of you,"—(that is, who is a Colossian himself :) "*they* shall make known unto you all things which are done here."<sup>3</sup>—You see at once what has been effected by these few words. The great Apostle by claiming Onesimus for "a faithful and beloved brother," has ensured that *all* shall receive him as a brother likewise. We learn that the Epistle which contains the words will have to be read out publicly in the congregation of the faithful ; and of course every eye in church will be turned admiringly, (as St. Paul very well knows,) on Onesimus the slave, who will be present. More than that. Onesimus brings (together with Tychicus) the latest tidings about St. Paul. He is therefore sought for,—cherished,—welcomed by all the faithful in Colossæ. Most of all,—the very epistle which is to make their Church conspicuous in the eyes of Christendom for ever, *has been brought to them by Onesimus*. The Colossians owe to Onesimus the safe convoy of the famous epistle which bears and will for ever bear their name (the Epistle to the Colossians, I mean). How can every one who names the name of CHRIST in Colossæ fail to welcome Onesimus as a faithful

<sup>3</sup> Col. iv. 7—9.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* ver. 16.

and beloved brother indeed? Philemon is disarmed,—more than disarmed,—the very instant he recognizes in his offending slave the bearer of words whose real Author is the HOLY GHOST. Archippus (Bishop of Colossæ) seems to have been Philemon's son. To him in particular the Epistle to the Colossians is sent. What stronger pledge *can* be given to Onesimus that on his arrival at Colossæ he shall be tenderly received?

2. But the principal provision which St. Paul has made in order to secure for Onesimus a friendly reception when he shall stand in Philemon's presence, has not yet been adverted to. He makes him the bearer of a short Epistle to his master,—*the Epistle to Philemon*. It is the shortest of all St. Paul's writings, but certainly not the least interesting. It is partly, if not wholly, written in St. Paul's own hand.<sup>5</sup> And when the document is presented by the slave Onesimus with a troubled conscience and a downcast eye, and a misgiving spirit,—and the familiar characters of the great Apostle are recognized by Philemon as a sure token that the epistle indeed has come from him,—can you

<sup>5</sup> ver. 19.

require telling that the past is forgiven and forgotten in a moment ?

3. Now let the letter be unfolded ; and be so good as to watch the countenance of Philemon while he reads the salutation,—“ Paul, a prisoner of JESUS CHRIST, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellow labourer ; and to our beloved Apphia,” (I suppose she was Philemon’s wife,) “and Archippus our fellow-soldier,” (their son, I suppose,) “and to the Church in thy house,—Grace to you and peace from GOD our FATHER and the LORD JESUS CHRIST.”

St. Paul then commends Philemon for his charity and faith and ministrations of love towards the Saints at Colossæ ; proceeding as follows,—“ Wherefore, though I might with entire confidence enjoin a certain course on thee as the suitable thing for thee to do,—yet, for love’s sake I rather beseech thee.” (The authority of *the Apostle* is waived, you see,—and entreaty is employed instead of command.) “ Being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of JESUS CHRIST, I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds ; who in time past was to thee

unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me; whom I have sent back again. Thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own heart. I could have wished to retain him, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the Gospel. But without thy consent, I would not; that such an act of good service towards me might be not a thing enforced, but an act of freewill." Note the skill of what follows: "For perhaps Onesimus was therefore separated from thee"—("separated from thee!" why, the man had *absconded!* Yes, he had: but St. Paul calls it by a different name; calls it *separation* only, in order to soften the matter:) "separated from thee, perhaps, for a season that thou mightest possess him entirely for ever;—and in a vastly different relation from that which before subsisted between thee and him; no longer as a slave, but above a slave,—a brother beloved. To *me* he is so in the highest degree, —but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh and in the LORD? If thou count *me* therefore a partner, receive *him* as myself! If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put it to my account. I, Paul have written it with mine ~~own hand~~, I will repay it:

not but what thou owest me thine own self besides."

You see, you *feel*, the beauty of this, of course. There had been some act of dishonesty committed by Onesimus. Well,—in his warmth, the Apostle, adopting for a moment the notions and the language of secular society, offers to stand in the offender's place. "Claim the money if thou wilt, of *me!* There,—you have in black and white (as the phrase is),—I make myself responsible!" . . . . Now does any one require telling that a proposal like *that*,—from "such an one as Paul the aged,"—could scarcely be read without tears and a sense of burning shame by any faithful man of those,—ay, or of these days? But to write so to *Philemon!* O it was to overwhelm him quite: for (as we have already heard the Apostle reminding him), he owed to St. Paul his very knowledge of the Gospel; and therefore his very hope of eternal Life . . . . . Pleading is over. Persuasion has done its work. St. Paul knows that by this time Philemon has wept on his servant's neck and freely "forgiven him all that debt." With a peculiar *naïveté* he derives an argument (strange to relate) from the very name of the man on whose behalf he is

pleading,—“Onesimus,” which means in Greek *profitable*. You remember that we had just now the words, “who in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me.” “Come, come, brother,” (he proceeds),—“Be thou *my* Onesimus, be *profitable* unto me in the LORD! Refresh my heart in the LORD! Confident of thy compliance in this matter, I have written thus unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more even than I say. Yes, and at the same time,”—(observe this little concluding touch; which seems to be a kind of laying of the hand on the arm of the other, and a confidential whispering to him about a little private matter which he knows will fill his whole heart with joy),—“Yes, and at the same time, *prepare me a lodging*; for I trust that through the prayers of you all, I shall be given unto you.” . . . Then come messages of love from St. Paul’s companions at Rome; and with a benedictory prayer, the epistle ends.

I have too much respect for the **understandings**,—too high an opinion of the hearts of my fellow-men,—to suppose that I need enlarge on what has gone before. But indeed it is not altogether to my purpose. I could indeed

contemplate the great Apostle taking all this pains,—exhibiting all this earnestness,—moving us with so many touches of pathos, tenderness, dignity, generosity, skilful address,—without calling your attention in detail to the matter. But after all, it is the slave Onesimus, the bearer of the epistle ; and next to him, it is his master Philemon, to whom the epistle is brought ; of whom I am to speak : and a very few words shall comprise all that still remains to be spoken.

1. There is, there ever will be, in the relation of Master and Servant,—as there was in old time in the relation of Master and Slave,—occasions when the grace of *forgiveness* is called for, and must for CHRIST'S sake be freely exercised. Within such narrow limits it is impossible to be more definite and particular. This is the sum of my first remark.

2. The second is,—That he to whom CHRIST reveals Himself ; the servant whose heart has been indeed reached and effectually acted upon by GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT,—that such an one is henceforth “*not* as a servant, but above a servant,—a brother” (or a sister) “beloved.”

3. The last remark is,—that we may not hold



ourselves at liberty without concern and almost at random to dismiss our servants;—to pay them their wages, and simply to turn them adrift on a cold and careless world:—least of all may any one dare to pursue them with bad characters. I do not say that any one is warranted in giving a false character to a servant: but I say that we should be very much on our guard against the sin of blocking the way of any poor youth or friendless girl by saying one harsh word needlessly about any who have once come under the shadow of our roof. . . . Onesimus was a slave who first *defrauded* his master and then *absconded*. We have seen St. Paul yearning over such an one with unutterable tenderness: by GOD'S grace reclaiming him: restoring him to his family and his friends: pleading for him with his master, as you or I might plead for the son of our very bowels: taking the blame, and the shame,—yes, and the very debt of Onesimus (with which *certainly* he had nothing to do!)—upon himself: and, in advance, writing the name of Onesimus in the Lamb's book of Life,—calling him “a faithful and beloved brother;”—and all, (be persuaded), for the abiding consolation and encouragement of many a poor brother

or sister who have erred from the way ; and who are to learn from this story that recovery is not impossible to them,—simply because “ with GOD *all things* are possible :” that the gate of mercy is held wide open for them by the Angels of the Most High ; and only sorrowfully closed at last when there has been the soul’s deliberate refusal to enter in.

## XI. CHRIST, IN "THE FORM OF A SERVANT."

THE MIND WHICH WAS IN CHRIST JESUS.

PHILIPPIANS ii. 5, 7.

*Let this mind be in you which was also in CHRIST JESUS,—who . . . . took upon Him the form of a servant.*

I WILL not attempt to vindicate for these words of the Apostle all their inherent depth and fulness. Were I to do so, I should be obliged to begin by reminding you that our SAVIOUR,—in that He was in His essential nature very and eternal GOD,—took upon Himself "the form of a servant," (or rather, "of a slave,") when He took our nature upon Him and was "born of a pure Virgin." But for my present purpose there is no need to take so large a view of the subject.

The words convey a real message to the soul, and a most important one, taken in their ordinary sense ; and it is out of *that*, which may be declared

to be at once their most obvious and their most precious meaning, that I propose now to gather a few thoughts which may become a comfort and a help to some of you,—as well as prove a channel of blessedness to all.

When we hear it declared concerning our SAVIOUR by such an one as St. Paul that CHRIST "took upon Him the form of a servant," we go over the Gospel history in thought, and ask ourselves how far the thing declared of Him seems to hold true. Verily, we have not far to look. We are reminded that His whole ministerial life was a life of service; and that He sacrificed His own will habitually, waiting on the sick and suffering wherever He went. But there is *one* scene in His Ministry, beyond all others, which these words of St. Paul specially bring to our remembrance. I allude to what is found in the xiiiith chapter of St. John's Gospel. Let me read to you the first five verses:—"Now, before the feast of the Passover, when JESUS knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the FATHER, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end. And supper being ended, the Devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot,

Simon's son, to betray Him ; JESUS knowing that the FATHER had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from GOD, and went to GOD ; He riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments ; and took a towel, and girded Himself. After that, He poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded."

1. There is not a more mysterious incident in all the Gospel than this. It represents nothing else,—sets forth in a kind of living parable no other thing,—than the entire purpose of our SAVIOUR'S Incarnation : viz. to wash our souls from Sin in His own most precious Blood ; to make our Bodies clean by *His* Body. More yet. It was declared by its Author to be a pattern act. "If I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you."<sup>1</sup> And there must needs be here a deeper meaning still ; for the cleansing spoken of cannot be supposed to be only the outward washing of the body. Once more, however, I may not go into the occasion

<sup>1</sup>. St. John xiii. 14, 15.

alluded to quite thoroughly, for it would speedily carry us out of our depth,—as well as lead us away from our own immediate and proper subject. I do but insist that, of all the recorded incidents in our LORD'S Ministry, there is no passage more apposite to what St. Paul says in the text, than this. It belongs to the last paschal Supper: in the midst of which (as you have seen) our SAVIOUR rose from the table and performed a clearly menial act in a clearly servile way. It was clearly a servile act,—*that* washing of the disciples' feet: for (as you may remember) it was ever performed by servants of the lowest class. "Behold," (said Abigail to David, when she wanted to express exceeding humility,)—"let thine handmaid be a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord."<sup>2</sup>—And the act was done by our Redeemer quite in a menial way: for whereas servants are often waited on and helped by other servants, it is distinctly stated that our Divine Master did every part of this lowly task unaided and alone. "He riseth from supper:" "He layeth aside His garments:" "He taketh a towel:" "He girdeth Himself." "After that, He poureth water into a bason;" and

<sup>2</sup> 1 Sam. xxv. 41.

behold "He beginneth to wash His disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He is girded."

2. But this is not all. Later on in the same evening, a strife arose among the Apostles as to "which of them was the greatest." Our LORD'S reply deserves your best attention. "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve."<sup>3</sup> Then follow some words which have clear reference to the act of washing the Disciples' feet which had gone before:—"For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth." Our SAVIOUR, you see, in these words, calls attention to the servile nature of the occupation in which He had been just before engaged. And though I will not venture to say that St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Philippians,—(when he wrote, "Let this mind be in you which was also in CHRIST JESUS, who . . . . *took upon Him the form of a servant;*")—though

<sup>3</sup> St. Luke xx. 25—27.

I will not assert positively that St. Paul was referring in particular to the scene described in the xiiiith chapter of the Gospel according to St. John ; —yet, I am persuaded we ought to think of these two places of Scripture in close connexion with one another ; and even to consider the Evangelical transaction in the upper chamber as the Apostolic precept deliberately carried out in detail and exhibited in action.

3. I have now said as much as I desire in the way of explanation of the assertion of St. Paul,—viz, that CHRIST JESUS our LORD "took upon Him the form of a servant." The chief inference I propose to derive from it is *this* :—that the very *fact* that He submitted Himself to servitude should make all our own service sweet. *This* is the use I propose to make of the doctrine ! I rely on your following me with your hearts, and agreeing with what I say. And if it never struck you before, I venture to hope that henceforth at least the thought that your SAVIOUR was among men "as one that serveth," will prove a solace to you and something more. I think it ought to make every Servant proud of his or her office,—in love with servitude, so to speak,—to know that the LORD of Heaven and Earth "took upon Him the



form of a servant" also. I am saying, that the thought that *He* whom we love and adore,—the object of all our worship and reverence,—our one stay in Life, our only hope in Death:—the thought that *He* by deliberate choice adopted servitude for His earthly portion,—*this* thought ought so to brighten the estate of servitude, so to gladden and as it were to sanctify it, that anything like murmuring or impatience should be quite impossible.

4. Then further, it seems to me that all servile acts,—(by which I mean ministerial actions of the more irksome and laborious kind,)—should become recommended to us all by the habitual contemplation of our LORD having been "among us as he that serveth." There is in our nature a peculiar unwillingness to take the lower place, and to adopt the humbler occupation, and to discharge the duties which demand a sacrifice,—the sacrifice of the will. O the untamed rebelliousness which breaks out when the alternative is proposed that there shall be a surrender of the inclinations; a submission to what is irksome and uncongenial; a surrender of one's own for another's convenience: and that one shall do any of the acts which are reckoned emblems or

tokens of inferiority! . . . But I am inclined to think that if we would be so much in earnest with ourselves as to set before our minds deliberately the thought of our SAVIOUR, "in the form of a servant,"—we must perforce at last unlearn some of our inordinate self-conceit and self-complacency ; and (in the words of a well-known hymn) feel constrained "to pour contempt on all our pride." We shall by degrees seek out for ourselves, besides the lowest place, offices of humility,—and acts of self-abasement,—and servile duties and occupations :—as carrying with them a true savour of the Gospel ;—as sure notes of our discipleship ;—as witnesses to ourselves that we are CHRIST'S.

5. That I may not be misunderstood, let me here add a word of caution, which possibly *may*, but certainly *ought not* to be needed ; viz. that nothing that I have been saying is to be so interpreted as if I had been overlooking the solemn fact that a diversity of ranks and stations, —the duty of subordination,—the respect due to office and authority ;—that all this is GOD'S own ordinance, a part of GOD'S own decree ; and is to be jealously maintained and upheld by all persons at all hazards to the very last. I have been re-

ferring to something which underlies, or (if you please) which soars far above social distinctions ; is wholly independent of secular considerations ; moves in quite a different plane, and belongs to an entirely different sphere of thought and action. It has been my privilege all my life to know those to whom the humbler offices of love were strictly congenial ; but whose refined education, whose exalted rank, whose ample fortune, made some of their private actions seem strange when the details came to be rehearsed in words. The truth is, if these persons *humbled*,—they did not *demean* themselves : they *waived* the privileges of their station,—but they never for an instant *ignored* them : they revered suffering goodness, or compassionated sick poverty *more*,—without estimating their own social privileges and secular advantages *less*. No. Our Divine LORD speaks of Himself as “*your Lord and Master*”<sup>4</sup> at the very instant that He is humbling Himself to perform the most typical of menial actions. ‘*The mind* which was in CHRIST JESUS,—the humble disposition and the self-denying will,—this, *this* is what is being just now pleaded for, and recommended to your imitation.

<sup>4</sup> St. John xiii. 14.

6. *This* then it was that I had to say to you at this time. "Let this disposition prevail among you which was also in CHRIST JESUS: who, although essentially existing in the form of GOD, esteemed not the being equal with GOD a thing to be seized on,—but emptied Himself of His glory, and took upon Him the form of a servant." St. Paul is here addressing all alike; not servants only, by any means,—no, nor only persons of low estate. Not so! The exhortation is for all time: for all ages: for all countries: for all ranks. The CHRIST-like mind is a disposition to which self-abasement is even a congenial thing. Meek submission,—and the surrender even of self,—and an habitual lowliness of spirit,<sup>5</sup>—and the absence of desire for the first place;<sup>6</sup>—these, and such as these, are the dispositions enjoined upon us. But we may on no account lose sight of "servitude" of some sort,—the estate of *Servants*, as such,—in the ideal we form to ourselves of the Apostle's meaning; which was also the meaning of his LORD and ours. And my entreaty is, that if any who hear me are Servants indeed,—or are likely hereafter to become so,—

<sup>5</sup> Consider 1 St. Peter v. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Consider 3 St. John ver. 9.

they will henceforth hold their calling very precious, will "magnify their office;" and all for His sake, who, though "GOD of GOD,—LIGHT of LIGHT,—very GOD of very GOD"—the only Begotten of the FATHER,—the CREATOR and upholder of the Universe,—our very KING and GOD ;—yet, "*took upon Him the form of a Servant!*"

XII. SERVING THE LORD :  
THE SECRET OF GOOD AND FAITHFUL  
SERVICE.

ROMANS xii. 11.

*Serving the LORD.*

IF you would understand precisely the lesson which I propose to build upon these words in St. Paul's epistle to the Romans, you will refer when you go home to the with chapter of the same St. Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, where you will find it set down at length. " Servants," (he says, in the 5th verse) " Be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto CHRIST: not with eye-service as men-pleasers; but as the servants of CHRIST, doing the will of GOD from the heart: with good will doing service, as to the LORD and not to men: knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the LORD, whether he be bond or free."

But the central point in all this,—the only matter to which I am about to invite your attention,—is St. Paul's exhortation to servants that they should do all their work *as to the LORD*. And because this short expression of the Apostle really contains the sum of all I have to say, I will unfold it to you with some care, set it out before you somewhat in detail. And this shall be done, *not* because the matter is at all difficult,—for on the contrary it is singularly obvious and easy,—but because it is so very important, and wraps up within itself the entire secret of good and faithful Service.

To all appearance, then, the Service we render,—of whatever sort it may happen to be,—is rendered to the person or persons who are immediately set over us. Perhaps we receive wages at their hands,—a money reward for our labour ; and this establishes in the plainest and most decisive way that our time belongs to them, and therefore that they have *a right* to our service ; that the labour we perform at their bidding is nothing else but the discharge (so to speak) of a debt. I am reminding you of one of the commonest things in the world,—the relation in which every servant stands towards his or *her employer*.

But Service may be rendered *without* fee or covenanted reward paid for it in money. Children working for their parents,—doing the bidding of Father or Mother, and in effect labouring with their hands at some task appointed them to do by those who have a natural right to their service: these are an instance of unpaid workers. Then again there is the work rendered by a dependant to his superior in station or office:—and lastly there is the very laborious life which many men impose upon themselves, and which really is often the severest bondage imaginable. They *serve*, I say; Masters of their own choosing perhaps,—but still they serve Masters. The essential feature of all service, in short, is *not* that a person receives a money payment for what he does, but that he is immediately responsible in the first instance to some earthly personage. The reason why I say all this is in order to show that every one present is comprehended under the Apostle's teaching: that the lesson of the present sermon is really addressed to all persons alike.

But I shall be best understood, if, in what remains, I address those in particular who are called "servants." Servants we all are, I repeat, and the fact that our SAVIOUR "took upon Him-



self the form of a servant " has ennobled servitude ; has consecrated it for ever ;—has made it a grand and a noble thing ; has erected it into a sacramental ordinance,—an instrument of holiness,—a gate of Heaven. Let there not spring up in any one's mind therefore a suspicion that I am speaking as one who addresses his inferiors, or that I propose to give Servants what is called *a lecture*, or anything of that kind. A servant myself, I do but propose to myself the pleasure and the privilege of telling you how to make your service delightful to yourselves. Service, I know, is often felt to be an irksome thing : and certainly, until the secret of faithful Service has been discovered, it may well prove very irksome indeed : but when once its true nature has been apprehended, I am persuaded that its irksomeness begins to disappear. When the secret has been entirely mastered, learned by heart, as it were,—I believe that no irksomeness at all remains.

As I began by saying then :—outwardly, by profession, and according to the common consent of mankind, the service which we render as Servants is rendered to the persons whom we serve. But the Apostle teaches us that, in reality,

it is not Man, but GOD, unto whom all service is—or at least should be—rendered. “Servants,” (he says), “Be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh. . . . *as unto CHRIST* : not with eye-service as men-pleasers :” (*that* means, not working only while and because your Master’s eye is upon you,—relaxing your service, and changing your method, the instant you are left to yourselves :) “not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but *as servants of CHRIST*, doing the will of GOD from the heart with goodwill, doing service *as to the LORD* and not to men.” This is written in the Epistle to the Ephesians. It is remarkable that almost the same words should recur in the Epistle to the Colossians, but so it is. Just listen :—“Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh ; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers ; but in singleness of heart, fearing GOD. And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, *as to the LORD and not unto men* : knowing that *of the LORD* ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance ; for *ye serve the LORD CHRIST*.”<sup>1</sup> . . . *That* is express,—is it not ? The Apostle acknowledges, of course, that the servants (or rather the slaves) whom he

<sup>1</sup> Col. iii. 22—24.

is addressing have "masters after the flesh." But for all that, he declares, "ye serve—*the LORD CHRIST.*" CHRIST is your real Master! St. Paul seems to say. In reality it is to *Him* that your service is rendered!

So then,—to come to the point,—a faithful person will feel constrained to render to his or her employer, a very peculiar, a very conscientious service indeed. The eye of GOD is upon that servant (she knows it very well),—is day and night upon her. This at first creates an uneasy sense that the work she does cannot be too well done: for she has already learned, suppose, to regard *Him*,—GOD I mean,—as her true master. This thought, I repeat, constrains her to do all her work in a very peculiar,—probably quite a new kind of way. "I am serving" (she secretly tells herself) "I am *servi*ng *the LORD.*" But the matter does not rest here. She notices that St. Paul is very express in declaring that it is the second person in the Blessed Trinity to whom he makes allusion. "Ye serve *the LORD CHRIST,*" he says. Ah, but this brings to her memory, as well as summons before her imagination, the image of Him who was Himself among men "as he that serveth."

Is it then *my Saviour*, (she learns to ask herself,)—Can it possibly be *my Saviour and my GOD* whose handmaid I am? O, but if this be so, then must love enter very largely into my service; for sure I am that the Man CHRIST JESUS knows all the hardships of my low estate,—my many temptations,—my forlorn and half-friendless condition,—the thanklessness of much that I do!

I am endeavouring to make you feel, as well as see, what must inevitably follow when once the conviction has been embraced with the heart by a servant, that in reality she is "*serving the LORD.*" A change will, I declare, pass over every part of her work. Every little act, no matter how trifling, will seem great in her eyes. I will mention two little things to show you what I mean. In the care of Children, for example, there will be excessive pains taken in all that regards their personal comfort. No eye is upon servants at the times I am thinking of. But by a good and faithful servant who is impressed with the belief that she is "*serving the LORD,*" the trust will be as faithfully discharged as if a hundred eyes were gazing down upon her,—*more* faithfully done a great deal.—Next in

respect of Household work, there are countless little matters of detail,—(as when one “doth sweep the house :”<sup>2</sup> why not ?)—in which carefulness (or carelessness) will be shown by any one, as she either recollects, or else does not consider that she is “serving the LORD.” . . . . These two allusions may suffice. Your own memories will supply you at once with at least twenty more.

Now it is possible that some will be surprised to hear such things alluded to in a Sermon : but *that* is only because they do not consider what Religion really is : viz. not by any means a thing to be put on and put off with our Sunday clothes,—but, on the contrary, something which is to cleave to us all the week ; to run into our daily life, to colour our entire conduct and influence our every action.

And this leads me, in conclusion, (for I have now done,)—this talk, I say, of the influence of Religion on the daily life, leads me to point out that a firm belief that one does in reality “serve the LORD CHRIST ;” the knowledge that while one *seems to be* serving an earthly master, one *is in reality* “serving the LORD ;”—this conviction,

<sup>2</sup> St. Luke xv. 8.

I say, will *not only* make a servant very conscientious and faithful in the discharge of every part of her duty. It will do *far more* than make her earnest and thorough in all she does. It will even transfigure her Service in her own eyes : will ennoble, refine, sanctify it. And then Service will grow at once sweet and pleasant to her. Her care will not even be whether she is " appreciated," as the phrase is, or not ; comforted, I mean, with praise, and rewarded by some tokens of favour by her employers. Not so. True that this is quite sure to follow, in the long-run ; for piety and goodness have the promise of this world as well as of the next. But this is not the thing coveted,—I was going to say, is not the thing cared for. The daily life of servitude has become lifted up into a higher region ; has become ennobled and sanctified ever since it has been discovered that it may be made a daily offering to the LORD CHRIST. Every act of it becomes an act of Religion,—a holy thing. She knows that her LORD meets her in her going out and her coming in : watches over her waking and sleeping : is with her in her loneliness,—will be her satisfying portion in her need. Above all, she cherishes the humble hope that she shall

at last hear Him say,—“Well done, good and faithful servant! Thou hast been faithful over a few things. I will make thee ruler over many things. *Enter thou into the joy of thy LORD!*”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> St. Matt. xxv. 31.

THE END.

EPHESIANS vi. 5 to 9.  
COLOSSIANS iii. 22 to iv. 1.  
I TIMOTHY vi. 1, 2.  
TITUS ii. 9, 10.  
I ST. PETER ii. 18 to 25.

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