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The vision of God, and other  
sermons





Rev Howard Beecher  
with paternal regard,

Nov. 1876.

Henry Allou

THE VISION OF GOD, AND OTHER  
SERMONS.



THE  
VISION OF GOD,

AND

*OTHER SERMONS.*

PREACHED ON SPECIAL OCCASIONS.

HENRY ALLON, D.D.,

*MINISTER OF  
UNION CHAPEL, ISLINGTON.*

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TO  
THE CHURCH AND CONGREGATION  
WORSHIPPING IN  
*UNION CHAPEL, ISLINGTON,*

**These Sermons**

ARE INSCRIBED IN DEVOUT AND GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT  
OF MUTUAL ESTEEM AND AFFECTION CONTINUED THROUGH  
THIRTY-THREE YEARS OF PASTORAL RELATIONSHIP.





## Contents.



### I.

PAGE

THE VISION OF GOD . . . . .	1
-----------------------------	---

Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seer. me hath seen the Father ; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father.—*John* xiv. 8, 9.

*Preached in the City Temple, London, before the Congregational Union of England and Wales, October 11, 1875.*

### II.

THE TRANSMIGURING POWER OF THE VISION . . . . .	39
---	----

And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty ; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation. And Moses made haste. and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped. . . . And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him. And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone ; and they were afraid

to come nigh him. And Moses called unto them ; and Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation returned unto him : and Moses talked with them. And afterward all the children of Israel came nigh : and he gave them in commandment all that the Lord had spoken with him in mount Sinai. And till Moses had done speaking with them, he put a veil on his face. But when Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he took the veil off, until he came out. And he came out, and spake unto the children of Israel that which he was commanded. And the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone : and Moses put the veil upon his face again, until he went in to speak with him.—*Exod.* xxxiv 5-8, 29-35.

*Preached in St. Augustine's Church, Edinburgh, before the Congregational Union of Scotland, April 22, 1874.*

## III.

THE CHRIST OF EXPERIENCE ... .. 75

Unto you therefore which believe he is precious.—*1 Pet.* ii. 7.

*Preached at the Opening of Feustanton Congregational Church, May 20, 1875.*

## IV.

HEALING VIRTUE OF THE CHRIST ... .. 103

If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole.—*Matt.* ix. 21.

*Preached in Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, October 2, 1870.*

## V.

THE ABIDING TEACHER ... .. 133

When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth.—*John* xvi. 13.

*Preached in Union Chapel, Islington, March 26, 1871.*

## VI.

THE SERVICE OF LOVE ... .. 161

And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head. . And there were some that had indignation within them-

selves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her.—And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always. She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.—*Mark* xiv. 3-9.

*Preached at the Opening of Brixton Independent Church, June 29, 1870.*

## VII.

## THE POWER OF INTERCESSION ... .. 197

And the men turned their faces from thence, and went towards Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the Lord. And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? And the Lord said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes. And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, who am but dust and ashes: Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five? And he said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it. And he spake unto him yet again, and said, Peradventure there shall be forty found there. And he said, I will not do it for forty's sake. And he said unto him, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Peradventure there shall thirty be found there. And he said, I will not do it if I find thirty there. And he said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord: Peradventure there shall be twenty found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for twenty's sake. And he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake. And the Lord went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place.—*Gen.* xviii. 22-33.

*Preached in Yale College Chapel, New Haven, Connecticut,  
October 30, 1870.*

## VIII.

## UNREALIZED VISIONS ... .. 225

And Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, that is over against Jericho. And the Lord showed him all the land of Gilead, unto Dan, and all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim, and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah, unto the utmost sea, and the south, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, unto Zoar. And the Lord said unto him, This is the land which I sware unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed : I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither. So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Bethpeor ; but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day. And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died : his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated. And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days : so the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended.—*Deut.* xxxiv. 1-8.

*Preached in Forest Hill Congregational Church, Funeral Sermon for the Rev. G. W. Conder, B.A., November 22, 1874.*

## IX.

## VOICES OF GOD ... .. 255

Speak, Lord ; for thy servant heareth.—*1 Sam.* iii. 9.

*Preached in the Stockport Sunday School, the Annual Sermon to its Teachers and Supporters, November 16, 1873.*

## X.

## HEALED MEN ... .. 289

What shall we do to these men ? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it.—*Acts* iv. 16.

*Preached in Fish Street Chapel, Hull, at the Centenary of the Church, April 14, 1869.*

## XI.

## FOR MY SAKE ... .. 337

For my sake.—*Matt.* v. 11.

*Preached in Westminster Chapel, for the London Missionary Society, Annual Sermon to Young Men, May 11, 1870.*

## XII.

SPIRITUAL POWER	... ..	371
-----------------	--------	-----

All things are yours ; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come ; all are yours ; and ye are Christ's ; and Christ is God's.—1 Cor. iii. 21-23.

*Preached in Union Chapel, Islington, Jan. 30, 1876.*

## XIII.

THE SORROW OF DEVELOPMENT	... ..	393
---------------------------	--------	-----

They say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou ? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.—John xx. 13.

*Preached in Union Chapel, Islington, May 30, 1875.*





I.

The Vision of God.

*Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?—JOHN xiv. 8, 9.*

## I.

THIS request of Philip touches the heart of all religion. Can God be seen? and if so, how? What is the true vision of God? Is it possible to men? By what means can we realize it? It is a question as old as humanity. In a thousand ways of formal interrogation, or unconscious yearning, we are ever putting it. In a thousand ways of ignorance, superstition, or intelligence, we are ever trying to answer it.

Sometimes, indeed, the spiritual soul becomes so debased, carnalized, and benumbed, that the desire ceases to be eager, or even conscious. It is the last wrong and ruin of sin that it makes the spiritual soul indifferent to the spiritual God; which is a perversion of natural law as malign and disastrous as if the flame were not to seek the sun, the magnet not to turn to the pole, the solid not to fall to the earth.

But in a normal state of human feeling, when natural spiritual consciousness is quick and unper-

verted, it has no yearning so spontaneous and strong, it puts no question with such eager, anxious intensity, "Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself to us?"

This last discourse of our Lord—the greatest and profoundest of His teachings—is simply His answer to this inquiry. From beginning to end it is a lofty, spiritual exposition of the true way of seeing God.

It would indeed be a fatal invalidation of the religion of Christ, if it had no answer to this fundamental quest of men—if it did not give the truest and fullest of all answers.

Indeed, it is a full and exhaustive definition of Christ's salvation, to designate it,—the Christian way of seeing God. For what is religious salvation but the perfect vision of God, the perfect restoration of man to God, the perfect enjoyment by man of God? "We will come to him and make our abode with him." Not a distant glimpse of God, a trembling touch, a casual break in the dark firmament of life; but a full unclouded manifestation, a Divine Pleroma, the true Pantheism. Not the old Oriental Nirvâna, our human personality lost in Deity, put out like a flame in the light of the meridian sun; but our true and perfect spiritual individuality filled with the light, the life, the inspiration of God.

In these sublime chapters our Lord sets this before His disciples in its ideal perfectness. In practical religious life Christian men realize it in

different degrees. Our spiritual life begins with distant glimpses, erroneous conceptions, broken and imperfect lights of God. The entire process of our religious teaching and nurture is simply an ever-growing vision of God—an ever-enlarging experience of God. Nor does any man attain to the perfect knowledge of God: we never understand all of God that there is to be known; we never experience all of God that there is to be realized. The finite can never compass the infinite.

Hence all religious teachings are necessarily ideals. Perfect holiness is enjoined for our attainment; perfect fellowship of the Divine life is promised for our joy; perfect consecration, and faith, and love, are demanded of our discipleship. Christianity could not set before us imperfect standards. With various degrees of success we strive after their attainment; but the one simple word of requirement is that we be "perfect, as our Father who is in heaven is perfect."

Hence our Lord speaks here, not of the various degrees of Divine fellowship which men realize, but of the perfect Christian ideal—the ideal glory which we are to conceive, the ideal truth and holiness after which we are to strive—that perfect life of God which is the goal of all spiritual desire, which ever recedes as we approach it, which enlarges as we realize it, so that the more of God we know the more we become conscious of what in Him may be known. God cannot set forth His

own perfect being in the imperfect forms of our human realization. We need ideals to inspire us. They are high, to make us soar ; they are glorious, to make us desire and strive.

Hence our highest spiritual feelings are never so excited and stimulated as by these marvellous chapters. While to men of carnal nature they are incomprehensible or fanatical, to men of spiritual feeling they are a revelation of all that is truest in our conceptions of God, and noblest in the possibilities of our own nature. We have "not yet attained,"—but this is the Divine life set before us,—and we tend and strive and soar ; we "see in part."

I. Philip's request to be shown the Father may indicate to us the craving for God which is characteristic of all moral natures. The root feeling of his desire was that instinctive groping for God, that irrepressible yearning for some contact with God, that no man is altogether without. To stand face to face with the Infinite—to have communion of thought and feeling with the "Father of our spirits"—is, in its lowest forms, the essential characteristic of a human being, and in its highest realization the perfection of the most spiritual religious life.

To those, then, who deny God, and to those who deny the spiritual soul of man, I am justified in putting the question,—Why do I concern myself about religious things ? Why do I crave some

vision of God? What are these mystic yearnings after the spiritual which are among the strongest, the most irrepressible of my human desires? As well ask why my physical body craves food, why my intellectual soul seeks knowledge. However it may be accounted for, spiritual desire is an essential constituent of this wondrous nature of mine, and can no more be denied or silenced than physical appetite. We may repress it, damage it, deaden it. By persistent sin, by carnal passion, by a continued course of sensuous or selfish indulgence, a man may practically disable his spiritual soul; just as by drunkenness or licentiousness he may disable his physical body, or reduce to idiocy his intellectual mind. So also he may reason down his religious instincts by material philosophies; he may oppose every uprising of his spiritual nature by demonstrations of the impossibility of there being such a nature, until his consciousness is confused and his spiritual action disabled; just as by fanciful notions concerning his body he may make himself a hypochondriac. But it is part of him still. He may damage, but he cannot kill it. And sometimes—it may be after years of sin, or of materialistic scepticism—when the victory seems well-nigh won, and the man to care for nothing but selfish gratification, and to believe nothing that his balances cannot weigh, his chemistry analyze, his mathematics demonstrate, there shall be a sudden breaking of the seal and rolling away of the

stone, and a coming forth of the entombed soul, despite of watch and guard; and it shall cry out for God, and refuse to be comforted if it cannot find Him.

We are all familiar with such phenomena: terrible awakings of men in moments of thoughtfulness, under teachings of religious truth, in times of calamity, in moments of peril, on death-beds.

But this, we are told, is only traditional superstition imperfectly shaken off, educational influence, social environment, from which no man can wholly free himself. But how account for the superstition—the social sentiment? Its universality and uniformity point to something inherent and ineradicable—the cause and not the consequence of religious beliefs. It is the indestructible religious soul—"the spirit of a man"—that is as much a part of his nature, and is as indubitably attested by his consciousness, as his flesh. Nay, is it not more than his flesh, for it will survive its decay; it is his essence, his identity; that in and of him which alone has continuity. His body undergoes a thousand transformations, his soul continues through them all; you may kill the body, you cannot kill the soul; you may reduce to idiocy the intellectual understanding, the spiritual instincts and cravings of the soul cannot be quenched. However men may silence or damage their spiritual nature, they cannot destroy it: it is the one potential force of their being that remains. There is something



in man and of man that will "cry out for the living God," that only God's spiritual truth and life can satisfy.

The spiritual soul may be befooled: its very strength exposes it to that. Men take advantage of it when ignorant or morbid, and urge upon it religious sacrifices, services, and ceremonies, sacraments, penances, and prayers. The history of priest-hoods and of religions is simply a record of such attempts upon it. But even these do not suffice. No religious *things* can satisfy a living religious soul. Life craves life for its satisfaction; the living soul cries out for the living God. "God has made us for Himself, and we cannot rest until we rest in Him."

It is then the cry of humanity. "Show us the Father;" give us some vision of the infinite, mysterious God; some assurance that He is; some knowledge concerning His transcendent nature, His spiritual purposes, His merciful feelings and doings.

True, in Philip the desire shaped itself in ignorant forms; but in which of us does it not? Who seeks the spiritual God in purely spiritual ways? Sometimes it is not God at all that we consciously cry for, it is only a feeling of blind unrest, a craving for we know not what. We moan and toss like men in a fever. It is our instinctive need of the living God, only we do not know it.

Let us, however, rather note the true feeling that lay at the root of Philip's desire; his measure of

that intelligent, lofty, spiritual yearning for God which, however uninstructed, all noble natures feel. We yearn for communion with Him from whose recognised and restful presence sin has separated us. We would fain get nearer to God than we are, in understanding thought, in sympathetic feeling, in practical religious life.

Through all ages men have sought God, and in manifold ways: ignorantly, superstitiously, idolatrously, credulously, as well as intelligently and spiritually. How men seek God depends upon their knowledge. The history of religions is simply a history of this great quest.

Who, conscious of a living soul, can be contented with mere laws of nature instead of the living God? a mechanical fate, instead of a wise and beneficent providence? extinction at death and a blank hereafter, instead of life with the infinite and loving Father? If there be no God, our nature, as it is, is the greatest solecism in the universe; the most pitiable victim of vain imaginations and purposeless faculties; the greatest contradiction of the doctrine of final causes; the most inscrutable problem for philosophy to solve. All things else have their purpose and harmony. But for man, this spiritual nature is a waste and a mockery; it is the curse of the strongest of all cravings, which there is nothing in the universe to satisfy. Robespierre was right. "If there be no God, then it behoves man to make one."

The strength of this craving is attested by the credulities of scepticism as much as by the confidences of faith. Let men reject the Christian revelation of God; let them reason down all spiritual beliefs, and crush all spiritual instincts: as surely as they succeed, wild and credulous imaginations will break forth, and in pitiful forms give the lie to all their philosophy. The spiritual soul will avenge its own disparagement, often very signally. The fantasies of modern spiritualism are as conclusive attestation as the convictions of the Apostle Paul.

Think of philosophic men, to whom the lofty spiritual truth, the peerless moral beauty of the Lord Jesus Christ are an insufficient attestation of the supernatural, recognising such in the senseless turning of a table and the puerile colloquies of a *séance*. Men will believe anything rather than the Bible. Blind to spiritual truth, they are by the very strength of their spiritual nature "given over to strong delusions, and believe a lie;" "professing themselves wise, they become fools;" rejecting moral evidence, they accept physical evidence that should awaken suspicion in a schoolboy.

Mere knowledge that there is an unseen world will not satisfy the spiritual soul. It can hold fellowship; interchange thought and affection; it can love, and rejoice in love; and it seeks God for its joy. Pour into the lap of a man all the material satisfactions of a universe, and into his understand-

ing all its intellectual wealth,—he will still “cry out for the living God.”

II. Further, the mistaken form of Philip’s desire may suggest to us the misconceptions into which, in their quest after God, even good men fall.

The disciples generally had but a very confused and imperfect conception of Christ and His work—of His spiritual kingdom, of spiritual life in Him, of the spiritual vision of God. Their persistent dream of a restoration of David’s throne and dominion hung like a veil between them and Christ. They were incapable of conceiving a kingdom of purely spiritual truth, dominion over the religious thoughts and affections by One who had no political place or power. We find few things more difficult than to believe in purely spiritual forces and processes. With the most enlightened of us, a visible Church body, a great ecclesiastical organisation, an imposing ritual, are much more real and assuring than a simple agency of spiritual teaching and influence. In our judgment of these disciples some of us have but little room for self-complacency. Spiritual education is a very slow process. How many there are still to whom spiritual religion, life in Christ, the manifestation of God in the soul, are utterly incomprehensible ideas. Religion as a morality, Christ as a Divine Teacher of great truths and sublime virtues, they can understand; but Christ as the Author of the new birth, as the Inspiration of a purely spiritual life, is a hopeless mystery.

Hence these teachings of our Lord far transcend the present understanding of the disciples. He speaks beyond their full comprehension. His words excite them ; like lightning flashes, they gleam with great meanings, but they do not convey exact ideas. Ask them, when they shall come to Gethsemane, what their Lord has said to them? How utterly incapable they will be of reducing it to exact statement. It is a poor spiritual teaching that can be fully comprehended. All true spiritual presentation passes into the infinite: it suggests more than it expresses. For the after instruction and enrichment of their spiritual life, therefore, He pours out this affluence of spiritual idea: they will remember what He has said when more competent to understand it. It is but a vague morning dawn rising upon the fogs of their spiritual ignorance. At the Resurrection, on the day of Pentecost, the Sun of Righteousness will be risen upon them; the fogs shall lift, and they will see more clearly and gloriously. Not perfectly, even then; for from that day to this these wonderful chapters have ever been disclosing greater meanings as men's spiritual capacity for understanding them has grown.

Our Lord has to speak of the highest spiritual things to men of low spiritual type; of the life which He comes to give, to men who very vaguely apprehended it; of His spiritual kingdom and glory, to men full of carnal preconceptions. Hence the confusion of thought and feeling revealed here; the

incongruity of such notions as Philip expressed with such meanings as Christ intended. So that, after vain attempts to make them understand, our Lord has to content Himself with a promise of the Holy Spirit, who should "teach them all things."

"Show us the Father." Probably Philip thought of some visible manifestation, such as the Shekinah symbol of Sinai, when the Lord descended upon the mountain, or made His glory to pass before Moses; or of the holy place of the Temple; or of Isaiah's vision.

How rarely men recognise manifestations of God in purely spiritual forms, in true religious ideas, in holy actions, in godlike character. For three years Christ had been with these men, teaching the divinest truths, exhibiting the most perfect holiness, the purest spirituality, the most ineffable love. They were utterly unconscious that, in all this moral glory, they were looking upon the truest and highest manifestation of God.

When we think of Divine manifestation we think of supernatural miracle, of inspired fervours, of signal conversions, of ecstatic services. How difficult we find it to realize that in the genuine religious character of a holy man, in the godly feeling, the consecrated service, the sublime faith, the unselfish love of a quiet saintly life, there is a far higher manifestation of God than there was in all the miracles of Egypt, in all the thunders and lightnings of Sinai, in all the mighty works of Christ.

Not in the earthquake, the tempest, the fire of omnipotent power, but in the still small voice of spiritual whispers, inspirations, and sanctities, is the glory of God most greatly manifested.

The great aim of our Lord's teaching was to turn men's quest after God from signs and wonders to His spiritual workings in religious hearts.

The supreme glories of the Divine nature cannot lie in the almightiness that works physical miracles, but in spiritual manifestations of His holiness and grace. By so much as spiritual excellencies transcend physical or intellectual, by so much is the moral character and grace of God more glorious than His omnipotent power. Not in the movements of planets, or the economy of physical providence, are the greatest workings of God seen; but in the expressions of His saving love, the processes of His renewing Spirit; in swaying the will to holy purposes, kindling the affections to holy ardours, transforming the character and the life to holy excellencies. No Shekinah symbol that Christ could have exhibited, no miracle that He could have wrought, could have manifested these. Such manifestations would only have perpetuated the old externalism in religion which He came to do away with.

He showed forth His true glories when He declared Himself "anointed to preach the gospel to the poor;" when He invited the weary to come to Him and rest; when He proffered the water of

life to the thirsty; when He spake the parable of the Prodigal Son; when He "received sinners and ate with them;" when He lifted up the sinful woman; when He prayed for His crucifiers; when He forgave the penitent thief. These were the genuine revelations of His character and feeling. And character, not ability, is the true glory of every moral nature.

The world had outgrown its external ritualism in religious teaching, and Christ sought to raise it to a higher life, to do away with mere sign and miracle as the manifestation of God, and to bring the spiritual soul face to face with His spiritual glories. He fulfilled all the material symbolism of the old economy in spiritual ideas.

Hence He refuses Philip's request as Philip meant it, just as He had refused miraculous signs to the Pharisees, and shows him how much more truly and gloriously the Father is seen in the Divine truth which He had taught, in the perfect holiness which He had manifested, and in the ineffable love of which His life had been the expression. Philip asked some theophany—"the Lord coming suddenly to his temple," as Malachi had predicted—some material sign, which he thought would give certainty to his faith and precision to his idea. Christ replies by directing him to a living spiritual Person, "full of grace and truth."

If, then, as the Divine Master teaches, this manifestation of purely moral and spiritual glories be the



the true vision of God,—the glory of His goodness which God caused to pass before Moses,—may we not, in the light of it, test the various ways of seeking God which men pursue?

What for instance are we to think of the *idolatries* of the world's history; which, in their lowest forms, have conceived of "gods many and lords many," impersonations of brute force, vengeful cruelty, and brute lust; and in their purest forms, such as Parseism, have thought it possible to represent the spiritual God by gross material symbols?

What again can we think of the *philosophies* of men which have sought to find God through purely intellectual processes—hard reasonings about Him?

What can we think of the *religions* of the world; which have sought to please God by costly sacrifices and cruel rites that may appease Him? The one conception of the Deity that is the farthest removed from all these is such a manifestation of spiritual truth and goodness and love as our Lord here insists upon.

Amongst ourselves there are, especially, two mistaken ways in which men are seeking God.

1. The scientist and the philosopher come with their intellectual methods of analysis and reasoning. The astronomer brings his computations; the geologist his hammer; the chemist his crucible; the physiologist his scalpel; and the philosopher his laws of sequence, order, and causation. They resolve substances into atoms, or ether; they trace back

all developments to a common protoplasm; they follow up sequence to its last term of causation; and then they gravely tell you that they cannot find God. How should they, when they have brought only physical tests to the mere material universe of God? His spiritual character they have never attempted to essay. Even on their own physical ground, they have ominous acknowledgments to make: they confess that their atoms are pure imaginations, which no microscope has ever detected, and, if they were not, that they are utterly ignorant whence they came; they confess that when they have traced all organisms to their common protoplasm, the protoplasm itself has to be accounted for, the mystery of life is utterly inscrutable; they confess that the evolution of species is a theory of pure hypothesis, as yet utterly unproven by ascertained facts; they confess that they can throw no light upon the genesis of mind, or of moral feeling, or of religious idea, or even suggest how vegetable life develops into animal intelligence, or animal intelligence into reason or conscience or virtue or piety. Before these primal mysteries, the profoundest philosopher stands as utterly ignorant as the dweller in an African kraal. Up to this point they have not found God; whether there is God beyond it they do not know. This is the utmost teaching of science. Here scientific knowledge must end, and all assertion becomes unscientific.

How should men find God by such processes? As well may the antiquary who unwraps an Egyp-

tian mummy, or the surgeon who conducts a *post mortem* examination, demur because he cannot find the heroism of the patriot, the genius of the poet, the affections of the lover, the piety of the saint. All that these processes can lead to is a rational presumption that a universe so wonderful must be the creation of an Infinite Intelligence; a basis for natural religiousness, when it affirms "the heavens declare his glory, and the firmament showeth his handywork;" and when it judges that "the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead," so that they who deny Him "are without excuse." These things may not be absolute or independent proof of God, but they are a strong presumption of God; and before God can be denied, natural instincts and presumptions have to be elaborately reasoned down; men have to learn to disbelieve.

The supreme manifestation of God is in the moral sphere of things. Let men ask their moral consciousness whether the scriptural ideas of God are not true and transcendent? whether they do not satisfy the highest thoughts and yearnings and wants of their own spiritual nature? whether they can think anything greater or holier, imagine anything more congruous and satisfying? While God is supremely and characteristically a moral Being, holy and loving, it must in the necessity of things be that the world by its mere intellectual wisdom cannot know God.

2. The other way in which men seek God is through creeds and Churches, priesthoods, sacraments, and rituals. What notion of God must men have who conceive of magical transmutations of a piece of bread, or of the virtue of magical words, as conditions of what they call "the Real Presence;" making material conditions essential to spiritual things, which is as much of the essence of idolatry as the worship of the golden calf? What are we to think of men who shriek out their dismay that they cannot realize Christ at His table, or can realize Him less perfectly if wax candles be denied them, or a chasuble be forbidden, or the eastward position at an altar, or an enacted pantomime of the awful sacrifice on Calvary, or specified genuflexions and ritual? Admitting, theoretically, that these are not of the essence of the ordinance—just as the Romanist would admit that his adoration of Mary is not supreme worship—they act practically as if they were.

With every wish to respect all sincere convictions, no man, in the presence of these things, who receives our Lord's spiritual conceptions of the vision of God can forbear somewhat of the indignation and anathemas which Paul poured out upon the carnal Judaizers of Galatia. It is not enough that purpose is devout and conviction sincere; conscientiousness cannot excuse perversions of Christ's gospel. Responsibility attaches to the processes whereby convictions are formed. Philip's conscien-

tiousness was not impugned, nor his piety; but he did not therefore escape the Master's rebuke. We may not compliment conscientiousness at the cost of great principles.

III. The manifestation of God that men crave is that of a Father.

In our Lord's day, as in our own, men had been told much about God as the Creator, the Ruler, the Judge of men. Moses had written, Plato had speculated, David had sung. Upon the Jews especially, and in many ways, great lessons of His holiness and His retribution had been inculcated: in terrible sermons against sin, such as the Book of Genesis contains; in the awful law-giving of Sinai; in the theocracy of their national life; in the teachings of their prophets; in the poetry of their psalms. Jewish conceptions of God were lofty and full of awe. The Jew knew more about God, and had a larger experience of Him, than all the nations besides. Better the awful revelation of Sinai than no revelation at all. Terrible as to a sinful man a God so holy must be, the holiness even has a strange fascination; he would not willingly be ignorant of it; he would not have it otherwise. But it does not satisfy his soul.

Is not God something more than a righteous Ruler, a stern Avenger? How can it help men, sinful and helpless, to tell them about law and holiness, about what they ought to do and to be? Men's hearts ached with the burden of all this

when Christ came. They yearned for something else in God — for pity, patience, help, love ; a God who would save them, help them to break away from their sin and to attain to a new life ; teach them ; cherish them in their pitiful struggles after holiness, their better yearnings, their bitter sorrows ; a Father, of whose love and tender mercy they can be assured, with whom they may have free and full fellowship.

Let the thought come that this great and holy God is also a Father. How our hearts leap towards Him ! Our conceptions of human fatherhood help us to feel what, if a Father, He must be. As a Father, He is precisely the God we need : our sins crave the forgiveness of a Father ; our weakness and imperfections, the patience of a Father ; our sorrows, the sympathy of a Father ; our yearnings, His fatherly love and bosom. We kneel down to pray to Him : how gladly we catch up the great word put into our lips, and say, “ Our Father who art in heaven.”

Not the mere Life-giver of men, the “ Father of our spirits,” in His common relations to men ; but our Father in a distinctive spiritual sense, whose sonship is the peculiar prerogative of those who believe on Christ’s name, who are one with Him in the religious principles and sympathies of their life. A Father who forgives us, sympathizes with us, helps us, holds spiritual fellowship with us, receives us to Himself.

Some glimpses of this the old Jew had. God was his spiritual Father to the full measure of his religious thought and life. The imagination of the psalmist, the merciful mission of the prophet, had somewhat of this inspiration and daring. "Like as a Father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." "I will be a Father to you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters." Had the pious Jew pressed the suggestion to its necessary inferences, realized its full possibilities, he would have rejoiced in a brighter light, a higher life, a greater comfort. But, as with all religious truths, the realization of God as a Father depends not upon intellectual ideas merely, but upon religious experiences. It is the experience of what, as a Father, God *does* for us, that enables us to understand what He *is*.

"Show us the Father." Help us to realize God in His fatherly affections. Let the fatherly pity, the fatherly love of His heart be so manifested, as that we shall be assured of them, and be inspired with the affection of sons. Bring us, sinful, sorrowful men, to rest upon His fatherly bosom, and "it sufficeth us." This is precisely the God we need.

IV. God as a Father is revealed to us only in Christ. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." "I am in the Father, and the Father in me."

Christ claims this as His distinctive revelation of God. It is the transcendent thought of Chris-

tianity. It was our Lord's characteristic and emphatic teaching. One of the great phrases distinctively His own is "Your Father who is in heaven." Like a refrain it rings through the Sermon on the Mount at the beginning of His ministry; like an atmosphere it suffuses this last great discourse "on the night that he was betrayed." It is the one unvarying representation of all His intervening teaching; it gives its unspeakable tenderness and pathos to the parable of the Prodigal Son; it is the basis of His great doctrine of providence, of His teaching of prayer, of His message of forgiveness, of His representations of the new spiritual life, of His tender and comforting descriptions of heaven—"the Father's house," in which there are "many mansions." Uniformly He strives to make us feel how truly and tenderly God is our Father. It may not be a new idea, but it presents the old idea with an emphasis, a richness, and an intensity, which give men a new realization of it.

Clearly, in this great word to Philip much more than a teaching is meant. It would be a cold and meagre paraphrase of it to say, "He that hath received my teaching hath received a true doctrine of the Father." It is a vision of God, not a theory of God, which He gives.

I do not think that the explanation is to be found in the Incarnation—the human Epiphany of the Christ. Much more than seeing His incarnate person is meant. Men saw Him, the veritable incarnate



Son, in His home at Nazareth, in the streets of Jerusalem, and yet they did not see the Father. Nor does He refer to His miracles, the displays of His supernatural power: these He always put in disparaging contrast with His spiritual glories.

Clearly His idea is of a purely spiritual conception of God, a vision of God's spiritual character such as God proclaimed to Moses when He made "all his goodness pass before him." "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth." "He who in true spiritual discernment has recognized my character of truth and holiness and love, has seen the spiritual glories of the Father; what in thought, in feeling, in His doings, the Father really is." The "glory as of the only begotten of the Father" which John beheld was a glory of purely moral qualities, a glory "full of grace and truth."

There is no sense in which, as distinguished from His almighty works, the spiritual God can be seen but in manifestations of His holiness, goodness, and love. And these can be adequately embodied and expressed only in a personal moral life—the life of the only begotten Son.

This is the true incarnation—the embodiment in a human life of these Divine moral qualities. As we conceive of the spiritual God, there is nothing else in Him that could be incarnated; no physical power, no intellectual wisdom. In Jesus Christ men see what, in holiness and in love, God really

is. They who would know the moral qualities of God's nature—what He thinks and feels, and does and is—have only to study what, in moral characteristics, Jesus Christ was and did. In Him the Divine truth, and purity, and love, and help, and self-sacrifice, found a perfect expression. No words could adequately describe these; they were embodied, incarnated, in the character and life of Jesus of Nazareth. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."

May we venture a speculation upon God's peculiar Fatherhood in its relation to the Incarnation? Are we right in thinking of God's love to us as little more than an arbitrary preference? or as resting upon reasons of Divine sovereignty? Is God's love simply moral complacency? Is His fatherhood only spiritual sympathy?

Is the Incarnation, again, a mere arbitrary conjunction or union of two opposite or different natures, the Divine pearl in a human casket of entirely different quality? Is it not the expression of a deeper affinity than this? Is there not an essential oneness between the spiritual nature of God and the spiritual nature of man, as between fire and the sun, the father and the child? Is it not a relationship of being, as well as of moral complacency and sympathy? Is there not something in the Divine nature of which the Incarnation is the supreme expression?—something in human nature which makes the Incarnation possible in virtue

of affinity? Is not God's fatherhood, like all fatherhoods, a radical relationship of nature? and His parental feeling, that of the Author and Preserver of our being? Does He not love us because a father must love his children? And does He not in the Incarnation of Christ show us how closely our nature is allied to His? May not our just shrinking from Pantheism drive us into something analogous to Manichean error?

I need not dwell here upon the inevitable inference from all this, as to who or what this transcendent Personage really is. He who could thus deliberately affirm Himself to be an adequate impersonation of the spiritual glories of God, and rebuke the disciples who had lived with Him in familiar intercourse for not having seen this, could not possibly have had the ordinary consciousness of men.

To them it would be a very startling word, a startling challenge, utterly impossible to human religiousness or modesty; such as could not be imagined in any of the greatest saints of God—Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, or Paul.

No creature may claim Divine glories, least of all God's spiritual perfections. Deliberately and emphatically this calmest and most ingenuous of men claims to have perfectly embodied them.

No other interpretation of either the claim or the rebuke is rationally possible than the accepted interpretation of the Christian Church, that in essential nature and perfect attributes He was one with the

Father. "In him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." "He is the image of the invisible God." "He is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person." "I and my Father are one."

This conception of the Christ is much more than a theological dogma, much more than a true theory of His person, much more than a reason for rendering Him worship and service. It is a great religious inspiration full of practical uses. Nothing so assures our hearts—nothing gives us such a feeling of Christ's practical sufficiency as a Redeemer—of His presence, His love, His saving power. In such a Christ "all fulness dwells;" "He is head over all things to his church." Such a recognition gives fulness and weight to all His words, value and certainty to all His promises, significance to all His doings, such as could not possibly pertain to those of a mere creature. We can trust such a Christ, pray to Him, worship Him, realize His presence and help. Our love for Him is that peculiar affection which only an incarnation could inspire, in which both human and Divine elements blend; as intense as it is reverent; a fervent affection for the human brother, a worshipful love for the Divine Lord. He knows all our necessities, for He has felt them. "All power in heaven and on earth is given to him." He is "wherever two or three are gathered together." He can bless us when all other blessing fails. "He is with us always, even unto the end of the world."

V. The manifestation of the Father in Christ is a perfect satisfaction to the spiritual soul.

Philip was right. He who really can show us the Father does "suffice us." We do not need to ask His credentials, to speculate concerning His mission; He is His own sufficient attestation. Be He who He may or whence He may, He is a Christ to us. What could any Christ do for us more than this? To know the Father is the sum of all theology, the realization of all religion, the perfection of all spiritual life. God Himself can do for us nothing greater than make us see Himself; "make his goodness pass before us."

Let the claims of Jesus, then, be submitted to this test. Let other questions stand in abeyance until judgment upon this be pronounced. Is not the demonstration conclusive? We know that He who really shows us God must be of God. No one has revealed God to men as Christ has done. Argue about Him as we may, the fact remains indisputable that His teaching and life have filled human thoughts with their highest conceptions of God, and human hearts with their greatest experiences of Him. "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life."

And is not this the true and sufficient test of every religious teacher: How truly and in what degree can he show us the Father?

Is it not the sufficient authentication of every teaching:—Does it bring us face to face with the

spiritual God? set us in the pure spiritual light of His glory? reveal to us what is holiest and most spiritual in His character?

Is it not in this that so much religious teaching is defective? Men tell us *about* God—His power, His wisdom, His love, His salvation; but it is doctrine only, they fail to make us *see* God. About means of grace, again—the Church, its worship, its sacraments, its priesthood—they have much to say: upon these they insist as the appointed, the indispensable means of seeing God. But we see only the means, not God Himself. They do not so present the means as that in their hands they become powers and mediums. How different the same thing in different hands! “What is that in thine hand?” “A rod.” Yes; but the hand is that of a prophet, and it works wonders. In ordinary hands it would remain a rod; in the prophet’s hand it brings water out of a rock. What are these services? Means of grace. Yes; but while one man so emphasizes their machinery, its validity, its excellency, so as to make them little more than mere ritual; another, saying but little about them, shall so penetrate them with spiritual meaning that they shall reveal God Himself. Like the garments of the transfigured Christ, they themselves become “white and glistening.” Instead of translucent means through which the Father is manifested, how often the Bible and its truths, the Church and its ordinances, are made so institutional and prominent as to hide the Father from us.

Whatever its theological truth, no teaching is really and spiritually such if it do not reveal God to us; if it do not fill with God our thought, our heart, our life; if it do not clear away all obstructions to our vision of God; make all things lead to Him, all things reveal Him. The test and the measure of all spiritual teaching is simply this. If the man that we call heretic does this the most, let orthodoxy look to it; it is assuredly wrong somewhere. Many a heretic with his intense spiritual realism reveals God much more fully than the most orthodox teachers of doctrines and Churches, whose spiritual realizations are less intense.

This was the supreme characteristic of the teaching of Christ. How directly and unerringly every word penetrated the spiritual heart of things! How He stripped off the form and grasped the spirit! How He pushed aside all Pharisaism, all ritual of religion, Sabbath keeping, temple services, self-complacent acts of praying, fasting, or almsgiving. How He would push aside our modern ecclesiasticism, with its ritual and upholstery. Think of Him who talked with the woman of Samaria, and with the temple Pharisees, in the presence of eucharistic genuflexions and vestments and wax candles! With what a sharp stern word He would command, "Take these things hence: my Father's house is a house of spiritual revelation, ye have made it a house of carnal histrionics!"

The sum of all religion is to see the Father; and

by whomsoever and by whatsoever the Father is most fully revealed to us, and we are but made to stand in the pure white light of His spiritual glory, there is the truest teacher and the highest worship. "It sufficeth us."

VI. How then may we personally realize all this? How may the possibility become a religious experience?

These chapters set this forth with great amplitude and emphasis. I will mention only two of the conditions that they specify.

I. The Father can be seen only by men of spiritual vision. "The pure in heart see God." "Spiritual things are spiritually discerned." The appeal throughout this great teaching is exclusively to the purities and sympathies of the spiritual soul. Christ does not demonstrate God, He simply manifests Him. He does not set forth a theology to be argued in schools, proved by evidences, formulated in creeds, justified by philosophy. He appeals to the perceptions, the religious consciousness of the spiritual soul. The process is not a theological, it is a religious one. We can know God as a Father only by religious experience of Him.

All life, all great passions of life are understood only by experience. It demands the poet's eye to see poetic beauty; the artist's eye to see art beauty. We do not see light through the demonstrations of the astronomer; we know love only by loving; and life only by living. In the essential nature of



things God cannot manifest Himself to an impure unspiritual soul, any more than the sun can shine into a blind man's eye. We know God only by the indwelling of God.

2. The Father is revealed to us in processes and experiences of common religious life. Mark the profound significance of our Lord's reply to Judas: "Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? If any man love me he will *keep my words*, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

This is Christ's only prescription for seeing God. The "pure in heart see God,"—purity is faculty of spiritual vision. The obedient in life see God,—obedience is practical experience of God. Christ does not speak of any special theophany to be put before the eyes of religious men, nor of any process of inspiration to be conducted in their hearts. He does not prescribe mystical ecstasies, or special excitements, or religious services. He has not a single suggestion of what is mystical, or ritual, or ecclesiastical. He says nothing about Church services, or revival meetings, or religious retreats. Whatever may be the religious uses of such things, they are not our Lord's means of seeing God. Nor does He intimate the possibility of seeing God by sudden boundings to spiritual heights, or by sudden endowment with special faculties of spiritual vision.

Ask Him how we are to see God, He has only

the simplest and homeliest of methods to prescribe. "Keep my words:" let your lives be religiously obedient; walk the paths of your common life in piety and purity; rule your tempers; purify your affections; do common things religiously; sanctify your daily life. If you be a worldly man, "crucify the world with its affections and lusts:" "the god of this world blinds the eyes" of his votaries, so that they cannot see God. If your passions be strong, bring them into captivity to the spiritual gospel of Christ: carnal mists rise from strong passions and hinder clear spiritual vision. If you be a selfish man, purge out your selfishness; for the eye of selfishness is inverted, and instead of God you will see only yourself.

In the ways of common life true sanctity—the medium of spiritual vision—is wrought; the life of God is strengthened; and experience of God is accumulated.

The process is somewhat prosaic: men of great fervours and of ecclesiastical enthusiasm get somewhat impatient with it. But here, as everywhere, the divinest wisdom lies in common-place methods. And when special fervours shall have exhausted their passion, and the crackling thorns shall have expired in ashes, this quiet strong life, growing from day to day and practically developed in all its parts, shall abide; this "patient continuance in well doing shall inherit glory, immortality, eternal life." This is the true "higher life" of a man, the highest life of all: not holiness in Church services, not perpetual

religious excitements; but the holy doing of common things—doing “everything heartily as unto the Lord.” When therefore men say to us, “Lo, here is Christ, or, lo, there,” it may sometimes be the highest religious duty to “go not after them,” for “the kingdom of God is within us.”

And how transcendent the visions of God which the man attains who thus, by patient processes of purity and obedience, develops all the faculties of his religious life. What knowledge of God men come to have who thus seek after Him in daily life, “set God always before them”—“build up the being that they are.” How true their spiritual judgment, how strong their religious heart, how assimilated their entire nature!

To us, then, Christ thus speaks; upon us He urges this spiritual vision of God; to us He prescribes this method of attaining it. We, too, are His disciples. May He not reproach us also with unspiritual blindness? “Have I been so long time with you, and yet have ye not known me?”

When, for instance, some period of special privilege is closing, when opportunities of youth, of manhood, of spiritual worship or facility, are ceasing; when the Christ has been with us and is going away, and we who have lived in the very sunlight of Divine manifestation remain ignorant and unspiritual.

Concerning Churches and sacraments and religious services we have known much; but of the spiritual Father Himself—of the mysteries and privileges of

spiritual life in Him,—only little. And the end has come; the end of life it may be, and the summons disquiets us. Have we rightly prepared for death? Have we the true viaticum? Are ours the true Church, the true creeds, the true sacraments, the true election of God? Man, the only thing to be solicitous about is,—Do you know Christ? Have you through Him seen the Father? Have you come to the Father by Him? “If ye had known me ye should have known my Father also.”

There are some who do not know even His true nature and work. They are still blind to His Divine dignity; they are ignorant of His spiritual redemption. To them He is only a good Man and a great Teacher. Even Philip saw in Him more than this, and yet Christ rebuked Philip for not seeing more. After all these centuries of glorious manifestation, not to see the Father in the Christ!

Some are blind to the spiritual character of His kingdom. He is a Teacher of great truths, an Example of pure morals; but of the spiritual life that He quickens and nourishes they have no conception. When He proclaims Himself “the bread of life,” of which we are to eat; the “water of life,” of which we are to drink; the “vine, of which we are the branches;” in ignorant perplexity they ask, “Ah, Lord God, doth he not speak parables?”

Others, again, have no practical experience of His salvation. They refuse His demands, pervert His meanings, evade His appeals; they reject Him as

their Redeemer, "crucify him afresh and put him to open shame." As in the old time, "he comes to his own, but his own receive him not." How often and how urgently He has come, in the teachings of His gospel, the strivings of His Spirit, the constraints of His love! And He is still to you an unknown Christ; "one standing in your midst whom ye know not."

And yet He comes to show you the Father; to make you see glorious visions, have unspeakable experiences of that Divine heart of fatherly pity, forgiveness, and love. He would bring you to the Father. How pure and blessed your life might be! how rapturous with loving gratitude! how radiant with immortal hopes!

And we, brethren, disciples of the Lord and teachers of His truth to men, are to be tested by this power of our teaching. We shall utterly mistake His lessons, our teaching will be in vain, our theology "as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal," our Church ritual an empty ceremony, if we do not "show men the Father." Both theology and Church worship are instruments for this, if we rightly use them; but they are worse than useless, they are "a mockery, a delusion, and a snare," if regarded as anything else. The humblest evangelist, using the rudest methods of speech and worship, and in the most out-of-the-way places, if he "show men the Father," is a greater servant of Christ than all the mitred bishops of the Church, than all its learned

doctors, than all its eloquent preachers, if they fail in this.

And clearly, if we would "show men the Father," we ourselves must see Him.

This, then, must be our first solicitude; not to misconceive the Master's teachings and kingdom,—which no more consists in Congregational Churches and creeds than it did in the Jewish Temple and ritual,—but, by keen and careful culture of our spiritual intelligence, by prayerful nurture of the Divine life, by tender cherishing of spiritual sympathies and sensibilities, by a solicitous habit of laying hold upon the spiritual essence of all truths and things, to attain to clear spiritual vision, true spiritual apprehension; so that, whatever the form of things, whatever the theological or ecclesiastical husk in which the vital grain of truth may be ensheathed, we may penetrate and liberate it, so that our people may be "fed with the finest of the wheat."

"The spiritual man discerneth all things, even the deep things of God." Not in things of the Church only, but in things of the world, he will see God—His hand moving, His Spirit working—so that everything of life shall reveal Him, and every path of life be illumined by His presence; for all things are full of Him, and our life in its entirety may be lived in Him, a "life hidden with Christ in God."

II.

The Transfiguring Power of the  
Vision of God.

*And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation. And Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped. . . . And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him. And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid to come nigh him. And Moses called unto them; and Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation returned unto him: and Moses talked with them. And afterward all the children of Israel came nigh: and he gave them in commandment all that the Lord had spoken with him in mount Sinai. And till Moses had done speaking with them, he put a veil on his face. But when Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he took the veil off, until he came out. And he came out, and spake unto the children of Israel that which he was commanded. And the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone: and Moses put the veil upon his face again, until he went in to speak with him.—EXOD. xxxiv. 5-8, 29-35.*



## II.

THIS was the transfiguration of Moses. We are told also of a transfiguration of Stephen; and of the transfiguration of Christ. And it would be a study both interesting and profitable to trace the resemblances and differences of these three glorifications of great servants of God.

Moses saw the glory of Jehovah; Stephen saw Jesus standing on the right hand of God; Christ held converse with glorified saints. Moses was transfigured when the idolatry of the people drove him almost to despair; and the transfiguration strengthened and encouraged him, while it filled the people with penitence and awe. Christ was transfigured when about to accomplish His decease at Jerusalem; and the transfiguration filled Him with calm strength and purpose, while it excited the disciples to rapture and worship. Stephen was transfigured when about to die beneath the murderous stones of a lawless mob; and the transfiguration filled him with martyr faith and Christ-like mag-

nanimity, while it exasperated the Sanhedrim and the people to a more murderous rage.

There are supreme moments in the lives of great servants of God, when only Divine visions can sustain them ; and there are visions of God adequate to sustain men in straits and agonies that are worse than death.

Moses was greatly disheartened by the idolatry of the golden calf. What could be done with a people so fickle and sensuous ? who in the very precincts of the holy mount, while the gleam of the lightning, the roll of the thunder, and the terror of the trumpet had scarcely passed away, could be guilty of such apostasy ? It was the first startling outbreak of that waywardness and rebelliousness which at length justified his forebodings, and doomed both themselves and him to die in the wilderness. True he obtained forgiveness for them. By his Christ-like self-sacrifice, and agony of prayer, he prevailed against the Divine threatening. Jehovah would spare, and would "go up" with them ; and, apparently, the people were humbled in genuine and remorseful penitence.

But what confidence could he have in a people so manifestly shallow and fickle ? He was greatly discouraged. He could not organise such a people into a nation, provide for them laws and worship, rule them under the difficult conditions of their wilderness life, discipline them into a self-controlled and godly nation capable of possessing the land of promise.

The burden was too heavy for him; and he gave way to that despondency, that sinking of heart, which in great exigencies the noblest souls so often feel—which Elijah felt when he went into the wilderness and “requested for himself that he might die”—which Christ felt when He complained that God had forsaken Him. And he prays for Divine succour; for some manifestation of God, that shall assure him that he is not alone, that he is accomplishing God’s purposes, and will have God’s help. He asks—he scarcely knows what—some vision of God that shall be more than the vague symbolism of the Shekinah cloud, some manifestation of the spiritual reality of the personal presence of which this was only the material sign—“I beseech thee show me thy glory.”

As Moses surmised it, this was impossible; the unveiled, personal face of Deity could not be looked upon by mortal eye. But there was possible a more spiritual apprehension, a fuller revelation of the true and gracious character of Jehovah; and this shall be vouchsafed to him. He shall penetrate yet more deeply the ineffable nature of Jehovah; he shall realize yet more vividly the personality of the Divine Presence—the glory of the Divine grace; he shall make the nearest approach to the unapproachable possible to mortal man. “I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee.” And this higher manifestation of God, of which we can figure to ourselves no conception, is to be to the burdened, anxious

leader, the reward of his faithful piety and noble self-sacrifice; and the pledge that he should have with him through the wilderness, not merely an "angel to go before them," but the presence of Jehovah Himself. The promise is grandly fulfilled. For forty days more Moses holds ineffable communion with Jehovah; and when he descends to the people his face shines with the reflection of the glory upon which he has gazed. He is transfigured before them.

From a spiritual point of view the entire conception of this narrative is, I think, one of the most transcendent and marvellous in Scripture. It is a glorious picture of perfect spiritual truth, to which imagination even can add nothing; the profoundest spiritual principles underlie it—the greatest spiritual meanings are symbolised in it. Let us then consider it as a spiritual parable, and try to read in it some of the conditions and privileges of exalted communion with God.

Communion with God is the high prerogative of spiritual beings. It is the instinctive craving of human souls, it is the supreme privilege and joy of the religious life, it is the inspiration and strength of all great service. Our nature is strangely mixed; there is a strong carnal tendency which draws us downwards to what is sensual, but there is also an irrepressible spiritual tendency which draws us upwards to what is spiritual. "God has made us for Himself, and our souls cannot rest until they rest in Him."

And He redeems and saves us by drawing us to Himself. By mysterious voices He solicits us, by irrepressible instincts He impels us, by subtle affinities He holds us, by ineffable satisfactions He makes us feel His nearness and fills us with rest and joy.

When we have found God, when He has revealed Himself to us in the glory of His love, when we have entered into spiritual communion with His love, our religious life is perfected, our feeling, our service, our joy.

There is no fact of our religious consciousness more indubitable than this—"Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ." We cannot demonstrate it to others, we cannot analyse our own experience of it; but we have no consciousness of which we are more certain. "We *know* that we have fellowship with him." It is the joy and strength of our religious souls. If we fail to realize it our spiritual life languishes and dies. In proportion as we do realize it it is the source of holy feeling, of self-sacrificing service, of unconquerable joy. It is neither a fanaticism nor a self-delusion. In the calm intelligence of our thought, in subtle sympathy of feeling, in a loving restful faith which no temptation or darkness can destroy, in vivifying, gracious sanctifying influence, our intercourse with the spiritual God and Father is as real to us and as causative in our lives as our intercourse one with another. "We have the witness in our-

Three or four general remarks, which this experience of Moses may suggest to us, will set before us the chief conditions and privileges of it.

I. We are admitted to fellowship with God only through propitiatory sacrifice.

Moses builds an altar under the hill, offers sacrifices upon it, and sprinkles the blood thereof, before he ascends the holy mount to commune with God. These were the sacrificial rites of patriarchal times; the Levitical sacrifices were not yet ordained. From the days of righteous Abel God had never been approached save through propitiatory sacrifice. Almost every religious system that men have devised has included this as a fundamental principle. I know of no way of accounting for an institution so singular—may we not say revolting—save the supposition that it is the deep instinct of human guilt, divinely instructed in the great principle of propitiation. And every explanation of the atonement of Christ which excludes it, every form of the martyr-theory of Christ's death, which resolves it into the mere moral influence of obedient example, of self-sacrificing love, of sympathetic experience, clearly leaves these ancient animal sacrifices unexplained—a meaningless, inexplicable rite. If animal sacrifices in any way prefigured the sacrifice of Christ, a propitiatory element entered into it. Hence wherever the sacrifice of Christ has been received, all animal sacrifices have disappeared.

That propitiation is necessary in order to our

fellowship with God, is one of the deepest and most unconquerable feelings of human souls. Fellowship with God is not their spontaneous untutored rest, their natural privilege, their instinctive seeking. In holy spiritual beings it would necessarily be so. It is not so in men. Whatever it may be, there is in the thought of a holy God something that forbids it; a consciousness of sin separates between us and God, an alienation of character and feeling which makes propitiation necessary. We need to be forgiven for wrong doing ere we *can* seek His fellowship; we need to be renewed in right feelings before we *will*. God must proclaim Himself not only holy and righteous, but "merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquities, transgression, and sin." Any theory of fellowship with God which ignores these facts of human consciousness, thereby proclaims its own insufficiency and untruth.

Just then as Moses offered expiatory sacrifice under the hill when he prepared himself for communion with God on the mount, so we must seek fellowship with God through the one propitiatory sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Through it we obtain the forgiveness of sins that are past, through it we have wrought in us the feelings of holy penitence, grateful love, and sympathetic delight, without which spiritual fellowship is impossible. The Father receives His prodigals; we, penitently and yearningly, seek His home and heart.

More than this. Not only is the sacrifice of Christ

the medium through which the forgiving love of God becomes possible, it is the supreme expression of it. Nowhere, as in the expiation of the cross, is the merciful and forgiving grace of God so wonderfully manifested. Again, the facts of human experience bear witness to its reality and power. None are so constrained to penitence and gratitude as those whom redeeming love constrains. None are so subdued to spiritual affections as those who are crucified to the world, and crucified to self by the cross of Christ.

For myself I must say that these deep moral harmonies of the doctrine of expiatory sacrifice have to me an overwhelming force of evidence. It is the only complete philosophy of Christ's death, the only conception of it that can satisfy my entire moral consciousness, that practically meets the necessities of both conscience and heart, that gives to both reason and soul perfect rest and joy.

Coming to God through this great sacrifice of love, we have practical experience of Him as "the Lord merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquities, transgressions, and sins." The cross reveals this higher glory of His love as nothing else does. We understand the great grace of His mercy through realizations of it; our knowledge is the sympathetic, the perfect knowledge of experience.

It follows that the fellowship with God to which the sacrifice of Christ introduces us is one of peculiar endearment. Through it we know God, and love God, as through no other revelation of Himself.



Ordinary religious feeling is touched with a peculiar emotion, and deepened into passion. It gives inspiration and glow to every feeling, constraint and self-sacrifice to every purpose. We stand in the light of His transcendent mercy; we enter into the secret of His ineffable love; we have fellowship with the yearning affection and satisfied joy of His fatherly heart.

The passion of grateful love which is inspired by the cross of Christ consumes as with a fire all love of evil, all motions of selfishness, all calculations of duty, all ritual of worship. We come to the Father, the Father comes to us. He lifts the veil from His throne, speaks the words of His love, discloses the depths of His tender heart; and thus He fills us with the feeling of a perfect trust, of an assured and boundless love.

To this fellowship with God the cross of Christ introduces us. Whatever our religious service, this is its end. Our spiritual intelligence, our religious trust, our practical experiences are simply its subtle and mysterious kindlings. Our grateful souls confess the loving Father, and rejoice in Him; as the eye rejoices in light, as the heart rejoices in love. He manifests to us the glories of His great grace, and we find in them our perfect satisfaction and joy.

In coming therefore to commune with God upon the mercy seat, we worship first at the altar of sacrifice. "Through Christ we have boldness of access by faith in him."

II. We are qualified for our highest intercourse with God by the spiritual grace of our own souls.

Moses was qualified for this revelation of the supreme glory of God by his peculiar magnanimity and self-sacrifice.

What sublimity there is in his passionate self-forgetful intercession for the sinning people! How he reasons and wrestles with the anger of Jehovah: as Abraham pleaded for Sodom, as Paul entreated for Israel, as Christ prayed for mankind! How heroically he throws himself into the breach! If the sword of retribution must destroy, upon his head let it fall; if a sacrifice be imperative, let him be the expiatory victim. "If thou wilt, forgive their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written."

All spiritual revelations of God depend upon our own spiritual qualifications. When God admits us to intercourse with Himself, what we see will depend upon our capability of seeing. "Spiritual things are spiritually discerned." In God there is always more to be revealed than we are capable of perceiving. Because of our feeble vision we cannot look upon the effulgence of His glory. Often we gaze upon the eternal light with blinded eyes. Moses could behold God because his own soul was so god-like. Because he was capable of such magnanimous self-sacrifice, he was qualified to receive the revelation of "the Lord merciful and gracious."

In seeking God, therefore, our first solicitude must

be the purity and strength of our own spiritual vision ; such purposes and affections as will the most effectually purge, enlarge, and elevate it. Only the pure in heart can see God.

Suppose, now, that the passionate pleading of Moses had been for some personal interest—his own exemption from the kindling anger of Jehovah, his own preservation amid the perils of the wilderness, his own part in the promised inheritance of Canaan ; suppose, even, that for selfish reasons he had sought this fresh revelation of God—some vision of God, some blessing from God that might gladden or enrich his own spiritual soul ! His desire would have been neither so noble, so inspiring, so enlarging, nor so spiritualising, as this self-sacrificing intercession for the people.

Even in spiritual things the desire and seeking of a man may be very selfish. Selfishness is not restricted to the domain of secular things. A man may carry his little egoism, with its subtle self-seeking, into the sphere of his religious life, and even there make self the main spring of all his desires and prayers, the test and measure of all his privileges. He may desire holiness for personal security, and love for unloving uses. His supreme solicitude may be that prayer may bring blessing to his own soul ; that preaching may be instructive and comforting to himself ; that he may have glowing emotions, personal enjoyments ; and be so ministered to, as that safely and triumphantly he may get to heaven.

And there is a legitimate care for self. It is a divinely implanted instinct. It is part of the Divine order of universal well being.

Nor is it possible for a selfish man to be so *meanly* selfish in spiritual things as he may be in sensuous things. In spiritual things there are inherent qualities of goodness and nobleness, which enlarge the soul that receives them in spite of itself. But a man who attains to no more than this, who does not consciously culture the spirit of self-sacrifice, who is as selfish as the necessary qualities of spiritual life will permit him to be, falls infinitely short of the magnanimities of the religious life; as exemplified, for instance, in self-sacrificing men like Abraham, Moses, and Paul. How selfish and little in religious life men often are! Everything in the Church and its services, everything in the Bible even, is practically estimated in its relation to themselves. The distinctive glory of the Divine Master was that "he pleased not himself," that He sacrificed Himself for others, "laid down his life for the sheep." The last thing the Lord Jesus thought of was His own religious enjoyment. The heart of self-sacrifice is the only Christ-like, the only God-like heart—the heart of Him who "spared not his only begotten Son," the heart of Him who accepted the cup and "endured the cross, despising its shame."

Moses had privileged communion with God. How did he use it? Not in seeking religious good for himself. In his solitudes for the people, he forgot

even his own spiritual soul; and prayed for them with an intensity of self-sacrificing love, that save in Christ Himself has never been surpassed. "Bless them, if thou slay me." He too was a good shepherd, giving his life for the sheep.

Now it was this unselfishness of soul which made possible to Moses this vision of the higher glory of God—that enabled a sympathetic apprehension of Him who was "merciful and gracious." The glory of God now revealed to him was the glory of God's magnanimous, unselfish love; and the magnanimous unselfish love of his own soul qualified him for appreciating it. No man in whom selfish desire had been predominant could have comprehended this Divine glory of unselfishness. If unselfish love in Jehovah be His highest glory, unselfish love in us is our closest affinity with it, our greatest qualification for understanding it.

We never, therefore, become so godlike; we never give to our souls such enlargement, such power of spiritual discernment and Divine fellowship, as when in utter self-forgetfulness we are full of generous sympathies and solitudes for others. A man who, when he kneels down to pray, is so absorbed in yearning desires that God would bless others, as that he thinks and prays only for them, blesses his own soul by his prayer infinitely more than he would have done by exclusive supplications for it. A man who in a mission field or a ragged school gives himself to pitying redeeming work, ministers to his own

salvation, to the instruction, sanctity, and Christ-like affections of his own soul, far more than he could have done by spending the hours in his closet. He rises higher in the sphere of the Divine sympathies, he becomes more like the merciful God in benevolent affections and purposes, more like the good Shepherd in self-sacrificing ministries. The generous sympathies that he nurtures, the spirit of self-sacrifice that he exercises, react upon his spiritual life—upon his discernments, his charities, his sanctities, and his joys. He “enters into the joy of his Lord.” According to the law of God’s supreme blessing he is blessed in being made a blessing to others.

III. We are admitted to visions of the higher glory of God only when we seek them for the uses of practical religious duty.

If selfishness be a disqualification, so is mere sentiment. Moses sought this revelation of God in the mystery and perplexity of life, and for his practical strength and guidance. The burden of the exodus of this perverse people was too heavy for him; his ignorance needed Divine enlightenment, his faith needed Divine encouragement. In the practical difficulties of life there is no resource so helpful as fellowship with God. There is a close connection between visions of God and practical wisdom. So far from spiritual communion with God disqualifying a man for practical duty, it is the means of his greatest fitness. It clears his moral vision, it fixes right principles, it gives great inspirations. Some

godly men may be spiritual dreamers, some ungodly men may have keen practical sagacity; religious feeling will not reverse a man's natural qualities. But whatever these may be, godliness will augment their practical power. Goodness does not make a man a visionary, wickedness does not make a man acute. The vision of God, the light which comes from the moral glories of God's character, is the highest knowledge of a man, the best for all legitimate uses of life; and, other things being equal, he will be the wisest, the most practical man in life, whose communion with God is the closest, whose knowledge of God is the greatest, whose visions of God are the most glorious.

Moses feels that if he is to rule and mould this people to national religiousness and power he must be instructed in the highest knowledge of God. And God makes "all his goodness pass before him," gives him a higher revelation of His own mercifulness. Is it too much to say that this great lesson of Divine benignity caused that peculiar humanity and beneficence which distinguished the code of Mosaic laws? The world has never yet estimated its great obligations to it. The spirit of the Mosaic institutions has entered into the national life and civilization of the world. The ten words of Sinai are the basis of every national constitution. The theocracy taught men how closely connected with the life of nations are the claims and the presence of God.

Even visions of God may not be desired by us for

mere sentimental reasons. A man who seeks God for his own religious gratification merely, may see God, but he will not see God's supreme glory. Our supreme reason for desiring to know God must be that we may glorify Him in serving others. Personal religious well-being is not the greatest end of human life; it is but a means of something greater still—the service of God and of man. "He that findeth his life shall lose it." Divine knowledge and stimulus, higher faith and sanctity, greater strength and joy, are to be sought for uses of service. So Christ sought the mount of Transfiguration, that by Divine communion and refreshment He might prepare Himself for the "decease which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem." We "wait upon God" not merely to delectate our souls, but to "renew our strength" for His service. For we can work for God only as we commune with God. The spiritual quickening, inspiration, and transfiguring of such communion is the secret of all great service.

IV. The most spiritual visions of God, the closest communion with God, are to be realized only when we seek Him alone.

The glory of Jehovah is revealed to Moses amid the solitudes of the mountain summit; Joshua and the elders remain on a lower level of Sinai. So when He would hold with His Father His closest and tenderest intercourse of prayer, our Lord went alone to the top of a mountain, and in the curtained darkness of the night.



Not only is spiritual life essentially a personal thing, its greatest experiences are absolutely incommunicable ; its closest intercourse with God, its most spiritual visions of God, are not possible save in sequestered communion with Him. We cannot too highly estimate the grand conception of the worshipping Church ; nor can we exaggerate the spiritual stimulus and joy of its services and its fellowship. In the manifold grace and gladness of common prayer, and praise, and instruction, and sympathy, it is often to us the "house of God, the gate of heaven." But the Church is not greater than the individual soul ; it exists for it, and ministers to it. It is valuable only as the wants of individual souls are satisfied by it. He, therefore, whose closest approach to God, whose clearest spiritual discernments of God, whose most intense spiritual feelings towards God are realized in public worship, has attained to but a very imperfect and unworthy spiritual life. Even in the most crowded congregations, if a man's spiritual heart be true, there is a sense, and that for which the worship itself exists, in which he is alone with God. The incense of the sanctuary may ascend as a cloud, but the cloud has its constituent elements. It is common prayer, common worship, common joy ; but this is only the aggregate of individual experiences. Each worshipper holds personal and private communion with God, tells Him his confidences, breathes to Him his desires, puts his secret into the common prayer, receives his blessing

in the common grace—forgiveness, sanctity, comfort strength—of which his neighbour knows nothing. Our highest possibilities of religious life, our moments of supremest intercourse with God, our most glorious visions of God, are on the mountain top, when even our most intimate friends are left below; when without concealment or check we unbare our most secret souls to the Ineffable, and are filled with the sense of His goodness. Alone with Him upon the mountain top we stand, the clouds of worldly passion and strife and care beneath our feet, and the bright sunlight of God filling our eye and our heart.

In our greatest emotions we seek solitude instinctively. Human presence is intolerable to the intensest moods of the soul. There was an hour when, in His greatest agony, the Redeemer sought to be “withdrawn from his disciples about a stone’s cast,” that He might be alone with His Father. So in our great agonies of repentance, of wrestling prayer, of struggling faith, of bitterest sorrow, we turn from even the tenderest human sympathy, and seek the feet and the bosom of the Father. All that is most blessed in intercourse with Him, all that is most spiritual and profound in our experience of Him, all that is most penetrating and rapturous in our visions of God, we realize alone.

He, therefore, who has no sense of this, he to whom being alone with God is an unaccustomed and irksome thing; he who has no silent thoughts of God, no hidden raptures of spiritual life, no precious

sequestered fellowship of thought and worship and love, knows but little of God, and lives but a meagre religious life. No man can be eminent either in holiness or in service who does not often ascend to the mountain top, that he may be alone with God and behold His glory.

V. The supreme revelation of God to which we attain through such fellowship with Him, is the revelation of His grace and love. When a man sees this the glory of God has passed before him.

Moses had beheld many sublime manifestations of God's glory—the glory of His power, as in the deliverance of the exodus; the glory of His Majesty, as in the Shekinah splendours of Sinai; the glory of His holiness, as in the ten words of the tables of stone. But these had not satisfied him. The more spiritual instincts of his soul told him that there was yet a higher glory of God to be revealed. And for this revelation he prays. As if hitherto “that which was made glorious had no glory by reason of the glory that excelleth,” he pleads, “I beseech thee show me thy glory.”

The reply is, “I will make all my *goodness* pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.”

The fulfilment of the promise is thus recorded:—“The Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed the Lord, the Lord merciful and gracious, long-

suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and fourth generation."

The revelation is exclusively in the higher sphere of God's spiritual being—a revelation of His purely moral qualities—the goodness, the mercy, the tenderness, the loving heart of God. Nothing is said about His Almightyness, His Omniscience, His Omnipresence; the suprême glory of God is the glory of His moral character. Further—among the moral qualities of the Divine nature the supreme glory belongs to His grace and love, His long-suffering and mercy. And this is the great central thought of this manifestation to Moses.

In the declaration of it elements are introduced which we should scarcely have expected. Qualities are represented as qualities of God's goodness that we, perhaps, should designate otherwise. This declaration of God's goodness is a harmony of different chords, some of them apparent discords; but goodness is the theme. The dominant idea, the undertone, the refrain, is "the Lord merciful and gracious." And this great glory of God is set forth with a fulness, a luxuriance, and a reiteration which indicate struggling and imperfect conception. Deep below deep of unfathomable grace are suggested. All the emphasis of the declaration is here. "God

is love," and everything in God is but an element of His love.

Is there any characteristic of God that we are so slow to recognize? Is there any belief about God so difficult as a simple, restful belief in His love?

It is easy to believe in His greatness or in His holiness—these are our necessary and instinctive conceptions of God. But it is not so easy to believe in all the feelings of tender, pitying, yearning, patient fatherly love towards sinful selfish men which God so wondrously and so earnestly affirms. Do we not sometimes feel as if His love could not be so great as our sin?—as if His Divine love could not be so pitiful as our poor human love?—as if our interests or those of our friends would be dealt with more tenderly in our own hands than in His?

How we pray and beseech Him about our sin and about sinful men; as if we could win Him to be as forgiving as we are! How we deprecate His declarations about the retribution of sin; as if our compassions would spare where His will not! How we hesitate to believe in His forgiveness! How we ponder His willingness to receive our prodigals! How we doubt and fear about men who seek Him on death-beds! So that again and again He has to remind us that "his ways are not as our ways," to asseverate the greatness and tenderness of His love, to frame wondrous words of great and condescending meaning, expressive of His boundless grace.

When this goodness of God has passed before a man,

when in spiritual apprehension He has recognized its supreme glory, he "comprehends with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and knows the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. He is filled with all the fulness of God."

1. God claims *liberty* for the ways of His goodness. "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy." God is not the creature of any law. He who has ordained all laws of nature, all processes of grace, has not made any supreme over Himself. It is the necessary law of His supreme being that all things shall be controlled by it, whether it be a sequence of physical nature, or a grace in the domain of moral principles. And the supreme law of His goodness is that it should bless.

Therefore He asserts His liberty "to have mercy upon whom he will have mercy." He can be limited by no national covenant, bound by no predestinating decree: this were an abnegation of freedom, a disability put upon His goodness. As the supreme glory of His goodness, He asserts its absolute freedom, its prerogative to be gracious to whom He will be gracious—to Egyptians as well as to Jews; to bless men beyond the national covenant that He was now making; to forgive all who needed forgiveness. The glory of His grace is its boundlessness. Not within the limits of a dispensation, or a plan, or a decree, does God bless. He forgives all who penitently seek Him. He "so loved the world, that he gave his only

begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

2. Not quite so obvious is the further assertion of *penalty* as a constituent of God's goodness. "I will by no means clear the guilty." And yet could there be goodness without penalty? Would forgiving grace be good if it were a moral laxity or indifference? Is not God's goodness necessarily a holy goodness, an incorruptible mercy? What benefit could there be, what possible well-being in unchallenged sin? Whatever God's goodness may be or do, it cannot permit sin to go unpunished. The last thing possible to it is to give immunity to the man who persists in wrong-doing. *That*, both to the world and to the man himself, would be the direst of all curses. Nothing, therefore, in God's administration of the world is more certain, and nothing is more merciful than penalty as the inevitable retribution of sin. God "will by no means clear the guilty."

Penalty is one of God's ministries of blessing. He would bless souls by healing them, bless men by deterring them from sin. It is the highest beneficence of a wise and gracious goodness. What can be more gracious in a man of tender sensibilities than to inflict pain in order to heal? The loving parent does not spare the rod, the tender surgeon does not spare the knife. Penalty is not the expression of Divine passion or resentment; it is a method of the Divine love.

And the great law of penal inheritance is part of

it. "The iniquity of parents is visited upon children even to the third or fourth generation." The physical disease, the pecuniary straits, the social obloquy, the moral degradation, which are the natural and inevitable entail of sin, are part of the deterrent and gracious order whereby God redeems or deters men from evil.

And when, in the individual case, all fails; and the sinner will not be persuaded from his sin; and the love that threatens penalty, and the love that makes its first sharpness felt, and the love of beseeching love are alike in vain; the eternal law must hold—"I will by no means clear the guilty." Goodness can no other—neither forgiveness nor love can bless a reprobate soul. Its own inherent character forbids, equally with the law of necessary righteousness.

Before the dark problem of the final destiny of the impenitent we must all stand with pallid cheek and trembling awe. All retribution is terrible. Even when we have discarded the coarse and brutal and unwarranted hell of mediæval art and poetry, it is a dark and appalling mystery, concerning which no reverent man will speak hastily.

Can we not leave it in the hands of Him who thus represents penalty as part of his very goodness? as an element of His supreme glory? Is it not enough that He from whose lips the most terrible of all threatenings of retribution fell is the pitying merciful Christ, with whose tender and infinite love no compassions, no sensibilities of human hearts may com-



pare? I do not know the secrets of God; there are principles of Divine government that I cannot understand, mysteries of Divine purpose that I cannot fathom, possibilities of evil development before which I stand appalled; but I do believe in the Lord Jesus Christ—I can rest upon the eternal love. Assuredly that which our best sensibilities would revolt from He will not do. His love has infinite and eternal compassions, of which all other love must fall infinitely short. However He may solve the great problem of final impenitence, can we doubt that the solution will be in perfect and satisfying harmony with the ways of His love?

VI. The revelation of God's glorious goodness transfigures the man who beholds it.

Moses beholds it, and it makes his face to shine. No other manifestation of God had produced such effect. The awful glory of the mountain, when in thunderings and lightnings the Lord came down upon it; the stern righteousness of which the ten commandments were the expression, did not irradiate him. No revelations of mere majesty or righteousness, no emotions of awe or fear can make a man's countenance radiant.

Dare we say that it was only an external and material luminousness, the mere reflection of the Shekinah symbol?

Moses had beheld that before, but it had produced no such effects. Was it a material glory which shone in the face of Stephen, when "all who sat in the

council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel"? Was it a physical illumination that transfigured the apostles before the Sanhedrim, when they "took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus"?

Clearly spiritual elements entered into it. Only goodness, graciousness, love, can thus transfigure men.

It is so in the common intercourse of social life. Sternness, threatening fear, do not make the face of a child to shine; only gentleness, graciousness, tenderness. Hard justice does not gladden the countenance of the transgressor or of the poor; only pitiful forgiveness, helpful benevolence. So it is only goodness in God that transfigures and glorifies us; our recognition of His generous forgiveness, His boundless grace, His patient love. It is not the stern righteousness of the elder brother, it is the overpowering love of the yearning Father that makes the prodigal radiant with penitent thankfulness and worshipping love.

There is no constituent of our human life that the experience of God's great love does not transfigure.

Even the *physical aspect* and bearing of a man—his refinement, his gentleness, his manifest satisfactions—are affected by it. There is physical beatitude as well as moral beauty in God's forgiveness, in quickened holiness, in kindled love. The joy of gratitude, the rapture of adoration, irradiate the man who communes with the merciful and gracious

Father. Great joys always transfigure us. In the brightness of a man's countenance, in the elasticity of his step, in his tone of mind, in his common speech, in his secular business, in his social intercourse and affections, there is an indefinable something,—a joyous-mindedness, a radiant beatitude, a spiritual and ethereal beauty—that indicates a new inward life, felicity, and hope; just as in the transfigured Lord “the fashion of his countenance was changed,” and His very raiment was “white and glistering.”

Need it be said how fellowship with God's great love, informs, expands, and illumines the *intelligence* of a man?

Thoughts about God, the soul, the Christ, redemption, holiness, immortality, are the greatest of all thoughts. The man to whose understanding these conceptions are introduced is intellectually elevated by them, as no other conceptions could elevate him. He stands in the purest light of God,—the truest, noblest, most inspiring of all revelations. He may acquire other knowledge; history may open to him her stores, science disclose her secrets, philosophy unveil her depths, poetry reveal her rich imaginations; but no truths are so sublime and so inspiring as truths concerning God; and no truths concerning God are so glorious as the revelations of His love.

No! the thoughts that intellectually limit and degrade us are not the theological teachings of the Bible; they are the crude theories, the ignoble con-

clusions of anti-supernatural science ; which reduces God to a philosophical first cause, and man to an arboreal brute, and mortality to a physical accident. Come this Bible whence it may, be it true or be it false, it may in any case claim the distinction of having given to men the noblest ideas, the grandest inspirations they possess.

Let even the most ignorant become interested in Divine things, meditate on truths concerning God, commune with God, try to be like God, and they are transformed into intelligent men, with a distinctiveness and a suddenness almost magical. That which the schoolmaster, the lesson-book, could not achieve at all, the great teachings of the Bible achieve without effort.

No man can be much with God without great intellectual elevation. To come into fellowship with thoughts and feelings and grace higher than our own necessarily transfigures us, as in its lower measure noble companionship does. The ignorant misconceptions, the foolish superstitions, the ignoble passions, the sordid solitudes, that darken and vex our life, vanish in that pure light as the mist around the summit of a mountain is driven down into the valley by the first beam of the morning sun.

And communion with God's goodness makes pure and beautiful and ethereal the *moral nature* of a man ; satisfies all its cravings, harmonizes all its discords, perfects all its spiritual beauty.

No man can see God as Moses saw Him—the in-

finite goodness, the ineffable love, the transcendent mercy and grace—without his surprised and thankful heart being subdued and satisfied, without himself being transformed into the same image. In the presence of that great love, how impossible ignoble passions, little selfishnesses, base pursuits, become! How the swift fire of holy love purges the heart of its grossness, and purifies the life of its self-seeking!

In the man who communes with the infinite spirit God Himself dwells. He is “renewed by the Holy Ghost day by day,” ever born to some higher holiness, ever moulded to some finer grace.

What a rare perfection of spiritual beauty Moses attained! What could be more significant of exquisite refinement and perfect humility than the quiet record “that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone”? Onlookers were dazzled with the moral beauty. It was wrought in him to such fine perfection that he himself was unconscious of it. The holiest are ever the humblest, their sensitiveness to evil is the most delicate, their translucence makes visible the minutest specks.

Thus communion with God irradiates the entire character of a man. He walks among his fellows in Christ-like beauty, he presents to men the moral aspects, and diffuses among them the holy influences of the Master Himself. To the most ordinary observer he is

“As one that holds communion with the skies.”

And finally it may be added that communion with

God transfigures *human life*, so enlarges the conceptions of a man, and nurtures his faith, as that life becomes a Divine order, and his relations to it a perfect restful affiance. This revelation of God's goodness to Moses was a virtual covenant of life, an assurance that life should be full of God's presence and blessing. Stiff-necked as this people were, God would yet take them for His inheritance; His "presence should go with them and give them rest." It was intended to remove all the fears of Moses about his own insufficiency, all his misgivings about the withdrawal of God's presence and the failure of His blessing. God will go up with them, and assuredly bring them to the promised land.

What new conceptions of life are attained by the man before whom God makes all His goodness pass! In the spiritual lights thrown upon it, in the assurance of God's love in the appointments of it, which it were a wrong to that love to doubt, there are unspeakable satisfaction and joy. The loving Father reveals His goodness to the trusting heart of His child, and assures him of His personal providence and grace in all the experiences of his daily life. "The very hairs of his head are all numbered." "All things work together for his good!" And the necessary effect is a pious and trustful patience, a restful contentedness and satisfaction, a perfect peace and joy, such as no other conception of life can inspire. "In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, we make our requests known unto God, and

the peace of God which passeth all understanding keeps the heart and the mind."

How can a life be desolate or desponding that is in daily communion with God? that realizes God's gracious appointment and loving purpose? that rests in His faithful care and very present help?

The real marvel is, that in men who do believe and realize all this the spiritual joy of life is so subdued; that instances of religious enthusiasm are so few; that mere outward things and changes have such power to disquiet us, to hinder the rapture of life; that holding such high spiritual communion with the Father we can be so carnal, that we can so sensualize our life, think so little of our Divine fellowship, neglect it for such long intervals, enter upon it so languidly, realize it so inadequately. And yet, blessed be God, we do realize it. In part, at least, it is the high privilege of all spiritual men. "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." Our vision is often dim, we carry to our interviews with God much that disqualifies us from seeing Him as He really is, and makes us imagine Him much that He is not—carnal conceptions, unbelieving fears, unloving or distrustful thoughts. But so far as we *do* see Him, so far as His goodness does pass before us, we attain to the supreme blessedness of human life.

He who never seeks the mountain top, who never connects God with his daily life, who sees no spiritual visions of Him who is "merciful and gracious," knows

nothing of the spiritual meanings and uses of life ; nothing of the supreme happiness of a man ; of the pure and exquisite joy in God, to which all other joys may be lifted ; of the calm strong patience with which ills may be endured ; of the gentle tender comfort which the Father's love can minister ; of the blessed rest to be realized in His forgiving love, His tender Fatherhood ; of the deep peaceful sense of the Infinite One ever near to us, ever in communion with us, "our refuge and strength, and very present help in trouble ;" "our God for ever and ever, and our guide even unto death."

Brethren, if all this be true, should it not exalt our conceptions of human life, enrich it, and spiritualize it ? And should it not urge us to the attainment of its greatest moral elevations, where only such visions of God are possible ? For the practical issue of the whole is the principle laid down at the outset—that our visions of God must depend upon our capability of seeing them, our purity of heart, our spirituality of conception, our devoutness of habit.

The people could not look upon Moses, although Moses could look upon God. They could not bear the mere reflection, he was not blinded by the primal glory. His finely attempered soul could receive the Divine vision, and reflect the Divine glory which fell upon it. Whatever its transforming qualities, Moses was capable of them. He had : to him therefore was "given more abundantly," "grace for grace."

The unspiritual, unprepared hearts of the people



had no receptive, no absorbing quality; the glory fell upon a hard, opaque, impenetrable surface. It is a suggestion of the manifold and subtle causes why the beauty and glory of a spiritual religion cannot be seen by unspiritual men. Spiritual truth always blinds where it does not transform. "Spiritual things are spiritually discerned." Speaking to the people, Moses put a veil over his face. Our own spiritual blindness hinders our visions of God. Turning to God, Moses took the veil from his face. No need before the great Sun of Glory to veil his dim splendour. When with "open face we behold the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image from glory unto glory." And this is the moral grandeur of a man, thus to be renewed after the image of Him who created him.

Have we spiritual conception exalted enough to picture it? Have we spiritual desire ardent enough to seek it? Have we spiritual simplicity enough to subordinate all things to its attainment? Failing in this we fail in all; realizing this we realize all. Our teaching, our prayer, our worship, our work, are but means of grace. Their end is thus to lead us into the very presence of God, that there with open face, with purified heart, and with spiritual eye, we may behold His glory, be changed into His likeness, and be lifted to fellowship with His ineffable goodness; and thus realize all the sanctity, and strength, and grace, and joy of the life that is "hid with Christ in God."



III.

The Christ of Experience.

*Unto you therefore which believe he is precious.*

I PET. ii. 7.

### III.

THIS is one of the undertones of Scripture, heard in all the pauses of its history or its argument. It is the music in human souls that religious experiences produce, and that no din of discordant theologies or ecclesiastical conflicts can drown. It is a recognition of the practical religious value of the Christ—of what He is to those who have put Him to experimental tests.

Such recognitions make the New Testament the religious book of men's practical life. Notwithstanding its great antiquity, notwithstanding its different conditions of life and circumstance from our own, its religious ministries are perennial in their fitness and sufficiency. Whatever else may change, the religious heart continues; and the true expression of one man's religious experience is true for all men.

Like Christian teachers in our own day, the New Testament writers may have to vindicate the reality of Christian facts, to expound the truths of Chris-

tian theology, to demonstrate the validity and excellency of Christian teachings, to enforce Christian moralities and duties; but beneath all their polemics, deep in their religious souls, lies the Christian life itself—the life of their spiritual consciousness, of their deepest affections, of their strongest yearnings, of their brightest hopes—the life that is “hid with Christ in God.”

And every now and then, like a stream that runs through thicket and ravine, but for a moment sparkles in the clear sunshine, this deeper life finds expression for itself. It breaks forth from the tangle of controversy, or through the crust of intellectual argument, or from the routine of mere duty, simply to assert itself; revealing unsuspected and translucent depths, in which is found the real life of the religious man—his truest thoughts, his holiest affections, his noblest faith.

This is characteristic of all the New Testament writers. How often Paul pauses in the vehemence of argument, between the gusts of fierce controversy, in the passion of strong objurgation, to give expression to some religious feeling of infinite depth, spirituality, love, and joy.

Still more frequent and sustained are such expressions in the Apostle John, who perhaps carried to their very highest degree spirituality of Christian thought and life. Soaring above the domain of mere theology, in which Paul so largely wrought, he more frequently set forth Christianity as an intense, ineffable communion of life with Christ.

Peter was a man far less profound and intuitional, more realistic, more under the power of externalism and of mere ethics. He moves upon a lower plane of spiritual conception and Christian life. And yet how the fervency of his heart of religious love breaks forth! He was now an old man, mellowed by years and by a long religious experience. He was about to "put off his tabernacle." He was touched with that tender ethereal premonition of the spiritual and transcendent which men on the verge of the grave so often feel. In the land of Beulah men have wondrous visions. Not only does he, in frequent expression, reveal his underlying religious love, but he does it with the peculiar glow and richness of an old man's religious feeling. He suffuses with it his entire argument.

How it comforts one in life to think that, while many of the men we meet with may be crusted over with worldliness, hard in manner, repellent in feeling, yet could we only break through the crust, overcome the conventional habit, see the real life that lies beneath—the life that they express to God in the confidences of prayer—we should often see a tenderness and a fervour that we do not suspect, and of which they have not yet learned not to be ashamed. Christ is precious to more than we know.

It may be enough to say, concerning the somewhat intricate course of the apostle's thought here,

that he is setting forth the great value of realized Christianity as a source of strength and comfort and hope in the trials of human life.

Speaking to Christian men, he says: You have had experience of this; you have tasted that the Lord Jesus Christ is gracious; you have come into vital connection with Him, and know the practical blessedness of so doing; you have become living stones and ministering priests in the glorious temple of spiritual Christian life; of which temple Christ is the divinely-appointed basis, "the foundation-stone laid by God in Zion, a chief corner-stone, elect, precious," upon which all may safely build their spiritual life; for he who trusts shall be justified in his trust; he shall never be ashamed of having rested upon Christ the vital faith and hope and inspiration of his life. To you who have so believed on Him He is a precious Christ.

There are others who do not come to Him, who are disobedient and unbelieving. To them, according to the great law of spiritual things which makes good refused injurious in proportion to its goodness, He is the opposite of this, "a stone of stumbling, a rock of offence," the means of their greater condemnation, of their more utter moral perdition; for no guilt is so great as to rebel against the light, no sin is so demoralizing as to refuse goodness and love, no perdition is so inevitable as to turn away from the great salvation.

But to you who do come to Him and rest upon



Him, He is an eternal salvation and joy. "He is precious." So that what the Christ is to us depends not merely upon what He is in Himself, but upon the relations to Him that we may personally establish, upon our appropriation of Him by faith.

"He is precious." We need not disturb the word, although philologically it is not perhaps the most exact translation possible. A stricter rendering would be, "Unto you who believe is the honour." So far from making you ashamed, trust in Him will be your highest honour; for through your trust in Him you will attain to all that constitutes the salvation of a man, the noblest life here and everlasting glory hereafter. So that the idea is substantially the same.

We get then a practical or experimental test of the value of the Christ. Is He the true Christ? Theology applies its tests, and shows how congruous with our highest and divinest ideas His character and doctrine are. History applies its tests, and demonstrates His supernatural works. Moral philosophy applies its tests, and shows how perfect and transcendent His moral system is.

Leaving these for their proper time and place of demonstration, we restrict ourselves now to the experimental test.

What is the estimate of Christ which they form who have tried Him? who have submitted their minds to His ideas, their hearts to His claims, their lives to His control?

Is the dictum of Peter concerning the value of Christ justified when we apply it to the men and women who make trial of Him now? In other words—Is there anything in the Christ that we can specify that is of such personal practical value to our human life, that in speaking of Him we should be constrained to say “he is precious”?

Perhaps general conceptions may help us a step or two.

The fundamental idea is value. In the commercial sense of the term, a precious thing is a priceful thing, a thing which fetches a price. But what constitutes value? Not only intrinsic qualities, but also peculiarities of circumstance: three things chiefly.

(1) *Rarity*. Some things depend for their value on mere rareness. Intrinsically worthless, great prices will be given for them because they are unique or rare. In such cases, we should scarcely care to possess if everybody else possessed also.

(2) *Beauty*. A diamond, a picture, or a statue. And yet even in beautiful things rarity is an essential element of value. The dewdrop, the flower, the tree, infinitely transcend in beauty any work of art. A man who gives a thousand pounds for a picture gratifies the sentiment of possession as well as the sentiment of beauty.

(3) *Serviceableness*. We give large prices for things that minister to our necessities or comforts.

Perhaps the conception of preciousness demands

all these three qualities in combination,—rarity, beauty, and serviceableness.

Persons are precious to us when they greatly serve us, greatly excite our affection, greatly satisfy our human yearnings; when their excellences command our admiration, when their love satisfies our affections, when their life enriches and blesses our life.

It is not, again, mere serviceableness that makes my friend precious to me; it is rarity and moral beauty as well. A workman, because of his rare fidelity and skill, may be valuable, but only in the sense in which gold is valuable. To constitute the preciousness of friendship personal affections must come in. My friend is precious to me because of our mutual esteem, our distinctive trustful love, because of his serviceableness, because of his moral excellences, because of his love.

The supreme preciousness of a friend—that which constitutes the difference between him and a mere servant or acquaintance—is his affection, the love in him that answers love in me. In persons love is the supreme element of preciousness, the charm of all beauty, the inspiration of all service. Love constrains sacrifices—we “lay down our life for our friend.” Love binds the mother to the bed of her sick child, and makes her divinely blind to all his deformities. Love endears the lover, so that he idealizes common qualities into peerless perfections; and in a few weeks or days his passion dominates even life-long household affections; for love has a

rare faculty for glorifying its object, and enshrining common pebbles as gems of the purest water.

Apply these suggestions of preciousness to the Christ: the rareness, the moral beauty, the incalculable serviceableness, the Divine, ineffable love. All the qualities that constitute preciousness are in Him, in a degree of excellence that imagination cannot overcolour, that even love cannot exaggerate. In other attachments we may estimate inordinately and love unworthily: the most transcendent estimate and affection confessedly fall short of the intrinsic worth of the Christ.

In respect of *rarity*, He is the only Saviour of men; the "one Mediator between God and man;" the only hope of sinful souls; the only joy of spiritual hearts. He only has words of eternal life.

In respect of *beauty*, He is the perfection of all moral excellence. In *character* He is ideally good, pure, devout, benevolent, loving. His unique perfection has won the worship of the world. His *work*, as the Redeemer of men, realizes our very loftiest conceptions—first, of moral philosophy; next, of spiritual holiness; next, of self-sacrificing love. Emphatically and supremely is He "the power of God and the wisdom of God." The moral influences of His cross are the mightiest moral forces of the world. There is no aspect or influence of God Himself that exerts such moral power over the hearts of men as Christ's redeeming sacrifice. "The Lamb is in the midst of the throne." Christ is "the express

image of God ;" the human embodiment of all that is excellent in God ; in character as holy, in work as perfect, as the Father Himself. All that He was, all that He did to redeem men, approves itself to our highest conceptions, to our noblest moral conscience. He inspires men with an admiration that is rapturous worship. If the moral judgment of men could detect either a flaw in His character, or an imperfection in his redeeming work, He would be less precious in our estimation. Both have stood the test, not only of hostile criticism, but of loving and poring admiration for eighteen centuries ; and at the present moment He is the supreme ideal of moral perfection, the greatest practical moral power of the world.

In respect of *serviceableness*, of personal beneficial relations to men, as their Redeemer from sin, His preciousness transcends all our words or thoughts. He is God's "unspeakable gift." This is the form of the apostle's thought. He speaks of the experimental value of the Christ—His preciousness to those who have practically come to Him as the living foundation-stone ; through whose vitalizing properties they have been quickened into living stones of the spiritual Christian temple.

It is not easy to specify elements of practical value in Him by whom our entire redemption is wrought, whose glory transcends all our powers of exact thought.

1. We might apply a comparative test ; and put the preciousness of Christ into comparison with all

other possessions of our human life. How does our practical judgment estimate Him? How does our instinctive feeling regard Him? Or we might subject Him to a comparative estimate with other good men; His character with that of all other saints; His teaching with that of all other prophets; His redeeming work with all other schemes or efforts for human improvement. How instantly and instinctively we give him the transcendency.

He is the one perfect Man of the world's history, the one ideal pattern of piety and virtue. He is the one adequate and infallible teacher of the thought and heart of God; the one authoritative revealer of life and immortality. He is the one efficient Saviour from sin; the only sacrifice for sin; the only moral power to transform men's hearts and lives. When "the world, by its wisdom, knew not God;" when everywhere it was confessed that "the blood of bulls and of goats could not take away sin;" when all human goodness failed, and the most strenuous endeavours to keep God's perfect law, by even the most righteous and resolute of Hebrew religionists, ended in the wild shriek of despair, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" He came as our Redeemer. By the profound philosophy of His atonement; by the perfect holiness of His character; by the transcendent love of His death on the cross, as the sacrifice for our sins, He showed to men how they might be just with God, and realize the life of God.

Hence the love and gratitude which in saved men become a worship. For His sake those who have trusted in Him "count all things but dross;" they lavish upon Him the strongest and noblest affections of their nature; they subordinate to Him the dearest interests of their lives; they "count not their lives dear to them;" they serve and worship Him with a love that is stronger than the love of wife or child, even of life itself. In every Christian land there are myriads of men and women who would lay down their lives for His sake; who vindicate their discipleship by His own high test—"He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me."

2. Our estimates are largely influenced by the judgments of others. Let us think then of the estimate put upon Christ's character and work by other moral beings.

Is it not significant of His excellence that he attracts the most readily and attaches the most profoundly the holiest and noblest natures? Men of purest heart and clearest moral vision instinctively seek Him, and do homage to Him. The noblest intellects, the greatest natures in all Christian lands, have been among His disciples. Even when the intellect has recoiled from the mystery of His supernatural claims, the moral feeling has done homage to His incomparable goodness: that stands confessed alike by friend and foe.

Christ is never rejected because His moral teaching is false, His moral character defective, His moral

inspirations corrupting. Testimonies to His peerless perfection have been won from almost every prophet of infidelity—the most ardent from the latest.\*

So far as the estimates of other moral beings are indicated to us, they give Him the same transcendency. The angels of God are commanded to “worship him,” and are represented as learning from the great principles and teachings embodied in His Church “the manifold wisdom of God.” The eternal Father Himself bears testimony: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” “Therefore my Father loveth me because I lay down my life for the sheep.” Of the spiritual temple of which believers are the living stones, He is “the chief corner-stone, laid by God, elect, precious.” When we believe on the name of the only begotten Son of God, we “work the work of God.”

Not we only, therefore, deem Christ precious, but the greatest moral natures that we know—the most saintly among men, those who have taught the world its highest truths, and as confessors and martyrs set it the noblest examples of moral heroism; the perfect moral beings of other worlds; and the infinitely holy Father. He has presented to us in the Christ the perfect image of His own moral glory, and has identified with the work of Christ the greatest issues of His government. He has “given him a name that is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue

\* John Stuart Mill’s “Autobiography.”



confess that he is God, to the glory of God the Father."

Hence it is only congruous with all this that in the final visions of the Apocalypse we see every crown cast at His feet, and hear every harp attuned to His praise. The new song of their rapturous and supreme worship is "Worthy is the Lamb." It is therefore no mere selfish estimate of interested men that deems Christ precious, it is the moral judgment of all the good, on earth and in heaven.

3. The conclusive appeal, however, is to the conscious experience of our own religious souls: "If so be we have tasted that the Lord is gracious." It is not in external proofs and demonstrations of worthiness so much as in personal Christian experiences, that we find our chief grounds for a high estimate of Christ.

This is the ground upon which myriads of religious men, ignorant men, feeble men, men whose knowledge is limited, whose theology is confused, whose reason is easily baffled, who are able neither to defend their Christianity, nor theoretically to understand it, justly trust in Him. They have personally come to Christ; they have rested upon Him the hope, and joy, and life of their souls; they have realized the forgiveness of His love, the tenderness of his sympathy, the boundlessness of His grace; He has consciously quickened the life and the love of their souls; they "know that they have passed from death unto life," that "whereas once

they were blind, now they see;" they cannot mistake the new life that has been wrought within them, nor the practical power upon it of the thoughts, the life, and the love of the Christ. His Divine presence witnesses in their souls. In some mystic way He is their daily Saviour, and Sanctifier, and Comforter. Other teachers they may have—Paul or John—to whom they listen, and whom they reverence; but Jesus they commune with and worship. He is their personal, ever-present Friend; they listen to His gracious voice, feel His healing touch, commune with Him at His table, stay themselves upon Him in sorrow, and commit their souls to Him in death: and He is precious to them—ay, precious as life itself. Question them, reason with them, array proof against them, nothing is more easy than to baffle them; but you cannot shake their trust, or make them ashamed of it. They "know in whom they have believed." They can give you no answer, but sooner than forsake their precious Christ they would die.

I. Is not Christ precious to us when we grope and stumble at the mystery of God, when we feel that "the gods of the heathen are no gods"? That scientific atheism leaves the greatest problems of the universe unsolved, the deepest yearnings of the spiritual soul unsatisfied, half our nature unaccounted for? When we cannot by any searching of our own find out God; when a thousand possibilities of ignorance and superstition torment us with vague

and nameless fears; what a marvellous revelation of light and power of assurance it is when Jesus Christ puts before us His great teaching of God; when, with the strong confidence, and in the quiet ways of perfect knowledge, He tells us of the Father; when He teaches us His great distinctive formula of recognition, "Your Father who is in heaven," which like a refrain fills every teaching, from the Sermon on the Mount to the discourse on "the night in which he was betrayed." "No man hath seen God at any time: the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him;" and His great revelation of Him is of Divine and tender Fatherhood.

Just think of the conceptions of God under which men have lived. From Osiris to Ashtaroth, from Baal to Buddha, from Zeus to an African fetish—these the greatest conceptions, the most potent moral influences of human lives! Of necessity men cannot rise higher than their notions of their deity. Every nation in its practical moral character is a reflection of its divinity. It embodies in that all that is highest and purest in its conception, and tries to be like it. Think then of the moral revelation to men of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; the embodiment of all that is highest and noblest in purity, righteousness, and love. Upon the conceptions of God which Jesus Christ has taught us, our religious life rests. These ideas are the practical inspirations of what we are and do. In the sore feeling

of our rebelliousness and guilt we go to Him, as the prodigal to his father, to ask the generous forgiveness of His fatherly love. In the helplessness of our need we cast ourselves upon the care of Him who clothes the lily and feeds the raven. In our weak struggles against temptation and sorrow we go to Him who is pitiful and full of compassion, who "knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are but dust." We take all our highest conceptions of excellence, we contemplate them in the light of the only begotten Son, the unspeakable gift of the Father's holiness and love, and we call the conception God. Whether true or not, it is the greatest, the most inspiring, the most satisfying thought ever presented to men; the highest, purest, most endearing conception of a Deity that the world has known. Our religious imagination even asks no more; it is satisfied with the God that Jesus Christ reveals. Men's quest after the true God is ended. All that is needful is that we should bring our hearts to receive Him and rest in Him. His perfectness, His love, His care, His patience, His nearness, His fellowship, His life, are all that the religious heart can desire.

II. How precious the Christ is when the sense of sin is quickened within us, when we awaken to the grave culpability of its guilt, when we realize its essential antagonism to the Divine holiness, its transgression of God's inviolable law, the imperative necessity of its dread penalty of death!

No feeling in human hearts is more instinctive,

mysterious, or ineradicable than the feeling of sin. What is it? It is altogether different from other human regrets. It is not the sorrow produced by mistake, by misfortune, by helplessness, by destiny. More pungent than either, it is a feeling of culpability, of shame, of remorse, of self-chosen self-incurred evil. In every age men have felt it. Never yet has man been found kneeling before his God in the pure consciousness of primitive innocence. Wherever men are found, in some way or other they indicate their consciousness, not merely of imperfection, but of sin—wrong doing. In every religious system this has had the most prominent place. Every religious service takes some expiatory form. A thousand altars have piled their sacrifices under its promptings; it has given birth to a thousand forms of priestcraft; it finds expression in manifold forms of penance and of prayer. The religious system that did not recognize and provide for it would be utterly unsuited for humanity: man has no feeling so strong and universal. Christianity does not produce it, it presupposes and provides for it. The feeling anticipates Christianity, and extends far beyond it; philosophers and moralists of all ages and countries lament over it. How men wail and struggle because of it! “Wherewithal shall I appear before God? how shall I atone for the sin of my soul?”

What human philosophy has furnished any solution of this great problem of sin? If there be no God, if I have no spiritual soul, if I live under no

religious responsibility, this is surely the most gratuitous and inexplicable of all human feelings. If every capacity has its provision, if every faculty has its function, if there is any truth in the doctrine of final causes, then surely this indisputable feeling of sin is the strongest of all presumptive arguments for the reality of our religious nature, for the truth of the supernatural, for the validity of the salvation of Christ.

How is this feeling of sin to be dealt with? It can neither be denied nor disregarded.

Who that looks in the face all the principles of the Divine government, and all the facts of its history, can satisfy himself with vague hopes of good-natured mercy on God's part. As well might the culprit calculate upon the sentiment of benevolence in an upright judge. Who could satisfy even his own conscience with a forgiveness that should rest upon no recognized principle of rectitude, but only upon an arbitrary feeling? Holy principles violated, the holy law broken, and no recognized reparation of them! Penalty remitted by a mere volition, its threatening arbitrarily reversed!

The moral sense, the conscience within me, that which makes me a moral being, demands atonement for sin as much as my safety does. Mere security is no moral satisfaction to a righteous being. I could not be happy in the salvation of Christ if I were saved as a man is saved who breaks prison, or to whom the prison doors are illicitly opened; if I were saved at the cost of a single righteous principle.

How unspeakably precious then the Christ when He is "set forth as a propitiation for sin,"—"who himself bare our sin in his own body on the tree." "He hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." How all that is within me leaps towards such a Redeemer! It is a provision for my forgiveness, in which both heart and conscience can rest. God is "a just God, and yet the justifier of the ungodly." It is not the Divine nature only that demands atonement for sin: our human nature demands it fully as much.

Than the principle of vicarious sacrifice, there is, I am bold to say, none that is more true to the constitution of our nature and to the experience of human life, none that is more satisfactory to the moral conscience, or more in harmony with the rectitude of love.

And this is the preciousness of the Christ: "He loved me, and gave himself for me." True or not true, it is, to say the least, a theory of forgiveness, the most perfect and satisfactory to all the feelings of our moral nature.

III. How precious again is the Christ in our struggle with practical evil, as we fight with lusts, resist temptation, overcome worldliness, subdue selfishness, or mourn over failures and falls! How assuring and helpful His perfect life, His promised grace, His ready and tender sympathy! We think of His sinless obedience, His resistance to temptation, His

patience under wrong, His peerless life of duty and self-sacrifice. Whatever our human nature may actually be, *that* is what it is capable of becoming. We may attain to that "image of the heavenly," we may "put on Christ." "We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

And to this moral perfection He is helping us. In unspeakable gentleness, patience, and grace He comes to us, stoops to our low estate, that He may lift us to His perfection. If careless, He entreats us; if impenitent, He weeps over us if despondent, He assures us; if "Satan desires to have us," He prays for us; if in our conscious vileness we fall at His feet, He stoops in tenderest pity to lift us up. He does not leave us offended when we refuse Him; His patience does not weary because of our obstinacy, selfishness, or weakness; He enters into merciful relations with us; He teaches us, ministers to us, encourages us.

But for Him we should have despaired in our degradation and helplessness; in Him we become "new creatures," and are "meetening for the inheritance of the saints in light;" through Him we are conquering evil, attaining to strength in good; in every moral conflict we are "more than conquerors through him who hath loved us."

Again we say, this conception of Him, true or not, is practically the greatest moral force that we feel. Therefore He is precious to us, because He enables the moral redemption of our soul. We love



none as we love those who give us our greatest conceptions, our highest inspirations, our noblest hopes of life. The thought of His helpful love works like a spell upon our hearts and energies; no power moves us as it does. "The love of Christ constrains us." Only it can overcome the evil of my heart and life. And because He thus inspires me and redeems me from evil He is precious. "I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me." "I live; nay, not I, it is Christ who liveth in me."

IV. How precious the Christ is in times of great sorrow; when we stand by open graves, and "refuse to be comforted because those whom we love are not." How He comes to us, as He came "from beyond Jordan to Bethany." How He talks with us about "the resurrection and the life." How He weeps with us in the silence of ineffable sympathy. How He "groans in spirit," and weeps wondrous tears of divinest love over the grave of our dead. What unspeakable meaning there is in the assurance, "He can be touched with the feeling of our infirmity." What ineffable comfort in the tenderness of His love: it can console when the love of the tenderest friend is powerless.

V. And how precious He is in our own mortal conflict; when "the shadow feared of man" falls upon ourselves; when our last hour of mortal life has come, and "heart and flesh fail;" when human love falls away from us, and its hands unclasp, and we hear its

receding voices as we go forward alone into the dark valley. "Into his hands we commit our spirit;" "His rod and staff comfort us;" His hand clasps ours; He leads us through the darkness into the eternal light and life. "When thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death, thou didst open the kingdom of heaven to all believers." "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there may my servant be also." His presence makes heaven the Father's house that He describes it to be.

How wonderful these relations to us of the Christ! He touches us at the most vital points of our being, succours us in our most vital interests. These are the very highest thoughts, the greatest experiences, the mightiest forces of human life. Hardly can conceptions be false which in congruity and power so greatly transcend all admitted truths. Should they be demonstrated false, our human life would be deprived of its noblest moral ideas, its mightiest moral forces.

What then should be our acknowledgments to this Christ? To the human friend who could so minister to us, our love would have no measure. Were it a new revelation to us it would be a wonder and a rapture, words would be too poor for the expression of our sense of His preciousness.

Clearly every one of us is vitally affected by these assumptions and claims. With the Christ "we have

to do ;” upon our reception of Him our entire life and destiny must depend. It is not a mere teaching that we accept or reject, it is a life. “ How can we escape if we neglect so great salvation ? ” Without Him as our strength and Redeemer, how can we realize the purity, the religiousness, the strength, the comfort, the nobility of a true moral life ? How meagre and inferior every life that is lived without Him ! How rich and noble every life that He inspires !

It is therefore for every one of us a practical question — Have we received the Christ into our own hearts ? Is He practically potent and precious in our daily lives ? Does He inspire, and sanctify, and comfort us in daily experiences ? Can we say of Him, “ Christ, who is our life ” — “ The Lord Jesus Christ, who is our hope ” ? Were we suddenly called to stand before God, should we be “ found in him ” ?

It is not a question of notions or beliefs about Christ, but of living experience of Him, practical appropriation of the grace that He brings, practical quickening by the life that He is.

They who do not so receive Him, whatever they may believe about Him, “ refuse him and are disobedient.” To them therefore He becomes “ a stone of stumbling, a rock of offence.” For to the guilt and misery of transgression they add the condemnation of refusing the Redeemer from sin ; they “ rebel against the light,” “ love darkness rather than light,” refuse the mercy proffered them.

Everything therefore turns upon your individually receiving Christ, upon your religious experience of Christ, linking your life to His life, rooting yourself in Him, as the branch is in the vine. Until you have this experience of Him, you cannot in the very nature of things know how precious He is, how great, and gracious, and loving a Saviour He is; how "plenteous" His redemption, how freely He forgives the sinful, how gently He speaks to the penitent, how wisely He helps us in our struggles, how patiently He restores us in our falls, how tenderly He comforts us in our sorrows, how radiant with immortal hope He makes our mortal life.

Do you then so trust in the Christ? Have you so received His atonement? Have you any experimental understanding of the things concerning which I have spoken? Is Christ precious to you above all things else—above pleasure, and wealth, and sin, and friends, and life itself? Is He nearest to you in thought, and dearest in affection, the supreme good and joy of your life?

And in your practical estimates of things, is that desired by you most eagerly, which brings you the nearest to Him,—the converse, the prayers, the hymns, the preaching, the Church, the ordinances? Does that which makes you know the most of Him attract and delight you most?

God grant to us all that we may know more and more of His preciousness, that more and more we may "taste that he is gracious," that more and more our "life may be hid with Christ in God."

May He be precious to you, as He was to prophets and apostles, to saints and martyrs; as He was to saintly men whom you yourselves have known—it may be to the father who first taught you His name, to the mother from whose lips you learnt your first prayer to Him—the “Gentle Jesus, meek and mild.” May your father’s Saviour be your Saviour, your mother’s joy in Christ fill your heart; may “Christ dwell in your hearts by faith; that being rooted and grounded in love, you may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, that passeth knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fulness of God.”



IV.

The Healing Virtue of the Christ.

*If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole:—*

MATT. ix 21.



#### IV.

THIS incident reminds us of the Old Testament miracle which smote Uzzah for irreverently touching the ark; and it illustrates the broad contrasts between the miracles of the old economy and those of the new—the stern retributive feeling of the former, the gracious restorative purpose of the latter,—each being congruous with the character of the dispensation to which it belongs.

It is singular, too, that the Old Testament miracle of vengeance has so frequently its New Testament analogue of mercy—the confusion of tongues at Babel, and the gift of tongues at Pentecost; the turning of water into blood in Egypt, and the turning of water into wine at Cana; the demon taking possession of Saul, and the demons cast out by our Lord; the infliction of leprosy upon Miriam and Gehazi, and the cleansing of lepers by Christ. In no single instance are these characteristics reversed: as if in this way also the Son of man would demonstrate how completely the retributive sternness of the dis-

pensation of law was superseded by the restorative mercy of the dispensation of grace.

In the irreverence or thoughtlessness of the moment, Uzzah put forth his hand to steady the ark: his presumption was punished by instant death. In grossest ignorance and superstition, the woman thought that by touching Christ's garment she could be healed: her faith is rewarded by an instant cure.

We shall read these histories very superficially if we merely note the severity of the one issue and the graciousness of the other. Great principles underlie them. While in both the external act was but a touch, the difference of internal significance was very great.

Uzzah's touch was an act of disobedience to an express command of a law purposely set forth as most exacting and uncompromising in its requirements. "If so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned or thrust through with a dart." The first lesson that men need, without which salvation will be neither sought nor appreciated, is the inviolable sacredness of law. "The word spoken by Moses was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward." The woman's touch was an ignorant and superstitious appeal to the mercifulness of Christ; and it instantly elicited it. The one was a touch of thoughtless presumption, the other a touch of ignorant faith; the one brought human support to God's ark, the other sought healing of Christ's virtue; the

one lifted his hand in the self-satisfied spirit of human sufficiency, the other put forth hers in the humility of conscious need; the one disparaged the sanctity of law, the other magnified the sufficiency of grace; the one exemplifies the peril of the least sin, the other the power of the least faith.

In germ and suggestion they discriminate the two great classes of religious character into which through all ages men have been divided—from the Pharisee and the Publican of our Lord's day to the Ritualist and the Evangelical of our own. We may serve God in the proud self-satisfied spirit of the elder brother, or in the penitent shame and conscious unworthiness of the prodigal. He will sternly repel our proud pretension and support, He will graciously accept our lowly humility, and satisfy our trembling need.

We therefore interpret this miracle of the healing of the woman, as a parable of our spiritual healing by Christ. All our Lord's miracles, indeed, have a parabolical significance: they are not only miracles of great mercy, they are parables of great truths, designed to teach or suggest spiritual lessons and processes. We make a very poor use of them when we merely put them among the evidences of His mission, or admire them as proofs of His benevolence.

It is a miracle of healing which may fairly suggest to us some important laws and processes of spiritual healing.

Upon one or two preliminary analogies I will touch but lightly.

I. The virulent disease of the woman may typify the moral disorder and disability into which human nature has fallen.

Disease is one of the commonest metaphors for the representation of sin. Apart from all theories concerning the origin or mystery of sin, it is a vivid suggestion of the derangement, the suffering, the disability, which, as a matter of fact, sin works in our moral nature. Just as the disease of this woman rendered her ceremonially unclean, excluded her from services of worship and from the ordinary intercourse of friendship, in addition to the physical weakness and disability which it caused, thereby justifying our Lord's designation of it as "a plague;" so the moral malady of our souls not only disables a life of goodness, taints our moral feeling, and enfeebles the faculties of the soul, but it disqualifies us for communion with God, and for the highest intercourse of social life. The plague of a sinful soul morally depresses, debases, and poisons all in us that is highest and best, and cuts us off from affinity, sympathy, and fellowship with all pure beings.

II. The conscious necessity and helplessness which brought the woman to Christ, after trial of many physicians, presents another very obvious analogy to human feeling and conduct under the sense of sin.

She was painfully conscious of her physical dis-

order; she had long been its victim; it had emaciated her frame, and exhausted her resources.

In spiritual disorders, however, consciousness is often faint and dubious. A fatal characteristic of moral disease is its growing insensibility. If we realized spiritual maladies as vividly as we realize those that are physical, we should eagerly seek for healing. And yet no one is wholly unconscious of moral disorder. "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth together in pain." All that is most radical and noble in our nature feels the disorder and abasement of sin, and craves deliverance: not always intelligently; for often it is but a vague sense of want, and wrong, and misery. We cry "out of the depths," but we hardly know for what or to whom.

We, like the woman, try various expedients for relief. We, too, "seek healing of many physicians;" or, as with something like irony Mark puts it, "She suffered many things of many physicians, and spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse." In her vain pursuit of health she became a pauper; she found the costly, tedious, and painful remedies of the physicians worthless; and when all other expedients failed, and only because they failed, she sought healing from the Christ.

This suggests the expedients for remedying the moral disorders of the soul that have abounded in all ages of human history. Men spend their money for that which is not medicine, they labour for that which brings no cure.

Sometimes we foolishly attempt to repress the mere symptoms of disorder, or simply to palliate them; or we have recourse to inappropriate or inefficacious remedies—penance, amended habit, sedulous activities, church services, almsgiving, acts of devotion—which, when thus wrongly applied, so far from curing moral disease, only make it worse: they are “physicians of no value.”

If anything in human experience is demonstrated, it is that no external remedies can cure diseased souls. You may sedulously seek to reform the habits of your life; to pacify conscience by religious purposes; to assuage spiritual alarms by vague hopes of good-natured mercy in God. And thus you may “waste your substance,” your thought, your feeling, your strength, in mistaken ways of recovery, and only be made worse.

Only by coming to the great Healer, who can give newness of life, only by His forgiveness and quickening can you be really cured. And we come to Him only after reiterated experiment has demonstrated the worthlessness of all other remedies; just as the prodigal was driven to the plenty of his father’s house by the famine of the far country—the insufficiency of the hard husks of pleasure, of the hollow friendships of sin, of the restlessness of disappointed affection, of the breaking of the cisterns so laboriously hewn.

This leads to the next analogy, upon which I wish more especially to dwell.

III. The way in which the woman sought and obtained healing from our Lord suggests in a somewhat striking way certain conditions of our spiritual cure.

We do not know what brought her into contact with Christ ; whether, like Bartimæus, she was accidentally where He was, or whether she had come from a long distance to seek Him.

The possibility of appealing to Christ is the essential thing. But yet how often such possibilities are casual, and, as we say, accidental in life. How many of the chief blessings of our life are made possible by fortuitous circumstances ! Whether we actually realize these blessings or not depends upon our discernment, and willingness, and aptitude at the moment. Jesus of Nazareth might have passed by in vain if Bartimæus had not been full of the quick urgency of need ; the woman might have remained unhealed if her necessity had not impelled her to follow in the crowd and touch Christ. . Men miss half the good of life because they do not discern, or because they neglect, opportunity — moments of favourable circumstance, conditions of softened feeling, urgencies of special appeal. How often the kingdom of God comes near to us, and we neglect to enter it.

If she came from far purposely to seek Christ, what a suggestion it is of His healing power and grace, and especially as illustrated by her method of seeking contact with Him ! It was not one of

Christ's formal and purposed miracles. He did not prepare to heal, as in the case of the daughter of Jairus. It was the unconscious influence of His merciful character that drew the woman to Him ; it was the involuntary virtue of His saving power that healed her. It is one thing to minister grace to men by formal service, it is another and a higher thing to minister grace by our simple being, our character, our existence :—the man so consecrated, so holy, and so gracious, that wherever he is he exercises moral power, men are better for being in his presence, for living in the atmosphere with which he surrounds himself. Some men *are* a means of grace.

The notions which the woman entertained of Christ were very confused. She was timid and shrinking—a woman probably of a sensitive temperament, her nervous system possibly injuriously affected by her disease ; but only ignorance and superstition could have suggested the idea of a furtive touch of our Lord's garments.

It was the early period of His ministry. Even the notions concerning Him entertained by the twelve were vague and erroneous. The fame of His miracle-working was beginning to be noised abroad, and probably induced the woman to seek Him. One cannot imagine her reasoning much about Him ; and her impressions and notions would not be very distinct. Possibly she thought of Him as performing magical cures that in His very person occult power



inherited which her touch might liberate, that influence as from an electric battery would flow into all who established communication with Him.

No doubt when she saw Him she would be emboldened by the benignity and gentleness of His character,—the Divine compassion that beamed in every look, that found utterance in every word, that gave its ineffable tenderness and greatness to His teaching.

Was she not attracted by that magnetism of indescribable grace and sympathy which always drew to Christ the wretched and the sinful? Why, they themselves could scarcely have told. How few of us can tell what it is in Christ that so attracts and constrains us. It is not because we have reasoned out doctrinal conclusions concerning Him. It is His wonderful personality that fascinates and wins us. The necessities of our souls constrain us to seek Him. His pitying love emboldens us. We pray to Him, and seek to touch Him. We put in Him an implicit and often very ignorant trust, for which we could give no definite reasons. We love Him, we trust Him, we are healed by Him, and then we are instructed concerning Him. His words of Divine grace and truth elicit responsive yearnings in all truth-loving souls. "Our hearts burn within us." There are in Him a truth, a purity, and a pity, so Divine, that sinful, needy souls cling to His feet, they know not why.

She feels her whole heart drawn out towards Him.

She dares not stop Him to appeal to Him, or even to put herself in His way. The rich Jairus is hastening Him to his house "ere his child die." Therefore she will creep behind Him through the crowd, and touch the hem of His garment. So the flowers turn to the sun, so the needle trembles to the pole.

And so myriads of sinful ignorant souls that know nothing of either theology or evidence come to Christ and are saved.

Christ is not so unconscious of her touch as she imagines. Nor is He in such haste as she supposes, fearing lest death should anticipate his arrival at the house of Jairus. Therefore He permits Himself, the importunity of Jairus notwithstanding, to be arrested by her touch. He heals her malady and instructs her faith.

Thus to be detained, is really to accomplish His high mission. Many of His greatest words were spoken, His mightiest works done, on such wayside occasions. The very delay indeed gave emphasis and conclusiveness to the miracle wrought in the house of Jairus.

The two characteristic things in her approach to Christ were her faith, and the way in which she gave expression to it.

1. Her *faith*—the faith that was our Lord's common requirement in His miracles of healing.

From this instance as from others it is certain that clear intellectual apprehension was not essential to

it. He demanded simple confidence in His power to heal; and that probably because these miracles of healing were intended to be spiritual parables; therefore they conformed to spiritual laws. The hand of faith must touch the hem of Christ's garment, or no healing virtue will go forth of Him.

The faith that seeks Christ may express itself in different ways, and with different degrees of intelligence. In the records of this single chapter we have some three or four varieties of it. There is the faith of the palsied man, so impetuous that it permits no obstacles to deter it: it breaks through the covering of the court to get to the great Healer. There is the faith of the two blind men, so clamorous that it cannot be silenced in its loud entreaty. While the faith of the woman is so timid and furtive, that so far from breaking through a roof, or crying by the wayside, she does not even venture to put herself in Christ's path, but creeps behind Him in the crowd. There is, again, the faith of Jairus, a man in authority, a ruler of the Jews, who comes to our Lord with a due sense of his own social importance, but clearly agitated by secret fears. His faith seems much stronger than it is. The woman makes no claim to social distinction, she creeps timidly behind Christ in a crowd, but really she is full of almost preposterous confidence. Her faith is much stronger than it seems.

We often see this—people of weak faith trying to appear very bold, and people of strong faith

timidly shrinking from all manifestation of it ; faith full of an anxiety that it would fain conceal, and faith full of a reserve that it cannot overcome.

The special encouragement of this woman's healing is that her faith *was* so ignorant and so superstitious.

And her *feeling* was as unworthy as her *notion*. She thought nothing about what was due to the Healer—the renown that her cure would bring Him, the service that gratitude might demand. She did not purpose so much as to express her thanks. She would steal her cure, be secretly grateful, but neither the people nor the Christ should know anything about it.

Is it not the simple working of the selfishness which misery so often produces? We seek the Christ, not for His sake but for our own; because we are starved upon the husks of the far country; because we can obtain healing of no other physicians; because the burden of guilt, the debasement of sin, and the ache of our spiritual emptiness, become intolerable. “We are carnal, sold under sin.” We are chained to a “body of death;” our present misery overwhelms us, the perdition that impends terrifies us; and we seek Christ that we may be saved, that through Him we may attain to the forgiveness of sin, the powers of a new life, and all the rich blessings of a Father's love.

Understanding, grateful love, come after He has healed us, not before. We “love much because we are forgiven much.” Love to Christ as the great

motive of life supersedes love to self as a motive only when we "consider how great things he hath done for us."

It is the marvellous grace of Christ that He accepts us with all this ignorance and selfishness; accepts us just as we are, that He may make us better, teach us His love, inspire us with gratitude for it by giving us experiences of it. When our hearts are true He bears with our wrong notions. Even the ignorance and selfishness of the woman did not neutralize the virtue of her simple faith. And this is the special lesson of her example.

It was not, of course, through her superstitious touch that she was healed, but through the faith that prompted the touch; a faith full of defects,—ignorantly conceived, secretly cherished, furtively put forth, openly exposed, humbly confessed as if it had been a sin—but yet because a true faith, graciously accepted, rewarded, and perfected.

I may be very ignorant of the philosophy of spiritual healing, I may not understand how or why sin should be pardoned, and a new spiritual life imparted through the atonement of Christ. No matter, so long as I practically believe that it is so. Comparatively few could give any intelligent account of the atonement, in its profound relations to the Divine government on the one hand, and to the hearts of sinful men on the other. No one indeed, however learned or able, can fully comprehend these. It is enough for our salvation if we receive God's

testimony concerning His Son, and practically trust in Him as the "propitiation" which God has "set forth."

It is of course well to understand, it is not well to be ignorant; but it is well that if I am ignorant my ignorance does not hinder my salvation,—that a look, a touch of simple trust suffices for that.

It is not a doctrine concerning Christ that saves me, it is trust in the saving power of Christ. It is not a scientific theory of touch, it is the practical grasp of faith. The drowning man does not reason concerning the plank thrown to him, its fibre, its motion, how it came there. He simply clings to it and is saved. Salvation is not the formation of a right creed in my understanding, it is the quickening of spiritual life in my soul. And this is the virtue which the touch of faith elicits from Christ. I believe that if I but trust in Him, this "strong Son of God" can save me. I do so trust, and I am saved. The woman was healed, not by her notions, but by her touch. There can be no healing power in mere beliefs of the understanding, even about the Christ; only in touching, clinging to Christ by faith. No orthodoxy of creed or Church ritual can save a man; no mere doing things in obedience to commands; only a new life quickened by Christ through the touch of faith. The most intelligent belief has no quickening power, the most ignorant touch of faith gives life.

In this way the most ignorant find salvation in

Christ equally with the most learned. Knowledge may instruct faith, but knowledge is not faith. Whatever a man may know or do, he cannot be saved unless in practical trust he casts himself upon the "strong Son of God." However ignorant, or otherwise imperfect, no one who does so trust can perish. At the very moment of her touch, her trustful contact with Christ, the woman was healed.

Suppose she had been intelligent enough to have appraised her own act—its ignorance, its superstition, its selfishness, its cowardice,—would she have ventured to approach Christ at all? Come to the Divine Christ with the derogatory notion that He was a magician! Come to the spiritual Christ with the superstitious notion that virtue inhered in the hem of His garment! Come to the Christ of benevolent will and grace, putting forth a tremulous hand, as a child would touch an electric battery, not knowing what kind of effect will follow! Come to the Christ who gave Himself for us, to steal healing without proposing so much as to thank Him! Come to the Christ who knew all men, imagining that virtue might be elicited from Him without His knowing it! Had the woman understood all these imperfections of her faith, would she not have deemed it utterly worthless?

And yet thus many persons do reason about the imperfections of their faith. They will not venture to come to Christ until they are quite sure that their faith is intelligent and spiritual, that it will not

mistake, that it will not falter, that it is not selfish, nor presumptuous. Many a poor soul, agonizing in the consciousness of sin and yearning for healing, is kept from touching Christ by conscious defects of faith.

The woman exercised precisely the quality and degree of faith that she had—"faith as a grain of mustard seed." It was very defective, but it was true. If my faith be sincere, then, however adulterated, however feeble, let me put it forth. The exercise of it will make it stronger. If I "will do I shall know." Only touching Christ can develop it—the germ into organic life, the grain of mustard seed into a great tree. The life of my faith must flow from His life, as the life of the branches flows from the vine in which they "abide." How can the faith be either great or strong that has not touched Christ, that has not had experience of His healing power, that has not fed its feeble life with His vital strength?

When faith first touches Christ it is necessarily ignorant, feeble, and imperfect. Its ignorance can be instructed, its feebleness strengthened, its defects supplied, only by practical experience of Christ. The only possible way of developing faith is to exercise it—to prove by experience how graciously and tenderly Christ will respond to the feeblest, most timid touch.

It is the strong instinct of faith to touch Christ, and in the touch there is wondrous virtue. Touch Christ, and virtue must go forth of Him; as hundreds of the blind, the halt, and the maimed proved.



Let our timid faltering faith put its finger into the print of the nails, and its hand into the wound of His side, and it will spring up to such a sudden strength and fulness, that we shall exclaim, "My Lord and my God."

2. Her faith found expression in *her touch*. This established her practical connection with Christ; and for this the hem of His garment sufficed. An entire philosophy of things is symbolized here, all that pertains to practical means of grace. It is a parable of all the instrumentality whereby we are brought to Christ.

(1) Some instrumentality for connecting the faith of our souls with Christ we all, perhaps, require. Without it the faith even of the strongest might have difficulty in realizing Christ. Sense is the minister to the soul. We grasp Christ best when the hand of spiritual faith rests upon sensible things: only let us be sure that it is the Christ our spirits grasp, and not the mere sensible thing.

(2) The sufficient test of all means of grace is the degree in which they bring us into contact with Christ, their fitness and power of spiritual realization. Whatever brings us into vital relations with Christ is to us what the hem of the garment was to the woman. Whatever is destitute of such conducting power, whether words in teaching or ritual in worship, is worthless, sometimes worse. It is then an adequate definition of any material thing in worship that it is a means whereby my faith lays hold upon the healing power of the spiritual Christ?

Anything may be to us as the hem of the garment. *Acts of worship*; song, prayer, adoration. *Sacraments*; the confession of Christ in baptism, communion with Christ at His table. *Preaching*; *active religious service*; *the fellowship of Church life*: the thousand things to which we all have recourse to enable our faith to lay hold upon Christ.

(3) The error of the woman lay in the superstitious notion that virtue inhered in the hem of the garment. So men make the virtue of religious things to consist in their forms: they imagine that Christ is to be touched only through a particular Church, or priesthood, or sacrament, or ritual; exalting things of mere expediency into essentials, confusing means and ends, disallowing or disparaging all means of coming to Christ but their own. The woman's superstitious touch fell far below the dignity of Church, or sacrament, or ritual; and yet through it she reached Christ.

(4) The truth of her act lay in her confidence that to touch the hem of His garment would suffice to put her into vital communication with Christ. Anything will suffice for this so long as it is Christ that our faith seeks. There may be no inherent virtue in the thing, and yet it may be the ladder by which the soul climbs, the scaffolding by which the soul builds. By touching the lowest and most material, we may attain to the highest and most spiritual:—a kindly word, the pleasant feeling of a church, attractive song, the grace and eloquence of a preacher.

We cannot realize God or Christ all at once. We begin with His lowliest works to realize His highest glories. We seek His footstool, that we may climb to His throne. The knowledge of God is a process, gradual and protracted; "that is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural." It is from grace to grace, from the picture alphabet to the highest knowledge.

(5) We may not think lightly of any thing that suffices to carry to Christ the hand of ignorant, feeble faith.

What can be less formal or imposing than to touch the hem of a garment? But when it is Christ who wears it, healing virtue flows through it. What act can be more insignificant than a touch? But when it is faith that touches Christ the power of Divine life is in it. A little water sprinkled in baptism, a little broken bread and poured-out wine in the Lord's Supper, a few words spoken in worship, or prayer, or teaching:—intrinsicly, what can be less? But when these are acts and appropriations of spiritual faith, powers of life and death are in them.

That which we do may ignorantly confuse things carnal and things spiritual. We may bow at the literal name of Jesus; we may prostrate ourselves before a crucifix; we may think that to turn to the east gives special virtue to a creed or a prayer. Like Dr. Johnson, we may even do reverence when we pass a church building.

Intelligent men might wish that the act were one

of greater spiritual intelligence and congruity. Spiritual men may deplore its carnality and superstition, as very likely the disciples did those of the woman; but if it be the expression of a true heart of faith, Christ will forgive its superstition, approve its sincerity, and reward it with His blessing.

The burden of the world's condition would be intolerable if we could not believe that even amid its darkest superstitions there is many a touch of true faith.

So, if we would be healed, we must touch Christ. He alone is the true spiritual healer. "His blood cleanseth from all sin." Whatever else we may touch, virtue goes forth only of Him. It may be but the hem of His garment that we touch, the act most trivial, the feeling most ignorant and superstitious: if it be the medium through which we touch Christ, it will save us.

We possibly may feel something like contempt at this woman's ignorant superstition; as at that of many around us—the blind Romanist kissing his crucifix or repeating his paternoster; the mistaken heretic who repudiates our creed, rejects our Church, refuses our ritual. Let us take care that there is not a more genuine apprehensive faith in his ignorance than in our intelligence, in his superstition than in our complacent reasonings. Through it he may touch Christ, while we never touch Him at all. Beneath what he so superstitiously does there may be a true faith, however uninformed; a true humility,

however awkward in its expressions. And wherever these are, clothe themselves as they may, Christ will respond to their appeal, and will heal; not as approving the ignorance or superstition, but as approving the faith that they so unworthily express.

So this woman came to Christ; probably with as little spiritual intelligence as the rudest Romish peasant or Hindoo devotee; expecting virtue in the hem of a garment; so timid, that she durst not meet the Lord's eye; so ignorant, that she thinks she can derive healing and He not know it; but her heart of faith is true, and she will risk everything for her healing.

And this is precisely the spirit that Christ demands, the faith, the humility, the ingenuousness that He specially rewards.

IV. The way in which our Lord heals her is illustrative of the grace, wisdom, and affluence of His salvation. In rewarding her faith He perfects it.

1. He instantly does what she wishes—heals her disorder.

Only in this way could He religiously teach her. Had he first endeavoured to correct her notions, to remove her ignorance, superstition, and selfishness, she probably would not have heeded Him. She was full of the urgency of her disease, and until that was cured she had no thought or feeling for other things. Her approach to Christ was full of trembling fear. How could He assure her save by healing her?

Therefore He accepts her faith upon its own conditions. He does not begin with a theological lecture or a religious lesson. He cures her first and teaches her afterwards; when her heart is opened by the glad sense of recovered health and grateful obligation. "According to thy faith be it unto thee." He condescends to all her imperfections, answers the appeal of even her ignorant and selfish faith. So unspeakable in its greatness and wisdom is His pitying grace to seeking souls.

2. Having rewarded her faith, He instructs and perfects it. Through the healing of her body He seeks the healing of her soul.

In receiving from Christ, faith is the apprehensive faculty. We can receive, therefore, only according to the quality of our faith. The woman's vague ignorant faith sufficed for her physical healing; but a more intelligent and larger faith is necessary for spiritual healing. This our Lord develops. In both Jairus and the woman faith was defective. He taught and perfected both; but in different ways. Jairus feared that Christ could not heal, at least, unless He hastened before the child should die. Jairus therefore is made to wait in agonizing suspense. Christ delays with the woman until the child is actually dead. The woman fears, lest because she was insignificant she might be disregarded, or lest because she was unclean she might be repelled. She therefore has to be exposed; forced to the shame of an open acknowledgment

before the crowd. The faith of Jairus has to be set free from despondency, the faith of the woman from timidity. When discovered, even though consciously healed, she is so terrified at what she has done, that she confesses as if she had committed a crime.

Imagine her consternation when she heard his inquiry, "Who touched me?" Like the voice of God in the garden, "Adam, where art thou?" Like Elisha's challenge to Gehazi, "Whence comest thou?" it would carry dismay to her soul. Think of the obtuse misapprehension of the disciples, "Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?" No wonder that He did not deign even to notice such a suggestion.

With a truer instinct of His prescience, the woman saw His searching eye, for "he looked round to see who had done this thing." She felt that she was discovered, that the vague inquiry of His eye was but a gracious pretence to enable her acknowledgment. And "fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, she came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth."

With characteristic consideration, our Lord compels this acknowledgment only after her cure. She fears His displeasure at her presumption, perhaps lest He should recall the precious gift of healing. His purposes, however, are higher and more gracious.

His miracles were the credentials of His mission. The confession was an added testimony which would give sanction to His teaching. Jairus stood by.

How his agonized fear would take courage, as he heard this acknowledgment of healing. How one weak believer helps another. How blessings bestowed upon others encourage our own fearing souls. How the confessions of individual men help the religious life of the world. With what a flutter of wonder and hope Jairus would accompany the great Miracle-worker to his house.

But chiefly for the woman's sake He did this. Not to correct her misapprehension merely, but to lead her to higher things. His keen susceptibilities discerned her touch of faith: it was a case for spiritual healing. He gave her not only the blessing she sought, but blessing richer than she had dreamed of. She had sought merely His virtue of healing. He would teach her to find Himself; how much better He was than His gifts. What an inferior and imperfect blessing she would have carried away had only her physical malady been healed! She found Him — the giver of all gifts; and she found her own nobler self. He taught her narrow selfish desire to grow into a yearning for His great love and salvation; her ignorant furtive faith to enlarge into a spiritual life of faith; her shrinking fear to become bold in its avowals, and obligation, and love. She had thought only to creep behind Him, she finds herself at His feet; she did not intend to speak to Him, she finds herself telling Him all; she purposed returning home with an unacknowledged blessing, she becomes His open and ardent disciple. Her



soul as well as her body is healed. Thus He corrected what was defective in her, not by stern rebukes or by doctrinal lectures, but by gifts and experiences of His grace.

The feeblest faith, therefore, may take encouragement. He, the great Healer, will not repel it. He "never breaks the bruised reed nor quenches the smoking flax." He who touches Christ by the hem of His garment, will be graciously led on to clasp His feet, perhaps to "recline upon his bosom." The first trembling touch will lead on to the realization of all the fulness there is in Him.

We may not rest in an ignorant and imperfect faith, but we may not hesitate to come to Christ because it is such. Only through that which is in part can we attain to that which is perfect.

3. Having corrected the imperfections of her faith, our Lord comforts her. "Daughter, be of good comfort, thy faith hath made thee whole." Faith as instrumentally connecting her with Christ; the touch not of the garment merely, but of the Christ; not of her finger merely, but of her soul.

After the fear, the struggle, the penitence, the confession, the agony, comes the blessed word of peace, "the peace of God which passeth all understanding." The merciful Lord has no pleasure in our fear or suspense. He seeks our restful love.

4. Her own consciousness answers to the gracious assurance. "She felt in her body that she was healed." She could not mistake the sensible con-

sciousness of recovered health, the returning tide of wholesome vigorous life. So it is with the consciousness of Christ's spiritual healing, the inward evidence of the new life in Christ, the rest that follows sore conflict, the clear vision after "the scales have fallen from our eyes," the throbbing tide of life after the "death in trespasses and sins;" spiritual sympathy, and life, and joy, instead of alienation, and coldness, and fear. The cavils of scepticism are powerless against this experience — the unspeakable thrill and blessedness of the new life of God.

5. How munificent are the conditions of Christ's healing!

How *instant* it is! At the moment of her touch, "straightway" she was healed. The instant true faith touches Christ virtue is elicited. He never keeps in suspense a trusting soul, never delays the healing, even to perfect the faith. So that if I have sought and not found Him, if I have touched Him and obtained no healing, the defect is in my touch, not in His virtue. "Believe, and thou shalt be saved."

How *gracious* it is! "Without money and without price." She who had spent all her substance upon physicians, comes to the Great Healer, and is asked only for her faith. He imposes no conditions, embarrasses her by no hesitating words, no jealous stipulations. Generously, royally, He gives; and trusts to the love and service of her grateful heart. It is enough for His great love freely to heal her and bid her go in peace. Strange that men do not bring

to Him their moral disorders! so that He Himself is represented as expressing surprise:—"Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? why then is the health of the daughter of my people not recovered?" "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life."

How *individual* it is! It is not enough to come even to Christ as one of a crowd—part of a collective mass, to gather round Him in churches, in acts of worship. You may do all this, and not touch Christ with the finger of faith, but only "throng and press him," as the multitude did. While one of the crowd, your distinctive purpose, your sense of personal need, your feeling of solicitude, your eager enterprize must distinguish you from it. You must stretch forth the hand of faith, touch the hem of His garment, come into personal contact with Him, or no virtue can go forth of Him.

In all this crowd, but one touch of true faith, one touch that elicited Christ's healing virtue! So it may be in the largest congregations. Men throng Christ, and press Him, in services of worship, in sermon hearing; come near to Him outwardly, ritually, but without purpose or touch of spiritual faith.

And yet all might so touch Him, and draw virtue from Him. He whose keen susceptibility discriminated the woman's touch recognizes every touch of true faith.

If therefore there be here but one, however obscure and trembling, seeking it may be the

church's farthest corner, who fain would creep behind Christ, and seek healing from Him, let him be encouraged. Christ will recognize his touch, and healing virtue will go forth of Him.

It is our encouragement that in every congregation there may be some furtively seeking to touch Christ, secretly stretching forth a trembling hand, carrying away an unrecognized healing. Let there be at least one such in this congregation. Surely some one needs healing. Be it yours then to adventure the touch, to lay hold of the skirt of His garment. Be you the healed man, the healed woman to-day. Christ in His glorious heaven is not less sympathetic, susceptible, or recognizing than when He was upon earth. "He who ascended is the same also as he who descended." Even now the great Healer is in our midst. Oh! that even now He may have to say, "Somebody hath touched me, for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me."

V.

The Abiding Teacher.

*When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into  
all truth.—JOHN xvi. 13.*

## V.

LIKE all true teaching, our Lord's discourses deepen in thought and spirituality. Scarcely can contrast be greater than that between the moral teaching of the Sermon on the Mount and the profound spiritual mysticism of this discourse at the Last Supper. And it would not be difficult to trace in successive steps the passage from the one to the other. He spake to His disciples "as they were able to bear it," and even at the last He had "many things to say unto them which they could not yet bear," some of which were said during the great forty days, others probably were left for the after-teachings of the Spirit.

Every wise teacher knows the educational value of reticence. Untimely truth, whether in science or in theology, can work only mischief. Truth, moreover, necessarily develops in all who receive it.

Here, in parting from His disciples, our Lord discourses about the source and conditions of the spiritual life ; and as with all life, we feel its mystery

to be inscrutable. How little in any domain of it we know of the secret of life. How utterly it refuses to submit itself to our analysis. Even in the lowest forms of physical life we are utterly baffled. Scientists can recognize its phenomena, explore its domain, analyse its constituents, discuss and calculate its conditions of matter and its laws of motion; but concerning its essence or its cause they can tell us absolutely nothing. Our only information concerning it is the theological teaching of Scripture. "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God." If we refuse to accept the scriptural representation of the Divine origin of things, we must remain in absolute ignorance: there is no other teaching.

In precisely the same way our Lord here sets before us the mystery of spiritual life. We see its phenomena, its emotions of penitence, and piety, and virtue, and love; its actions of rectitude, beneficence, consecration, and worship; and we can understand something of their sequence and law. But ask the moral philosopher concerning their origin or cause, he is helplessly silent. We may talk about the instincts, the laws, the necessities of our spiritual nature: we simply use terms that are symbols of ignorance.

The Great Teacher, the Revealer of God and of spiritual things, tells us that our spiritual life has a Divine cause; that, as with the physical life of the body, the spiritual life of the soul is the product of a



Divine energy. In order to become religious a man must be "born again," "born from above," "born of the Spirit." And when in our ignorance and wonder we ask, "How can these things be?" He simply reiterates the fact, and tells us that the philosophy of it is beyond human comprehension. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth: so is every one who is born of the Spirit." No man can understand the mystery of life, it is the secret of God, the inscrutable product of creative energy.

But it is a strong presumption of the truth of Christ's teaching that it does thus set forth a doctrine of Divine influence. In thus attributing spiritual life to God it makes it harmonize with all other orders of life. Our spiritual life, like our physical life, is directly connected with the Divine power. Its inspiring vitality and sustaining strength is the Holy Spirit of God.

In speaking formally and fully of the spiritual life to be realized in His disciples, our Lord necessarily and prominently sets forth the place and work of the Holy Spirit. And He does this in terms that make it impossible for us to understand Him as speaking only of a Divine afflatus or influence. No rhetorical personification can account for the phrases and attributions which He employs concerning His character and functions. The only construction that can be fairly put upon them is that the Holy Spirit

is to be conceived of as a distinct and proper personality, not as merely an attribute or influence, but as an agent.

Hence from the time when this great discourse was spoken about, "the other Comforter" who was to come when He departed,—who was to "convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment;" who was to "guide men into all truth," "to take of the things of Christ and to show them unto men," to "abide with His disciples for ever,"—the doctrine of the personal Spirit became as distinct and prominent in the Christian Church as the doctrine of the personal Christ. The epistles are full of it. They represent our very bodies as "temples of the Holy Ghost." Our new life is the regeneration of the Spirit. We live in the Spirit and walk in the Spirit. We are taught by the Spirit, sanctified by the Spirit, and comforted by the Spirit. In the high realizations of Christian life, which the inspirations of the Spirit make possible to us, we understand the great paradox of our Lord, "It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away the Comforter will not come to you; but if I depart I will send Him to you." Even the Christ cannot bless us, save as the Holy Spirit renews us to spiritual life and sympathy with Him.

Concerning the metaphysical mystery of what theologians have come to call the Trinity; concerning the mystery of the Divine nature, the possibility and reality of distinctions in it, such as the doc-

trine of the Spirit implies, I have here nothing to say. In my necessary ignorance of the mystery of all life, and above all of the Divine life, I am contented to accept the simple teachings of Christ. Few things can be more hopeless or presumptuous than metaphysical speculations about the *modus* of the Divine being. I am contented to rest in necessary ignorance. Here surely we have reached the limits of the knowable. If we refuse the explicit teachings of Christ, we have no other sources of information, we must remain in absolute ignorance.

Accepting then the fact that our Lord reveals to us that the Holy Spirit is the distinct and personal cause of our spiritual life, and is its permanent Teacher and Guide, what practical uses of the revelation can we make ?

I. The assertion is of the inwardness and perpetuity of the Holy Spirit's teaching. He dwells in all true disciples of Christ, and abides with them for ever. It is not therefore an external or temporary inspiration ; it is a permanent indwelling. It is not a specific deposit of truth such as the Bible contains—an oracle in the midst of the Church provided once for all, a book-lesson ; it is a personal teacher. It is not a presence in a religious society that is promised ; it is a teacher of individual men. It is not a general influence to be exerted upon them like that of a preacher ; it is a personal indweller and comforter entering individual souls.

The statement is a most momentous one, and

vitality affects many of our theological conceptions and ecclesiastical theories.

1. If it can be made good, then the teaching function of the Holy Spirit is not exhausted in the inspiration of prophets and apostles, nor in the production of the sacred writings.

Hardly can the importance and preciousness of the volume of inspired Scripture be exaggerated. We have no qualified words to speak concerning the absoluteness and authoritativeness of its revelation of Divine things. This is not the place for any vindication of the supernatural character of the Bible, or for the discussion of theories of its inspiration. I will say only, that to deny its unique claims in any sense that would surrender its great teachings concerning God, or its religious authoritativeness; to reduce it to the level of mere literary genius, or of personal religiousness, however transcendent, were to leave a large class of its phenomena utterly unaccounted for, and to make it as a whole an inexplicable enigma. On the other hand, to imagine it the mechanical product of divinely moved but unintelligent penmen; to reduce its varied human feelings and sayings to what Coleridge calls a Divine ventriloquism—the Divine Spirit simulating the voices and passions of men—is not inspiration at all, it is absolute substitution. Inspiration is the Divine quickening and illumining of proper human faculty, so that both the Divine and the human are there in proper individuality and in perfect harmony. It is indeed after the

analogy of all other incarnations,—the principle of life in dead matter; the spiritual soul in a physical body; the Divine regeneration of sinful souls; Divine renewing day by day, and help in prayer and in service; even the only begotten Son in a human body. We cannot define, we cannot distinguish, we cannot say how much, or which is the human and which the Divine; but we recognize both in their congruous harmony; and we accept the result as the supernatural communication to men, and through men, of the Divine thought and purpose.

This we conceive we have in the Bible. It contains the loftiest teachings that the world possesses concerning God, and salvation, and the true religious life, and the immortality that lies beyond death. Its doctrines concerning these things give us light where otherwise we should be in darkness, they give us comfort and hope where otherwise would be only anguish and fear. It inspires us with our greatest conceptions, and urges us to our noblest achievements. How divinely, and at times almost awfully, in every Sunday's church lessons, in every morning's family worship, its teachings break in upon the low-minded worldliness, the selfish earthliness, the limp morality of our common life. In great sorrows and desolations, and death, especially, what a power of calm strong consolation they have.

What would our human life be if the Bible were not in our hands, if its high-thoughted solemn words were not appealing to us day by day? It would be

what without it the life of the greatest peoples has ever been. Formal as we are in reading its teachings, and carnal as in spite of them we continue to be, what should we become if we had them not,—if we never heard the soaring spiritual notes of David's psalms, the sublime and solemn righteousness of the old Hebrew prophets, the Divine and affluent revelations of our Lord, the urgent, passionate arguments of Paul, the spiritual communings, the ethereal aspirings of John? We feel that in the Bible we have not only the highest of all teachings and inspirations, but God's infallible truth. Blessed be the wisdom and the love which provided for our religious life this Bible, which caused "holy men of old to speak as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." The power of all sanctity and of all strength and comfort and hope is in the Bible. Our intelligence can never outgrow its ideas, our necessities can never exceed its provisions, nor can our enthusiasm exaggerate the power of its manifold inspirations.

But precisely because it is all this, our ignorance or superstition may misconceive or misuse it. Whatever the excellency of the Bible, it is outside our personal life, and can only from without minister to it by its teachings. It is not the living Spirit, it is only a book produced by men whom He inspired in past ages, produced once for all. Strictly speaking, it is not even God's revelation to man. It is not the appearance on Sinai. It is not the incarnation at Bethlehem. It is only a historic record

of God's revelations. The true revelation of God was in the living person of the incarnate Christ.

The New Testament did not exist when Jesus was revealing the Father, when He lived upon earth His incarnate life, when He died upon the cross. It did not exist on the Day of Pentecost, when the dispensational gifts of the Spirit were bestowed upon the disciples. For twenty years after the ascension—until Paul wrote his letters to the Thesalonians—so far as we know, not a line of the New Testament was written. If no line of it ever had been written, the revelation of God in Christ, the personal bestowment of the Spirit, would have been precisely the same. Only, in the absence of the inspired record our knowledge of both would now be far less perfect: tradition as a mode of transmission cannot be compared to the precise record of a book. The New Testament is simply the record of what Christ and His apostles thought, and knew, and said, and did in revealing to men, and in establishing among men the Christian gospel. Doubtless the manner and measure of producing the record were controlled by God's wise Providence, but how informal, and local, and accidental much of it seems. While, therefore, we can scarcely exaggerate the theological and religious value of the record, it is imperative to remember that it is only a record. It is not the Incarnate Christ, it is not the imparted Spirit, it is not even the inspired apostles, but only the history of what they were,

and said, and did. Christ would have been as much "the image of the invisible God," the apostles would have been as much inspired to preach Him and to found Christian Churches, had there been no New Testament at all; that is, historical records are not so important as the things that they record.

I shall not then be misunderstood when I give emphasis to the statement that the Bible is subordinate to the spiritual life of the Christian man; that it is only an instrument, like institutions of worship, for the use of his religious life. If it be not used, if its teachings be not received, if its religious ideas be not incorporated with our personal life, it remains a dead, unappropriated thing. The Bible is solely an instrument for teaching, strengthening, and comforting religious men. It is a definite record of God's revelations to men up to the close of the apostolic age, infallible in virtue of its supernatural production. As such it is to us divinely authoritative. We receive it with reverence, and use it with thankfulness, for the teaching and inspiration of our religious life.

But the inspirations of the living Spirit were not exhausted with the canon of Scripture. The promise of our Lord is not, "I will send you the Spirit of truth, whose mission it shall be to inspire a certain number of holy men to write the histories and letters of the New Testament, a book which shall be your sufficient teaching and inspiration through all Christian ages." It is, "He, the Spirit of truth, shall



come, and shall be your living personal teacher; and that He may teach you effectively He shall dwell in your individual hearts, and shall abide with you for ever."

Who would affirm that the indwelling Spirit would not have been to men a teacher of spiritual truth had there never been a Bible? The Bible is not God's only means of revealing Himself to men. Did not the Holy Spirit teach Noah, and Enoch, and Abraham, and Moses, and make them, ere there was any Scripture, some of the grandest and most saintly men that the world has seen? Dare we say that pious pagans like Socrates, and Sakya Muni, and Seneca were not taught of God's Spirit? Hath not God "in every nation them that fear him and work righteousness"? And who but the Divine Spirit is their teacher and sanctifier? The Spirit teaches men according to the instruments of knowledge they possess—these by means of the imperfect light of nature and the religious conscience, us by means of the revelation of Jesus Christ which the New Testament record preserves to us.

Do not let us, in our high estimate of the lesson-book, disparage the Living Teacher. The Divine Spirit dwelling in the soul and teaching it through His inspirations is more than even an inspired Bible. Nor dare we think that His inspirations are restricted even to the contents of the Bible. The indwelling Spirit is perpetually teaching us. True, the Bible comprehends all the essential facts

and principles of God's salvation, just as the physical universe contains all the elements and laws of science. But the Living Teacher is ever discovering in them fresh meanings and powers, the indwelling Spirit is ever qualifying us for new and larger discernments of the gospel. We understand more than the first Christians understood, more possibly than even Paul or John understood. Even inspired men did not attain to all Divine meanings in the things that they wrote; they "searched what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify." We read their teaching, and through the spiritual experiences, the thought, the teaching, the realized life of eighteen centuries, wherein men have been taught by the Spirit, we see Divine meanings in their records, far beyond even their own thought. There is in Scripture an inexhaustibleness, a power of indefinite development, which is the property of all true and Divine things; most of all of teachings concerning God and Christ and the religious soul. So that each generation of men conceives of God's truth more largely than its predecessor. The primitive ages were ages of but dawning light, and if ours be not the perfect day, it is a day of brighter light and of a wider horizon. Each Christian doctrine, even, develops into larger forms, broader principles, more diversified and congruous applications. The cardinal doctrine of the Atonement itself is not held by two successive generations alike. The same great principle is grasped—forgiveness through the propitia-

tion of Christ—but its theory is conceived of differently. The indwelling Spirit not only teaches each individual man, but through each he teaches all. A sun of light shining more and more unto the perfect day.

2. And if the inspired Bible does not exhaust or exclude, or limit the teachings of the indwelling Spirit, much less does any Church, or Council, or Pope.

It is quietly assumed by those who thus claim infallibility that these promises of Divine teaching are addressed to organized ecclesiastical bodies, or to their officials. So far as I can recollect, not a single promise of our Lord, either of His presence, His Spirit, or His grace, is addressed even constructively to organized Churches as such. Even when the disciples were addressed collectively, the promise had individual applications. Indeed there is no conceivable sense in which the Holy Spirit can either dwell in or teach a corporate Church as such. His only possible indwelling, so far as we can think it, is in the individual soul. He can be in the Church and teach the Church only through His teaching of individual men. The Holy Spirit may be in your heart and in mine, enlightening and sanctifying us when we are in our Church assemblies, but He cannot be in a Church assembly a distinct and additional personality, teaching it collectively, as any one of its members might do. In any other sense than that of personal indwelling His presence in the Church is

simply unthinkable. This therefore is the uniform promise, that He shall dwell as a teacher, not in a collective assembly, but in individual men. The Church is sometimes idealized; "the holy Church throughout the world" is spoken of, just as the human family is spoken of; but there is not a vestige of foundation for the assumption that by this any ecclesiastical organization is meant, or that the Spirit of Christ is given in any other sense than to dwell in the hearts of individual disciples.

I will not, however, waste precious time by further refutation of this monstrous assumption—one of the characteristic audacities of priestcraft. This much, however, it was necessary to say, inasmuch as this assumption is a direct negation of the promise of individual indwelling as it is here recorded. It is indeed formally propounded as a substitute for it. Individual men may be guided by the Spirit, but it is only through the medium of the infallible Church, or the infallible Pope. But surely this is to reverse the true process of guidance. The wisdom and sanctity of the Church are necessarily constituted by the aggregate of its individual members. If it be not said, "I will guide you into all truth by an infallible Bible," much less is it said, "I will guide you by an infallible priest or an infallible Church." Neither in an inspired man nor in an inspired Church is an infallible teacher of my personal life to be found; only in the personal indwelling Spirit of truth, who sanctifies my heart and purifies my moral vision.

He may employ as His instruments for my guidance the wisdom of the wise and the example of the saintly. This He does. All who speak wisely teach me, but I must individually receive their teachings, not blindly and implicitly—which would be ignoble, injurious, and immoral—but through the apprehension of my intelligence, and the sympathy of my soul.

I am necessarily thrown upon exercises of my moral responsibility. Whether I am actually guided into truth depends upon my reception of the teaching, as well as upon the competence of the teacher; upon my intelligence, my earnestness, my candour, my moral sympathy, my docility.

Is then every man to form his own personal judgments of the things of God, and to act upon them? If so, will there not be as many judgments as there are men? The only, the unhesitating answer must be, Yes. Whoever the teacher may be, truth,—religious truth, cannot be taught save as it is individually apprehended and received. Intelligence and will and sympathy are as essential to receive as to impart. Even though I receive the dictum of an infallible Church, or an infallible Pope, I must at some stage of the process, and by an act of personal and private judgment, determine so to do. I must for myself decide which is the true teacher—Scripture, Church, or Pope.

Even when I have accepted the infallible Church, exercises of private judgment are still imperative; for within its boundaries I find Father contra-

dicting Father, Council reversing the proceedings of Council, Pope anathematizing Pope. In the Church of Rome there are as many diversities of opinion, from extremest rationalism to grossest superstition, as there are in Protestantism. About this very question of infallibility, about the very place and prerogative of the Pope, it is just now in a state of schism, as indeed it has been throughout its history.

“To prove all things, and hold fast that which is good,” is my inalienable prerogative and responsibility as a moral being. Of course I shall seek guidance from those who are informed where I am ignorant, just as I should in the study of any other science; else instead of intelligent faith I should surrender myself to foolish fanaticism; but I must receive their teaching as evidence that is to convince me, not as a dictum to which I am to submit myself. Above all I shall ask the teaching of the Divine Indweller. It is a responsibility which I cannot evade. It is a necessary condition of all moral life and probation; it is that which makes me a man. What is it, but a weak and unmanly shrinking from the burden and struggle of this responsibility, which leads so many to seek vicarious faith and direction in creeds and rubrics, in infallible Churches and infallible Popes? It is a cowardly and guilty thing, an attempted abnegation of intellectual and moral manhood.

The wisdom of the wise by all means; but what a huge assumption it is, and how signally contradicted

by facts, that this is the qualification or prerogative of official priests. Even the learned may seek wisdom of the religious life of the most ignorant. The true spiritual guides of our life are often found in obscure places. The Churches are full of men of lowly station, and of illiterate minds, who through the teachings of the Divine Spirit have attained to pre-eminence of spiritual wisdom, wisdom of spiritual principles, wisdom of religious practical life. Ignorant they may be of theology, they are yet wise in holy conduct and service.

No! Any human infallibility, whether of Church or Pope, that should authoritatively formulate for us God's truth, so as to absolve us from exercises of our own reason and religious feeling, were not only of all things most emasculating to our manhood, it were to depose from His special office and work the indwelling Spirit of truth.

3. Whence it follows that the living guidance of the Spirit of Truth is not exhausted in the formation of Church creeds, whether of the fourth century or of the sixteenth.

Creeds are a provision for making all men think alike. But if we attempt to make men of the nineteenth century think about theological things exactly as the Nicene Fathers did, or as Cranmer did, or Calvin, or Wesley, do we not limit the Spirit of Truth to the measure of light which He bestowed upon them? If the Spirit of Truth dwells also in us, guiding us into all truth, is He to be limited in

His teachings to the boundaries and forms of their thought? Am I to say, "He is my Divine Teacher, but the result of His teaching must be that my thinking shall be exactly like the thinking of the creeds. Thus far His teaching may go, but no farther." Do not men who subscribe creeds as the accepted form and limit of their beliefs, thereby exclude all further teachings of God's Spirit. What assurance have we that the creed makers apprehend the exact truth, much less all the truth of the Divine Teacher? Infinitely grander, more reverent, and more believing the noble urgency of Pastor Robinson. "He charged us before God and His holy angels, if God should reveal anything to us by any other instrument of His, to be as ready to receive it as any truth of his ministry; for he was very confident the Lord had yet more light and truth to break forth out of His Holy Word."

Can it be a reverence to the Divine Teacher to tell Him that His highest possible inspiration is the Nicene Creed or the Thirty-nine Articles? Is it not a close approximation to a sin against the Holy Ghost? God's Spirit may have more to teach me than all the Fathers knew. It is not for me to keep His teaching in a certain line of ecclesiastical traditions, or within specified forms: that is the responsibility of the teacher, not of the pupil. My responsibility is to maintain a clear eye and a ready heart to receive whatever He may teach. To each succeeding generation He has necessarily further,



and higher, and more spiritual truth to teach, the truth that develops out of the thought and experience of men. We, if faithful to His teaching, necessarily know more than our fathers could know. All other sciences advance to broader and more exact knowledge, and theology cannot stand still.

As forms and restrictions of belief, therefore, creeds are simply anachronisms and hindrances—antique moulds for living men, nay, for the living Spirit Himself. Creeds have their place in Church history, and mark the stages of its development; they have no legitimate place in controlling present life.

4. The same principles apply to Church Liturgies, whether imposed by Acts of Parliament or by rigorous synods.

Is the praying inspiration of the Spirit limited to the forms which He taught Chrysostom, or Bernard, or Cranmer? Is a Church to say, "The Divine Teacher cannot further enrich our devotions. He exhausted Himself in the liturgical canon which our forefathers adopted. We have accepted that as a measure of public prayer for ever." Can anything be conceived more presumptuous, irreverent, or injurious? Extemporaneous prayer may lack the literary excellencies, the august stateliness, the devotional beauty of liturgical forms, but it has more than a compensation, in that it is the immediate inspiration of living souls. It is neither the prayer of dead men, nor a past inspiration of the Spirit. It may be homely, but it is the expression of

a present living experience, it is an immediate teaching of the Spirit of Truth that dwelleth in the man. Shall a Church presume to ordain that the Spirit shall never inspire another prayer for public worship? Use the past by all means, but not so as to forbid the inspirations of the present. Past prayers may be useful, as past hymns are; but both in prayers and in hymns we should be prepared to welcome every fresh inspiration of the living Spirit.

5. Preachers are not dogmatic imposers of theological truth, they are only instructors. No man may receive beliefs implicitly from their lips, only as teachings that must commend themselves to his conscience. Indeed, beliefs to be intelligent and religious must be received and formulated by our own judgment and heart. The preacher, like the Bible, may be our instructor, but the indwelling Spirit must by His personal processes "guide us into truth." "He dwelleth with you and shall be in you." God will not exempt us from the duty of inquiry, the anxiety of doubt, the responsibility of forming conclusions. He could do so only to our hurt, only at the cost of our moral nature. He appeals to us as men, and by this discipline of our intellectual and moral nature He makes us men; just as by the discipline of sorrow He perfects our moral affections.

II. The practical issue is that the indwelling Spirit can guide us into truth only by working upon our moral nature—by purifying our religious affections, by quickening our love of truth, by purging

our carnality and selfishness. So far as we can conceive of it the process is purely moral. He does not in any miraculous way reveal new truths, He qualifies us for higher discernments of truths already revealed.

We all know the revealing power of strong affections. How much we understand through our love; how difficult it is to understand at all where we have no liking! By His inspiration, therefore, of holy desire, of religious passion, by His purifying influence upon imperfect moral feeling, by exciting strong religious sympathies and yearnings the Holy Spirit chiefly guides us into truth. Love for truth is three-fourths the acquisition of truth; and without love it cannot be attained at all. "The pure in heart see God," with the keen vision of spiritual desire; the Holy Spirit purifies our heart. "With the heart man believes unto righteousness," trusts with the instinctive confidence of a little child; the Holy Spirit inspires the heart of trust. He constrains us to do, and then we know. How, we do not know, any more than we know how any of our emotions are excited. We know only that it is the religious agency of the Spirit to "create within us a clean heart, and to renew within us a right spirit;" to "renew us day by day;" to "sanctify us wholly, body, soul, and spirit." He uses truth for producing holy feeling, and the holy feeling becomes a qualification for attaining to further truth; according to the law of almost all human acquisition.

Concerning the work of the Holy Spirit as "the

Comforter," about which so much is said in these chapters, I have not specially spoken; His teaching of truth being the point to which emphasis is given in this verse. But this may be said,—Truth is comfort; and in things religious there is no comfort but through truth—a true knowledge of God, His thought, His heart, His fatherhood; a true knowledge of Christ, His nature, His work, His love; a true knowledge of spiritual life, its principles, processes, and possibilities. Mere excitement of the sensibilities, ecstasies of feeling produced by passionate appeal, fervid devotional affections, are not sufficient for solid comfort; they are, in themselves, only as intoxicating fumes, which pass away and leave depression and debility. The only true comfort is that which clearly apprehended truths produce. Let the Spirit "take the things of Christ and show them unto us," make us fully understand them, guide us unto their great meanings, and we are comforted. Our necessities, our sensibilities, our love, our practical life, are all ministered to.

Does not all this harmonize most perfectly with our nature? No instinct of it is stronger than its desire for truth, above all for truth concerning God. Even the least cultured will speculate in ignorant imaginings, and brood in dull ponderings concerning the highest mysteries of God, the deepest experiences of the spiritual life.

1. It is possible, then, for us to know truth, concerning even the highest religious things; if not absolute

truth, yet actual truth, adequate for all uses of the religious life; not regulative truth merely, which may or may not be in accord with the actual nature of things, but essential truth, limited only in degree by our finite capabilities.

These great instincts of our nature are not mocked by Him who made us. He has given us no desire for which He has not provided a perfect satisfaction. In all His communications to us He has revealed Himself according to the measure of our comprehension. Christ came to manifest "the Father." "This is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."

2. All religious joy is conditioned upon true knowledge. Think of the practical disabilities and miseries that men suffer when they have false or confused notions of God—of His predestination, of His merciful love, of His conditions of forgiveness, of His practical requirements; or when they misconceive the kingdom of Christ, or the life to come. All truth is light, which guides our feet for the comfort of our hearts.

3. Truth is our only preservative from peril. If a man's notions be false, his practical life will be weak and damaged. Only God's truth can prevent our being victims of the devil's lies.

4. Truth is the essential qualification for religious usefulness. No man can be really serviceable to the religious life of other men but through ministries of truth. He may excite them, amuse them, gratify

them ; he cannot really benefit them. "No lie is of the truth." No false views of God or of religious life can possibly minister religious good. We are made for truth, not for falsehood ; falsehood always hurts us. Truth has properties to which both mind and heart respond, as the eye welcomes the light ; falsehood is congruous only with a diseased organ of vision.

If, therefore, a religious teacher, however sincere himself, teaches error and not truth, his teaching is shorn of moral power. In the very nature of things it cannot effect the good that he desires. If a religious worker seeks success by untrue ways he cannot possibly attain it. The effect will be meretricious and immoral. He may pander to popular prejudices, appeal to dominant passions, have recourse to tricks of oratory or sensational attractions ; but he does not succeed simply because he gathers crowds, only when he incites to true and holy spiritual life. No religious end, not even the salvation of a soul, were that possible, can justify untrue methods. Our first care, as workers, is to be true—true to truth, true to the souls of men, true to God. Our next, to have faith in truth—to believe that it, and it alone, has moral power, and can do good to the souls of men.

5. Truth is the true unity of Christian men. Not mere intellectual agreement in propositional creeds or theological dogmas, but unity of heart in the love of truth and in fealty to truth:—bringing all things

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to the test of Scripture, to the interpretation of the illumining Spirit, implicitly submitting ourselves to His guidance, and simply and boldly preserving our freedom to accept whatever He may teach us. No Churches are so severed in their exclusiveness as the Churches which have elaborate creeds : these circumscribe sympathies, hinder the attainment of truth, and stereotype error. The Churches the least fettered with formulæ have the fewest diversities of opinion.

Have faith, therefore, in the abiding Teacher of truth. Assuredly he will not greatly err who "proves all things," who "searches the Scriptures to see whether things be so or not," and who humbly seeks the lights of God for their interpretation.





VI.

The Service of Love.

*And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head. And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her. And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always. She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.—MARK xiv. 3-9.*

## VI.

THIS picturesque narrative presents an instance of the striking and sometimes startling way in which our Lord reversed men's conventional estimates of things, and by a single word illumined their darkness with Divine light. It needed but a word, for light is its own evidence; and whenever Christ speaks one of His great words of truth, all true hearts bear witness to it. And yet how different His estimates from ours,—the things that He puts honour upon, that He deems worthy of scriptural record, for which He demands our religious homage! He passes over things which other histories magnify. The Gospels are silent concerning great battles and political changes; but they tell us about the widow who cast her two mites into the treasury; about Zaccheus, who climbed into a tree to see Jesus; about the little children whom He took up into His arms and blessed; about Mary of Bethany, who lavished her precious ointment upon the head of the consecrated Christ.

As a book of spiritual character, the Bible, with profoundest discernment, records little incidents like these ; for, far more than greater achievements, they indicate the spiritual life of those who do them.

The incident is a notable one. Our Lord was returning from beyond Jordan to keep His last Passover in Jerusalem, and die. For the last time He sought the peaceful home of His beloved friends at Bethany. It is His last Sabbath, His last peaceful day upon earth. The tidings of His arrival will soon reach Jerusalem, and the people will crowd to Bethany to see Him, and Lazarus, whom He has raised from the dead. On the morrow they will escort Him into the city with palm branches and hosannas.

Simon the leper, whom Jesus had healed, makes for Him a feast. He was probably a relative of Lazarus and his sisters. One tradition says that he was their father, another that he was Martha's husband. Gratefully, joyfully, tenderly would every member of this favoured family welcome again their Divine Friend, whom they had not seen since the resurrection of Lazarus. It was a remarkable group, and an exciting occasion—Simon recovered from his leprosy, Lazarus raised from the dead ; the Redeemer and the trophies of His Divine power ; looking at Him as in the resurrection life we shall look at Him who has redeemed us, and conversing with Him concerning the things of His kingdom. Again Martha is serving, but she no longer complains of

her more impassioned sister ; again Mary is worshipping, in a characteristic way pouring forth the great, passionate love of her heart ; both are rapt and adoring worshippers now. Memories of the past are crowding upon them. The solemn scenes of the Passover are just at hand ; and their hearts are full of indefinable premonitions. Another Sabbath, and their Lord will have endured His passion, and Mary will be weeping at the sepulchre.

Under some great impulse of love, Mary produces her precious box of ointment, and pours it upon the head and feet of her Lord.

Her eyes are homes of silent prayer,  
Nor other thought her mind admits  
But, he was dead, and there he sits,  
And He that brought him back is there.

Then one deep love doth supersede  
All other, when her ardent gaze  
Roves from the living brother's face,  
And rests upon the Life indeed.

All subtle thought, all curious fears,  
Borne down by gladness so complete,  
She bows, she bathes the Saviour's feet  
With costly spikenard and with tears.

Thrice blest whose lives are faithful prayers,  
Whose loves in higher love endure ;  
What souls possess themselves so pure,  
Or is there blessedness like theirs ?

Her act of love sought to embalm Him ; it has embalmed her. The odour of her ointment filled the house ; it has filled the whole Church of God.

The record of her loving homage is everywhere read as part of the story of the Saviour's Passion.

Hardly could it be so, did it not involve some great principles of Christian love and service that make it noble; some great religious lessons that all may learn; a great example that all may imitate. Indeed the story is one of the precious jewels of the Book of God; some of the divinest lights of God fall upon it, and are reflected by it on every side. It is rich in spiritual suggestions. If a single word may designate them, it sets before us the essential conditions of the SERVICE OF CHRISTIAN LOVE.

I. Mary's act illustrates the spontaneous, fervent, uncalculating nature of the service of love.

Anointing with unguents was part of the common hospitality of the East. After the bath the perfume. So, in her humble way, the woman who was a sinner washed the feet of the Lord with tears, and then anointed them with ointment; thus giving point to our Lord's rebuke of the cold hospitality of Simon the Pharisee, but exciting by her act no remark, save that she who did it was "a sinner."

So far, therefore, Mary's act was remarkable only for its comparative costliness. All the Evangelists put emphasis upon this. It was "a pound of ointment of spikenard very costly;" it was "an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious." The three hundred Roman pence of its cost were equivalent to about ten pounds of our modern money. Mary's love was munificent in its ministry, as all true love is.

There are two ways of the religious life—the *way of knowing* and the *way of loving*. We may coldly regulate the measure and methods of our religious service by processes of knowledge, and conscientiously refuse all service that reason cannot justify. Much of the coldly correct and timid service of our Christian life is the dictate of mere intellectual knowledge, which keeps in subjection all fervid impulses of love. We are prudent in calculation, timid about proprieties. We solicitously count the cost, until our intelligent caution overbears our impulsive affections.

The true function of knowledge in religious life is to minister to love. It is not a cold light shining upon the understanding, but a vital heat quickening the heart. A mere knowledge concerning God, that we can formulate in creeds, debate in schools, and profess as doctrine, is but a very inferior part of religious knowledge. Its full realization is experience of God's goodness and love, which appeals to the emotions as well as to the reason, which is as fuel to the heart, kindling its ardours, inspiring its gratitude, and constraining its consecration.

More than this, love is the supreme way of knowledge, especially in religious things. If knowledge excite love, love above all things else enables knowledge. It has a power of divining which transcends all the methods of the schools. Mary, sitting at the feet of her Lord, might have listened to His words, but if her affections had not interpreted them, she

would never have learned Divine wisdom. In a mood of rapt impassioned love her quick sensibilities and sympathies fed her eager knowledge.

And now, under a great impulse of uncontrollable tenderness, she brings the unguent she has treasured; and, as it would seem, impatient of the slow trickling current, she breaks off the neck of the vase which contained it, and pours it upon the head and feet of her Lord, filling the house with its odour; and, as John significantly adds, wiping His feet with the tresses of her hair. No words are spoken. As when she silently sat at His feet, as when in her bereavement she silently wept, so now she silently worships. The thoughts of Mary's heart were too deep for words.

We need not too curiously analyze her impulse. Some elements of it, however, can hardly be mistaken.

1. Gratitude. For the first time since the resurrection of her brother she was in the presence of his Restorer. All present would be full of grateful love, as they remembered the perilous journey from Perea, the tender sympathy of His words and tears, the mighty resurrection word, and the wondrous coming forth of the dead man bound in his grave-clothes. There he sat with them, fully restored to their love.

But Mary's nature was the most profound. Emotion possessed her the most fully, stirred her the most mightily; and this was the strange, passionate, and



beautiful expression for it that she found. In this way she manifested the shy tenderness, the peculiar inwardness, susceptibility, and worship of her love. Gratitude put the crown upon her deep affection, and it could not be restrained. It was characteristically a woman's act; but in this, as in many things, the woman's heart, in its inspirations, was deeper and wiser than all the reason of men.

2. Reverence. Above most, she had listened to Christ's Divine words, seen His Divine works, felt His Divine love. To Mary our Lord was the perfect ideal of greatness and goodness, of wisdom and tenderness. Every indication of her shows how deeply she had thought and felt concerning Him. She had permitted the intensest affections of her nature to gather round Him, and to be possessed by Him.

How the moral beauty of His Divine character would unfold to such a student, to such a worshipper! How her love would discover in Him what cold observers must always fail to discover—hidden treasures of wisdom, of purity, of love, of self-sacrifice. Who can doubt that Mary divined more of our Lord's true character than any of His disciples, unless indeed it were John.

This anointing, like her previous acts, indicates reverence as well as affection—that peculiar blending of respect and love, of worship and confidence, which seems to be the special inspiration of the Incarnate God. The worship which love to Him constrains

is neither bold familiarity with the human Christ, nor cold reverence for the Divine Christ. It is the mystic blending of both into religious affection—Divine trust. John reclined upon his Master's bosom, Mary sat at His feet. No words, no hearts are so full of sacred reverence and rapture as theirs. What must have been the transcendency of His nature who could thus inspire those who knew Him best!

3. And then, for His love she loved Him ;—loved Him with the passion that can give no account of itself, that loves because it must. She loved Christ as we always love Him, not because she reasoned about Him, or calculated her obligations to Him, but because His great love constrained her love ; swayed the passions of her soul like a tide ; satisfied all that she had thought, or felt, or desired ; transcended all the yearning, searching, indefinite instincts of her being. It was the surprise and fulness of Divine satisfaction, the rest that sinful, penitent, hungering, sorrowing, loving hearts always find in the Christ.

And her love found expression in an uncalculating, unhesitating impulse. She poured out her heart in her anointing.

Ask her why she does this thing: she cannot justify it to reason, only to love. Who can conceive of Mary calculating the value of her gift, asking whether more were necessary, or whether less would not suffice? Love is confidence, and

where it is perfect it does not torment itself about less or more. It does just what it can, it mistrusts neither itself nor its object. The love that is troubled because it has not done a more costly thing, is just as self-conscious, and therefore as imperfect, as the love which thinks that less might have sufficed.

Neither can we conceive of Mary's love asking what onlookers will think, regulating its impulse by public opinion. Love has but one conscious world, that in which itself lives. The passion that permits us to think of public criticism is not a very strong one. Love is an enthusiasm; it adores, and finds for its adoration such expression as it can. It demands freedom, and will not be restrained by either calculation or fear.

4. The supreme expression of love is sacrifice. It seeks to demonstrate itself; not because it suspects suspicion, but in the pure joy of loving. Martha's love offered the sacrifice of serving, Mary's the sacrifice of worship. Sacrifice is the true nutriment of love. Not anxiously, or in a calculating way, but instinctively and rapturously, it proffers whatever it has to give. It is a "living sacrifice." The mere gift is not the sacrifice. No gift, however costly, can be the sacrifice of love, that is not part of itself. A gift of calculating selfishness it may be, or of ritual formality, or of easy good-nature, but not a gift of love. It was the outpouring of Mary's heart, which the outpouring of the ointment only indicated, that constituted her gift a sacrifice.

Only the heart of a woman could have conceived a gift of such poetic fitness and tender beauty, so fragrant, exquisite, æsthetic. It was precious ointment in an alabaster vase, a costly offering in a beautiful form. It was neither precious ointment in a vase of clay, nor an alabaster vase containing an inferior thing. It is the instinct of love to bring its offering with beauty and tenderness, its worship in cultured forms, its sacrifice upon a golden altar, its service with comely fitness. Its generosity has no stint, its method has no rudeness. It may be awkward, it is always refined. It proffers whatever it can proffer, and proffers the veriest trifle with beauty and grace.

Who are they who bring to God the costliest gifts? "Surely," it will be said, "the wealthy." Nay, rather, but the loving. The loving may be wealthy, then their love will inspire great gifts. But when love inspires the poorest, their "deep poverty abounds unto the riches of their liberality. for to their power, yea, and beyond their power, they are willing of themselves." It is the wealthy heart that fills the Church with bounty—the widow with her two mites, Mary with her box of ointment—those who bring to Christ what others lavish upon themselves. It is the largeness of heart that overflowing love inspires, the impulsive passion that refuses calculation, that disregards conventional limits, breaking through them as Mary brake her vase, and pouring

forth glad sacrifices, and uncalculated gifts, a loving offering to Christ.

II. In sharp illustrative contrast to the fervid, uncalculating love of Mary, is the selfish, sordid, depreciating spirit of Judas :—the antagonism of misconception and remonstrance that the service of love provokes in unloving hearts.

We read indeed that Mary's impulsive act of lavish love excited murmurings even among the disciples. "When the disciples saw it, they had indignation." But John is careful to tell us that the demur originated with Judas. To the beloved disciple Judas was an object of unspeakable loathing. He always mentions him with that terrible intensity, that unsparing anatomy of holy hatred, that "wrath, wide-sweeping, inexorable, close neighbour to pity, to trembling affection, to soft tears,"\* which is the property of passionate love; for of necessity love has the greatest power of hating. Judas, evidently from the basest motives, was the originator of the censure in which, either from simple ignorance, or thoughtlessness, or shallowness of feeling, the others joined.

In this way the working of the Judas-spirit of selfishness is brought into sharp contrast with that of the Mary-spirit of love.

And this apparently is one of the teachings intended. Are not moral antagonisms always thus generated? The spirit of self-sacrifice gives inten-

\* Carlyle.

sity to the spirit of selfishness, the spirit of piety is the great provocative of hypocrisy. The heart that does not love, not only misconceives, it dislikes and condemns the heart that does. Its fervours are foolishness, its service is a reproach. However blind selfishness may be, and few passions are more blind, it has a dim consciousness of its own meanness, and instinctively it hates the self-sacrifice that puts it in so invidious a contrast.

The two therefore stand not only in necessary antagonism, but in mutual provocation. The love of a Mary is intensified by the selfishness of a Judas, the baseness of a Judas is exasperated by the devotedness of a Mary.

Many a man's latent evil is quickened and developed solely by the presence of good. The generous consecration of Barnabas provokes the sordid hypocrisy of Ananias.

Clearly Mary's loving adoration thus incited the open treachery of Judas; for all the Evangelists intimate that he went directly from this scene of loving service to covenant with the chief priests about his diabolical treason. "What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you?"

The intense heat of love quickens into strong life all qualities upon which it falls. In the heart of Judas there were only evil things to quicken, the seeds of all wickedness were in him. He was out of sympathy with both the spiritual character of the Master and the unselfish love of the disciple. So it

ever is. Great love for Christ, great acts of self-sacrifice for Christ, will provoke censure, where quiet, undemonstrative, tepid affection would pass unquestioned. The selfish soul of Judas saw in the act of Mary things to censure that no one else saw. The loving heart of Mary saw in Judas more that was hateful than any of the rest did; just as through his intenser love the beloved disciple looked more deeply into the heart of the traitor than the rest of the Evangelists. Is it not part of the praise of Mary's act that it did incur the censure of Judas?

It is almost startling to think of these two at the same feast, fellow-disciples of the same Master. Mary, so pure, enthusiastic, transparent, self-sacrificing, her countenance transfigured by her holy love; and Judas—as art has conceived him—swarthy, cunning, hard, looking at his Lord, as he clutches the bag, not with the fearless, eager gaze of loving adoration, but askance and furtively, with the conscious baseness of selfishness and treachery. Now these two are together at table. In a few hours Mary will be weeping in the judgment-hall, and then bringing spices to embalm Him whom she has anointed; and Judas will be selling innocent blood, then writhing with remorse, then hanging upon the ignominious tree of the suicide.

What contrasts there may be in any social circle, in any assembly of worshippers, around any table of the Lord! Into what nearness of contact, into what common relations, the purest and the basest may

come—the noblest self-sacrifice and the most sordid selfishness—the most fervid love and the most unscrupulous hate.

We need not enter into detailed analysis of this base Judas-spirit.

The glimpse into its dominant motive that John gives us, when he says that “Judas was a thief, and bare the bag”—implying that he would have appropriated, that he was in the habit of appropriating for his own uses, what was put into it—is quite enough.

Selfish lust, doubtless taking many forms, was clearly the dominant passion of this man’s soul, and the medium through which everything was seen and judged. Covetousness is simply selfishness in its meanest form, the sordid desire of money for selfish uses. It is, I think, more closely connected with baseness than any other passion, than any form that selfishness can take. Mammon is

The least erected spirit that fell.

It never considers the good of others. It never sees what is meet. By a rapid process of mental arithmetic it appraises every generous impulse; calculates the pence when it should admire the moral nobility. And thus it becomes the root of all possible meanness and treachery.

Only a spirit such as this could have blinded a man to the moral beauty of an act like Mary’s. Avarice is a form of self-seeking that turns love itself into an offence, that extracts poison out of the noblest virtues, that freezes the very heart of affection.



This demur to Mary's act of love reveals the base nature of Judas more fully than a long history could have done.

No wonder that such meanness clothes itself in hypocrisy. Even souls like Judas have sufficient self-consciousness to pretend a solicitude for the poor, and cowardice enough to adduce this as a plea. Baseness must disguise itself even to a man's own heart. It is quite characteristic that the man who was ready to sell his Lord for thirty pieces of silver had the hypocritical meanness to simulate a care for the poor, and the mendacious audacity to be benevolently indignant at Mary's "waste."

With this selfish and malign Judas-spirit good never receives credit. Evil suspicions, base detractions spring up congenially. Some Diogenes in his tub; some censor in his chair; some cynic or miser in social life; whose meanness cloaks itself in slander, with whom self-interest is the only criterion of goodness, who, conscious of base motives, can give no one else credit for noble ones, and can conceive of nothing higher than that of which he himself is capable.

How often in practical life we encounter this form of depreciation! Men seeking credit for high principle through a disparagement of the principle of others:—demurring to another's service on the ground that it is not high-principled enough, or that it is an enthusiastic mistake:—hinting imperfection, suggesting wrong motive, simulating a virtue greater still. What temper is more ignoble, what vice is

more pestiferous? A man surrenders himself to the basest passions, corrupts the best feeling, hinders the good that others would do, or robs it of its praise. If another is doing a noble, a self-sacrificing thing, am I entitled to demur because it is not done in my way—I, who have done nothing at all? Do I not rather recommend moderation in others because in myself there is nothing that needs moderating?

How utterly false the whole objection was! Whatever the plausibility of the reason assigned, it was not the true reason. The motive pretended is not the true motive, it is an attempt to deceive others, if not himself. Like most of the base things that selfishness does, it dares not avow itself, and pretends a virtue that it does not possess.

It is humiliating that some of the disciples should have been carried away by this plausible hypocrisy; that they should have joined in a demur to the honour done to their Lord; that they should have called "waste" an offering which He was delighted to accept; that they should have asked "for what purpose" it was, and have begun to speculate upon the money value of this offering of affection. But their feeling had not the Judas-spirit as its root, although for a moment affinity with it was stronger than with the spirit of Mary, and it found very strong expression. "They were indignant." Clearly their love had not learned the highest ways of love.

Therefore our Lord does not in His rebuke iden-

tify them with Judas. They erred through ignorance rather than through viciousness. They were superficial rather than wicked. They were led astray by right impulses. The care for the poor, which in Judas was a hypocrisy, was in them a genuine benevolence. They were honest, right-hearted men, led astray by a villain.

The lesson is, that there is nothing so contagious as censure. It infects like a plague even hearts intrinsically noble. How little we suspect the inoculation from which many of our judgments spring! And yet how easily it might be detected. When, for instance, the thing done, or the impression made, has on the whole been favourable, and we are disposed to bestow upon it a generous commendation; then some Judas comes, and suggests evil, and we are weak enough to be ruled by the suggestion, and to propagate it.

Is not this the origin of the fault-finding of good men? How often they censure in ignorance, or in weak conformity! Why was not some other thing done? Why was not this thing done in some other way? A thousand answers are conceivable. We can never judge the doings of others unless we can realize their circumstances, and know all that they know. "Mary's motive is all very well, but what a wanton, wasteful way of expressing a mere sentiment! How much better to have sold the unguent and have given the price to the poor. He upon whom she has lavished it has always refused

honours done to Himself, has always cared for the poor, and has consecrated His life to serve them."

The reasoning is not without plausibility, and the disciples are scarcely to be wondered at for being momentarily carried away with it. If it be sound, Judas is right in calculating the pence, and Mary is a foolish enthusiast in wasting the ointment.

Whether this be so or not, may appear if we look—

III. At the principles which our Lord lays down in His vindication of Mary.

1. He designates her act of impulsive uncalculating love a "good work;" and rebukes the disciples for troubling her with their disparaging cavils.

He pronounces no judgment upon the intrinsic worth of her deed, nor upon the counter plea for the poor. He speaks simply of the feeling to which she gives expression. Love, however, will not often do foolish things: its clear intuitions and delicate perceptions are generally wiser than the coolest, clearest processes of reason. Even though it should sometimes express itself unwisely, its very fervours will, with generous minds, be its abundant excuse. Assuredly He who is the object of it will lovingly appreciate it and generously commend it.

Our Lord makes no attempt to refute the reason of the cavillers. Simply as reasoning it was not easy to refute it. But He intimates that there are principles of action other and higher than those

which reasoning determines ; sometimes, it may be, apparently rash and wasteful ; but nevertheless embodying some of the truest impulses, the noblest feelings, and the deepest wisdom of human life.

Even on calculations of mere social economy, the world is far better, the poor are far richer, for the waste of the ointment, than the three hundred pence could have made them. The charge of the six hundred at Balaclava might not be war, but it has inspired more noble heroism than all the consummate strategy of Waterloo. Many a rash action that generous impulse prompts teaches the world more than the profoundest science of political economy. The oracle of a loving heart speaks truer and more inspiring things than all the wisdom of the sages.

So that while all the reason was with Judas, all the true wisdom was with Mary. Her single impulsive act has, from that day to this, inspired myriads of hearts with their noblest enthusiasm.

How did her Lord regard it? In the narrow judgment of the disciples it was waste ; in His profounder appreciation it was worship. It was love excited to an enthusiasm to which their cold calculating souls could not rise. It was the expression of a nature greater than their own, which they could not even comprehend. It was the outcome of the strongest, deepest, worshipping feeling. Not that it is opposed to calculations of utility : it simply transcends them. There are more things in heaven

and earth than political economists dream of. They formulate their maxims for the social life of the world—"the greatest good of the greatest number," for example—and if the world were a mere economy of human rights, the maxim would be unimpeachable. But how does it stand in the light of Mary's anointing; with the poor really needing the three hundred pence? Is no work good that cannot be tested by utilitarian principles? Are there not higher principles of service, both human and Divine, than political economy has ever dreamt of; and which have been the true nobility of human history? Mere calculated utility is no adequate expression of affection, no worthy service either of God or man. We may not relieve poverty at the cost of noble affections. Love to Christ must dominate all other love. Whatever is the most adequate expression of that, is the noblest work of human hearts.

Was it really waste? Is everything done for Christ waste that is not calculated on utilitarian principles? And yet there are good, true, and consecrated disciples of Christ, who in their service or their appreciation of others never rise higher than such calculations. They will give money to purchase bread for the poor, but not to purchase ointment for Christ. Good, careful souls, they would have thought more of the twelve baskets of fragments than of the miracle of feeding.

"But surely Christ knew what was in Mary's heart, and did not need the proof of such a wasteful act.

It was but the gratification of a moment. Might she not have avowed her affection and her willingness to anoint Him if He wished it ; and then have suggested the benevolence to the poor—the hungry mouths it would fill, the sorrowful homes it would make glad ?”

So we might justly reason concerning a thousand luxuries and superfluities of life. How many things we all might do without, that would provide food for the hungry, build churches and schools, and send the gospel to the heathen ! How much we might spare of the purple and fine linen, the sumptuous fare every day, the costly house and equipage, expensive habits, superfluous indulgences ! How many lavish upon themselves, or hoard for their children, to a degree that neither God nor man can approve ! All honour to the noble few who deny themselves in order that they may have to give to the poor.

But this is not the alternative before us. Here the claims of almsgiving are urged as superior to those of worship.

Are we then to calculate every offering to Christ by the simple measure of utility ? Are we to build churches, and regulate services of worship, on the simple principle of getting for our money as much as we can ? counting seats, calculating the minimum of decent comfort, balancing in our hands the three hundred pence ? Is this rule of utility to denude our churches of ornament, to impoverish our ritual of music and song, to reduce churches to mere places of shelter, and worship to a mere canon of propriety ?

Are we never to pour forth our ointment? Is the enthusiasm of love, even though in its impetuosity it breaks the costly vase, to be rebuked as wasteful? Is utility the whole of piety? Is it the whole of life even? May not love give for love's sake; strive to pour forth itself? Must it always take the form of almsgiving? Is adoration forbidden it?

Should not every church in its becoming ornament, every worship in its modest richness, correspond with the social habit of the worshippers? And should it exceed, who will rebuke it, Christ or Judas? Is it a proper expression of love for men who "dwell in ceiled houses" to worship in bald and comfortless churches? And yet when a costly church is built, and loving men are glad and proud to bring generous offerings, how readily the demur comes from the less enthusiastic, "Why was all this waste? He who 'dwells not in temples made with hands' needs neither lofty spires nor gilded columns. Are not shelter, accommodation, decent propriety, all that are requisite? Whose sense of the beautiful is this decoration to gratify? How much better a second church built with the superfluous cost of this? Why 'waste' the ointment, when the poor need the three hundred pence?"

So we demur to distant Christian enterprizes. Might not the cost and labour of heathen missions be bestowed upon the poor at home? Why spend money upon preaching to Hottentots, when the poor of London want bread?



Thus in a thousand forms the Judas-spirit of depreciation censures and disallows the worshipping love of Mary. A narrow, critical, utilitarian spirit passes judgment upon a warm heart, leaving no room in human life for generous impulses, for artless, loving feeling.

Why was it "a good work"? Because the heart of Christ craves love, and rejoices in every act that expresses it. Hunger of the body is not only hunger of a man: there is a hunger of the heart that must also be satisfied. All who love crave love:—Christ most of all, because He loves most of all. The worshipping love of Mary satisfied this hunger of Christ's Divine heart; for it is the property of acts of love to satisfy both those who receive and those who do them. If ever human heart beat with a deep, passionate love for Christ, it was the heart of Mary of Bethany. Could she have poured forth ten thousand boxes of ointment, she would only thereby have enhanced her joy.

And if there be one heart more than another to which human love is precious, it is the heart of Jesus of Nazareth. No affection can be wasted of which He is the object. No offering of love to him can fail of appreciation. Even its perfume is precious to Him. Our love is His mediatorial reward. Other hearts may be cold or indifferent, His is eager and acquisitive. Think of such loving fervours met by such churlish rebuke. "Why was this waste of the ointment made?" What a chilling word to speak to

such a fervid heart! What wonder that she was troubled that her love should be so misunderstood, that the very disciples should be incapable of sharing her enthusiasm. What wonder if she wept!

Therefore her Lord, to whom her love was so grateful, rebuked the cavillers; commended what she had done; directed attention to the surpassing love which had prompted it; declared it to be a right, a beautiful thing, a fitting expression of the true homage of love. "She hath wrought a good work *on me*;" thus delicately reminding them that in censuring Mary they were disparaging Him. How the gracious word would thrill through her soul. This then was *His* estimate of her act—He so accepted it. The supreme reward of love is to be lovingly appreciated. She had sought simply to express her feeling; better pleased to waste upon Him her ointment than to utilize it in any other way. It was only the symbol of her feeling of boundless self-sacrifice. With the perfume she poured out her soul; she brake the vase of her heart, and poured forth the fragrant affluence of her love. And He full appreciated it; it was a good work wrought on Him. They saw only the lavish ointment and the broken vase; He saw the precious love and the broken heart. It might not be a calm, calculating act; but it is a tepid, meagre love that always calculates; and the love that does not calculate is often called extravagant by the love that does.

2. Our Lord emphatically justifies her preference

of service. "The poor ye have with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good; but me ye have not always."

What a wistful tenderness, a subdued pathos, there is in this way of putting it! It is a premonition of His coming Passion; and a yearning of His great, gentle, human heart for the sympathy and comfort of love in its endurance. It was not service that He sought, nor co-operation in His work, so much as love.

No one cared for the poor as Jesus did; but that was the time for showing love to Him, not to the poor. There is a fitness of service which only fanaticism will disregard. Mary cared for the poor also, more perhaps than they all. None care for the poor so much as they whose hearts are full of passionate love for Christ. He is a poor advocate for the poor, who in their name rebukes great impulses of love to Christ. "When ye will ye may do them good." In which was the will the stronger, in Mary or in Judas? Now the Master is present, to-morrow He will be present no longer. Now is the time for service to Him, the golden opportunity for an expression of love which can never recur.

Thus by gentle and significant words He brings His departure to their thoughts, vindicates His timid disciple, and soothes His own human spirit by her love.

3. He speaks of the premonitory fitness of her act. "She hath anointed my body to the burying."

Was this her intelligent purpose? May not her delicate womanly instinct, her penetrating womanly love, have perceived meanings in His words to which the duller hearts of the disciples were insensible? Might she not have a deeper insight into the mystery of His cross? "Against the day of my burying hath she *kept* this." Was this to her the day of His burying? Was her love consciously consecrating and embalming Him? Does she render to Him, living, honours she may not be able to render Him dead? To-morrow He will go forth to His Passion. She cannot go with Him, like the rest. To her this is the parting hour. Hence she hovers round Him so tenderly, pours forth her love with such transport, offers such valedictory adoration to the Friend and Saviour of her house. What wonder at the impetuous passion, the uncontrollable tenderness of her act! The fervour of love, the sanctity of worship, the solemnity of a burial, were in it.

Or did our Lord mean that Mary had done a thing that had a fitness and a significance beyond her own purpose or consciousness? that her deed involved hidden congruities which she did not suspect? This is the distinctive property of acts of love. Love ever goes beyond its own purpose, does more than itself is conscious of. In its keen instinct of what is fitting it works up to the limit of its perceptions; and often therefore unconsciously goes beyond them. Our simple act of courteous benevolence is often a ministry to unsuspected depths of feeling. Love finds

human hearts at depths and points which itself does not suspect.

Therefore our Lord was so deeply touched by Mary's ministry of love. It found Him in deeper thoughts and workings of His soul than she imagined. Its fitness disables all criticism concerning its reasonableness. Ay, and when on the morrow the people shall shout their hosannas, and strew their garments in the way, as in the triumphal procession of a king, He will forgive *their* mistake, for the sake of its impulse. As he accepts Mary's costly ointment, so He will accept their enthusiastic ovation. If every passion carries in itself its own excuse, the Master will surely forgive excess of love for Himself.

"Against my burial." What a premonition for the foreboding heart of Mary, as well as for the traitorous heart of Judas. While it is a commendation to her, it is a condemnation to him. As He does afterwards, the Lord spares Judas the open exposure of his treason. It was a delicate, subtle, pathetic appeal, which should have brought him to repentance. But let evil take possession of a man, and love, even though it be Divine, only exasperates it. The effect upon Judas of this considerate warning was, that he went out to covenant with the chief priests.

4. But the crowning vindication of Mary is the generous appraisal of her act as the measure of her fidelity. "She hath done what she could." All that her opportunity enabled, all that her heart suggested to her to do. And nothing suggests doing

like love. We never know what we can do until love has taught us. Mary's love divined an act which in the appreciation of her Lord had deep and beautiful significance. It was an anointing for His burial, it was the last touching office of tender reverential affection.

Absolutely considered, and in her own estimation, her act was simple and trivial enough. Nor did her Lord mean that she had strained her power of doing to the utmost. It was not her only possible service, it was not her last farthing. Not in this way does Christ estimate the doings of our love. Just as it is not on our part a perfect love that painfully strives and fears, lest it should not do enough, so neither on His part would it be a perfect love if it were jealously exacting more and more. Love sees only love. His loving appreciation saw no deficiency. His generous delight was not capable of criticism. He could neither measure nor weigh her expression of affection. Had there been defects, His love would not have noted them. He broadly estimated the thing that she had done by the love that did it. He lovingly commended it as good and beautiful; and by His high and emphatic encomium comforted her wounded feeling.

What a word for Mary to hear! He not only accepted her service, He fully understood its loving impulse, generously vindicated the way in which she had expressed it, and expressed something like gratitude for it. What an impression the Christ

must have made upon those about Him when His lightest word was such a vindication, could give such satisfaction, kindle such rapture, win such worship! What a charity and a grace were in Him, so to interpret and vindicate the hearts of His disciples! How He read loving hearts, and commended them!

This then divests the incident of all that was peculiar to Mary, generalizes the principle and measure of loving service, makes it a test and a joy to all true-hearted disciples.

What do we proffer to Christ? Not great riches, perhaps, not elaborate service. Mary did not. The widow with her two mites did not. They brought simply what they were able to bring, and thereby they won the highest commendation that our Lord ever uttered.

What can we do? We may give love, sympathy, worship; and give expression to our feeling by whatever means are possible and most natural to us—the veriest trifle, “a cup of cold water,” if we can do no other. There are ministries possible to all love, if the love be there to prompt them. Opportunities for loving service present themselves everywhere. True love will find its own expressions, it will draw us ever more closely to Christ, and constrain us more fully and richly to pour out our affections for Him. Our life may be very humble, small in its abilities, contracted in its sphere. We may be steeped to the lips in disabling poverty, far removed

from large spheres of action. We may lie helpless upon a sick bed. Active service may be forbidden us.

They also serve who only stand and wait.

We may fill the narrowest sphere of life with the service and atmosphere of a loving heart. Mary had no great opportunities; and yet what appreciation she won. Martha had served the Divine Master, Mary had sat at His feet; and yet it is neither Martha's service nor Mary's absorbed discipleship that wins this supreme commendation—it is this simple expression of love.

Do not let us be distressed then because great abilities or great opportunities are not given to us; because we cannot do more, or give more. Mary's act seemed but a barren proof of affection. It was not preaching the gospel, it was not going with Christ to His cross, it was not feeding the poor; it was simply pouring an unguent on the head and feet of the Lord. That was what she could do. And her trustful heart did not fret because she could not do more, because she could not do the service of another. She no doubt thought but little of what she had done. No true heart of love can be satisfied with itself. Its conception of what love should be is ever greater than its own realization. Mary could not thus have commended herself. If a man self-complacently consoles himself for imperfect service by the plea, "I have done what I can," he has within him no true heart of love.



But while the love that gives cannot be satisfied with itself, the love that receives is satisfied abundantly. No matter what its form, if its feeling be true. His test of value is affection and motive; else love would be graduated by ability. No matter whether it be a costly box of ointment, or a cup of cold water; nothing is too costly if our love proffer it, nothing too poor if it be all that love can give; an ornament for a church, or a crust for a beggar, so long as it expresses love for Him, He graciously accepts it.

5. And this is Mary's memorial. "Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her."

How confidently He predicts the universal spread of His kingdom, and how He promises, long ere the first of the Gospels was written, that this shall be an illustrious record in it! Wherever men read the history of the Redeemer's Passion, they read how truly and tenderly Mary loved Him.

It is, I think, the only time that our Lord promises reputation as a reward of service.

Then, desire for posthumous fame is not an unlawful or ignoble thing. What a value He puts upon the love of our poor hearts! While "the memory of the wicked shall rot;" while deeds of conquerors, and dignities of monarchs are forgotten; while even service in Christ's Church is rarely distinguished by special discriminations, the memory of this simple act of true affection endures. Not he

who does most will be most honoured, but he who loves most; because qualities of the heart are much more than achievements of the hand. Because Mary thought so little of honour, this honour is secured to her. Any thought of the renown that her act might bring would have adulterated the simplicity of her feeling, and substituted selfish calculation for self-forgetful love. Honour comes, it is not pursued.

His word is the stamp of immortality. While other names far more resounding have been forgotten; while other things far more imposing have sunk into oblivion; this simple act of a loving woman in the little village of Bethany is spoken of throughout the world.

(1) If Mary's love for her Lord was so fervent and uncalculating, what should not ours be?

True He had been her personal friend; she had sat at His feet; He had raised her brother from the dead; but He had not yet died for her upon the cross. The last great proof of His self-sacrificing love had yet to be given. The least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than Mary, knows more of the love of Christ, has conceptions of it which she never surmised.

If then Mary brought her ointment, what should not we bring? If she poured out her heart of love so fervently, how rapturous and affluent should the expressions of ours be?

Love so amazing, so Divine,  
Demands my life, my soul, my all.

And yet, compared with hers, how cold our hearts, how calculating our service.

(2) It is a wise and great thing to yield to loving impulses, to permit strong love to carry us beyond the prescriptions of cold reason and deliberate calculation.

Our peril from over enthusiasm is not great. Give it free course. Love will carry us farther than any other inspiration. Let its promptings be yielded to without too nice a calculation of proprieties. However costly our box of ointment, let us gladly bring it, and with eager love break it over the head and feet of the Lord. He will not call it waste.

(3) The love that is true will serve as well as worship.

It will not permit worship to be an excuse for neglecting work. The love that restricts itself to the pouring out of perfumes, that does not also minister to the poor, is hardly a true love. Christ accepts our costly offering to Himself, but we "have the poor always with us, and when we will we may do them good." Those who worship Him with the truest heart, serve the poor with the truest sympathy. No man ever yet loved Christ much who was not a true philanthropist.

(4) What a grand characterisation of a life it is:—"She hath done what she could!" It may be true, whether the doing be great or small—preaching the gospel or pouring out a vase of ointment. And when true it is a verdict of God that may not be

reversed. Wherever a life so consecrated is seen, it is full of moral nobility. How it inspires and stirs men! When the poor man consecrates his poverty, and the rich man his wealth, and when the humblest and the greatest service are alike rendered in the spirit of self-forgetful love and worship, it is its sufficient reward and joy that He graciously accepts and commends it.

It is but the prelude to the great and wondrous word of final commendation, "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."

VII.

The Power of Intercession.

*And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the Lord. And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? And the Lord said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes. And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, who am but dust and ashes: Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five? And he said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it. And he spake unto him yet again, and said, Peradventure there shall be forty found there. And he said, I will not do it for forty's sake. And he said unto him, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Peradventure there shall thirty be found there. And he said, I will not do it if I find thirty there. And he said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord: Peradventure there shall be twenty found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for twenty's sake. And he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake. And the Lord went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place.—GEN. xviii. 22-33.*

## VII.

THIS intercession of Abraham for Sodom is the first prayer that the Bible records; and in its great characteristics—human and spiritual—it is one of the most remarkable. It is the intercession of a good man, a friend of God, for men who, in their wickedness and their defiance of God, had well nigh approached the utmost possibilities of human evil.

The general characteristics of it are obvious; its roots lie deep in the mysterious sympathies and promptings of the spiritual life; its principles and suggestions extend over a wide domain of spiritual things. In a simple and yet almost startling way it presents an illustration of the kind of intercourse—so reverent and yet so bold, so acquiescent and yet so persistent—which a good man may hold with God. Incidentally, it throws some practical light upon one of the questions just now debated between philosophy and faith, viz., the place and power of prayer in the economy of God's government

of the world. It is, too, an illustration of the great Christian law of mediation:—God blessing one for the sake of another. It exhibits the solicitude and sorrow with which a good man will regard the retribution that falls upon the wicked. It is a comforting instance of the indulgence which our Father in heaven will show to our weak and narrow apprehensions:—how He bears with Abraham's pious artifice, and blesses the generous and ingenious charities of his heart. It indicates the value which God puts upon good men:—He would have spared wicked Sodom for the sake of ten. It is a measure and demonstration of the amazing power of a good man's prayers. It is full of assurance and comfort for all who, urged by their own spiritual necessities, or by their solicitudes for others, seek the Divine mercy-seat. Indeed, it is a history well nigh exhaustless in the fruitfulness of its teachings and comforts.

But passing over these more obvious suggestions of the narrative itself, it may be instructive and stimulating to ascertain, if we can, the secret of this marvellous prayer. How came Abraham to be qualified to offer such an intercession? How is it that only men like Abraham can be effective intercessors with God for the world of sinful men?

And this will, perhaps, appear, if we consider certain contrasts exhibited in the history between Abraham and Lot:—Lot in Sodom, and in imminent peril of sharing its doom; Abraham at Mamre,



interceding for Sodom and for him: and yet both religious men.

I. A man's praying power is not an arbitrary thing, it is the result of long antecedent spiritual processes.

If a man find himself an effective intercessor with God, a prince having power with God to prevail, it is only because he has grown to great spiritual wisdom, unselfishness, and grace. The praying power of a man is no mere accident of his mood, no mere impulse of his necessity; it is the slow growth of spiritual character, the gradual development of a faith that has "grown exceedingly," the confidence which a long familiarity with God creates, the fervent sympathy and desire of a chastened unselfishness, the ripened spirituality and tenderness of a carefully cultured heart.

You cannot be worldly, selfish, and lukewarm to-day, living feebly and unspiritually, caring little for others, realizing but little of vivid, joyous communion with God, and, to-morrow, become suddenly a man of fervent, large-hearted, mighty prayer.

Spiritual life, like other life, has its laws of growth and power. Spiritual weakness does not suddenly develop into strength. Self-seeking is not magically transformed into self-forgetful intercession. A prayer such as this is perhaps the very highest achievement, the supremest grace, the most perfect fruit of the spiritual life; altogether impossible, therefore, to a man whose spiritual life is feeble.

It is true that prayer is the nurture of life, and that we live cold, feeble, unblest lives, because we pray so little; but it is true, also, that life is the condition of prayer, and that we have so little disposition or power to pray because our general spiritual life is so meagre and languid.

Is it not very significant that it is Abraham, and not Lot, who became the intercessor for Sodom? And yet Lot was "a righteous man," a servant of Jehovah. Lot had, moreover, the deepest interest in the fate of the guilty city. His worldly interests were involved in it; the home of his children was there; it contained the circle of his friendships; and apparently its destruction would involve his own. He, too, knew as Abraham could not know what "sinners exceedingly before the Lord" the men of Sodom were; "that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds."

Who could have prayed for Sodom with more intelligence, or urged by more powerful feelings? And yet it is Abraham, and not Lot, who is the intercessor for Sodom.

1. Jehovah does not even impart His confidence to Lot: only at the last moment, when all is determined, He mercifully sends messengers to bring him to a place of safety. Because Lot is a righteous man, and because he is Abraham's kinsman, he is saved—but "saved so as by fire." But Jehovah goes

to consult Abraham in the formation of his purpose; although Abraham's personal interest in Sodom was so remote; although he was dwelling some twenty miles away, across the mountains of Engedi, "at Mamre which looketh toward Machpelah." Why does He impart this confidence to Abraham, whose interest was only secondary, rather than to Lot, whose interest was so vital?—both being men of God.

2. Suppose that Lot had been made acquainted with Jehovah's purpose: was he capable of interceding for Sodom as Abraham did? Had he the requisite spiritual qualifications? Can we even conceive the historian putting such a prayer into his lips? Whatever the character and authority of these old records, their moral harmonies are too subtle and profound for an incongruity such as this. Every character delineated here is, to say the least, in perfect and wonderful keeping. The whole history and character of Lot are out of keeping with such an intercession; those of Abraham make it so natural that we scarcely feel surprise at it. Abraham had always been a spiritual man; he had always given preference to spiritual things; he had so cultivated religious tempers and habits, that it had come to be the characteristic of his life that he "walked with God." God Himself had come to designate him, "Abraham my friend." He was habitually devout, accustomed to commune with God, and to find in such communion the rest and joy of his life; therefore, "the secret

of the Lord was with him." It was no unaccustomed, formal interview, that he sought with Jehovah; this intercession for Sodom was simply the special topic of his ordinary prayer. It was natural to him thus to speak, thus to plead with his Divine "Friend," to urge an intercession in which reverence is strained to the very verge of boldness, although the boldness excites no surprise.

Does not this contrast teach us that all good men are not equally good? that all religious men are not equally devout? Just as the apostle distinguishes between a "righteous man"—a man that is scrupulously just, and a "good man"—a man who is benevolent and gracious as well as just, so we may distinguish between religious men, whose intercourse with God just suffices to preserve their spiritual life, and *devout* men, with whom intercourse with God is a daily habit and craving, a daily strength and joy. Only such can be great in prayer; only such can become efficient intercessors for the world.

If, then, your habitual temper of life be unspiritual, if the religious life that you normally realize be feeble, stunted, undevout, as of a "root out of a dry ground," you are spiritually incapacitated from praying as Abraham prayed. However great the urgency, even were the city in which you dwell threatened with destruction to-morrow, you could not shape, you could not attemper, you could not sustain such an intercession. You have

not reverence enough to be so bold, you have not assurance enough to be so importunate, you have not spiritual sympathy enough so to yearn for men, so to take hold upon God. It is not every cry to God, whatever its sincerity and passion, that constitutes such an intercession. You might invoke an Almighty power, of whose disposition you had but little assurance, if, haply, He might have compassion; but you could not plead as Abraham pleaded—as though one of the cherubim of the mercy-seat were to plead—plead with a perfect confidence that God's love would refuse nothing that it could grant; plead as if from under the sheltering wing of the Most High, that it might be stretched out to cover others also. Loudly, passionately you might cry, but then you would weary, and stand, and wait in dumb silence and fear.

Oh, why are we so poor in prayer, when prayer would so enrich our souls? Why are we so impotent in intercession when our intercession might so prevail for the world? Is it not because we have not developed praying habit into power, because we have not by daily culture, by daily communion with God, deepened and hallowed spiritual feeling, so that prayer has become the pervading temper, the unconscious intercourse of our daily life?

There was spiritual life in Lot, but it ever leaned to the worldly side of things. He chose the rich pastures of the vale of Sodom—the goodly portion

of the land, the good business, the lucrative profession, the pleasant residence; risking all spiritual interests—the worldly contact, the godless society, the irreligious atmosphere of life that such a choice might involve.

There was spiritual life in Abraham, but it always leaned to the heavenly side of things. Abraham left his patrimony at Haran in obedience to God's call. He permitted his younger kinsman Lot to choose the portion of the land that pleased him best, simply to avoid the moral evils of strife. He would not use his power as a prince to obtain any portion of the promised land; God should work out His promises in His own way. He insisted upon purchasing even a burial-place. To avoid reproach, he refused all share in the spoil of the kings. He is prepared at God's demand to surrender even Isaac, the "heir of the promise." Abraham never hesitated in his preference of spiritual good, he was ever jealous of worldly influences, ever implicit and prompt in obedience, ever faithful and fervent in love. And thus through daily habit and temper his spiritual life grew, drinking in more and more of the influences with which he surrounded himself. Thus he "built up the being that he was;" abiding in God as the branch abides in the vine; nurturing the very life of God in his receptive soul. Thus he was qualified to be the intercessor for Sodom.

II. The praying power of a man is conditioned

upon the circumstances by which he surrounds himself.

What a contrast there is in the positions and surroundings of these two men! Abraham at Mamre, Lot in Sodom! This alone explains how it was that Lot needed Abraham's prayers, and that Abraham was in a position to offer them. How greatly Abraham's circumstances favoured such an intercession, how impossible it was in the circumstances of Lot! Upon the peaceful heights of Mamre, in his oratory beneath the terebinth tree, there was nothing to disturb Abraham's prayer, to distract his thought, or to deaden his heart. In the mad whirl of Sodom, how was it possible for Lot to command either the leisure, composure, or gracious influence essential to such a prayer? The life and power of a man's prayer depend upon the spiritual atmosphere with which he surrounds himself.

How can you pray, brethren, if your life is immersed in worldly things? if, wherever you turn you see only the wickedness of Sodom, and feel its hot scorching breath; even if you yourselves have preserved your integrity, if you have only permitted yourselves to be compassed with unspiritual influences? But how difficult this is, and how rare! How often they who dwell in Sodom are corrupted by it! What then if you have imbibed its spirit, if it has drawn you into its wrong, and the prayer of your Sabbath worship or of your

closet is checked and disabled by your ordinary temper and life! What if, when you would open your mouth to God, you are hindered by the secret consciousness that you are not "lifting up holy hands;" that your sinful indulgence, your commercial morality, your selfish ways, are incongruous with your prayer! If, for instance, in the principles and methods of your business, your speculations have been equivocal, your methods disingenuous; if there has been any compromise of the highest right, anything that you could not submit to a jury of the Church, or unbare to the whole world; how is it possible for you to pray ingenuously to Him who is holy, who searches the heart? England might perish, her statesmen become venal, her merchants fraudulent, her artisans criminal, her social life corrupt, her Church insincere and unspiritual: you cannot so intercede as to save them; you have trained yourself to no habit, cherished no spirit, grown to no power of holy pleading prayer.

III. Even when God vouchsafes to visit a man, how much of its spiritual blessing depends upon his own character and circumstances.

Lot receives Divine guests, but how? In the midst of one of the foulest, the most lurid, the most hellish night-scenes that literature records. The sinners of Sodom clamouring about his door, seeking the vilest ends, and threatening him with personal violence; so that the angels have to



suggest that they shall remain in the street all night. He, humiliated and fearful, has to go out to the mob, shutting the door of his house behind him. To conciliate them, he calls these vile wretches "brethren;" and in his fear and confusion proposes an infamous compromise, which he should have died sooner than have thought of. Very terribly had the vile atmosphere of Sodom demoralised the tone of even "righteous Lot."

Such are the straits into which good men bring themselves when they dwell in Sodom, when they get entangled with the world, associated with its wrong-doers. So that even when God comes to commune with such a man, he is not at leisure to receive Him. The men of Sodom clamour at the door, distracting his mind, awakening his fears, and hindering his quiet absorbed communion with God. He has to go out to them, break off communing with his Divine guest, and "shut the door behind him."

You cannot have the world for your companionship and be free to receive God as your guest. It will presume upon its intimacy and intrude its disturbing pollutions, even when God has honoured you by coming to you, and you would fain be alone with Him.

Abraham receives Divine guests. How? There is significance even in his contrasted salutation. Lot's guests come upon him unexpectedly. Abraham "ran to meet" his approaching guests, as if he had been

looking out for them. He is at leisure to receive them; with undistracted, restful mind, he sits down in peaceful communion with them. Personally and socially, mentally and religiously, he is prepared for intercourse with God. There is nothing in his character or his circumstances to disable it. It is calm, leisurely, thoughtful, spiritual. His eager heart, like Mary's at the feet of the Lord, drinks in their Divine words. What wonder that this man can pray! Prayer is the outcome of our entire life and circumstances; and those only who habitually walk with God can receive His counsel or speak to Him with confidence.

Again, if a man dwell in Sodom, and God vouchsafe to visit him, the only word that it is possible even for God to speak to him *there* is a word of personal alarm and urgency. "We will destroy this place, escape for thy life, lest thou also be consumed." And the only possible response to such an urgency is to make immediate provision for personal security. How can God talk with a man in Sodom as He can in a peaceful tent in Mamre? If he be in Sodom, the only merciful word to him is a word of personal alarm. But if he be devoutly dwelling in his tent at Mamre, there is no need for personal urgency, and there God's word to him will be a word of leisurely confidence, counsel, and peace.

If, again, a man have his own personal safety to secure, how can he plead with God in self-forgetful intercession for others? The instinct of

personal safety is strong in us all. It is morally impossible for even the best of us to be absorbed in solitudes for others while our own peril demands our care. This, again, is the disability of worldly circumstances and entanglements. A practical selfishness is forced upon us; even when we would intercede for others our prayer becomes the passionate entreaty of personal necessity. But if a man be dwelling in safety, with no cause for personal alarm, he has leisure of thought and of heart to think about others and to pray for them.

Oh, brethren, how little we realize the spiritual power and privilege that we lose through our worldly life and habit! Nor can we realize it until some great emergency comes and we try to pray. Then we shall discover how entirely our strength has departed from us,—how largely personal peril has disabled even natural charities; and instead of the prayer of calm, pitiful, generous faith, we are full of fear, and flutter, and selfish absorption.

IV. It is instructive to compare the intercession of Abraham with the pleadings of Lot, when the angels sought to deliver him. The prayer of Abraham is perfect in its humility, and yet daring in its boldness. It is so bold because it is so humble. With what a lowly estimate of himself he prays! He is but "dust and ashes." How he deprecates the seeming presumption of taking upon himself thus to speak unto the Lord. How

implicit his confidence in whatever God shall determine. "The Judge of all the earth will do right." Although his pleading is so importunate, it is throughout interrogative, and not imperative; he will in the last issue confidently leave the matter in God's hands. But then how daring and urgent his confidence is; the holy, the wistful persistence of his faith! How like a privileged friend, how like a freeborn son of the Father's house he speaks! Surely the intercourse of man with God culminates in this marvellous prayer. Piety, faith, unselfishness, humility, cluster in a spiritual grandeur that is almost unique. It is, I think, a prayer rising nearer to the spirit of our Lord's great prayer than any other that is recorded; unless, indeed, we except the marvellous prayer of Moses when he interceded for the sinning people.

How different the prayer of Lot! How troubled, how selfish, how self-willed! When the angel urges him, "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou also be consumed," he does not think of the doomed city, or of pleading for it. He begins in absorbed self-solicitude to remonstrate about the conditions of his own deliverance: they seem to him too onerous, and to involve too much risk. Cannot one of these cities of the plain be spared—not out of compassion for its imperilled inhabitants, no thought of their impending doom seems to have excited a feeling, but—as a shelter

for himself. "Stay not in all the plain, escape to the mountains." "Oh, say not so, my Lord. I cannot escape to the mountains, lest some evil take me and I die; behold, now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one; oh, let me escape thither (is it not a little one?), and my soul shall live." His only thought is the salvation of his own wretched life, and in a spirit of the most abject and despicable selfishness he urges the concession.

And besides the selfishness, and the self-will of all this, what a sad confusion of faith and fear it expresses! God has assured him that his life shall be preserved. He believes this so far as that he is willing to take shelter in Zoar; he does not believe it so far as to be willing to escape to the mountains. Were he to attempt *this* "some evil would befall him and he would die." He believes, that is, that God can preserve him by exempting Zoar; he does not believe that God can preserve him in the shelter of the mountains close by.

Are not many of our prayers like this? Prayers of sheer selfishness, prayers of mere fear, prayers of presumptuous self-will, prayers of a maimed, incongruous faith? a faith that says one bold word, takes one bold attitude, and then falters, and falls into confusion, and breaks down into an incongruous, unintelligent, unbelieving whimper. "Permit me to evade this requirement, to modify this con-

dition ; gratify me in this self-will ; if I am to obey implicitly I shall perish." Faith utterly failing, even when God has sent His angel to deliver us, even when the hand of the Deliverer is upon us. While in the prayer of Abraham, the acquiescence, the faith, the unselfishness are perfect ; in the prayer of Lot, these high qualities have no place at all.

Such must be the prayers of worldly Christians, of men who choose to dwell in the Sodoms of life ; to surround themselves with associations, to form habits, to accumulate interests, to assimilate elements of character that are unspiritual and selfish. When the hour of peril comes, and they have no recourse but prayer, they can pray only in this incoherent, selfish way. They are children of God, but they have chosen to "dwell in the tents of Meshech," and they have no feeling of their privations. Rather will they boast of their freedom from religious restraint, of the degree in which, as good men, they can with impunity mix with the unspiritual men of Sodom, cultivate their friendship, visit at their houses, and conform to their ways. What wonder, that when Sodom is threatened, they have enough to do to escape in hot haste for their lives ! They know but little of constant, confiding, loving intercourse with God as a heavenly Father ; therefore, when they seek His help, their prayer is a fluttered, fearful, incoherent cry ; and they cannot help saying in it things that evince only an alarmed selfishness, or a practical unbelief, utterly dishonouring to Him whose help they solicit.

Such are often the prayers even of good men, of men whom God hears and will take care of, but who have so little realized the life that is hid with Christ in God, that their cry is the frenzy of a praying fever, rather than the calm, natural utterance of a praying life.

V. There is one contrast more, which is very suggestive. The narrow, selfish, self-willed prayer of Lot was answered; the holy, Christ-like intercession of Abraham was unavailing. Zoar was spared, according to Lot's request; Sodom was destroyed, notwithstanding Abraham's pleading.

It is, therefore, no criterion of a right or a wrong prayer that it does not receive the kind of answer that we solicit. Some of the greatest and holiest prayers that have gone up from earth to heaven have been unanswered prayers:—the pleading of Abraham for Sodom, of David for his sick child, of Paul for the removal of the thorn in his flesh, of Christ for passing of His cup. Thank God for unanswered prayers. Could any calamity be greater than for every desire of our ignorance, our folly, our self-will, our piety even, to be implicitly granted.

Concerning the Israelites, we read that "God gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul." It is no more a presumption against God's fatherly love that His own wise goodness regulates His compliance with our desires, than it is a presumption against a human parent's love

that he does not grant every foolish request of his child. Nor in either case is it an argument against the general efficacy of prayer. No child of God, conscious of his own ignorance, will present an imperative prayer: tacitly or formally he will submit his desire to the wiser will of the heavenly Father. If he do not, there is all the more need that God's patient love should refuse.

Well would it have been for Lot had his prayer been refused. Zoar was spared to his self-will and fear, and he took refuge in it. I need not remind you of the melancholy sequel of his history. From Zoar he fled to the mountains of Moab, and with one dark record of drunkenness and lust he disappears from the history. The last record concerning him is one of shame. He would not walk in God's paths, and in terrible severity he was permitted to walk in his own; and he fell—fell into sin such as the life of Sodom had prepared him for. A man always falls on the side to which he leans. His shameful end, like his worldly life, shows how shallow and unspiritual his religion was. Can any lesson be more solemn? Is it not the natural end of the worldly, the self-seeking religious man? He walks on the worldly side of the path of life. He chooses worldly conditions, and a worldly habit of life: these eat out the strength of his piety, and in "time of temptation he falls away."

Abraham's prayer was not answered, but how spiritually strong it left him! While Lot disap-



pears, a fugitive in the dark shadows of the mountains of Moab, Abraham "returns to his place," the place of his communion with God, where God had often visited him, and would visit him again. His common life was consecrated by his prayer, was consecrated *as* his prayer. He "set God always before him," and by every contact with God he deepened the spiritual affections of his soul, and waxed stronger and stronger, "perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord." And is not this the supreme answer to prayer—not the mere granting of a request, which may or may not be a benefit, but—the spiritualizing of the soul by its intercourse with God, the purifying of its affections, the strengthening of its faith, the increase of its grace? If in answer to our passionate pleading the assurance comes, "My grace is sufficient for thee," we have received the greatest answer to our prayer.

1. What a moral sublimity there is in the character of a man like Abraham! How greatly it makes us think of the religious life, of the possibilities of piety! How he inspires us with admiration, reverence, and great impulse! How grandly he stands, how nobly he lives amid the worldly, carnal men of his generation! How abject in comparison, a weak, sensual man like Lot seems! Men like Abraham fill the world with the light of a great hope! How great he is among his contemporaries, how great before God! What

elements of power he wields, what reverence he wins, what sanctity he diffuses! His very presence is a grace; to have known such a man must have been a religion. His prayer moves heaven, and moulds destinies on earth. May we not understand through this history the great meaning of the expression, "He was called the friend of God"? God might have destroyed Sodom and rescued Lot without any reference to Abraham. But he is represented as almost rebuking Himself for the suggested thought. "Shall I hide from Abraham this thing that I do?" It is a confidence due to him; to withhold it will be to violate the sanctities of friendship. Oh! it is a wonderful thing that the moral claim of a holy man upon his Divine Friend should be so strong as to overshadow even the disparity between the Creator and the creature. It seems a kind of audacity for a man thus to lay his hand upon the right arm of the Most High, and arrest the poised thunderbolt of His wrath. And yet something like this still goes on between God and His people. Thus in their prayers and pleadings His children still speak to Him.

2. What a grandeur and a power there are in a good man's intercession! What a marvellous colloquy it is, God and His friend standing face to face in expostulation! God informing Abraham of His purpose, and Abraham turning the information into remonstrance and prayer! First, pray-

ing generally for such righteous as there might be in the city, and then growing bolder, and praying for the wicked for the sake of the righteous! At first he suggests that there might be fifty righteous men in the city, then taking advantage of the concessions of his Divine Friend, he presses his urgency until he takes his stand upon the moral worth of ten. He seems as if he were experimenting upon Divine clemency, upon the Divine estimate of good men. He brings down the terms to the lowest possible calculation. And so long as Abraham feels it morally right to stipulate, God concedes. He seems, as it were, helpless against a good man's intercession. Not until Abraham leaves off asking does God leave off giving; as if He would draw out the measure and intensity of Abraham's praying spirit. It is interesting to note the cessation of Abraham's pleadings. He is restrained only by a feeling of moral fitness. It is not the importunity of a beggar, it is the intercession of a saint. Abraham is perhaps greater in the cessation of his prayer than in its pleadings. He shows the reverent truthfulness of his love and pity, the great religious strength of his self-restraint.

There are moral limits to God's mercy, and, therefore, to a good man's prayers. "There is a sin unto death, I do not say that ye shall pray for it." The iniquities of a people may arrive at such a pitch that "if Noah, Daniel, and Job were among them, they should not prevail, save to deliver their own souls."

Abraham did not prevail for the preservation of Sodom, but he did not plead in vain: no righteous person perished in it. Even Lot was delivered; although, having chosen the earthly portion of the wicked, he might justly have shared their temporal calamities. But so long as Lot was in Sodom, a moral disability was upon the angel of destruction. "Haste thee, escape thither, for we cannot do anything until thou be come thither;" and as soon as Lot was in Zoar the fiery retribution came. The next chapter gives the explanation. "It came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered"—not Lot, but—"Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow." It was not Lot in Sodom, and exposed to its doom, it was Abraham, at Mamre, that God remembered; and he delivered Lot for Abraham's sake. It was not mere mercy to Lot that was the urgency, it was the remembrance of "Abraham, his friend."

Is it not the indication of a great and momentous principle in God's government of the world, a principle which is perpetually working in our common life? Benefits and deliverances even for godless men are wrought by good men's prayers. It is an avowed characteristic of Him who orders all things that He is "a God that heareth prayer." There is, so to speak, between a wicked man and God's threatened judgment, a space, into which a good man may step and pray.

The praying Church in the midst of the ungodly

world:— as unsuspected in its agency and power as Abraham's prayer at Mamre. Can we doubt that God hears its myriad cries? Are they not God's "own elect who cry unto him day and night"? If any religious thing be certain, it is that for the sake of the praying Church, which "gives him no rest," and in answer to its intercessions, God is ever sparing and blessing mankind. True, the godly interceders are but few; Abraham was but one, and the men of Sodom were many. The moral forces, even of social life, are not with the multitude; frequently they are with the solitary thinker, or philanthropist, or virtuous citizen, or self-sacrificing patriot; the salt that leavens the lump is not equal to the lump in bulk. Good men are the salt of the earth, who keep it from becoming utterly corrupt and intolerable. Good men are the intercessors of the world, who prevail with God on its behalf; and yet the world does not know. Sodom did not know the influences that were affecting its doom. It is not the number, it is the dynamic energy of men that rules the world and the Church. There is that peculiar relationship between God and His people, that "his eye must ever be upon the righteous, and his ear open to their cry."

A pious man in a godless house:—Jacob in the house of Laban, Joseph in the house of Potiphar. His daily prayer goes up, a solitary cry from a godless fane; it enters the ears of the Lord God of Sabaoth, He blesses the household for the righteous man's sake.

Pious men in the ordinary social circles of life. Can we doubt that God hears their prayers; that directly and explicitly He blesses, not in a common, indiscriminate way, but specifically, in answer to their intercessions? The Bible is full of assurances of this, and it accords with our conceptions of friendship and favour. Is it not the "note" of true friendship when the historian tells us that God delivered Lot because He remembered Abraham,—the fidelity of his love, the earnest pertinacity of his pleading, the bold yet reverent challenge of his friendship? Had there been ten righteous persons in Sodom, God would, at the instance of His friend, have spared the city for their sake. He did spare the righteous that there were. And He still governs the world upon the same principle. In the New Testament, as well as in the Old, we have distinct and emphatic affirmations of the efficacious intercessions of righteous men; and the records of subsequent history and of personal experience are too remarkable in their coincidences to permit us to doubt it.

Let it then be with us a practical principle of life, that by our prayers we may bless others. Let us take care that we do not lose out of our lives this great faith. It is possible so to indulge in speculations about the philosophy of prayer, as to destroy the heart of prayer. No logic can avail against a great instinct; and there is no instinct greater or deeper than the instinct of prayer. It is, therefore, the dictate of wisdom simply to yield to the strong, irrepressible

instinct that urges us to pray, and with childlike simplicity, like that of Abraham, to ask our heavenly Father for the things that we need. A history like this, as a justification for such prayer, is a thousand times worthier than any philosophy that can be constructed. Surely the Infinite One knows better than we His own nature and purposes, and the principles upon which He governs the world.

We can only say that if this instinct of prayer which He has put into all human hearts, and which has found expression in every form of religious faith, be a delusion, He has "made all men in vain." And if this holy and wonderful book be not throughout a fable and a falsehood, he has enjoined upon all men that they pray—that "in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, they make known their requests unto him." And in signal instances like this He has shown us how graciously He hears, how lovingly He responds. If we ask we shall receive,—receive for others as well as for ourselves, for our kindred, for the Church, for the world. And what higher form can affection take, what holier expression can friendship find, than prayer for those we love! We ourselves would bless them if we could; we avail ourselves of our access to the great and merciful Father in heaven, and commend them to Him who is "able to do for them exceeding abundantly, above all that we can ask or think."

3. I will add only this. If Abraham's intercession so touched the heart of God, his friend, what must

be the power of the intercession of Christ, the well-beloved Son, pleading with His Father! What a mighty cause of God's long-suffering His prayers must be! "Him the Father heareth always." While He continues to plead, God can "do nothing." "He makes intercession for the transgressors," and they are spared—for awhile. But even the prayers of Jesus the Son of God will be ended; He will not intercede always; He will "leave off" communing with God, and will "return to his place;" and then the fiery retribution will fall, and "the curse causeless will not come." To such then as are in Sodom, whom its retribution threatens, and whom God's mercy entreats to "escape for your life," I would say, "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart; as the Holy Ghost saith—to-day." Oh, flee to Him, the "refuge from the storm, the shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall;" for "he is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."



VIII.  
Unrealized Visions.

*And Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, that is over against Jericho. And the Lord showed him all the land of Gilead, unto Dan, and all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim, and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah, unto the utmost sea, and the south, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, unto Zoar. And the Lord said unto him, This is the land which I swear unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed: I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither. So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Bethpeor; but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day. And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated. And the children of Israel wept for Moses on the plains of Moab thirty days: so the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended.—EXODUS xxxiv. 1-8.*

### VIII.

THE great parable of the wilderness wanderings of the Israelites has one of its profoundest applications in the death of the two great leaders of the people, Moses and Aaron. Life is more dramatic and tragic than we know; and when we read of the fate of these two illustrious brothers—the men who, above all others, seemed entitled to enter the land of promise; neither of them falling in battle nor dying a natural death, both of them doomed to die by the sentence of Jehovah whom they served and under whom they were leading the people—we are startled into a recognition of the true tragedy of life that there is in this. The indubitable impress of reality is upon it. How differently fable would have constructed the story! how different the apotheosis of mythical heroes! Moses and Aaron would have led the people into the land of promise, and ruled them there in triumph and honour; their sepulchres would have been proudly built in Jerusalem, and would have been among the

shrines of the world. The destinies of real life are different; men do not so completely complete the cycle of their thought, the purpose of their work.

Aaron was the high priest of God, and, some infirmities notwithstanding, he was a noble and saintly man; in character and service second only to his brother Moses. But Aaron must die in Mount Hor, because, with Moses, he "waxed wroth with the people, and disobeyed the Lord at Meribah." Arrayed in his priestly robes, like a garlanded victim, he is led by Moses his brother and Eleazar his son out of the midst of the wondering, weeping people, to the lonely summit of the mountain in Edom, where he dies. Imagination fails us when we try to realize the mystic solemnity of the position; the farewell glances upon the tented host in the Arabah valley below; the last words of affection and regret, of penitence and faith; the solemn awe of brother and son, as suddenly they looked upon the dead, unconscious body; the stern fortitude which dug his grave and buried him there, amid the weird limestone crags of that storm-worn summit. And then the submissive piety, the calm, tender heroism of faith, with which they descended to tell the people of the issue, and to mourn for Aaron forty days.

In like manner, Moses must die upon Nebo. Only, Moses must die alone. Neither son nor brother may close his dying eyes, or receive his last words. He, moreover, looks down, not only upon the host

which for forty years he has led through the wilderness, but also upon the land of promise which they were just about to possess; and he, their deliverer from Egypt, their guide and legislator, their captain and ruler, is forbidden to enter it with them.

And yet, in its romantic incidents and tragic crisis, his death is a fitting close of his great heroic life. Moses is one of the few historic characters that are well-nigh perfect. What a place in the world's imagination he fills! From the day when he was so romantically rescued from the bulrushes, and became heir to the Egyptian throne, to the day when, abjuring all, he fled to the wilderness of Sinai; from the day when he went to Pharaoh, with his proud, perilous mandate, "Let my people go," to the day when he died in solitude on Nebo—died, as the Rabbins say, "by the kiss of God"—a foundling, a courtier, a patriot, an outlaw, a miracle-worker, a warrior, a legislator, a national leader, he surely fulfilled the greatest mission ever entrusted to man, and exhibited the noblest elements of character ever moulded into greatness. In the grandeur of his conceptions, the greatness of his achievements, the heroism of his patience, and the magnanimity of his self-sacrifice, he stands foremost among the sons of men.

"Get thee up into this mountain and die." What a contrast to a former Divine summons, to ascend Sinai to commune with Jehovah, to receive from Him comfort and strength, and a renewed commis-

sion of service! And yet he evinces none of the trembling awe with which he ascended Sinai. Without remonstrance, without hesitancy, save for a moment, he calmly obeys the stern injunction. A good man knows how to die. Not again in the thick darkness and the weird lightnings of his privileged communion with God, and which might seem more congruous for the obsequies of such a prophet; but in the bright sunlight, and calm clear atmosphere, and with the promised land spread before him like a map, he prepares to die.

With a minuteness that seems almost a wanton mockery, a calculated cruelty, his gaze is directed to specified points of vision. He stands upon a peak of the almost perpendicular mountain wall of Moab, facing Jericho, some three thousand feet above it. Immediately beneath his feet, some ten miles in breadth, lies the valley of the Jordan. Almost the entire course of the river can be traced: its springs at the foot of Hermon in the far north; the waters of Merom in which it seems to merge itself; the bright lake of Galilee into which it broadens; then its winding, rushing course through a deep ravine fringed with almost tropical vegetation, until it loses itself in the mystic waters of the Dead Sea in the south.

Along the opposite side of the Jordan valley runs the parallel mountain ridge of Central Palestine—Lebanon and Hermon in the far north, Hebron in the south, the “mountains round about Jerusalem” in the central distance; beyond them the littoral

plains of Philistia and Sharon, Tyre and Sidon, bounded by the mysterious waters of the Great Sea. The sacred heights of the land, Hermon, Tabor, Gerizim, Moriah; its fertile districts, Bashan, Carmel, and Eshcol—all lay beneath his eye, in the almost incredible distinctness of that transparent atmosphere. It is one of the few landscapes that satisfy the imagination. To Moses it was the realization of dreams and hopes grown to passion in the cherishings and endurances of the wilderness and under the great promises of Jehovah; the *mirage* of forty years ever filling the vision of the people and soliciting their hope; now an actual, solid domain at his feet.

Doubtless there was deep pathos in his disappointed feeling. The land upon which he looked was the land for which God had brought the people out of Egypt, in which He had promised to make them a great nation. In Jerusalem, just beneath his eye, His temple would be built, and His name preserved when all other nations should be given over to idolatry. There the Prophet like unto himself should appear and accomplish His Passion; thence His salvation should go forth unto the ends of the earth. How much of this Moses foresaw, or understood, we do not know. He knew, however, that it was the land of miraculous heritage, of glorious destinies: "This is the land which I swear unto Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed."

It was a strange death-chamber; it was death under strange conditions. Alone, with the vision of promise in his eye, with his foot upon its margin, separated from it only by the Jordan; and *he* imperatively prohibited from entering it. And yet he did not tremble at the awfulness of death; he did not shrink from the mystery of its circumstance he did not murmur at the almost tantalizing refusal of his hope.

Ordinarily, when men die, there are friends to gather round their bed, with tender ministries of love and prayer. Sometimes, in the case of men like Moses, a nation will hush its footsteps, and wait the issue with agonizing suspense. Shut us up to die alone, with no hand that our weakness may clasp, no tear that may soothe our love, no prayer that may wing our hope, and how appalling death becomes. What pathos there is in the shrinking wail of Pascal, "I shall die alone!"

Thus Moses must die; and with all the enhancements of these disappointed hopes. The command comes to him to climb this strange death-chamber on Nebo, not knowing what pangs of dissolution will agonize his body, what terrors of death are to agonize his mind, only that he is to die alone; having first filled his vision with the land which the people are just about to possess, but which he is forbidden to enter with them. It seems a penal infliction almost wantonly aggravated. Imagination even can scarcely enhance the mystery and the awe



of the situation, so terrible in its deliberateness, its prepared conditions, the stern inscrutable mystery which enfolds it. Only the sublimest faith could implicitly obey such a mandate, and ascend the mountain for its accomplishment—a faith more sublime, I think, than that which stood before Pharaoh, or entered the thick darkness of Sinai. “The Lord showed him the land of Canaan, and said unto him, I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither. So Moses the servant of God died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord.”

It is a twofold parable.

First, of the unrealized hope of human life; and, secondly, of the visions with which, notwithstanding, human life may be inspired.

I. The unrealized hopes of human life:—the frequent disappointments, the unfulfilled purposes which so often characterize it; and which, to the affections and to the philosophy of life, are so mysterious and painful.

Every life is a pilgrimage, seeking its goal in some Canaan of rest. How we picture it, dream about it, struggle and endure for it, and sometimes seem on the very verge of realizing it! We “see it with our eyes;” but, in the mysterious Providence of life, suddenly, sternly it may be, we are forbidden to “go over thither;” our “purposes are broken off,” realization is palpably forbidden us.

No wonder that we feel disappointment, and, if

pious faith prevent not, something like resentment. However wise and loving the Divine reason, to us it is inscrutable. Why am I forbidden to enter? Why is the promise of my hope thus broken? Why are such rainbows painted on the firmament of life by lights from heaven?

The aims of this great servant of God, moreover, were very high. It was no selfish or ignoble ambition that kindled his desire. Who ever lived more piously, more unselfishly, more greatly than Moses? How often he would have sacrificed himself for the sake of the people! More than once he proffered himself to bear their curse. God might exclude him from Canaan if He would but permit them to enter. Who can doubt that his desire to cross the Jordan, and to lead the people into the promised land, was more for their sake than for his own? And yet even this purpose of noblest patriotism and holiest piety was denied him.

They are not selfish purposes only that God disappoints. Few have desires so unselfish or ambitions so noble as Moses. Who would compare the virtues, interests, and aims of his little life with those of the great saint and prophet, legislator and leader of Israel? And yet our desires and purposes may be religious and noble. The love of God and the things of His kingdom may have the supreme place in our affections and motives. It may be our most ardent prayer that His "kingdom may come." We may be willing to spend and to be spent for it; to preach

our preaching, teach our class, achieve our enterprise at any cost of labour, at any sacrifice of self. And yet God may not permit it to us. Our striving may never accomplish its purpose; our opportunity may be prematurely ended. In the midst of our usefulness, in the crisis of our work, in the supreme exigency of the Church—just when we may have brought a great enterprise to the verge of success, and our personal agency seems the most indispensable; just when about to cross the Jordan, and to realize all that we have lived for—the stern mysterious prohibition comes, “Thine eyes shall behold it, but thou shalt not enter it.”

But, then, how seldom our chief disappointments are of this high spiritual order! More commonly our most solicitous cares, our supreme desires, our most eager pursuits, are for things very inferior; not necessarily unlawful, but less noble, less worthy our absorbing pursuit. We would fain leave our business a success; our children brought up; the relations of our life completed; our affections ripened to their yellow autumn; life itself completed in the cycle of its energies, and matured in a good old age. We dream a rounded, completed life; the full exercise of faculty and opportunity, the full enjoyment of our acquired possessions, the perfected growth of character and influence—a youth of aspiration and successful struggle, a manhood of noble toil and achievement, an old age of dignified and well-earned rest—accomplished purposes, gathered repu-

tation, saintly maturity, rich, fruitful affections. Let who may fall in the wilderness, we hope to enter Canaan. When, suddenly, like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky, the prohibition comes! Health prematurely fails, business enterprise proves disastrous, property wastes away, friends disappoint us, our relationships betray our affection, and, instead of ministering joy, bring bitter sorrow. Children prove unworthy, and "bring down our grey hairs with sorrow to the grave." All the conditions were full of promise; it seemed as if entrance were assured. "No; thou shalt not enter it."

Even to the bright ambitions, the fairy castle-building of youth, how often sudden disappointment comes! Hopes are baffled, friendship is wounded; the blissful dreams of love have a rude and terrible waking. Realization differs greatly and sadly from hope. Love itself fails, or else it weeps in premature widowhood. Young eyes weep widowed tears; little children stand in piteous wonder over a mother's grave; young mothers bury their little children. How many bury the fairest visions of young life in a tomb!

Or else, the rich heart of hopeful, thankful parents seems to be realizing all its desire: healthy, comely, virtuous, loving children grow up around them. All that vigilant affection can devise they minister; all that sanguine hope can imagine they seem about to realize; their "sons are as plants grown up in their youth, their daughters are as corner-stones, polished

after the similitude of a palace." When the home is suddenly darkened, and the fairest and most promising has to be buried in a grave; or, more bitterly still, a manhood of folly belies a youthful promise of grace.

Is not life full of such experiences? In a thousand ways we fail to realize its hope; to reap what we have so patiently sown, so carefully tended, and what has sprung up in such luxuriant beauty, "first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear," with even the near promise of the harvest.

How we nurture this idealism of life; and it is often the source of its richest poetry, its noblest inspirations. The imagination of youth glows with it; it is the light of its hope, the stimulus of its endeavour. It sees only the fair landscape to be traversed; it does not see the rough paths that must be trodden. Whether it be a noble service of life that we purpose, or only its ignoble pleasures; whether the higher ambition of social achievement, or the meaner desire of accumulated wealth; whether the heart promises its paradise of affection, or the intellect its arena of power; whether it be the man's ideal of work, or woman's ideal of marriage—how the dream and the hope inspire and inflame us! Success, love, home—how the heart throbs, and the pulse beats high at their pure and noble vision!

What an idealism, too, there is in our religious life; and what an important function it plays! How much nobler the inspirations of all true life than its

realizations! How we picture the holiness, and love, and service of our discipleship—what we are to be, what we are to do. We do not realize the serpent that finds its way into every Eden, the failure that mars every purpose, the element of disenchantment and disappointment that corrects every illusion. The chief pathos of later life is the mournful contrast between the promise and the performance—"I am not better than my fathers were." Still the idealism has its great uses; it is not delusion that discredits it, so much as shortcoming. What would life be without it? Perhaps it could not be as we imagine it; but it may be better for our imaginings.

Mark the conditions under which death came to Moses.

(1) He died while as yet his physical strength was undiminished. "His eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated." He died, that is, as the greater proportion of men die, not of sheer physical decay, the natural wasting away of the forces of life—"One dieth in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet;"—"the house of life is broken into;" sudden arrest is put upon its vigour; its pulse is touched into death: the warrior falls in the ardour of battle, the builder drops from the scaffold. "My years hast thou shortened; I am cut off in the midst of my days."

(2) Moses died while as yet there seemed a great work for him to do:—the Jordan to be passed,

Jericho to be conquered, the Canaanites driven out, the tribes led to their inheritance, the social, legislative, and religious organization of the people to be completed.

So the field is left half ploughed, the building half erected, the book half written. Die when we may, we always leave something unfinished; we always carry to our grave some unrealized purpose. Only, sometimes the inopportuneness seems so signal that it is a mystery and a sorrow. History, both of the world and the Church, is full of proverbial instances, were it needful to cite them. Rarely is the worker permitted to complete his work, rarely is the moment when arrest is put upon it the moment that we should choose. "God's thoughts are not as our thoughts."

(3) Moses died just when bright prospects of realization filled his eye:—when all the hope of his life was about to be fulfilled; the cup was dashed from his lips just as it was lifted that he might drink.

What can we say to all this? Can we say anything that will explain its mystery, or justify the ways of God to man?

We are unable to form judgments concerning individual instances; but we may perhaps recognise three or four general principles, which will enable the rest of both our faith and our heart. The thing may be inscrutable, and yet we may assure ourselves of the righteousness and love of Him who does it.

1. Success is not the chief nobility of life. Who dared have told Moses on Nebo that, inasmuch as entrance to Canaan was forbidden him, it would have been better for him never to have left Egypt?

That grand heroic life of the wilderness had been lived. Its very trials had perfected his character. He had become, what no success in Egypt could have made him, what failure to enter Canaan could not hinder him from becoming.

To disparage success would be affectation; the end that is not worth winning is not worth striving for. But success is generally more important to others than to the worker himself: so far as he is concerned, it is more important to become than to achieve. Service is greater than its results. To serve greatly and fail is better than to realize without service. The good that is put into my hand is a poor possession compared with the good that long struggle and self-discipline win. The very disappointments of a life that nobly strives, the very sorrows of a heart that nobly loves, are better than a heart without striving or love:—

'Tis better to have loved and lost,  
Than never to have loved at all.

Better to die on Nebo than on the Egyptian throne. In the great character which he had moulded, in the love and veneration which he had won, Moses realized a nobler reward than Canaan.

2. The chief blessedness of life is capability of service.



Better for Moses that he should die on Nebo, his service incomplete, than that he should have outlived his faculty of service, and fallen into the decrepitude and senility of an Eli or a David. What is better for a man than for death to find him in the vigour of his service, doing noble work; his hand upon the implements of his toil; working with his might; with an earnestness and an efficiency that will be the commendation of both the workman and the work? Blessed is the man whom death finds doing work full of noble aims and gracious influences! It is the verdict of the Master Himself; "Blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing!"

3. It is a blessed thing to die when the work has been so far done that it justifies the worker; demonstrates his character, vindicates his nobleness; so that he is not ashamed to leave it for completion; so that his friends are proud of its unfinished fragments.

God does not always vouchsafe this. Even then the faithful servant will accept the conditions. He puts into the Master's hand his reputation as well as his service. His "record is on high." But if, as with Moses, God continue him in His work until all its true glory has been won, and only the formal sanction of success is wanting, it is a grace and a blessedness. Nelson dies in the moment of victory; Captain Hardy's assurance of it is the sufficient consolation of his premature death. So

Moses dies, with the wilderness all passed; the people whom he had led, on the verge of Canaan; the gathered reverence of the nation round him; and in singular and exalted favour with God.

4. The formal denial of our hopes may be the means of perfecting our character. Patient acquiescence in disappointment is a higher grace than satisfaction with success.

To endure piously is more than to achieve. The most illustrious character has its defects, the most disciplined its immaturity; and sometimes God can work in us the last grace of perfection only by shutting us up to Himself. Never, as on Nebo, did God so draw to Himself the heart of His servant, and by no means so effectually as by this great disappointment. We never so seek God as when other things are denied us; we never seek Him so earnestly and so spiritually as in worldly disappointments and sorrows. God can educate our perverse affections for the enjoyment of Himself only by bereaving them. It is a rough school for piety, but it is a salutary and effective one. How often, if permitted to possess it according to our desire, earthly good would satisfy us! How creature love would absorb our affections if its enjoyment were continued to us! How pride of achievement would hinder humility! How sense would blind the eye of faith! With all the disappointments and sorrows of life, how carnal our hearts remain! What would they be if they had neither disap-

pointment nor sorrow? It is not easy, when the fulness of things on earth is appealing to us, to "set our affections on things above." We need the disappointment and the chastening. Oh, brethren! if all the disappointments of our life could be converted into realized hopes—if all the structures which God has overturned could be restored to our homes and hearts—who could answer for the spirituality of his affections, for the religious fidelity of his soul?

5. If in our service we have sinned against right methods and tempers of service, sinned against Him whom we serve, it is well that His disapproval of our sin should be manifested.

If it be asked why the promise of the exodus was not kept to Moses, why the promise of life is not kept to ourselves, is not this the sufficient answer? Provoked and wearied with the perverseness of the people, Moses and Aaron had "spoken unadvisedly with their lips," had petulantly smitten the rock at Meribah, where they should only have spoken to it:—a parable of many of our self-willed and violent methods of doing God's work.

It seemed a harsh sentence for such an offence, and at first Moses apparently felt it such, and pleaded against it. "God was angry with me for your sakes, and would not hear me: and the Lord said unto me, Let it suffice thee, speak no more to me of this matter." But who can estimate the mischief of wrong methods and wrong tempers in

doing religious things? What a catena of disasters from this single cause might be culled from the history of the Church, from the Romish Inquisition to the last orthodox unfairness in controversy!

How a single sin may change a history, or modify a character! Eve's disobedience, Noah's drunkenness, Lot's worldly choice, David's adultery, Peter's cowardice! For sins are not isolated acts; they are indications of character, results from long-prepared conditions; causes from which subtle and prolific consequences flow.

Moses stood before the people in "the fierce light that beats upon a throne," therefore his sin could not be passed over. Provocation is no excuse for wrong-doing; temptation does not justify sin. To a people like Israel, the impunity would have been perilous. It was an occasion for an impressive lesson concerning the sanctity of law and the sin of disobedience. Because Moses, the most eminent and favoured of God's servants, had disobeyed, Moses must die. It was a retribution in the spirit of the Old Dispensation. What could produce upon the people a deeper impression? What a revelation it was of what men lose by sin! How they would be affected and humbled, because their sin had brought such retribution upon their revered leader! for the misery of sin is, that it brings evil upon others as well as upon ourselves.

It was not that God refused to forgive His beloved servant. Never did He show him such kindness and

favour, never did He so tenderly commune with him as on Pisgah. And yet this penalty may not be remitted. Our sins have relations to our fellow-men, and to principles of eternal right. It is not merely a personal feeling between God and ourselves ; it is a matter of public comity and morals. Therefore, although God may "forgive our iniquity, He takes vengeance of our inventions."

It is this that makes the lesson so monitory. The holy God must punish the sins even of His servant whom He loves. Let not, then, our enervated consciences think lightly of Divine law, or of any transgression of it. Let us not talk loosely and foolishly about God's mercy, as if it could set aside His holiness. Let us think of Nebo, where he who was "faithful in all his house" must die ; of Calvary, where the well-beloved Son "bears our iniquities." "If these things were done in the green tree, what will be done in the dry ?" God is love, but the supreme law of His love is holiness. He cannot love us better than He loves holiness ; therefore His most favoured servant, whom He forgives, and loves, and communes with, and calls up to Nebo to die, must suffer for his sins.

Hence Moses accepts the Divine decree ; Jacob does not complain because he is a fugitive ; David because "the sword does not leave his house." The instinct of righteousness accepts the just retribution. All were forgiven—saintly, beloved men ; but God must punish their sin, as He must punish yours and mine.

6. The prohibition comes with gracious mitigations. Even though a sentence of death, everything that gives death a sting is extracted.

(1) What greater grace can be wrought in a man than acquiescence in such a mandate? There is no blessedness like the blessedness of submitting our will to the wiser will of the heavenly Father, even though it be to drink a Gethsemane cup or to die upon a bitter cross. In learning this obedience the Christ Himself was perfected. No rest and satisfaction can be so great as consciously to feel that whatever the heavenly Father may ordain for us is absolutely the best. Clearly it is not for us to choose the time and circumstances of our death. When should we deem it a fitting time to die?

How variously men regard death!

A man may violate God's will, and recreantly or impatiently die before his time—the coward of life, who deserts its warfare, and prematurely rushes into the presence of the Lord of life, carrying with him the record of his dishonoured life, his repudiated trust.

A man may resent the summons to die, and impotently resist the demand that he give an account of his stewardship.

The supreme grace and blessedness is meekly to obey, to climb to our death-bed whenever the command is given; not, it may be, without a prayer that “if possible the cup may pass”—this nature demands and grace does not forbid—but with the ultimate feeling, “Not my will, but thine be done.”

To some few the grace is given to receive the summons with gladness; with joy to "enter into the joy of their Lord." Clearly the law of our life must also be the law of our death; to "serve our generation according to the will of God," and according to the will of God to "fall on sleep."

(2) Moses is permitted to prepare for his departure. He receives a timely intimation of it, calls a solemn assembly of the people, and delivers to them his dying charge—his Deuteronomy—in which is condensed into a written form the substance of their history and of their law—the Magna Charta of the Old Economy. He receives their loving homage, and pronounces upon them his valedictory blessing.

(3) He is permitted to see his successor. Joshua is installed as leader of the people in the arduous conflicts which awaited them.

This, perhaps, is the most arduous grace of religious magnanimity; especially for greater and grander men, like Moses and Elijah, to see themselves superseded by lesser men, like Joshua and Elisha, and to feel that these are better fitted for the new age and the new work. Moses, the aged statesman, cannot do the military work of the young captain. It was better that he should die, and give place to a new order of things. Had he continued to rule the cabinet while Joshua ruled the camp, embarrassment and collision might have compromised the interests of the nation.

It is but little to say that God can do without the

best of us. The better we are, the greater our influence, the more venerated our character, the more needful it may be that God should take us away; lest undue reverence should hinder the new ideas, the fresh service which the changed conditions of society demand. It is better even for Israel, if Israel did but know it, that their great legislator and leader should die. It is better for the Church, better for the mission field, better for the family, better for business and social life, that their venerated sages and greatest workers should die, and make room for younger men, who else would be untrained in service, unexercised in responsibility. God has always servants under training for the great succession of work and responsibility: only mischief comes when their opportunity is denied them. A man's greatest work may be that which is to grow out of what he has done:—

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

7. God honours His faithful servant by Himself preparing his sepulchre.

An obscure passage in the Epistle of Jude speaks of the archangel Michael, to whom, according to Jewish tradition, the burial of Moses was entrusted, as “contending with the devil about the body of Moses;” as if the devil would contest the exemption of Moses from the common lot of men. Apparently Moses shared the distinction of Enoch and Elijah: he did



not see corruption. He was "not unclothed, but clothed upon;" "mortality was swallowed up of life." This grand seal of His approbation God set upon His illustrious servant.

8. God fulfilled His promises and the hopes of His servant in a deeper and higher way than he anticipated.

A man may leave his work unfinished, his purposes unfulfilled, his goal unreached, but he does not therefore fail. The spiritual end which these sought may be reached in a grander way.

So Abraham failed of the hope of Canaan, his only possession in it being a grave. But Canaan to him was but a suggestive type of a better country, and grandly he realized God's spiritual heritage. The prophecies of the Messiah, as the old, pious Jew conceived them, were never realized; but how much more grandly they were fulfilled in the Christ! The disciples did not realize their dream of the kingdom of heaven in which they were to "sit on thrones;" but what a glorious spiritual heritage the resurrection conferred upon them—a "kingdom of God within them!" The Pentecostal Church did not see the millennium for which it looked; but how much grander than their local and limited hope, the millennium which is the result of ages of cross-bearing and testifying and martyrdom! So every Christian age, every Christian experience, has its dream of a goal to be immediately reached, a glory to be personally attained. The Church is to achieve its triumph, the

soul its religious beatitude. Instead of which come years of arduous struggle and temptation and seeming failure. But these are only profounder processes whereby God is working out greater and more glorious spiritual fulfilments. The thing of which we dream is denied us, but only that a far more glorious realization of our desire may be given us. That which is material is but the shadow of the spiritual, to which it unconsciously leads us on. Nay, those who realize the most of it, feel the greatest disappointment with it, and are the most urged and enlarged by it to the spiritual good that lies beyond it. God's spiritual fulfilments of the dreams and desires of every noble life are above all that we can ask or think.

II. The second parable is of the visions which may inspire human life, its unrealized hopes notwithstanding. Only a few words are here possible.

To men who live greatly, God gives visions through this very idealism of life, which are a glorious inspiration and strength; visions of a great faith and of a bright hope; of rest though they toil, of triumph while they fight, of heavenly perfection and blessedness, the failures and disappointments of earthly life notwithstanding.

Many glorious visions had been vouchsafed to this great servant of God. At the burning bush, where he hid his face, afraid to look upon God; on Horeb, where the Lord made "all his goodness pass before him." But this was his true "delectable mountain." From the summit that overhangs the Jordan of

death, he sees the "better country" which his pilgrimage of life had sought; the long wanderings and privations of the wilderness ended, the dreary, dusty desert all behind.

Who knows! To the lofty spiritualized soul of Moses, Canaan perhaps would have been a disenchantment: many of our realized hopes are. The vision has ideal beauty; but who ever realizes his ideal, his imaginations and dreams? How much better for us often, to be taken from the disappointment of our realized desires, from the evil that lurks under the good we picture! Whether is greater, the disappointment of God's interdict or the disappointment of His permission?

But in the better country, of which Canaan was but an imperfect type, there is no shortcoming, no disappointment. Canaan may suffice for a suggestive prophecy; only God's heaven can be a satisfying fulfilment. What did the land upon which he gazed suggest to the dying prophet? We know that he "had respect unto the recompense of the reward." Would it not carry his thought to that other land where

Everlasting spring abides,  
And never-withering-flowers,

and which he was soon to see. Might not the Jordan that rolled at his feet be idealized into the river of death, and "the mountains round about Jerusalem" into the everlasting hills that compass the city of God? God was calling *him* to the land

where alone the dreams of life are fulfilled. It seemed a sentence; it was a reward. And, after the momentary pang and disappointment, Moses would exult in it as the saintly always do when their summons comes.

Brethren, it is a great thing for our faith to climb, to stand on heights whence it can survey the heritage of God.

All men have visions, even the meanest and the worst; but there are no visions of life so great and inspiring as those of religious faith. Partial and limited, as from the side of earthly life they are, how they brighten its desert and cheer its pilgrimage! How light they make its burden seem, how trivial its cares! How the thought ranges and the heart swells! *Here*, are toil and sorrow and care; *there*, perfect rest and peace and joy. *Here*, all have burdens of life, all carry aching hearts; but in the better country there is "neither sorrow, nor crying, nor pain, nor death." "God himself" wipes away all tears from our eyes."

What wonder if, like the prophet, we weep when we see the vision—weep for very joy? What wonder if, like Bunyan, when he saw the pilgrims enter the celestial city, and the gates close upon them, we "wish ourselves among them"? It is an "exceeding great and eternal weight of glory." We gaze upon the infinite beauty, the everlasting rest. True, "we groan, being burdened;" but we do not always groan. Sometimes God gives us a trem-

bling, almost a fearful joy, when, to the eye of faith, He unfolds such visions of blessedness. How poor our life would be without them! they are "powers of the world to come."

And the nearer the Jordan the more glorious the prospect. The true Pisgah is in the land of Beulah; it overhangs the Canaan of rest. What visions of God are possible to dying saints! What "a door in heaven" is open to them! What a light fills their eye, what a rapture their heart! It is an enthusiasm stronger than the most clinging love of life, more constraining than the tenderest earthly affection. What songs break from dying lips! They falter through their very intensity, as if the parting tabernacle let in the effulgent glory! The goodly land is revealed; and though to inherit it they must die, death is swallowed up in victory. All earthly lights pale before that great glory. All things here seem little and unimportant in that great blessedness; "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."

Thus Moses disappears from the sight of men. God's own hand buries him.

One more glimpse of him, however, is vouchsafed to us. Upon another mountain summit, within sight of Nebo, but on the other side Jordan, fifteen centuries afterwards, there was another vision of God. The "Prophet like unto Moses" was transfigured. "And there talked with him two men, who were

Moses and Elias, who appeared in glory." In the "Holy Mount" the wistful prayer, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory," was finally answered.

"Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory."

"When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we also shall appear with him in glory."

"Such honour have all his saints."

IX.

Voices of God.

*Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth.*—I SAM. iii. 9.



## IX.

SAMUEL was called to be a prophet of God in a great crisis of Jewish history. His appearance was quieter and less dramatic than those of Moses and Elijah, but it was almost as momentous. The epoch was one of those which determine the character and destiny of nations. One great act in the drama of Jewish history was closing, another was opening. Two great revolutions were effected—one political the other religious.

1. The commonwealth established by Moses came to an end with the weak administration of Eli. The pure theocracy of the government was superseded. Hitherto there had been no permanent civil authority. Jehovah had been the immediate legislator and ruler of the people. As exigencies arose He commissioned captains to lead their armies, and judges to administer their affairs; but He appointed no permanent vicegerent. He ruled them through the code of Sinai, counselled them through the oracle, went forth with their armies as "The Lord of hosts."

But such leadership was too severe a test of their

spiritual faculty: they craved a visible king, who should keep court among them in royal pomp, and go forth with their armies to battle; and visible symbols of the God whom they worshipped. The feeling had been working for generations, it first found expression in the idolatry of the golden calf. Gradually the judge forbore to lay down his office with the exigency that necessitated it, and retained it for life. More than once attempts to make it hereditary were made.

Clearly this was a lack of faith in their Divine King. Virtually it was rebellion against His authority, and in many ways it corrupted religious feeling; until in the days of Eli the people had fallen into a sad condition of godlessness and profligacy. Dark days came. They were delivered into the hands of their old enemies the Philistines, who captured the very Ark of the Covenant. And with this catastrophe the second act of the great drama of Jewish history closes.

A political revolution is effected. Saul, the first of the kings, succeeds to Eli, the last of the judges; and for the next five centuries the Jewish government is a monarchy, often in open revolt against Jehovah. So the Cæsars built imperial Rome upon the ruins of the republic.

An experiment so carnal in its motive, and so rebellious and obstinate in its temper, could hardly have a prosperous issue; if, that is, there is any virtue in religious feeling, any reality in God's

government of nations. No wonder that a monarchy which began in unbelief and rebellion was torn by dissension, became corrupt through idolatry, and ended in shame. Samuel was raised up to control this political revolution.

2. The religious revolution was equally decisive and momentous. The religious supremacy of the priest was superseded by that of the prophet. The prophet became the ambassador of Jehovah to the Jewish court and people. The priesthood soon came to be despised, and the Urim and Thummim disregarded. Only the living voice of a bold, rebuking prophet could attract attention or assert Jehovah's claims. With Samuel the spiritual order of the prophets begins. Its spiritual power culminated in Elijah, it ended with Malachi, and, among the Jews, was succeeded by the Rabbis or Doctors of the Schools. It was revived only in Christian apostles and preachers.

No change could be more momentous in its religious influence. The function of the prophet differs fundamentally from that of the priest, and appeals to entirely different feelings. The priest goes from the people to God, and in their name presents offerings and prayers. Should the people therefore become so godless as to have neither offering nor prayer, the function of the priest would cease. The prophet comes from God to the people. He speaks to them in His great name; brings commands, entreaties, promises. However godless they

may be, his function loses none of its validity, it becomes only more important.

The priest, again, presents his offering dumbly; he is a mere performer of rites of which the people are spectators. The very essence of the prophet's function is speech; in God's name he delivers his message, and urges his appeal. By his testimony and rebuke he maintains God's honour and service, reveals God's character and will, bears witness to His holiness and love, and seeks to lift men to spiritual communion with Him. Prediction was only a subordinate and occasional function of the Jewish prophet. The great idea of his office was to bear witness for Jehovah. The function of the prophet, therefore, must always be essentially more spiritual and vital than that of the priest.

Samuel was the first of the order of the prophets. He witnessed for God against the revolt of the people, and, divinely directed, he guided them in the transition which became inevitable. Samuel, indeed, was judge as well as prophet, just as Eli had been judge as well as priest. The two offices simply overlapped during the transition. The disorganized nation needed a wise and able judge to administer justice until their king should be appointed; they needed a faithful and fearless prophet to keep before them the claims of Jehovah. In Samuel the dispensation of the judges ended, and the dispensation of the prophets began. "He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet." But his distinctive designation was

“Samuel the prophet.” “All the prophets, from Samuel and those that follow after.”

Hence the call of Samuel was of exceptional significance and importance. He began at once to discharge his prophetic functions. “Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord.” He declared God’s will to Eli, then to the people. He foretold things to come, he wrote sacred books, he established educational seminaries in different places—probably for the general education of the people, for statesmen and magistrates as well as for religious teachers—but which from the larger numbers of the latter became famous in Israel as “the schools of the prophets.”

Samuel was clearly one of those great men of manifold gifts and functions whom God raises up in great crises and for great services. He was not, like Moses, the founder of the economy, nor, like Elijah, its restorer. But he was its preserver through a revolution that had become inevitable; which he opposed as long as he could, which he reluctantly accepted when he could oppose it no longer, and which by sheer force of character he regulated and moulded so as to prevent national disorganization. Like Luther, he built the new upon the foundations of the old. As far as circumstances permitted he reformed his age; and by his

genius, his piety, and his wisdom he powerfully controlled the turbulent elements of national life. Must we not say that the watchful Shepherd of Israel prepared him for his work: the product of his generation, he impressed upon it his own character and work, moulded it, and the generations that followed it. The hour came, and the man was ready for it.

His character has a singular elevation and purity. His life is rounded to an unusual completeness. He lived long enough to become the Nestor of the nation, pre-eminent in wisdom, sanctity, and devoutness. In their difficulties the people sought him; in their feebleness they leaned upon him; and in their sins and penitences they sought his prayers.

The lessons that I wish more specifically to gather from Samuel's call to this great and holy life, and from the first spirit and consecration of it, will be more emphatic and suggestive in the light of these general estimates. We shape our future very early. The entire course and character of Samuel were probably determined by the spirit in which he thus responded to God's first call, and discharged the first arduous service to which he was called.

The narrative of His calling is wondrously beautiful. Luther tells us that it was the first portion of Scripture upon which he opened when he found the old Bible in the monastery of Erfurt; and how it fascinated and excited him. As he read about the

little child whom his mother "lent unto the Lord as long as he lived," and whom He accepted by so signal a vocation—the little child whose relations to the venerable Eli were so dramatic in their contrast of age and function, of circumstance and character, and upon whose tender childhood such a burden of the Lord was imposed—his heart filled with emotion, so that he could scarcely control his excitement; and the picturesque and tender story, so full of religious meaning to himself, led him on to further study of the wondrous book that contains it, until, through the sentence, "The just shall live by faith," as through the gates of the morning, the light of the Sun of Righteousness brake in upon his joyful soul and brought in a glorious evangelical day.

Few pictures take such possession of our imagination. It is our typical conception of Samuel. Whenever his name is mentioned we think, not of the stern avenger hewing Agag to pieces, nor of the warrior chief of Ebenezer, nor of the venerable Rabbi of the prophetic schools, nor of the learned analyst, nor of the sage old magistrate at Ramah. The picture that rises before us is the child-prophet in the temple, arrayed in his linen ephod, and in the mantle that his mother had made him, kneeling in childlike reverence and faith before God, or sleeping in boyish beauty and innocence, unconscious of the mysteries of life and of God which surrounded him; aroused by the mysterious voice, and questioning Eli about it; then, as he had been directed,

answering in wondering awe, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth;" and then, when the morning breaks, a child-prophet, timidly and reluctantly delivering to old Eli his first terrible "burden of the Lord."

Thus we picture Samuel, the type of those who grow up before God from their childhood; the beauty of the blossom impressing us more than the richness of the ripened fruit. This is the image of Samuel that the art of the painter has fixed, that the genius of the musician has sung: a perfect conception of pious motherhood and saintly childhood, which we are never weary of contemplating.

The voice came to Samuel that in some form or other comes to all God's servants. It comes in many ways; not now audibly addressed to the ear of sense, but not therefore the less distinct. Sometimes it is an outward call of circumstance, sometimes it is an inward call of the Spirit. He who made man's ear, made also his reason, his conscience, and his heart; and to each He can appeal with equal distinctness. The essence of a Divine call is not the medium through which it comes; it is the consciousness that it does come, the voice of God waking the soul and filling it.

I. Life is full of voices of God, only we lack the spiritual faculty which discerns them.

The responsibility of life lies in listening for Divine voices, and in the response to them that we give. We may cultivate the spiritual faculty that hears



God's call, or we may make it obtuse. We may cherish God's call, or we may silence it; obey it, or rebel against it. With spiritual intelligence we may recognize it as really God's voice, or with unspiritual repugnance question it, explain it away, reduce it to a mere suggestion of human prudence.

1. When we think of God's voice, we English Protestants probably think first and most spontaneously of God's revelation of His will in the Bible. We call this distinctively the "Word of God." It is the word which through prophets and inspired men God has formally addressd to us, telling us concerning His thoughts and purposes, His yearning love, His saving help. Whatever our theory of its inspiration, we all agree to call the Bible the highest and most authoritative teaching concerning God, and the religious life and the world to come, which has ever been addressed to men. The world has no teaching which in elevation, spirituality, and power can be compared with that of the Bible. Even if it be not God's voice in any sense of supernatural inspiration, it is God's truest and most urgent voice in virtue of that inherent power with which the highest truth always appeals to the religious soul. Be the Bible whence it may, it is the highest spiritual authority we possess. It reveals God as nothing else does. More distinctly, unequivocably, and emphatically than through any other medium, God appeals to us by it.

So we think of its preachers, men who are "servants of the Most High God, who show unto us the way of

salvation." When their exposition, and argument, and appeal approve themselves to our religious conscience and heart, we recognize the truth that they preach as God's voice to us.

The history of Christianity is mainly a history of the impressions and transformations which the teachings of the Bible have produced upon men. In public assemblies, where it has been read and preached, and has been listened to as a message from God, who of us has not known it arrest careless thought, like a hammer, break the hardest heart, and, like a fire, consume all defences of lies? It has appealed to the answering conscience within, it has set forth the perfect holiness, the wondrous love of God. It has awakened tender memories, it has excited religious fear, wrought religious shame, inspired religious hope; working like the remonstrance and appeal of a friend, until the heart has softened into penitence and trembled into prayer.

How sentences from the Bible haunt a man like a conscience, and subdue him like a sentence, following him like a sound in his ears wherever he goes—a distinct, penetrating, persistent voice of God! "For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

2. There are again voices of God's providence,

which, if we have docile hearts, if we listen for the "voice behind us," and watch for the guidance of God's eye, we shall not fail to recognize. That man will fail of providential guidance whose self-will anticipates God's will, who tries to shape and direct his own providences, who asks God to sanction his purposes rather than to inspire them; but either the entire religious teaching of the book is delusive, or assuredly the meek and docile soul will be guided in judgment.

3. The instincts and yearnings of our own spiritual nature, again, are an unmistakable voice of God. Everything proclaims its own nature by its desires; and for every desire there is some answering reality in the universe of things. If there be no God, no spiritual world, no immortal life answering to these irrepressible yearnings of my nature, then am I the most insoluble enigma, the greatest contradiction in nature. Philosophy has no more emphatic teaching than the harmony, the correspondences of nature. Every faculty has its function, every yearning its satisfaction. What then is the satisfaction provided for my religious soul? Christianity loudly and eagerly replies, God, and Christ, and salvation, and heaven. Atheism is dumb, or it can only try to persuade men not to believe in their own spiritual nature.

This voice of God within tells us that we are more than the brutes that perish, that we are more than mere intellectual machines. In every man, at

one time or other, and in some degree, there are a distinct consciousness of a spiritual nature, uprisings of moral feeling and desire, unappeasable yearnings for more than material or intellectual things can supply ;

Thoughts that wander through eternity, capacities and aspirations that crave fellowship with the spiritual and eternal. "The heart and the flesh cry out for the living God."

A man has to do gross violence and outrage to his own nature, debauch it by sensual excesses, reason it down by hard logic, before he can disable or overpower its spiritual elements. Nay, when he has done his utmost, he has not destroyed, he has only overborne them. And in moments of relaxed strenuousness, of weariness, of disappointment, of sickness, of bereavement, they will suddenly and strongly assert themselves, breaking the green withs of lawless passion and of perverted reason wherewith they are bound, and in a great agony crying out for the forgiveness and the satisfaction of God.

Out of the very constitution of our nature a still small voice of God testifies to our spiritual and immortal being.

4. And to this religious nature God speaks by the motions and monitions of His Holy Spirit; awakening solitudes, exciting desires, touching impulses. These we may either cherish or quench. We may submit to their guidance or we may disregard them. God's Spirit speaks to us, He does not force us. He

speaks in whispers, we must bend our ears to listen. The strife and din of passion drowns His voice, the dull ear of unspiritualness disregards it. Only the quick, listening ear of faith recognizes it; the heart that humbly and passively waits to be guided, that instinctively says, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

5. In moments of *intellectual perplexity*, for example, when speculative reason has baffled herself in trying to think out the mysteries of being and of God, when the tyranny of logic or pride of understanding would urge us to the denial of what we cannot comprehend—we call upon God, but He does not answer, we grope in the darkness and cannot find Him; we "go forward, and he is not there; and backward, but we cannot perceive him; on the left hand where he doth work, but we cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand, but we cannot see him"—amid this tempest and earthquake of intellectual strife the still small voice of the religious soul is heard—God's voice within us. So that the spiritual soul itself disallows the reasonings that would deny it. It witnesses to its own spiritual nature, and to the spiritual God whose breath it is. "The fool may say in his heart there is no God," but every beating of that heart attests that there is.

6. In *quieter and more thoughtful moods* of life we hear the voice of God. In solitary ways, in quiet evening hours, in the sequestered chamber of sickness; whenever the crowd of men is left, and the din of the

world's noises dies out of our ears; whenever, like Abraham at Mamre, "we sit in the door of our tent at the cool of the day:"—then God's voice comes to us; whence or how we do not know. We know only that we stand face to face with Him, and that He is speaking to the spiritual soul within us. Vague memories of religious teachings, mysterious stirrings of religious feelings, unconscious forecastings of religious yearnings, have stilled the passions of the soul, and attuned its ear to that Divine voice which is always to be heard. God speaks, and we must answer. Ay, and upon our answers at such moments the very life of our souls depends. If we do not listen reverently, and answer religiously then, when shall we do so?

7. God has voices that reach us *in crowds*; distinct, perhaps loud, above every din of business, or clamour of strife, or song of revelry. Amid the most eager worldliness, the most jocund mirth, there are suggestions and appeals to the inner heart, which it hears, and is disquieted thereby.

8. In *moments of temptation*, even, God's voice finds a tongue. In some lingering power of conscience, in some sensitive remnants of virtue, in some angel memories of a pious home and an innocent heart. And when the hand is just uplifted to perpetrate the fraud, and the foot directed to the haunt of vice, and the voice of the tempter seems to win upon excited passion; like the mystic handwriting on the wall, some startling thought is suggested; like the voice

that came to Saul on the way to Damascus, some strange remonstrance seems to find utterance; and the forces of conscience and of virtue rally. "How shall I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" Happy he who listens, and turns and flees, whatever he may have to leave behind in his flight, before the irreparable crime is committed, before the irrecoverable purity is lost.

9. In *times of sorrow* God's voice comes to us; summoning us to faith in His rule, His purpose, His presence, and to patience and acquiescence in the sacrifice demanded of us. In the wilderness of sorrow God "speaks comfortably unto us," recalling great promises, suggesting bright, and blessed, and certain issues. What voices of God men hear in sick chambers and by open graves.

10. Most terrible of all is it when the first voice of God that we seriously listen to is *a sentence of doom*. "I will judge thine house for the iniquity which thou knowest." "Thou mayest be no longer steward." "Thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting." "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee."

Such voices of God have come to men. Our lives are full of voices of God, if we would but listen to them. It is not God's silence, it is our deaf ear that hinders every place from being eloquent with Divine meanings. He "visits us every morning, and tries us every moment." Everything that God has made, and into which He has put a Divine

thought ; every providence that moves, every teaching of His Word, every quickening of His Spirit, every motion of the soul within us, is simply a voice of God.

I have seen

A curious child, who dwelt upon a tract  
 Of inland ground, applying to his ear  
 The convolutions of a smooth-lipped shell ;  
 To which, in silence hushed, his very soul  
 Listened intensely ; and his countenance soon  
 Brightened with joy ; for murmurings from within  
 Were heard, sonorous cadences ! Whereby,  
 To his belief, the monitor expressed  
 Mysterious union with its native sea.  
 Even such a shell the universe itself  
 Is to the ear of faith ; and there are times,  
 I doubt not, when to you it doth impart  
 Authentic tidings of invisible things ;  
 Of ebb and flow, and ever-during power ;  
 And central peace, subsisting at the heart  
 Of endless agitation. Here you stand,  
 Adore, and worship, when you know it not ;  
 Pious beyond the intention of your thought ;  
 Devout above the meaning of your will.

How this was recognized by the old Hebrews ! How full of it the Hebrew Psalms are ! God is everywhere and in everything. "The heavens declare the glory of God, the firmament showeth his handiwork." Science may scoff at this, but the religious recognition is nobler and more inspiring than the scientific recognition, and is equally true. They are not morbid fancies that fill all things with God. God is in everything that He has made ; and through everything He can speak to our personal souls.



11. Again, at what *unlikely times* and in what *unlikely places* God may speak to us. Not always in churches, or in formal acts of worship, or on Sabbath days, when mind and heart are adjusted to listen. He *will* speak to us then. He is "the rewarder of them that diligently seek him." And when we specially prepare ourselves to listen, He will specially speak to us. But He also speaks to us when we have not prepared ourselves for His communications; when we may not be expecting Him. So He spake to Abraham in Haran; to Jacob at Bethel; to Ezekiel by the river Chebar; to Belshazzar in his banqueting hall; to Saul of Tarsus on his way to Damascus; to John in Patmos. In the crush of business, in the mad whirl of pleasure, in our indolent leisure; suddenly, and in startling ways, "in such an hour as we think not" the call of God comes.

12. To what *unlikely persons* God's call comes. Hardly should we have selected for a prophet a little child in the temple, or have summoned him from his unconscious sleep to be the messenger of so terrible a judgment to the aged priest and judge of Israel.

From what improbable places God's prophets come: Moses from the Egyptian court, David from the sheepfold, Peter from his fishing boat, Saul from a murderous band of persecutors, Luther from a miner's cottage, Whitefield from a provincial inn! How little we can predicate whence the next great

Church apostle or teacher shall come! Social rank, educational culture, Church sanction, pious solicitude even, do not count for much in determining God's prophets. Into the lips of a little child God puts a message of doom for the high priest and judge of Israel. He "chooses the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty."

The lesson is not an easy one for the Church to learn. God will choose His own instruments. He "will send by whom he will send." And it is for us reverently to accept and honour His messenger. God does not directly address His terrible message to Eli, He sends it through this child-prophet. He selects the least as His messenger to the greatest. It is part of the great economy of mediation of which life is full.

II. How then do we respond to God's call? Is not Samuel's answer, "Speak, Lord, thy servant heareth," in the childlike simplicity, faith, and submissiveness of it, a most beautiful and perfect type of what our answer should be? The parallel to it is the response of Saul of Tarsus, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" But Samuel's, I think, is the more perfect. It does not even assume that God calls him to do. He simply listens and waits. And when the commission came—terrible as it would have been even to an Elijah or a Jeremiah—the submissive childlike heart of Samuel implicitly accepted it. He did not demur or remonstrate, as even Moses did when sent to Pharaoh. Humility is

seen as much in the implicit acceptance of a great mission as in apologetic excuses for not accepting it. True fidelity of service is simply to do whatever may seem to be duty. The responsibility is with him who calls us. Then and there Samuel became God's prophet. From that hour the temple-child was known in Israel as "Samuel the prophet."

How variously men respond to God's call! Even in those who obey it, what gradations of faith and submissiveness there are! Our power of resisting or of according with the Divine will is our greatest and most fearful endowment! How Balaam parleyed with the Divine command! How Jonah tried to flee from it! How Felix trifled with it and trembled; putting it off with a promise! How Agrippa set it aside with a compliment!

Men may deal with God's call so insincerely that they may destroy their very power of recognizing it, and come to confound it with mere human suggestion. Or else, recognizing it to be such, they parley with it, pervert its meaning, resist it, silence it. In the first king of Israel we see almost every gradation of this. At first Saul is ingenuous, modest, pious, obedient; but gradually he befools his conscience and hardens his heart, until he comes to be utterly unable to recognize God's voice.

How God speaks to individual souls! Our neighbours cannot hear His voice to us. Eli did not hear the call to Samuel; the companions of Saul of Tarsus

did not hear the challenge of Jesus. It is addressed only to our personal consciousness. He who sits by my side does not hear it. He listens to the same preaching, sees the same providence; but he hears only a confused noise, "seeing no man." To me it is distinct, thrilling, urgent.

Anywhere it may come, in services of worship, in crowds of men, in places of business, in quiet homes, in silent night watches.

Sometimes we ourselves fail to recognize it at first. Samuel thought it the voice of Eli, as we may think it the mere word of a preacher.

It may not be even a message, but only a call; "Samuel, Samuel;" vague and inciting. Upon our response to it, our inquisitiveness and our docility, it depends whether more shall be revealed to us.

Oh, these voices of God, how they fill our life and make it solemn and great! What forms they take! What things they say! The voices of childhood calling across the years to the hardened unspiritualness of our manhood; the voices of youthful innocency calling to jaded profligacy; voices of conscience speaking to the wrong doer; voices of spiritual truth appealing to the flippant scoffer or the resolute infidel. It is of God's wonderful condescension and patient mercy that He speaks to us at all. Upon our capability and willingness to hear Him our spiritual life depends. So to dull and deaden our souls by evasions and evil passions, as that it becomes incapable of discerning voices of God, is

to destroy its finer spiritual sense, to degrade and carnalize it.

Of all the voices of human life none are so great and inspiring as voices of God. Nay, even grant them illusions,—the mere imaginations of spiritual feeling,—they are dreams of noble and inspiring things. For practical uses of life it is better to be led by imaginary voices to noble virtue, Divine sympathies, and immortal aspirations, than to be led by real voices to carnal indulgences, to hard worldly selfishness, to a denial of moral obligation, to an immoral fatalism, to a consciousness of life which is redeemed by no Divine succour, enriched by no Divine blessing and presence. Better in every way to dream a life filled with God, such as the Christian realizes, than to demonstrate the life without God of material philosophy. Better to be wrong with the Christian than right with the infidel.

Even if it be an imaginary voice of God, no man can disregard it without dulling and deadening his spiritual soul ; without augmenting its hardness and carnality ; which, on any theory of life, is the real debasement of a man, and which in the ultimate issue of it leaves him “past feeling,” hardened in moral scepticism, until he conceives nothing nobler than himself ; blunted in moral sensibility, until he recognizes no distinction between right and wrong : nay, it may be brutalized in sensual profligacy and debauchery, until he scoffs at purity itself, and believes in nothing innocent.

Very precious lessons, therefore, are suggested by this response of Samuel. It presents a temper of Christian service that it is of the utmost religious importance to cultivate.

True it is only the example of a little child, but it is in the temper of little children that the Divine Master completes the cycle of Christian perfection. Such we all must become, if we would enter the kingdom of God. Simple, unquestioning acceptance of God's will is the perfection of Christian character. The apostle's ideal of it is, a "man in understanding, a child in heart." So soon as the heart of a man becomes thus holy, humble, and obedient, he has reproduced the heart of a child under conditions of higher intelligence and experience. Innocence is matured into holiness. It was but the word of a child, but how beautiful the manhood into which that childhood developed. As the oak in the acorn, so in Samuel's young heart all the piety and usefulness of his life lay enfolded.

It was because Samuel so responded, that He who thus spake to the child, feeding the morning lamp of his life with the oil of piety and gladness, continued to speak to the man through all his after years, to be with him in every after experience, to preserve him in every after temptation and peril; very largely, no doubt, by the very memories and spiritual forces of his childhood. Amid disheartenments and difficulties, failures and falls, the shame of imperfection and the humiliation of sin, the

memory of the voice that called Samuel, and the growing religiousness of the spirit that answered the call, would be present with him, restraining, and restoring, and comforting him, pointing out the achievement behind, the peril before, restoring his soul and perfecting his piety.

The child's the father of the man,

and this meekness of Samuel's child-heart was the germ and root of all his after piety. Had the spirit of the child been wayward, the spirit of the man would have been rebellious.

Scarcely have the world's three thousand years since Samuel taught it a better answer to God's call. Even the maturest and most saintly cannot transcend this response of the temple-child. The more enlarged our knowledge of life, the more complicate our experiences of it, the more helplessly are we thrown upon this simple cry, the more simply we thus put ourselves into the hands of God. The last cry of the saintly man is the first cry of the saintly child. "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

III. One more lesson we may learn, viz., the religious importance of the passive or receptive side of our spiritual life.

There is an active side of spiritual life which exerts power, and there is a passive side that receives it; just as the body receives food for its nourishment, and puts forth energy as the result of it. I kneel down to pray; I put my soul into

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a receptive attitude ; I open my heart to spiritual influences, to the touch of God's Spirit that would quicken it, to the dew of God's Spirit that would refresh it, to the vital energy which God's Spirit would infuse into it ; I read God's Word, and take into my heart its precious promises and teachings ; I surrender myself to quiet musings ; I cherish thoughts about Divine things ; I nurture spiritual affections ; I solicit into strength and fruitfulness the seeds of things that I have received. This is the *passive* side of my spiritual life. These are the vital processes that make me a spiritual man, holy, devout, loving.

But I also go forth to *do things* ; to teach, to work, to serve, to speak to others the thought that is in me, to proffer to others the help that love prompts, to embody before others the holy principles and feelings that have been generated within me. This is the *active* side of my spiritual life. The one is God working within me, filling me with His presence and love ; the other is my working for God, filling the earth with the godliness that I have realized, ministering the grace I have received.

Every true life realizes both. If either be wanting, life is impossible ; if either be in excess, life is maimed. If I surrender myself to passive habits of religious life, seeking what and how much I can minister to my religious soul, what light and comfort I can get from prayers and hymns and sermons and church life, and care for nothing more ; then,



in the first place, I am guilty of the grossest and most incongruous of all forms of selfishness. I may not hoard God's gifts of wealth, but I hoard His more precious gifts of spiritual grace. I am a miser in things that would bless men infinitely more than gold, if I would only use them rightly. I am selfish where it is most disastrous to be selfish. And, in the next place, the religious life that is a life of absorption and lazy church enjoyment is necessarily an unhealthy and miserable life. The joy of life is living—having all the functions of life in full exercise. In spiritual life as in all other life there is no greater curse than indolence, there is no surer way to misery than to make happiness the end and seeking of life. Happiness is found only of those who seek her not. Health comes only of the vigorous exercise of the strength that we nurture.

If, on the other hand, we permit activity to be in excess, if we expend more force than we generate, we simply destroy the tissue and mechanism of life, wear and dislocate it, impair its energies, until in very weariness and disability we cease to put forth energy altogether. As with the man who labours without adequate food, so the man who does religious work without the spiritual nutriment of Divine thought and prayer and communion, will first degenerate into weary listlessness, then lose his spiritual life altogether.

Both sides of our spiritual life, therefore, must be nurtured and developed. It is not enough to ask of

our own will, "What shall I do?" there is a previous question to ask of God, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" We must pray as well as purpose—ask God to direct the work we would do. Our zeal must be according to knowledge. Whatever its inward stimulus, it must seek Divine direction. Saul asked of God, with the predetermination to go to Ramoth-Gilead; Samuel waited and listened in the temple, that he might do or not do as God should tell him. It is only one half our spiritual life to say, "I will work out my own salvation:" there is another half which says, "For it is God who worketh in me."

The religious history of the world is full of instances of mere zeal and self-will, working, even in God's service, extremest evil. Cain brings his sacrifice, but it lacks the element of self-sacrifice; he will serve God, but only in his own way, not in God's way. Jacob puts his human hand to God's Divine processes; he will accomplish God's purposes, but only in his own carnal way, so that his service becomes disastrous sin. Saul of Tarsus is exceedingly jealous for God; but in the blind madness of his self-will he becomes the persecutor and murderer of God's saints.

The Church needs Christian workers, consecrated lives, vigorous hands; "the harvest is plenteous, and the labourers are few." In a thousand forms evil has to be encountered and counteracted. "The world lieth in the wicked one." At every turn we

meet demands for workers. But the supreme thing is to work holily and submissively ; to lift our working hand to God, and ask Him to direct it ; to bow before Him the heart of our working purpose, and ask Him to sanctify it ; to choose for us the sphere and the kind of our work, and to bless us in doing it. Not to say, " Lord, I will do this ;" but, " Lord, what wilt thou have me to do ?" God will accept no work, however ostensibly done for Him, that is not thus submitted to Him. In " his name we may prophesy and cast out devils, and he may never know us." We shall not work efficiently if we do not work heartily ; but neither shall we work efficiently if we do not work dependently and submissively. With our instrument of labour in our hands, and our foot uplifted to go forth, we must still linger in the temple until God gives us our commission ; our attitude, our voice, our heart, all saying, " Speak, Lord, thy servant heareth." The spirit of work is more easily attained than the spirit of submission. It is much easier to say, " Lord, I will do," than to say, " Lord, what wilt thou have me to do ?"

It is a great grace for a man to be willing to serve God in any way, for him to be converted from the service of the devil to the service of Christ. It is an eventful crisis in a man's history, a vital change in a man's character, when he first submits himself to Christ. But it is not all at once that he subordinates to Christ all his feelings and purposes. His excited zeal would fain be doing. He is ready to put his

hand to anything. He has no conception of service that is not doing. He has not attained to the great recognition,

They also serve who only stand and wait.

He would feel injured if sent, like Saul of Tarsus, three years into Arabia. He feels as if his work were essential to the Church. A theological student can scarcely be kept, in his wayward zeal, from rushing upon the great masses of our London sin. A tradesman's apprentice deems lost every hour not spent in the school or in evangelistic work. He can scarcely be kept from abandoning business altogether. He does not wait to hear God speak. He takes for granted that God has only one thing to say to him—to bid him throw himself into the thickest of the fight. Young life is characteristically energetic. Its strength is *not* to sit still.

Different states of society, different ages of the Church, have different characteristics and perils. Our fathers developed the thoughtful, reflective side of the Christian life. Christian activities were in abeyance. We have left their thoughtful ways, and have developed the practical energies of religious life. We work unrestingly; ingenuity is ever devising new enterprises. We fill the world with our Christian agencies, and our life with strenuous endeavours. Nor may we say that too much is done: the world needs it all. But perhaps we suffer in the completeness of our spiritual life. The balance in-

clines unduly. Are we not too busy for thoughtfulness—almost for quiet communion with God—for patient, intelligent self-examination, for the rest and the pleadings of prayer? Everything tends to outward demonstration. It is so much easier to do religious work than to nurture religious feeling. The work of the market is so much easier than the waiting of the temple. The Church advances with a strong, swift march, and we go shouting in the van. Our closets do not often see us.

There is therefore a sense in which we need to preach, not so much activity as the lessening of it. Our life runs to leaf. It is not inward, rich, deep. It is so in the market as well as in the Church. Most men live too fast.

The world is too much with us late and soon.

We have time for but hurried devotions, for but scant spiritual culture; so that our religious life becomes formal, external, meagre. We do not walk closely with God. We do not "follow hard after him." There is no "depth of earth," and the good seed shoots up, meagre, straggling, and discoloured, and "in time of temptation falls away." We are too busy to be deeply pious. We keep up a religiousness without God, which degenerates into a mere morality. Its spiritual heart dies out of it. Its springs of godliness dry up. It is life according to tradition and rules, instead of life springing out of religious principles and affections; a "life hidden with Christ

in God," rooted in Him, and nourished by His grace : it is therefore weak and precarious as it is worthless.

It is not difficult to keep up religious acts, church going, school teaching, preaching. The form of godliness may long survive its power. We may continue works long after faith is lost, long after the living heart has been severed from Christ its life. It is not enough that we work for God. God must work in us. It is not enough to put forth *our* strength, we must lay hold of God's strength ; cast ourselves upon His inspirations, that in Him our life may rest and be quickened.

Sometimes it may be needful to turn away from even the greatest work, and to obey His injunction, "Come ye into the desert and rest awhile." We live only as the life of God flows into our souls. We "bring forth much fruit" only as we, the branches, abide in Christ, the vine ; only as day by day we are renewed by the Holy Ghost. The great and busy life of Christ Himself was such largely through His communion with His Father. It was a life rooted in God. So must our lives be, or all our doings will be worthless. Without Him we can "do nothing." We "eat the flesh, we drink the blood of the Son of man, and thus have life abiding in us."

How much is said in Scripture about this devotional side of spiritual life, its aspect towards God, its vital union with Christ, its dependence upon Him ! "As I live by the Father, so ye also shall live by me." Let but our life be rooted in Christ,

and all activities will follow. Let a man meekly and implicitly say, "Speak, Lord, thy servant heareth," and he will be ready to receive any commission that God may give him.

This, then, is the conclusion of the whole matter—that in the activities of our zeal we do not forget its inspirations in God; that we keep open the heavenward gates of our souls; that while with one hand we do battle with evil, or build the temple of God, with the other we clasp the cross. The more entire our Spirit of dependence, the more effective the work we do. Our greatest sanctities, our greatest elevations of thought and feeling, our greatest impulses, come from our communion with God. The nearer to Him we live, the fuller we shall be of His light and goodness and love.

There is no inspiration so great as to feel the influence of a spirit greater and nobler than our own. When we wait upon God, when we listen to His voice, when we are ready to do His will, our whole nature is liberated and exalted. And out of this the greatest and noblest work comes. The men who have done the most for God are men who have stood in Samuel's attitude, and said with Samuel's submissiveness, "Speak, Lord, thy servant heareth."

Even though it be in the dark that God speaks to us, when the temple lamp has gone out, when our vigilance has relaxed, or our service languished, and our efforts seem like baffled blows upon the air; if our heart of faith will listen, if in the spirit of consecra-

tion we are willing, and wait till the morning light, our way will be made plain to us. And then, though it be a burden of the Lord that is laid upon us, a service of sorrow that is appointed us, we shall simply and humbly do it.

And thus we shall find the true harmony of life ; its two hemispheres of dependence and activity, united in a full-orbed whole. The faith that listens and submits is the condition of the faith that greatly achieves ; humility is the precursor of usefulness and honour. While love stretches out its beneficent hand, hope lifts its expectant eye, and faith clasps the cross.

“Wait upon the Lord, and he shall strengthen thine heart. Wait, I say, upon the Lord.”



X.

Healed Men.

*What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Ferusalem, and we cannot deny it.—*  
ACTS iv. 16.

## X.

### I.—THE MIRACLE.

IT has been characteristic of the most rapid growths of the Church that “its walls have been built in troublous times.” In many ways indeed troublous times are conditions of spiritual prosperity—they test faith, they purify affection, they develop strength, and they furnish remarkable attestations of supernatural character.

Few things are more striking than the continuance and growth of Christianity in the world; first, under the circumstances of difficulty, antagonism, and persecution under which it has so often been placed; and next, under the severe moral conditions of maintenance and progress to which it is restricted; only moral persuasion and impression are permitted it.

The Church of Christ is its own sufficient witness. It is of God, because it has so triumphed. “Had this council or this work been of men, it must have

come to nought; because it is of God, it cannot be overthrown." The conditions under which its most signal triumphs have been won have been far removed from any that human sagacity could have devised. How often the things that threatened its destruction have proved the signal means of its salvation. The very success of their schemes has proved the discomfiture of its enemies. The Jews prevail upon Pilate to crucify Jesus; their hostile machinations have succeeded beyond their most sanguine hopes. They have secured the death of the intractable Prophet of Nazareth, and the dispersion and destruction of His few peasant disciples will be comparatively easy. That very death accomplishes the redeeming purposes of Christ, and lays the foundations of His Church. "He is lifted up from the earth, and he draws all men unto him." The Sanhedrim persecute the little Church. Stephen, its eloquent apologist, is stoned to death, and the disciples are scattered abroad throughout Samaria and Galilee. Again the policy of the chief priests seems perfectly successful, the Jerusalem Church is broken up and dispersed; but it is simply scattering coals of living fire, which ignite everything they touch. These fugitive Christians "went forth everywhere, preaching the Word," and instead of one Christian community there sprang up scores.

So it has been a thousand times since. "The blood of the martyrs has ever been the seed of the church." The dispersion of the disciples has ever

been the diffusion of their faith. The persecutions of the early Church by the Roman Emperors, of the Protestants in the Netherlands, of the Huguenots in France, of the Lollards and Puritans in England, of the Covenanters in Scotland, of the Christians in Madagascar; Marian intolerance, Acts of Uniformity, arrogance and exclusiveness in a thousand forms of political enactment or of social repression, have generally done the very thing they were intended to prevent. Tempests of persecuting passion have simply carried in every direction the pollen of the Christian flower, which has fructified and brought forth a hundred-fold.

Precisely this result was produced by this persecution of Peter and John: unwittingly it furnished occasion for one of the most signal triumphs of early Christianity. No question of doctrine was raised at the trial. Peter's discourse was not called in question. The whole issue turned upon the character of the alleged miracle, and upon the power whereby it was wrought. It came to be tacitly admitted that upon this the entire claim of the new religion depended. If it could be established that such a miracle as this really had been wrought in the name and by the power of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christian doctrine was indubitably attested. The question therefore really was the relation of miracles to Christianity, the question that scepticism is discussing still. Only the Sanhedrim never thought of taking the ground of modern scepticism. Ad-

mitting that the miracle had been wrought, they denied only that it had been wrought by the power of Christ. Modern sceptics are much bolder. Not so closely confronted by contemporary fact, they summarily affirm that in the very nature of things miracle is absolutely impossible. They do not ask evidence, they absolve themselves from the necessity of examining it by affirming that no amount of evidence can authenticate the miraculous—which is surely a revolt from the very fundamental principle of true science.

The unbelievers of the early Church did not venture upon ground such as this; in that age indeed they did not even conceive of it. And if they had, it was impossible, with the healed man standing before them. They admitted the miraculous healing, and sought merely to evade its implications by attributing it to some agency other than the power of Jesus of Nazareth. Their ostensible inquiry was—"By *what* power or authority" has the miracle been wrought? Their insinuation was the old Pharisaic blasphemy, "He casteth out devils by Beelzebub the prince of the devils." It is instructive and significant that with the healed man before them they would not believe. It is not always deficiency of evidence that causes men to reject Christianity.

This is the history. Let us deduce from it three or four lessons illustrative of the principles and progress of the gospel. I will say nothing about the invocation and the recognized presence of the Lord Jesus

Christ and their implications ; nor concerning the singular character, co-operation, agency, and economy of the cure. I wish to speak of other matters.

I. The healing of this poor cripple is a striking illustration of the peculiar benevolence and grace of Christianity.

Amid the thousands in Jerusalem who needed healing, this poor squalid beggar was the selected object of apostolic compassion. Lordly priests and wealthy nobles crowded the temple, some probably victims of painful disease, but to none of them were the apostles sent, save to this poor cripple, whom these proudly swept by on the temple steps. It was surely in purposed and very beautiful harmony with the character of the gospel that neither our Lord nor His apostles sought for illustrious patients upon whom to perform their miraculous cures ; that the poor were the conspicuous objects of their healing compassion. They did not, of course, exclude the rich. Our Lord gladly went to the house of Jairus, and to that of the centurion. The rich were eagerly welcomed to a participation of the blessings that Christ brought ; but they were not as heretofore the exclusive, or even the ostensible objects of His ministrations. To the poor, characteristically, the gospel was preached. *They* especially awakened the Master's compassion, because of their greater misery. His Divine pity made them the prominent objects of His care. For the first time they were included in the solitudes of a religious ministry, and committed to the special benevolence of the Church.

Of course we may not find upon this anything like ascetic doctrine or practice in the ministrations of Christianity. There is an ostentatious talk, a fussy solicitude about the poor, which is simply a spurious sentimentalism and a cant—as sectarian and as Pharisaical as the ritualism of old Judaism itself. The distinctive character of Christian benevolence is that it is inclusive of every class, exclusive of none. It were as gross a violation of its catholic charities to exclude the rich as to exclude the poor. Whoever—either in things religious or in things social—sets the poor as a class against the rich as a class, sins against the very first principles of Christian unity, which seeks to make all men one in human brotherhood and religious affection and privilege. There is a sense in which special solicitudes of the Christian worker will gather round the rich, whose peculiar spiritual peril the Master indicated when He said, “How hardly shall they that have riches enter the kingdom of heaven.” For it is their tendency to think themselves “rich, and increased in goods, and in need of nothing.” It is the rich man, not the poor man, whose exaggerated estimate of what worldly things can do, leads him to say to his soul, “Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.” The world does not disappoint such, it satisfies them with its “good things;” their hearts are thus confirmed in unspiritualness, enervated by indulgence, intoxicated by flattery.



It is not easy to make Dives conscious of his spiritual poverty. Men who receive their "good things" in this life are in danger of neglecting the life hereafter. Were we not so blinded by the glamour of mere outward circumstance, did we not find it so much more difficult to pity the rich than to pity the poor, we should feel that it needs all the compassion of a Christ to care for them, all the resources of Christianity to save them.

But it is the distinctive grace of Christ's gospel that to the very poorest its blessings may come. It proffers its salvation the most eagerly to those who most need it. It saves the respectable Pharisee, but it has its greatest triumph and joy in saving the outcast Publican. It comes to "seek and to save the lost;" to "call, not the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Its churches are full of healed men, "walking and leaping and praising God," once the crippled beggars and outcasts of social and moral life, living in utterest and vilest sin. From what depths of squalid vice it has redeemed many of its saints! What "sinks of iniquity" it has purged! What outcasts it has received! What prodigals it has welcomed! The reproach of Julian is its true moral glory!

With what a true and irrepressible instinct its ministries are directed to the miserable! How instinctively it turns its foot of mercy to the most destitute. It is "anointed to preach the gospel to the poor." Its characteristic agencies are Reformatories and Ragged Schools, Theatre Preachings and

Midnight Meetings, City Missions and Missions to the Heathen. When do its workers seek the palaces of nobles, or a place among the rich? If they do, what a strong and universal instinct condemns them as unfaithful. The gospel is true to its great principle of self-sacrificing benevolence. It seeks the lost, and for their redemption it consecrates its treasure and its toil. Heedless of fame, regardless of wealth, taking no account of peril or health, counting not even life itself dear, it goes forth to savage lands and pestilential climes, and labours and sacrifices itself, "if by any means it may save some." Its glory is to fill its churches with "healed men."

II. A second general lesson is afforded by the promptings of the healed man's gratitude.

*First* its piety. His first movement was into the temple, at the porch of which he had been healed. The first use of his recovered limbs that he made was to employ them in God's praise. His boundless joy, his rapturous thankfulness, found their first and highest expression in an act of religious acknowledgment. The healing of his body had touched deep springs of religious feeling. Perhaps his disability had long taught him to pray. Such is often the severe yet gracious lesson of affliction. The rarer thing is that his healing prompted him to praise. Of the ten lepers cleansed, only one returned to give God thanks. The whole bearing of the man shows the reality and strength of his religious feeling.

All great experiences of life appeal to religious

emotions: in great sorrows we are passionate in prayer, in great joys we are rapturous in praise; only, the religious feeling excited is often as transient as it is fervent. It subsides with its occasion; our return to ordinary experience is too frequently a return to ordinary religiousness. Whether or not this was so with this recovered cripple we are not told. We see him only at the moment of his cure, and with the excitement of it strong upon him. But the fervent way in which he uttered his pious thanks, and the manful courage with which he took his stand by the criminated apostles, are strong presumption of a radical and permanent piety. In any case pious praise was the most fitting expression of his gratitude.

Whatever the instrument of our blessing, it is God who makes it efficient. He therefore claims our supreme acknowledgment. Without His providential ordering it could not have been applied, without His efficient blessing it could not have been successful. If, therefore, I have received temporal healing, let me first pay to Him the "vows which I made when I was in trouble." If my soul has been healed, let me "enter his courts with thanksgiving, his gates with praise." What emotion can be so strong, what joy so exquisite, as those of the man who for the first time after his healing enters God's house? Who may imagine the ineffable rapture of his first temple worship, offered perhaps upon the spot where the consciousness of God's forgiving love was first quickened

within him? In his closet he may have acknowledged his new spiritual life, but his first worship in the Church as a redeemed man, his first hymn of public thanksgiving, his first communion at the table of the Lord—these are a rapturous joy and blessedness but feebly indicated by the “walking, and leaping, and praising God” of this healed man; a blessedness which perhaps only the first song of the redeemed in heaven can surpass.

Next, its *human fidelity*. He “held Peter and John” in a grateful embrace—clung to them with irresistible transport. And to whom shall we be grateful, if not to those to whom we owe our healing? The parent, the minister, the faithful friend, who has spoken to us the word of life—the word which has been “the power of God to our salvation.” Next to Him who saves us our gratitude is due to him who leads us to the Saviour. We may “have ten thousand instructors in Christ, we have not many fathers.” Both on earth and in heaven it is the greatest of secondary joys to call him blessed who has turned us from the error of our ways, and saved our soul from death.

Thankful to his benefactors, the healed man stood by them when they were apprehended by the Sanhedrim; glad to share their reproach and peril; for their sake willing to brave all the resentment of the Jewish hierarchy. The martyr-spirit of his gratitude took no counsel of selfishness, or even of the cold virtue of prudence. With them and with their Lord, in whose

name they had spoken, he was willing to go forth without the camp, bearing Christ's reproach. And poor and unworthy will be our thankfulness if, when Christ is rejected or His servants are scorned, we slink away in shame or fear. Wherever Christ or His witnesses may stand, there all true and manful disciples will stand with them.

III. In this perilous crisis of the infant Church it was saved by the presence and testimony of this healed cripple. He it was who disconcerted the Sanhedrim, and who was the shield of the little Christian community. What could these few peasants and fishermen have done against the might and hostility of the Sanhedrim? What should prevent James from being then "killed with the sword," or Peter from being then cast into prison?

To all human apprehension the odds against the Nazarene preachers were portentously great. Save as miraculously endowed, they had neither wisdom to understand, nor learning to defend their own Christian faith. If, as is sometimes affirmed, Christianity be only a thing of human thought and faith, the miracle of its establishment and propagation by such apostles, and under such circumstances, is surely as great as the miracle of the Incarnation itself. If these men were only Galilean peasants, propagating by their unaided natural powers a new religion upon which the sagacity of their leader had stumbled, these results transcend all rational computation. Five thousand converts within a few days,

as the result of simple religious teaching, are surely as difficult to credit as the healing of the lame man. If we reject the miracle, we must also, I think, reject the history.

It was not the first time that Peter had stood before Annas and Caiaphas—the names were of ominous import. In the palace of the latter but a few days before Peter had denied his Lord. He was known to Caiaphas as the chief disciple of the Nazarene prophet. Caiaphas would hardly calculate upon his sudden boldness. “They took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.” Again Caiaphas would exult in having in his hands the leaders of the sect; again, perhaps, he would venture upon sinister prophecy. What could be easier than to crush this accursed thing? The difficulty lay in certain incorrigible facts that even the Sanhedrim could not gainsay. Nay, the vitality that this pestilent heresy possessed was derived from these facts. First, there were the notorious miracles which Christ Himself had wrought, crowned by His own indubitable resurrection from the dead. And now His followers seem to be working similar marvels. This notorious cripple, a man above forty years of age, known to have been lame from his birth, familiar to all the temple-goers of Jerusalem as the cripple of the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, had been publicly healed, and in the sight of all the people was “walking and leaping and praising God.” So embarrassing was this notorious fact, that it could not be gainsaid by

either denial or sophistry; "they could say nothing against it." "What shall we say to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell at Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it."

A fact such as this was worth a thousand arguments. It utterly baffled the Sanhedrim. It compelled them to admit the miracle, and, with it, its undeniable inferences. The healed man, not the eloquence of its apostles, saved the infant Church. Such has often been the vindication of the Church; not the learning of its doctors, or the arguments of its apologists, but the spiritual life of some humble simple-hearted disciple,—some healed man full of evangelic life, and love, and gratitude—who, when learning has failed and argument has been disregarded, has justified its work by himself demonstrating its healing power.

It may be humbling to apostles and to Church leaders that ignorant converts should thus do for the Church that which their learning and eloquence fail to do. But so it is. The true saviours of the Church in its great perils, whether of persecution, infidelity, or spiritual deadness, are the men who effect practical results, who originate missions, circulate Bibles, teach in Sunday-schools and ragged schools—its practical workers and not its theoretic apologists. Those who, when confronting their accusers, have healed men standing by their sides, and who thus demonstrate the excellency of its

power by the irresistible logic of fact. The very humblest member of a Church may, by the beauty of his godliness or the extent of his usefulness, demonstrate it to a neighbourhood, and silence gainsayers; proving that, whatever its origin or its doctrine, it has practical power to heal men, to fill society with virtuous citizens, and the Church with pious saints.

## II.—THE ARGUMENT.

IV. In the maintenance of Christianity, and in the vindication of it against all its antagonists, the most effective and conclusive demonstration is practical result—healed men.

In moral and religious systems the ultimate test of validity must ever be practical efficiency. There can be no question concerning the end for which moral and religious agencies exist. Nor can true moral and religious goodness be mistaken. On all hands it will be admitted that the practical end of religious systems is piety towards God, and virtue and self-sacrificing benevolence towards men. Presumably, therefore, that is the best and truest religious system which produces these in the highest degree. So that healed men—men practically redeemed from the power and habit of sin, men renewed in spiritual affection, purified in religious life, made virtuous and benevolent in daily conduct—are the most conclusive vindication of any religious system



or agency. "The God that answereth by fire let him be God."

Let us then apply this test to Christianity. Putting the argument in the broadest way, it stands thus:—The fact of human sinfulness is assumed. Not one man merely, but all men; men wherever they are found, whether learned or ignorant, civilized or savage, are far removed from moral purity and religious piety. Even according to the test and standard of man's own moral judgment and conscience he is impure and unrighteous.

This characteristic and consciousness of moral imperfection is so universal, that we are compelled to admit the truth of the conclusion which theology and moral philosophy have both reached—Plato as well as Paul—that in our nature itself there is some inherent and universal moral defect or damage. The conclusion of the Christian Scriptures is that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." So that everywhere, with the consentaneousness and force of a universal law, men left to themselves—left to the simple workings of their own nature—uniformly develop impurity and godlessness.

Now the philosophers, theologians, and moralists of the world have set themselves to correct this tendency to evil; to teach men such truths, to urge them by such motives, and to operate upon them by such influences as may quicken within them holy affections, and array their will resolutely and effectively on the side of purity and piety.

The world has had a long history. All kinds of experiments have been made in it. Mythologies, superstitions, philosophies, moral systems, theologies of various schools, political economies, social contracts of all kinds, theisms, atheisms, pantheisms, scientific materialism, all have been repeatedly tried. The entire moral course of different nations and communities trying these various experiments, living under their power, embodying their ideas in national, social, ecclesiastical, and individual life, is recorded for us in history. We know what was the faith, and what the kind of life that it produced in Assyria, Egypt, Greece, Rome, India, China, Africa, Arabia, and other non-Christian nations. We know how various forms of Christianity have worked in Europe. We know the effects produced upon classes of men, often upon a large scale, by various systems of anti-Christian infidelity. We have, I think, ample knowledge founded upon ample experience. And the comparative claims of these various systems, these diversified agencies for reforming men and making them virtuous and pious, are submitted to our verdict. Which of all the theologies, philosophies, or moralities propagated amongst men has been the most effective in making men good? Which of them has been most suited to man's religious and moral nature, to its radical principles, to its actual condition? Which has approved itself most fully to the moral conscience, to the moral affections? Which has had the most power over man's religious soul? Which has made

it noblest, purest, happiest? Which has given him his highest truths, his grandest knowledge of God, his loftiest realizations of himself? For the highest worship of God and the greatest elevation of our own moral nature have always gone together. The piety that injures morality, the worship that degrades a man, the religious service that demoralizes him, is an essential contradiction. God cannot be God if everything in Him, if everything that He requires, does not make us purer and nobler, and lift us towards Himself—the ideal of all our greatest conceptions. Let then Christianity be compared with other systems, in this its practical power to make men good and noble, to possess, and purify, and elevate their entire moral nature:—and this, as attested by what they have actually done in the world, and by what they are actually doing; what they demand of their respective disciples, and what they produce in them.

1. We might rest the argument upon a broad historical view of nations and peoples; we might compare Christian nations with idolatrous nations, such as we see in India, China, or Africa; or with Mohammedan nations, such as we see in various parts of Asia; and point out how little non-Christian faiths have done to correct moral evil in men. We should gladly admit that they have done something, some of them a great deal. It would be as false as foolish to question the true and noble elements of Buddhism, Confucianism, Greek and Roman Paganism, Mo-

ammedanism. Perhaps the very worst superstition and idolatry that the world has seen has good elements in it, elements that have worked good in the moral and religious character of their votaries. The very worst superstition is better than unchecked godlessness and vice. Christianity does not need lies and slander to establish its supremacy. He is both ignorant and foolish who thinks that everything that is not Christian is evil, or who tries to make out that every good element of paganism has been somehow or other borrowed from Christianity or Judaism. A great deal that is true and good in all systems comes out of the religious nature that belongs to all men alike ; and there may be religious traditions of a primitive knowledge of God which even a Bechuana has not lost.

We may admit to the full every good element that the best of non-Christian systems can claim, all that is sublime in Buddhism, all that is morally elevating in Confucianism, all that is really noble in the reforming theology of Mohammedanism. And yet who would hesitate for a moment to recognize the moral superiority of Christianity, and the greater practical power of its truths. The nations, and the individuals who submit themselves most directly and fully to the power of Christian truths and motives, are incomparably the most elevated in character and life.

2. A similar line of argument might be maintained respecting different forms of Christianity. We might compare Eastern Christianity, Roman Ca-

tholic Christianity, and Protestant Christianity, and submit them to the same test of results. Just in proportion as the Christianity that nations have received has been spiritual, biblical, moral, just in that proportion have they—speaking broadly and generally—been virtuous, noble, industrious, and powerful. An intelligent man might confidently pronounce upon the Christian faith of the different nations of Europe just now, simply from their moral, industrial, and political condition. The connection between Popery and the state of nations such as Spain, Austria, Italy, and Ireland, not to speak of France; and between Protestantism and the state of nations such as Germany, England, and the United States, is too obvious to need exposition. In his remarkable pamphlet,\* just translated at the request of Mr. Gladstone, M. de Laveleye has traced these connections in detail, and has pointed out conclusions so invariable that they have all the force of a law. Even the German states of Switzerland which are Roman Catholic are uniformly far behind the Latin states which are Protestant. And one has only to think of the principles, religious, social, and political of the two systems, to see that the result is inevitable. Where every principle of spirituality, of self reliance, of freedom of judgment, of conscience, and of life, is either denied or emasculated, noble character as the result is impossible. Sacerdotalism, in all its forms, is antagonistic to the

\* "Protestantism and Catholicism."

noblest life of nations or men. "Men do not gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles."

But these lines of argument are far too extended for a sermon; they demand volumes for their adequate illustration. Let me therefore gather in my remarks to one or two more definite and practicable illustrations. And we will take one or two of the fundamental elements of Christianity, and look at their adaptation to make men holy.

(1) First let us take the Bible itself, which, although it is not Christianity, yet is the record of what Christ was, and of what Christianity is. It is our authoritative religious book, claiming to be a supernatural revelation of the thought and heart of God. We say of it that it is "given by inspiration of God," and that it is full of moral power—"profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness;" so that by means of it "the man of God is made perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

Is then the Bible, as tested by its history and by its practical moral power over men, the efficient instrument for recovering men from godlessness and moral evil, and to piety and virtue, that it is here affirmed to be? Are men who receive the Bible and submit themselves to it made good men, or otherwise? Is the practical influence of the Bible beneficial or injurious?

On many sides its claims are disallowed. It is denied that in any Divine or special sense it is in-

spired at all. A book of transcendent human genius it is admitted to be, but inspired of God only as all intellect is of God—only as Plato, and Bacon, and Shakespeare, and Milton are inspired. It is not, we are told, even true as a history. Its chronology is preposterous, its statistics are erroneous, its science is false, its miracles are impossible violations of natural law, its prophecies are but remarkable coincidences or sagacious prognostications. There is in the Book nothing that may not be accounted for on natural principles. Probably at no previous time has the literature of Christianity been so variously and severely questioned, or more contemptuously disparaged.

How then are the Divine claims of the Book to be vindicated? Christianity has scholars and philosophers abundantly competent to reply to the scholars and philosophers of infidelity; to determine how far these exceptions are well founded, and what value is to be attached to such inferences as may be drawn from them. Nay, it is not arrogant to say that the chief learning and science, criticism and philosophy of the world, are arrayed on the side of Christianity. The greatest names in the history of learning have long been and still are those of men of devout religious belief. The master minds of our literary and philosophical history have accepted this book, not indeed in the forms which its less instructed or more fanatical believers may have insisted upon, but yet as pre-eminently and uniquely a book from God.

Hitherto, moreover, every assault of hostile criticism has only called forth new champions of the faith, who by fresh researches and new lines of argument have shown how impregnable and manifold its defences are. If, therefore, we adduce empirical arguments, it is not for lack of philosophical ones. While every sceptical attack has been refuted again and again, the great apologies of Christianity are still unanswered. From Augustine to Butler, from Athanasius to Paley, the chief scholastic bulwarks of Christian theology have been called forth by hostile assaults. And thus it must ever be. "No weapon formed against it shall prosper."

But the vindication of the Bible need not be left to learned argumentation. The battle need not be relegated to the fields of philosophy and criticism. We may appeal to the religious character and to the religious achievements of the Bible. Alone among the religious books of the world it is a book of history—it consists of historical facts concerning men and things; and further, as a book, itself has a history among the nations of the earth. The Bible is not like the *Zendavesta*, a book of liturgies; nor like the *Vedic Hymns*, a book of impossible legends; nor like the writings of Confucius and Plato, a book of moral philosophy; nor like the *Koran*, a book of mere doctrine and precept. Fundamentally and characteristically it is history. The Old Testament is the lengthened history of a nation, in which its entire religious cultus is



embodied ; the New Testament is the history of a Person, in whom all distinctive Christian teachings are incorporated. This subjects the Bible to the most searching tests. What, then, is the moral character of the Bible as judged by the religious sense of men ? and what have been the moral effects which in the course of history it has wrought ?

Take as a test of the Old Testament the Book of Genesis. Is it history or is it legend ? Is it from God or is it of men ? Do we need a Niebuhr to give us a reply ? Nay, verily. Make what abatement we may for historic or scientific difficulties, for obscurities or errors, great, unmistakable, and indisputable religious characteristics remain. How, for instance, are we to account for the personal characters of its heroes ? Abel, Enoch, Abraham—whence came the conception and delineation of such men ? Moses is older than Homer. How is it that Abraham, the “friend of God,” is not, like Herákles, a demigod or a hero ? Always in closest intimacy with Jehovah, he is yet always a proper man, as human in all his thoughts and actions as the men of to-day. How is it, again, that the Jehovah whom he worships is not like Zeus, an incongruous conception of supernatural attributes, human imperfections, and even vile passions—hatred, cruelty, and lust. While the worshipper has no single trait of divinity, the Jehovah whom he worships has no single trait of humanity. How is it that these conceptions of the human and Divine, and of their

relations, so incomparably transcend all the mythologies of the world, that in fundamental ideas we have neither surpassed nor altered them since?

How is it, again, that the morality taught in the Book of Genesis so singularly transcends even that of Plato, as might easily be shown in important details; nay, that it is so wonderfully accordant with the moral conceptions and feelings of our own day, so that Christian preachers deduce the greatest religious lessons from them? The characters of these old heroes—Abraham, Jacob, Joseph—are fully delineated, and their faults and immoralities exposed. The moral portraiture is suffused with the colouring of their own age and feeling; and yet wrong is never confounded with right, we are never permitted to approve the wrong or disapprove the right. Even in the delineation of Jacob, one of the most complex and tortuous characters in history, the line between right and wrong is never once blurred or transgressed. The wrong of Jacob whom God chooses, the right of Esau whom God rejects, are clearly and firmly set forth, and the religious principles which justify both are clearly indicated.

Are we then asked for a vindication of the Book of Genesis? We will not contend about the science of its first chapters, about the chronology of its generations, about the ethnology of its dispersion. Let science determine how much or how little of these are exact. We appeal to its religious evidence, to its wonderful delineations of moral char-

acter, to its grand conceptions of God as the great First Cause of all things and as the ruler of men, to its lofty and unique morality, to its noble types of religious manhood. The evidence of theological and moral greatness is surely far more than that of the science or the history! How came it to pass that when the philosophy of a Plato and the morality of an Aristotle were so signally defective, this old book of three thousand years ago anticipated the fundamental theology and morality of our nineteenth Christian century? Is not the only possible answer—These were men whom God had healed, and this is God's record concerning them? Difficulties of science or of history have no weight against these moral evidences; they are negative only—difficulties of our ignorance, or of our erroneous interpretation, which greater information might remove. But there can be no mistake about the positive features of these religious and moral characteristics, and before the claims of the record can be rejected these must be accounted for.

Turning to the New Testament, still grander moral delineations are presented to us. Peerless and Divine stands the moral portraiture of Jesus Christ. Whence is it? of man or of God? a mere human conception or a Divine inspiration? Is it history or is it romance?

Whatever we may think about Christianity, Christ Himself is the greatest moral miracle of human history. Who but He, when the Pharisees asked

for a sign, could have rebuked them because they did not see the Divine attestation that He Himself was,—the Divine beauty of His life, the Divine truth of His words? Had they been “of the truth” they would have “heard His voice.” His works would have appealed to their true hearts, as the Alpine horn appeals to the answering mountains; they would no more have asked the spiritual Christ to attest His Divine mission by miracles, than they would have asked the astronomer to demonstrate the noonday sun. Who but He, when Philip requested to see the Father, could have replied, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father”?

Whence, then, the New Testament conception of Jesus Christ? It is a question that has been a thousand times asked, but that has confessedly never been answered. Had Jesus never lived, could His character have been imagined? Has any conception of romance approached it since? Whence that pure childhood, that sinless youth, that peerless manhood? a life without defect, a character without a flaw, in which no fault had to be corrected, no stain washed out. For Jesus did not, as others, *become* good; He *was* good, “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” What a wonderful character it is, however we look at it.

Think of His calm, majestic *strength*, His perfect self-possession, His unswerving dignity, and yet His nature intense even to passion in its emotions. He denounces the Pharisees, but without a vestige of

unholy passion; He drives out the money-changers, but without a spark of religious fanaticism.

Think of the *wisdom* of His holiness. His is not the innocence that is ignorant of human life, it is the strength that is above it.

Think of His *self-consciousness* and *self-assertion*. He never confesses defect, never expresses a feeling of unworthiness. No tear of penitence rolls down His cheek, no prayer for mercy breaks from His lip, no confession of moral weakness enters into His prayer. When He speaks concerning Himself it is to avow His human faultlessness, to assert His Divine perfection and prerogative. For nineteen centuries Jesus of Nazareth has been the world's ideal of moral goodness, as perfect on earth as God is perfect in heaven. His fearless challenge to the men of His day, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" has been repeated to every gainsayer since. His character has been subjected to unparalleled tests, and without the discovery of a single flaw. Scepticism itself, while rejecting Christianity, has almost uniformly done homage to its Christ. Acknowledgments of moral admiration and reverence—almost of worship—are perpetually wrung from the apostles of infidelity, one of the latest and most emphatic from Mr. John Stuart Mill.\*

The purest and loftiest name of antiquity is that of Socrates. Who ventures to darken the bright portraiture of Christ with even a suggestion of the

\* "Three Essays on Religion," p. 253.

defects of Socrates? What wonder that Rousseau was constrained to say, "If the life and death of Socrates were those of a sage, the life and death of Jesus were those of a God. His history has marks of truth so palpable, so striking, and so perfectly inimitable, that its inventor would excite our admiration more than its hero."

Think again of the singular *proportion and adjustment* of His character. What a wonderful harmony of greatness and gentleness, holiness and pity, strength and sympathy; the grandeur of the loftiest manhood, the tenderness of the gentlest womanhood. How the two hemispheres of human excellences are in Him filled and rounded to a full-orbed humanity. He was more than perfect man, He was ideal humanity. We reverence as much as we love Him, we love Him as much as we worship Him.

Think of *His moral excellences in combination with His intellectual greatness*. His clearness, calmness, strength! How singularly free from over excitement of the imagination, from all approach to self-delusion, from all error and defect. He is never impulsive, never dogmatic, never in extremes. His goodness is never weak or sentimental. In everything He is wise and strong, intelligent, profound, majestic. He sanctions no single excess, He prohibits no lawful enjoyment. He wondrously holds the balance of life, always and perfectly preserving the golden mean. His teaching is still our perfect ideal of life; none of His principles are found erro-

neous, none of His requirements fall into desuetude. His moral kingdom is planted in the heart of our common life, and claims everything in it. He does not call men out of the world in order to become His disciples: He sends them into the world, to serve Him there, and to enthrone Him there as the Lord of human life.

What a conception *His spiritual kingdom* is! He, a peasant of the mountain village of Nazareth, without literary education, ignorant of the world's history, of its geography, of its races, of its politics; nurtured amid the misconceptions, prejudices, and exclusiveness of His countrymen—conceives a kingdom of pure spiritual life, that is to include all races of men and all generations; in its principles and requirements, alike adapted to the ancient Asiatic and to the modern European, to the shivering Esquimaux and to the torrid Hindoo; a kingdom of universal brotherhood, in which all men are to be knit together in holiness and love; a kingdom to be won and ruled by only moral forces, whose only sword is “the sword of the Spirit,” whose only coercion is the coercion of strong conviction and affection; a kingdom whose foundations are to be laid in a cross—the great instrument of His triumphs—and which unaided is to maintain a successful war against all the opposing powers of the earth, against all the strongest passions of human nature. This was His conception, and for nineteen centuries the course of events has justified it. His cross has gone

forth conquering and to conquer, and at this moment it is the symbol of the mightiest intellectual and moral forces of the world.

What must have been the intellectual and moral grandeur of the nature in which such a conception as this could be rooted, and out of which it could spring. The very conception is the greatest miracle of human history; upon any hypothesis it places its author infinitely higher than all the statesmen, all the philosophers, all the moralists who have appeared in our world.

May we not, then, fairly appeal to the moral portraiture of the New Testament in proof that it is of God? Not merely to its apostles and saints, its Ephesians and Corinthians, its *healed men*, but also to their Healer, to Him who is the incarnate ideal of all goodness, the perfection of the human in the Divine. If our blessed Lord never existed as these brief records of the four Evangelists so artlessly and yet so profoundly delineate Him, whence their conception of Him? If four men could simultaneously imagine such a character, each presenting an individual portrait of Him, and yet all so congruous and harmonious—why not a fifth or sixth? Scepticism has had its men of genius—why has it never produced another Gospel?

Upon the moral integrity of its Christ Christianity is staked. He alleged that He wrought miracles. He bade the disciples of John tell their master the things they had seen and heard; how the deaf heard,



the lame walked, the blind saw, and, most marvellous of all, the poor had the gospel preached unto them.

But if He never wrought such miracles, if they were miracles only in seeming, achievements of greater knowledge or cleverness, not only is His religion deprived of its credentials, but it is founded upon a huge imposture. The loftiest truth, the purest morality of the world is the offspring of a lie—a moral solecism so great that our entire consciousness rejects it.

It is vain to talk about Christ's personal goodness and excellent doctrine, and deny His miracles. He declared that He raised Lazarus from the dead, that He Himself came forth from the sepulchre. If these things did not occur in the sense intended, if the pretended death of Lazarus was only a pious fraud of the family at Bethany, if Christ Himself was only in a state of suspended animation, He is infinitely less than a good man. He is found a false witness before God; He roots a holy religion in falsehood and fraud. He must be apologized for whenever He is named, His self-assertions excused, His self-selected credentials explained away. Is He not more culpable than Mahomet in his pretended journey to Paradise, more unscrupulous than the fabricator of the "Book of Mormon"? He claims more than religious teacher ever claimed, sets up a higher moral standard; and if His claims have forged credentials appended to them the Pharisees were right—He is "a deceiver of the people." He

whom we thought the most perfect of men is really one of the most base. I cannot receive as a perfect man a Christ like this. Either He Himself was deceived, and must be ranked as the most credulous of men—and this in the face of the imperial intellect of the Sermon on the Mount—or, there is no alternative, He is the incarnate Son of God. We must either receive the Christ altogether or reject Him altogether. I could sooner disbelieve the entire Bible than the supernatural claims of such a Christ. “If Christ be not risen our preaching is vain, your faith is also vain.”

Nor is the *religious history* of the Bible less conclusive than its moral portraiture. Wherever it has come it has proved its Divine power by healing men. The completed Scripture has existed for eighteen centuries. We are familiar with its history. Testimonies to its practical religious power have been adduced by its friends and wrung from its enemies. What nations can be compared in moral goodness with Christian nations? Who amongst the rejectors of Christianity could be put forward as competitors for the palm of virtue and philanthropy?

We know what Christianity did in apostolic times, when it came into contact with the unutterable depravities of Greece and Rome—what it found its converts, and what it made them. We know what it has done in every land to which it has come since;—what just now Europe is in contrast with Asia, America in contrast with Africa. We know what fifty years ago the South Sea Islands were, and what

—the officers of our navy and the intercourse of our merchant ships being witness—they are now. And throughout its history, without a solitary exception, wherever the Bible has come, it has produced the effects that we see in the Sandwich Islands, in Tahiti, and in Madagascar. While, before it savagery and obscenity and bloodshed have rioted, and guilt has cowered and misery shrieked, behind it healed men have thronged—pardoned, purified, happy—filling its path with benedictions and virtue.

And its latest triumphs have been the most signal. A few chapters of the Bible, sometimes a single page, has sustained and propagated the Christianity of Madagascar; inspiring its converts with the virtue of saints and with the heroism of martyrs. I myself have looked upon a few dirt-stained and blood-stained verses brought home by Mr. Ellis, which wrought as a moral power to turn men from Satan unto God, and sustained their faith, first in caves and forests, and then in imprisonment and death; and wrought in them processes which, according to Mr. Ellis, made their prayers and praises and their moral virtues undistinguishable from those of our English Churches.

No other book does this. Stand in a pulpit and read to men Plato, or Milton, or Bacon: where are their converts? whose hearts do they change? whose lives do they sanctify? Read to them the Bible, and healed men spring up everywhere, “walking, and leaping, and praising God.” There is no evidence

so convincing as this; the truth that turns sinners into saints, that purifies men's hearts, and makes their lives holy and benevolent, is the divinest of all truth.

We might take the distinctive doctrines of Christianity, and reason from them in the same way, showing that whatever their metaphysical truth they have practically power to heal men. No doctrine, for example, has been more demurred to than the doctrine of *atonement*—forgiveness through propitiatory sacrifice. It has been represented as unrighteous and immoral—as demanded by a vengeful feeling, as accepted by a perverted moral sense, and as introducing only confusion into our conceptions of moral principles and processes.

It is sufficient to reply:—First, that with exceptions so few as to be scarcely worth mentioning, this, for eighteen hundred years, has been the fundamental doctrine of Christendom. The moral conscience of Christian men, so far from stumbling at these moral incongruities, has gloried in nothing so greatly. Next, that if it be a false doctrine, men are misled the most grievously where they think themselves guided the most explicitly; and instead of being the most lucid, the New Testament is the most ambiguous of books. And next, that in its practical influence upon men's hearts and lives, this alleged error has been more potent and fruitful than all admitted truth. The great constraining thought about Christ has been, not that He brought a new revelation of the Father,

not that He Himself was "God manifest in the flesh," not that He put before men an example of perfect holiness, not that He comforts men in their sorrows by His precious human sympathies, not that in His death He is a grand example of perfect sacrifice. All these men have recognized Him and rejoiced in Him; but the great constraining recognition has been that He gave "his life a ransom for many," died on the cross an expiation for human sin. To this supreme recognition, rightly or wrongly, men have passionately clung; this has been the distinctive excitement of their fervours; and whenever this idea is lost, whatever else is retained, religious life is chilled down, and grateful love is abated. For this men have cherished fervent gratitude and love; above all other beliefs it affects their hearts and constrains their service. "They look upon him whom they have pierced, and they mourn." As they think of Him dying for *their* sin, penitence smites upon its breast, and faith looks up with joyful recognition; the power of evil is broken, and deep springs of thankful love are opened; and a piety, a holiness, a self-sacrifice are constrained, that, taking it as a whole, has had no parallel in human virtue.

Can we then imagine that all this is a delusion? that this gratitude has been falsely generated? this holiness illegitimately wrought? Are these fervours false fires, sparks that ourselves have kindled? Oh, no, it cannot be; man's error can never be more potent than God's truth. By their fruits we know

doctrines as well as men, and this great doctrine has produced the chief penitence, and sanctity, and self-consecration of the Church. More than all other doctrines it has filled the Church with healed men.

So with the doctrine of the *Holy Spirit*. It is objected to as loosening the bonds of personal responsibility, as encouraging a perilous laxity in practical Christian morals; inasmuch as men who are taught that all their goodness is from God, and that a Divine power external to themselves must "create in them a clean heart," and "renew them day by day," are not likely to strive to be good. Again we appeal to the inexorable logic of fact, again we adduce healed men. Who in religious life are the most sensitive to sin, the most scrupulous in holiness, the most consecrated in service, the most beneficent in help? Beyond all dispute, they who theoretically believe, and who practically illustrate the new birth of the Spirit.

In a word, we boldly submit all the fundamental doctrines of Christianity to this test of results. We do not fear to take its most hostile critics into our churches and homes, our ragged schools and missions, and when they ask for evidence, bid them look around. Imperfections they will find, as everywhere else; ignorant fanaticism and sanctimonious hypocrisy will sometimes be found, as the characteristic forms of human evil which false religious life will take. But applying even far severer moral tests

and a much higher moral standard than to any other form of life, we are not afraid of any equitable verdict. We can adduce processes of religious penitence and of moral reformation; men fighting honest and strenuous battle with the devil in their hearts and with whatever they think evil in their lives; rough men subdued to tender-heartedness, and profane men humble in prayer: transformations of character that are a moral miracle—characters the vilest, lives the most iniquitous, utterly changed; homes, once the haunt of every vice and the scene of every misery, virtuous and happy; men once reeling drunkards, and women viler still, tremblingly guarding their new-born virtue, and kneeling together before God to ask His help; the husband cherishing the wife to whom he has been a terror, the wife ministering to the husband to whom she has been a curse; children, once the pests of a neighbourhood, reclaimed to honesty and industry.

Every Christian minister, every town missionary, almost every member of a Christian Church could adduce instances, some of them scores and hundreds, which would stand the test of any judicial investigation. No one rejects Christianity because its influences are pernicious, or Christ, because His teaching is immoral. When Christian men are charged with inconsistency, the very charge implies a standard far higher than any other in our social life.

Reason with a sceptical objector, you may be ignominiously defeated. It is not a question of mere

truth or falsehood, but of comparative cleverness, logical faculty, manifold knowledge. But the argument from moral result is unanswerable. The most ignorant can say, "Whether this be of God or not I cannot tell; this I know, that whereas once I was blind now I see;" I have the consciousness of a new life, of nobler impulses, of higher virtues. The argument is irresistible. You adduce experience in reply to speculation, fact in contradiction of theory. If the objector tells you what his philosophy *is*, you show him what your Christianity *has done*. He challenges the philosophy of your creed, you challenge the moral effects of his infidelity. - Where are its religious penitents, its rescued reprobates, its Magdalens and prodigals? Where are the moral trophies of the apostles of infidelity? And if he has found no such moral power to make men holy, he will, if a true man, tell you with a quivering lip, a tearful eye, and a sorrowful heart, how reluctantly he rejects your Christianity, what anguish it costs him to be unable to become a disciple of a faith so noble, of a moral force so great and beneficial. He who feels no such anguish, who exults in debasing the moral standard of life, or who chuckles over any discredit of a benign and holy Christianity, is simply a fiend and not a man.

In this way, then, even gainsayers may be made to confess, "That a notable miracle hath been done by these Christian teachers, is manifest to all them that dwell in the land, and we cannot deny it."



(2) You are a member of an unauthorised Christian Church. You "teach men to worship God contrary to the law." Yours is not the true apostolical succession. Yours are not valid sacraments. Your Church life is schismatic, your Church teaching illicit. Therefore your claims are disallowed; you are accorded only a reluctant toleration, and that only where there is no ecclesiastical power to deny it. The courtesies of ministerial recognition are refused you. At the very best, you are regarded with a feeling of official inferiority.

How, then, are you to vindicate your ministry? By arguments, lectures, sermons, or ecclesiastical polemics? Nothing were easier; for of all the claims that are defiant of facts, these are the most unscrupulous. Nay, rather, but by the more excellent way of vigorous, effective, spiritual work. By the holiness of your Church character, by the spiritual grace of your Church ordinances, by the entireness of your Church consecration, by the unselfishness of your Church service, by the munificence of your Church offerings, by the moral efficacy of your Church work, by schools, by missions, by redeeming agencies, by saved souls.

The end of all Church organizations is spiritual life. Vindicate your Church by demonstrating that in the spiritual and moral life that it nurtures, in the benevolent work that it does, in the souls that it saves, it is not a whit behind the very chiefest of the Churches. Demur and protest against the theory of your Church

will be powerless so long as God manifestly recognizes and honours it thus—making it the means of saving men. Evil men will, perhaps, be convinced by no argument at all, but good men will be convinced by no argument so soon and so completely. Their spiritual sympathies will constrain them to “see the grace of God” and to be glad.

The only stamp of validity worth caring for is the proof of God’s working with us. When they see this the wise and good will hesitate to condemn. They will say, “If this counsel or work be of men it will come to nought, but if it be of God we cannot overthrow it, lest haply we be found to fight against God.” “They of the ecclesiastical circumcision who believe will be astonished because that upon us ecclesiastical Gentiles also is poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.” Their piety will overpower their prejudice, they will “hold their peace and glorify God,” or else be constrained to say, “That notable miracles are wrought by these Churches and ministers, whose validity we have questioned, is manifest to all religious men, and we cannot deny it.”

(3) Or ignorant or unscrupulous men may misrepresent your doctrine, question your orthodoxy, seek to damage your influence or character.

How are you to vindicate yourself? By solicitously reciting the articles of your creed? Nay, rather, but by increasing your earnestness. *You*, too, will in the long run be “known by your fruits.” Let

your self-assertions be the souls that you save — lame men healed standing by you—so that, turning to them, you can say, “Ye are our epistle, written in our hearts, known and read of all men.” “By well doing we best put to silence the ignorance of foolish men,” or else compel them to say, “That notable miracles are done by the preaching of this heterodox man, is manifest to all who know him, and we cannot deny it.”

(4) Or your evangelical agencies are called in question—your ragged school teaching or theatre preachings, your special prayer-meetings or exceptional services—their place of assembling or the manner in which they are conducted. They are disorderly; they are contrary to the rubric and to the traditions of the Church; they are perilous possibilities of evil. What matter if they succeed, if they are vindicated by healed men, if public-houses are emptied, if homes are made virtuous and happy? What are all Church agencies, what is the Church itself, but a means of saving men? The Church does not exist for its own sake, Church life is only in order to holy human life. That Church, therefore, is the truest, those Church agencies are the best, which the most effectively accomplish this end. All Church agencies are but expedients which will vary with varying circumstances. The wisdom of one age would be folly in another; that which is extravagance to-day may be propriety to-morrow. Why should the charge that we “turn the world upside down” trouble us?

It has been brought against better men than we. Is not the greater peril of Churches the persistency of traditional methods, the cramping, deadening influence of rubrics?—the check which undue timidity and conventional propriety put upon bold and effective enterprise? All Church life tends to formality. Its palsy is far more disastrous than its fever.

Let us speak to men wherever they will listen to us; employ whatever agencies will the most effectually reach them. It is said of a French monarch that he was burned to death because court etiquette forbade the persons who happened to be near to touch him. Are we to let men perish because there is no surpliced priest to save them? are we too nicely to calculate personal risks in rescuing them? Let us not fear. Light is not defiled by being carried into dark places. Truth is not adulterated by being spoken amid the devil's lies. Purity is not sullied by contact with pollution. Even the Christ may lift up the woman who was a sinner.

When the city missionary or the ragged school teacher, the theatre preacher or the revival evangelist, is seen with healed men standing by him, vile characters transformed, lost souls saved, good men will "thank God and take courage;" and cavillers will be compelled to say, "That notable miracles are wrought by these irregular workers, is manifest to all who know their work, and we cannot deny it."

(5) So we justify our missions to the heathen.

Men sneer at our fanatical philanthropy, and reproach us with romantic and costly solitudes concerning those remote from us; or with virtuous indignation read homilies of cold prudence over the graves of missionary martyrs, denouncing a self-immolation, which, had it been exacted by merchandise or science, would have been lauded as heroism.

Let us be contented with the simple rejoinder of success—the legitimate success of spiritual truth and influence—not to be measured by a geographer's chain or calculated by arithmetic merely, but to be seen in holy leaven diffused, in the softening and civilising, the refining and assimilating of communities into which the gospel has been introduced; nations brought within the pale of civilisation, Churches planted, schools established, commerce inaugurated, peoples elevated, purity wrought in souls once given over to the vilest lusts, humanity and benevolence kindled in hearts once possessed of the most savage cruelty. Every mission field would furnish sufficient proof. Even where the least has been done the success is more marvellous than the failure. And where most has been done, we of this single generation have seen transformations wrought almost without a parallel in the history of Christianity. Not to speak of the South Seas or Madagascar, in India alone the mere number of Christian converts has doubled within the last ten years; and this is the least effect that Christianity has

wrought. So that travellers and traders visiting our mission stations are constrained to say, "That notable miracles have been wrought by these fanatical missionaries, is manifest to all who take pains to know what they have done, and we cannot deny it."

Brethren, let our solicitude be to do well our Christian work! Then, however we may be assailed, our vindication before God and man will be abundant. In matters involving moral right and wrong, that only may be done which is right; but in matters of mere expediency, whatever the most fully achieves the end is best. In such cases the end does justify the means. Let us not be turned aside from any practical endeavour to vindicate its theory or even to vindicate ourselves. Why should we stay our work to take part in frivolous controversies, or to answer follies and impertinences? When foolish or evil men challenge us, it is our sufficient reply, "We are doing a great work, and cannot come down." Practical success—healed men—are an abundant justification of both the work and the worker. For this let us supremely care, for this let us devise, and labour, and pray; how to achieve the largest and speediest success; how most effectually to bring to God the unconverted in our congregations, the scholars of our schools, the neighbours of our homes, the outcasts of society and of the world. Let it be our glory to say, "God being our helper, this one thing I do."

It is never inappropriate to ask—Are you your-

selves healed men? Is there any apostle, any minister of Christ by whose side you could take your stand, whose work your own healed souls could attest? Any whom you reverence with such grateful love that everywhere you confess him for the healing he has brought you?

It may be you are still unhealed, "sitting at the Beautiful Gate of the temple." It is no presumption in me to say to you, "Look on us." "In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise up and walk;" for not in our own name or by our own power do we this. It is "through faith in his name" who is risen from the dead that men are healed. We simply declare His power, proffer His grace. In His great name we say to you, "Repent, and be converted, every one of you, that your sins may be blotted out." "Unto you, God, having raised up his Son Jesus, has sent him to bless you, by turning every one of you from his iniquities." Even now He waiteth to heal; His servants would lead you to Him. To heal you He comes as the Great Physician; to save you He lays down His life. If, therefore, you turn away unhealed, if you die unsaved, it will be because you "will not come to him that you may have life."

May the merciful God incline you to hearken to His gracious invitations. May His great love so constrain and bless you, as that even now, in the first great joy of your healing, in this His temple, with these His servants, you may be found "walking and leaping and praising God."





XI.

“For my Sake.”

*For my sake.*—MATT. v. 11.

## XI.

**T**HIS is only the fragment of a sentence ; but in detaching it we do the texture of Scripture no wrong, inasmuch as it contains within itself a complete sense, and affirms an important principle.

It is a distinct and cogent motive for religious life and service. We are to be religious men, and to do religious things "for Christ's sake." Not is it a mere casual word, or passing sentiment struck out in the glow and exaggeration of passionate feeling. Who can conceive of our Lord, in the calm self-possession which characterized Him even when His emotions were excited the most strongly, thus lightly using religious sanctions ?

It is a phrase which both our Lord and His apostles employ so frequently, and in such various connections, that there must attach to it great and vital meanings. It is one of those characteristic phrases upon the lips of our Lord, one of those wonderful notes of distinctive meaning and claim,

which clearly draw a broad line of separation between Him and all other teachers. It is like the authoritative phrase, "Verily, verily, I say unto you," which no other prophet of God ever presumes to employ. It is like the great revealing phrase, "Your Father who is in heaven," which proclaims the gospel of God's Fatherhood, and which, like a refrain, is reiterated in all our Lord's discourses—from the Sermon on the Mount to the valedictory discourse on the "night in which he was betrayed."

It is the assertion of a claim to personal affection and gratitude as the supreme motive of our religious life. It falls from the lips of our Lord some ten or twelve different times. It is urged by Him in connection with some of the highest and holiest of our obligations to the supreme Deity, and with some of the most vital interests of the spiritual soul. Where it is not formally urged it is everywhere implied. It underlies every injunction that He utters, every demand that He makes. It was practically admitted by His disciples; the apostolic writings are pervaded by it. Even the most momentous things are done, and the most arduous things endured, formally and avowedly "for Jesus' sake."

Is it too much to say that the acceptance of such a motive of religious life involves all that is most distinctive in Christian doctrine, and all that is most influential in Christian constraint? Can we, therefore, who are assembled for the special purpose of considering the claims which the great

Redeemer prefers to our service, do better than examine the full significance and power of such a motive of religious life, so that we may practically submit our hearts afresh to its peculiar constraints?

I. First, the urgency of such a motive involves a very distinct doctrine concerning Christ. It has important and suggestive bearings upon His distinctive character. I can only suggest two or three thoughts, out of a broad and fruitful field.

1. Is it not, to say the least, a remarkable, nay, a unique principle of religious obligation? Where else shall we find it? So far as I know, such a consideration is urged by no other religious teacher. The ordinary urgencies of God's prophets are altogether different. They demand of us religious submission on the ground that they speak in the name and by the authority of Jehovah, who has a supreme right to our obedience; and on the ground that the things which they urge are essentially and eternally true, our own religious soul being witness. They appeal to our natural conscience; to our religious affections, capacities, and yearnings; to our entire moral and spiritual nature. And the voice within responds to the voice without; we confess the teaching to be true and right and good. Therefore say these religious teachers, "Obey. God commands you to obey. Your own religious nature confesses that it is right and good to obey."

The great Teacher does not omit these sanctions. He demands obedience because He speaks in His

Father's name. He urges the intrinsic truth, the spiritual excellency of the things He teaches. He lays it down as a great principle that all who are "of the truth," all truth loving men, will "hear his voice." Hearts that yearn for truth will receive Christ's words of truth, as the eye receives light, as the heart receives love.

But in addition to these common grounds of appeal, our Lord claims religious obedience upon a ground peculiar to Himself. "Be," He says, "religious men, yield to God's commands, love your Father who is in heaven, and consecrate to Him your body and soul, 'for my sake.'" And this startling claim is so entirely conceded, that every service rendered by the apostles and early Christians, every distinctive holiness, consecration, and affection of "the holy Church throughout the world," from the first day until now, is consciously and avowedly "for his sake."

Now this implies a broad and essential difference between Jesus of Nazareth and all other servants of God. Neither in the inducements of Old Testament prophets nor of New Testament saints do we find even the suggestion of such a motive.

Moses was, perhaps, next to the Lord Jesus Christ, the greatest and most august of God's prophets. When did such a word fall from his lips? Although for the sake of the people he had forsaken the court of Pharaoh and relinquished the succession to the Egyptian throne; although for forty years he had

led them through the wilderness and patiently borne with so much of their petulance and ingratitude, never once in his Deuteronomy—which recapitulates their history, their law, their manifold obligation—does he ever think of urging them to religious obedience by personal considerations. Nor does Samuel, the prophet and legislator to whom, next to Moses, the people were most indebted; neither does David, nor Isaiah, nor Jeremiah. These great servants of God had too lowly a sense of their insignificance to think of intruding personal inducements into their religious urgencies. Who were they, that any consideration for them would be likely to prevail, when the direct and august claims of Jehovah were disregarded? They would have deemed it an impertinent intrusion, almost a blasphemy, to have urged God's high service by a motive so egotistical.

Not only does Christ urge this motive of personal consideration, He introduces it into the most sacred and solemn things, and apparently gives it supremacy over every other. Either, therefore, in distinctive character, or in insufferable egotism, He broadly separates Himself from all other servants of God. Whatever opposes the consecration of the religious life is to be sacrificed for His sake. Whatever endurance the religious life may bring upon us is to be cheerfully submitted to for His sake. Every cross that may lie in the path of religious duty is to be taken up and borne after Him. Even though men

should nail us to the last bitter cross of martyrdom, for His sake we are to accept it.

From any other lips such a demand would provoke resentment or ridicule. Even from Him it would startle us, had not a long familiarity with the idea of His Divine supremacy made it so natural. Assuredly we cannot conceive of Him who was "meek and lowly in heart," and who so ingenuously proposed Himself as the exemplar of all humility, less reverent, less lowly, less obtrusive of self into Divine sanctities than Moses or Isaiah.

The claim is so daring, it is preferred so frequently, and in such a lofty style of conscious right; He who prefers it is so intelligent and calm, so holy and so humble, that there is but one satisfactory explanation of it. There did pertain to our Lord a distinctive and Divine character, which made it congruous for the lowliest and calmest of men to claim the highest of prerogatives. Because He thought it no inordinate thing to claim equality with God, He could urge upon His disciples that they should be religious and self-sacrificing men "for his sake."

2. But clearly the urgency does not rest upon Divine prerogative merely, or mainly. It is not a fitting argument for pure Deity. Do this "for my sake" is an entreaty of human affection rather than a claim of Divine supremacy. Divine claims have not, I fear, very much cogency with us. We are not greatly moved by thoughts of the Deity. He is very remote from us. We know but little



about Him. We have but very imperfect sympathies with Him. His declarations and commands do not greatly affect us. Mere considerations of right, mere systems of moral truth have never moved the world very greatly, or inspired much religious passion.

A deep human element enters into this claim of our Lord. More than Divine beneficence is urged. It is the appeal of yearning human love. In one place our Lord intimates this by using the phrase, "For the Son of man's sake," the designation that so often fell from His own lips, but that, except the dying Stephen, none of the disciples ever apply to Him. In His character and work as the "Son of man," the true ground of the appeal is to be found. If His Divine nature supplies its right and authority, His human nature supplies its reason and pathos. "Do this for my sake." It is an urgency of the manifold and pathetic motive which His mediatorial character and work supply: — of His incarnation, wherein He "took upon him not the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham," that thus bridging over the great gulf which separated us, "he might bring us to God;" of His human life in our midst, a "strong Son of God," teaching us by His wondrous wisdom, comforting us by His manifold experiences, and strengthening us by His perfect manhood; of His mysterious and vicarious death, "the Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world," wherein "no man took away his life, but he laid it down of himself," voluntarily

bore its agony and shame, its human imputation and Divine infliction, "for us men and for our salvation." "He bare our griefs and carried our sorrows." "The Lord laid upon him the iniquity of us all."

These are the penetrating and constraining elements of the deep and subtle motive that He urges. Into it there enters every nobility and excellence that can win admiration for human goodness; every tenderness, delicacy, and beauty that can constrain response to human love; every self-sacrifice and solicitude that can awaken gratitude for inestimable blessings, blessings bought with more than blood. In the constituent elements of His character and work He is peerless. He is the one perfect man of history, the ideal of human goodness incarnate.

In these Divine biographies the history of this wonderful life is recorded with wonderful minuteness, simplicity, and tenderness. We know this peerless Being as we know no other character in history; so that we of this latest generation of men can submit our hearts to the full force of His goodness and love. We know Him even more intimately than the disciples did; and how marvellously they felt His power! Mysterious as to them His being was, perverse as were many of their notions concerning Him, whatever else they might mistake, they could not mistake His goodness of more than human temper, His heart of more than human love. And it held them under a spell stronger than the love of friend

or wife, a spell which wrought in them, they knew not how, a passion and a worship.

Divine authority and glory *are* a motive of great power. It is a cogent argument for religion that He who enjoins it has the rights of a creator; that He calls us to a knowledge of the highest religious truth, to a participation of the purest religious goodness; that He invites us to be “partakers of the divine nature,” “conformed to the divine image,” “to drink of the river of God’s pleasures.” Apart from the incarnation of Jesus, these are the greatest thoughts that the mind of man has ever received, the greatest excellences that the conscience of man has ever recognized, the most powerful constraints that the heart of man has ever felt.

But when our Lord urges us to be religious for His sake, He means more than even this. He appeals to the great mystery and love of His incarnation. He solicits our religious affections by all the claims that a human embodiment of the Divine gives Him upon our human affections; thus gathering into His urgency every conceivable element of pathos and power—Divine and human, of heaven and of earth.

Thus He presents Himself to us as the supreme Mediator and argument even of our prayers. “Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father *in my name* he will give it you.” “Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and ye shall receive.” And the true and irrepressible instinct of faith has con-

strained His disciples to pray not only through Him but to Him, to invoke the human, so to speak, as a plea with the Divine. And when in the intensity of their pleadings they say, "By the mystery of Thy holy incarnation; by Thy holy nativity and circumcision; by Thy baptism, fasting, and temptation; by Thine agony and bloody sweat; by Thy cross and passion; by Thy precious death and burial; by Thy glorious resurrection and ascension—good Lord, deliver us," they attain to the crowning pathos and power of prayer.

So when our Lord would most cogently plead with us, He can urge no motive higher and holier than that we serve God for His sake. It seems a great assumption, almost an arrogancy, to direct us to pray for His sake, as if thereby the Father would be induced to answer our prayers the more readily and largely; and to urge us to be religious for His sake, as if thereby we should be under the influence of a motive more cogent than any to be derived from Divine claims. And if Jesus Christ were a mere human teacher, I do not see how He could escape the imputation. Only because He was the incarnate Son of God, could He with propriety thus urge us by what He was, and by what He had done. These are the implications of the doctrine involved.

II. Let us now look at the pertinence and power of this new and peculiar motive of the religious life, and at some of the practical applications of it.

It is mainly as power, motive power constrain-

ing men to act upon their religious convictions, that the religion of Jesus Christ transforms the world. Men have always possessed more religious knowledge than they have used : their religious law has been better than their lives. Their lack has been not so much light in their understandings as passion in their hearts; motives and urgencies which, appealing to their emotions, should constrain them to religious service and love.

It is pre-eminently this that is the power of Jesus Christ. It is not because He was so great or wise or holy that He so rules men's hearts. How rarely great men, merely as such, win love ! They are admired or feared. They excite awe, sometimes enthusiasm, not often affection. Which of the world's heroes, warrior, lawgiver, or sage, is enshrined in the world's heart ? Whose heart throbs at the name of Cæsar, or Plato, or Moses ? What passion does Zoroaster inspire, or Sakya-Muni ? The followers of Mahomet would obey him, fight for him, die for him : which of them regards him with any sentiment of personal affection ? Jesus Christ excites human hearts as a friend or a lover does. He rules them not through their admiration so much as through their love. Not because He was the greatest, or wisest, or holiest of men ; not because He was Divine even : but because He "loved us and gave himself for us," "laid down his life for the sheep." Therefore myriads of men and women worship Him with passion and would die for Him as martyrs.

It is an entirely new law of life under which we are thus placed. We are constrained not by conclusions of reason or dictates of conscience, but by grateful affections. The motives that urge us are charged with an unspeakable power of pathos. The tenderest human feelings are introduced into the holiest place of the soul. Every religious duty becomes an enthusiasm of personal love. Virtue is not a mere dictate of right, it is a passionate affection. The love of Christ constrains our love, and through love we fulfil the entire law. Every dictate of conscience passes into an impulse of gratitude. Every consideration of self-interest is lost in self-consecration. All our powers of loving are excited, the entire emotional force of our nature is enlisted on the side of holiness. The ardour of the lover enters into the consecration of the saint. Every demand of obedience is an appeal to our love, every act of it an expression of love. So entirely does this conception pervade Christian obedience, so vital is this feeling in it, that, whatever the service, it is rejected by the Master if love do not proffer it. Without love, knowledge, holiness, almsgiving, and martyrdom are but "as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal."

And when the constraining motive is thus a passion, it is supreme. Let men serve because they fear, and their service will be jealous, stinted, and irksome. Let men serve because they must, and with the heart of a slave they bear the burden of a

slave. Let men serve from a mere sense of right even, and the grave and anxious feeling of responsibility will reduce the elastic joyous energies of the soul to a painful exercise of conscientiousness. The yoke of Christ may be borne, but it will be in a martyr spirit of virtue. We may pray and sing and work, but duty will be the stern taskmaster. We shall look longingly to the boundaries of the broad commandment. It will be a "tale of bricks" that we deliver, and often with wearied limbs and dull submissive hearts. The service will be, if not exactly that of a hireling for reward, yet that of a martyr to duty—a sternly conscientious service, of bitter Sabbath-keeping, irksome services, gloomy, God-fearing, painful law-keeping. But let us serve because we love, and the law will be easy, the burden light. We shall joyfully bring full measure, pressed down, running over. Nothing is too arduous for love to attempt, nothing too costly for love to proffer. It does not ask how little will suffice, but how much it may bring. Love breaks its most precious box of ointment, that it may pour it upon the head of the Lord. It furtively sheds worshipping tears upon His feet. It can never be with love a question what does necessity demand, with what will His generous appreciation be satisfied? It asks that in any way possible to it it may be permitted to demonstrate its depth and tenderness. Its gift is not a calculation of less or more, but simply the best possible expression of itself. The greater

the self-sacrifice possible to it, the more it rejoices. It thinks only of this. It loves because it must, because it is love; loves "with all its heart and soul and strength."

This inherent, mystic, uncalculating power of love is made by our Lord the law of the religious life. He appeals to Christian consciences through Christian hearts. He applies to Christian religiousness the greatest force of human lives. What wonder that His disciples have been constrained to a greater holiness, a more passionate worship, a more self-sacrificing service than the world has elsewhere seen. The love that He has won is a self-sacrificing passion, which "counts not even life itself dear" for His sake.

Men imagine that they have accounted for Christianity when they have appraised its ideas. How much new thought has it contributed to theology and to morals? What new light has it brought into the world? And they will tell you how much of its theology may be found in Judaism, how much of its philosophy in Plato, how much of its morality in Epictetus, how much of its grand beneficence in pagan moralists and poets. Ay, but they forget how much more than mere ideas Christianity is. Men write histories of morals, and leave out the *dynamics*, the moving power. As well construct a theory of the universe, and take no account of force and motion. As well propound a philosophy of animal physiology, and omit the principle of life.



Christianity *does* bring new light both to theology and morals, but, as in the physical, so in the moral world, the moving power of the world is *heat*, not light. It is because the religion of Christ supplies the greatest heat that it is the mightiest power among men.

It applies a new motive power which makes the truth that it teaches resistless:—the sentiment of personal love for Him whose teaching we receive, the strong masterful passion that is the constraint of all true service, a power of constraint that the most selfish and sinful and indolent cannot resist. “At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow.”

Talk they of morals, O Thou bleeding Love,  
Thou maker of new morals to mankind;  
The grand morality is love of Thee.

We may now, for further illustration and instruction, look at two or three of the instances in which our Lord adduces this great motive as an urgency to religious duty.

1. First, He urges it as a reason for the consecration of the religious life. His words are remarkable. “He that loveth father or mother *more than me* is not worthy of me;” “Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sister, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, *for my sake*, shall receive a hundred-fold, and shall inherit life everlasting;” “He that loseth his life *for my sake* shall find it.”

It is not enough for our Lord to tell us what an arduous thing Christian discipleship may possibly

be, what sacrifices it may involve of everything that is dearest in life, yea, of life itself; He affirms that His personal claims are higher and stronger than all these, and that the man who is not willing, *for His sake*, to sacrifice them all, is not worthy even to be His disciple. He does not hesitate to say that whenever it may be an alternative, and these things are not sacrificed for His sake, the man will fail of life everlasting. There are things much more noble and momentous than physical life. To die is not the worst thing that can befall a man. Better die a martyr to great principle, than live without principle. This, the universal sentiment of humanity, is confessed in many other things besides religion.

If then a man prefers to "save his life," that is, to secure the temporal interests of his life, houses, lands, relationships, security, comfort, rather than consecrate himself to a faithful discipleship; if a man chooses a life of selfish gratification rather than a life of noble self-sacrificing service, he will really "lose his life," lose out of his life, that is, all that is good and noble and blessed, all that makes life worth living. Dives sought to save his life, the purple and fine linen, the sumptuous fare every day. The man sought to save his life whose fields brought forth plentifully, and whose highest conception of the use of the produce was to build bigger barns to put it in. Peter would have had our Lord save His own life, and not go to Jerusalem to die. Thousands on every hand of us are saving their lives, living

sordidly, selfishly, meanly, ignobly, amassing money, taking care of themselves, avoiding sacrifice and pain at the cost of all higher things, of all noble character.

The uniform issue, the only possible issue of such self-seeking is that a man loses out of his life all that is noblest in it, all that brings to life its purest satisfactions. He debases, perhaps destroys, the most precious thoughts and feelings and joys of life. He "loses his soul" not merely in the low and little sense of being excluded from God's heaven, but in the much higher sense of being disqualified for it. His is a "lost soul," in the sense of being a meagre, debased, ignoble soul, a soul out of which the nobler attributes are lost. In the great and solemn alternative which is put to every man—will you be true or false, spiritual or sensual, magnanimous or selfish, bear the image of the earthy or the image of the heavenly? he chooses the unworthy part; and he is rapidly attempered to his preference. He makes evil his good, he is "led captive by the devil at his will."

And this is not all. He loses the very happiness that he seeks. Happiness is too coy to be won by her eager pursuer: she is found only of those who seek her not. Happiness is noble consciousness. She comes to the self-forgetful, self-sacrificing man; she flees the self-seeking man, who would sacrifice all noble things to win her. Let a man generously lose his life, nobly, for Christ's sake,

sacrifice its possessions and pleasures, give his property, consecrate his service, forego indulgence, that he may win souls to the holiness and joy of Christ's kingdom, and he will realize unspeakable satisfactions of life, such as no mere possessions can give. "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesses." As the husbandman finds the fruit of the seed-corn which he scatters; as the beneficent man finds the "blessings of them who were ready to perish;" as the unselfish and loving find natures enlarged, enriched, and ennobled, hearts cultivated to powers of exquisite enjoyment, and filled with the rich satisfactions of God Himself.

But it is almost startling to find our Lord enjoining all this on personal grounds. There are rights of Divine authority, He does not urge these; there are claims of truth and virtue, He does not refer to them; there are natural rewards of goodness, both here and hereafter, He does not suggest these. His sole and supreme motive for such consecration to a religious life is personal love for Himself. "Be religious for my sake." Peter never urges such a consideration in his passionate addresses to the Jews, nor Paul in his powerful harangues to the Gentiles, although both are full of personal references and experiences. Had such a thought been suggested to Paul, we may imagine the loyal vehemence with which he would have exclaimed, "Was Paul crucified for you?" Only He who could urge Divine claims

through human endearments could so plead. He who became Master and Teacher for our sakes may fitly beseech us to become disciples for His sake. By His own sacrifice *for us* He acquires the right to ask sacrifices *of us*. Love me because I first loved you.

Thus the appeal of religion becomes the appeal of affection. Refusal to become His disciple is refusal of gratitude for love, the greatest that even the loving God has manifested; of gratitude for the tenderest affection that even the Divine heart can proffer. It is to sin against much more than religious right, against personal self-sacrificing love. He who hangs upon His cross appeals to those who turn away, “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?”

2. The next class of sayings with which our Lord connects this personal motive relates to the sacrifices and endurances which the maintenance of the Christian life may involve.

They are such as these: “Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely *for my sake*.” “Ye shall be hated of all men *for my name’s sake*.” “Ye shall be brought before governors and kings *for my sake*.” “These things will they do to you *for my sake*.” “He that taketh not his cross and followeth me is *not worthy of me*.” “I will show him how many things he must suffer *for my name’s sake*.” And, taking up the same strain, the great note of apostolic consecration is, “We are always delivered unto death *for Jesus’ sake*.”

Here again the urgency to patient fortitude is a purely personal one. Not a word about the religious obligation of doing right at every cost. Not a word about the nobility of suffering for conscience' sake. Not a word about the ennobling influence of patient suffering for the right upon a man's own nature. The supreme, the sole urgency is, "Suffer for my sake." If our Lord had not the Divine right to urge such a claim, would He have the human right? Thus to have spoken of mere human suffering for their sakes would have been to turn self-sacrifice into a calculation. He to whom mercenary calculation of self-sacrifice is divinely impossible can't so speak of the sufferings of His incarnate life,—His poverty and toil, His temptation and sorrow, His passion and death. Only He who was Divine could thus exalt the claim of self-sacrifice into the sphere of religious obligation.

3. And not to prolong distinctions that can hardly be maintained, I will only add, this personal motive is urged by our Lord as a reason even for martyrdom. We are to lay down our lives for His sake, the crowning proof and sacrifice of all love. And this because He laid down *His* life for our sakes. We may not love our life more than we love Him, inasmuch as He has loved us more than He has loved Himself. It is the one great proof and note which rings through the Scripture announcements of the glad tidings. He "the good Shepherd laid down his life for the sheep;" He the righteous one

"died for the ungodly;" He, the man Christ Jesus, "gave himself a ransom for all," "he laid down his life for his friends," "tasted death for every man."

Our love is not now tested in this crucial way, but the Church has had many a martyr age, when the stern, the only alternative was renunciation of Christ—a pinch of heathen incense or the lions of the arena. What is the record which faithful love won, even from the loud voice which John heard in heaven? "They loved not their lives unto the death." The recreant disciple who thus ignobly saved his life would have been disowned by the Master. "It is sweet to die for one's country," a pagan poet sings; and a thousand forlorn hopes and battle-fields attest how much more than a mere sentiment he utters. "Neither count I my life dear unto me," is the motto of the Christian disciple; and a thousand blazing pyres and missionary fields attest the indomitable, exulting feeling.

Our timid love may doubt its power so to dare, so to endure; but latent forces of character cannot be calculated beforehand. Great peril, great necessity, has a power of inspiration which transmutes latent affections into an indomitable strength; which surprises no one more than the martyr himself. By God's helping grace, there is not one of us, even the feeblest, who would not be able to endure even death for Christ's sake. The martyrs of the Church have often been timid women and feeble children. Love

is stronger than death. In its intensity it is a power of unlimited sacrifice. Nothing can restrain it. It overcomes every obstacle.

Such love Christ claims. Even we cannot conceive of Him as claiming less. It would contradict all our instincts, it would be incongruous with all our conceptions of Him. How could He concede supremacy of claim, even to life itself. Therefore He points to the cross that lies in our path, and whatever it may be, He bids us take it up and patiently bear it for His sake—the cross of obloquy, the cross of poverty, the cross of suffering, the cross of martyr testimony, hard to bear, and that only the strongest constraints can enable us to bear cheerfully.

The cross may be evaded, if at the cost of right and duty we are determined to evade it. Instead of taking up the cross of poverty, and meekly bearing it for Christ's sake, it may be possible to go round it through by-paths of grasping selfishness or lax integrity. Can He who "had not where to lay His head" sanction us in so doing? Instead of taking up the cross of social obloquy and self-sacrifice and suffering, we may consult only our own security and self-indulgence, and go through by-paths of selfish indolence, of weak effeminacy, of recreant faith, of sneaking cowardice, of humiliating scorn. Can He who "endured the contradiction of sinners against himself," "resisting unto blood," "striving against sin," who "steadfastly set his face to



go up to Jerusalem," who said, "Not my will but thine be done," who having power to lay down His life and to take it again, gave Himself to be nailed to the cross—can He deem us faithful disciples if we do so?

There are again many *ways* of cross-bearing. The cross may be laid upon reluctant and remonstrant shoulders. We *must bear* it, but we do not the less resent it and struggle to throw it off. We only increase its burden and bitterness. Can He who was "led as a sheep to the slaughter" accept such unwilling cross-bearing as the sacrifice of love?

What *can* He demand of us but that we take it up, and bravely, willingly, joyfully even, bear it for His sake—the cross that may lie in the path of rectitude, the cross that may be imposed by our discipleship, every cross that bravely borne may glorify His name. How can He exempt us from it? Bear it with a loving heart, and it will be lighter than it seems. But if not, if its bitterness fill you with surprise and dismay; if it make your soul "exceeding sorrowful even unto death;" if it extort a sharp cry of anguish as if the Father Himself had forsaken you; if it compel you to pray even the third time, prostrate on the ground, being in an agony—still take it up, and for His sake bear it. This only is noble, this only *can* He demand of us.

He of His free self-sacrificing love thus took up every cross that lay in His path, and bore it for our sakes. He would not evade the cross of hunger, by

turning stones into bread ; nor the cross of sacrifice, to reign over all the kingdoms of the world ; nor the cross of suffering, from which His Father would presently have given Him more than twelve legions of angels to deliver Him. He would not permit tabernacles to be built when He was transfigured, lest He should be diverted from the decease which He was to accomplish at Jerusalem. He would not protract even His last spiritual fellowship with His own. With the resolute words of duty, "Arise, let us go hence," He broke up their tender fellowship and went forth to His agony.

He would not avert His cross by compromises or pleadings before Caiaphas, or Herod, or Pilate. It behoved Him to suffer, and He was straitened until it was accomplished. In the great love and strength of His purpose "he gave his back to the smiters, his cheek to them that plucked off the hair. He hid not his face from shame and spitting." He permitted men to crown Him with thorns, to nail Him to the cross, to revile Him as He hung upon it. The rocks rent, but they did not fall upon His murderers. The earth opened, but it did not swallow them up.

And for *His* sake we are to endure. Once teach the heart that loves, that by suffering it may the best express its love, and suffering becomes a glory, a gospel. To all love self-sacrifice is a joy—the mother for her child, the lover for his mistress, the husband for his wife. Love is strong as death, yea, stronger. It glories the most in that which

expresses it the best. It asks only that it may prove how true and tender and overmastering it is.

To suffer because we cannot help it, to suffer that we may secure some selfish advantage, is necessarily a hard, selfish, joyless thing; but to suffer for the sake of Him whom we supremely love, is the highest privilege and glory of affection. "Most gladly, therefore, will I glory in infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake." It is in this way that Christianity lifts us to the true nobility of life. Souls are made great, love is made noble by self-sacrifice.

No man is so worthy of love as he who will sacrifice it for right. The love of wife, or child, or lover is made more true, more noble, more tender by willingness to sacrifice it for Christ's sake. Abraham was never so worthy of Isaac as when he was willing to offer him to God. When a man takes his most precious thing and offers it to Christ, he simply proves how fit he is to be entrusted with it, how capable of using it for the highest purposes. Love itself receives a hundred-fold through self-sacrifice.

What constitutes the transcendent nobility and glory even of Christ Himself? The uncalculating self-sacrifice of His love, the Divine heroism of His manger, His poverty, His cross? Only by a similar self-sacrifice can our own Christian life become noble. God's grace itself cannot make noble the

religious life that temptation never tests, that self-sacrifice never disciplines. Christ's Divine heroism appeals to our human heroism; the cross that we bear, He bore first; the path along which we bear it is hallowed by His footsteps; the cross-bearing perfects us as it perfected Him. What else could produce the Divine elevation that we often see in a Christian man's life? What else could extort the admiration that its piety and benevolence have often wrung even from its enemies? It is the truest grandeur of a Christian life to love supremely Him who has redeemed us, and to sacrifice all things for His sake. To hesitate, to debate, to huckster, to drive a bargain concerning the measure of consecration and service; even to surmise how much may be withholden, is to dishonour and degrade the very conception of loving discipleship. It is to introduce mean calculations among the generous impulses of affection. It is to commit treason against the primal sentiment of love. It is to chaffer with Him who proffers the whole of His love, and who cannot ask less than the whole of ours.

One or two practical remarks may point the application of these general principles.

I. What a power of assurance there is in the personal and tender relationships thus established between the Master and His disciples.

We consecrate ourselves for His sake. How powerfully this must affect *His* feeling. How different from the feeling to which a cold, measured

obedience to authority would appeal! How tenderly He must regard us as we struggle, achieve, and endure for His sake! In how many ways when on earth He evinced His susceptibility to our poor affection! With what touching pathos He expressed His gratitude to the twelve, "Ye are they who have continued with me in my temptation!" With what a sensitive, wounded feeling He rebuked the cold, formal hospitality of Simon the Pharisee, "Thou gavest me no kiss!" How delicate and grateful His appreciation of Mary's anointing—a pure, unpractical expression of impulsive love! Not because she sat at His feet or gave to the poor, but because she anointed His head, her renown throughout the world should be inseparable from His gospel. With what a beautiful ingenuousness of affection He tells His disciples, "The Father himself loveth you because ye have loved me!" With what touching pathos He entreats the three disciples to be with Him in His agony, not to be farther from Him than "as it were a stone's cast!" How wounded His yearning love when He found them sleeping! What an eager solicitude to be remembered breathes in the institution of the Lord's Supper: "This do in remembrance of me!" It is the instinct of His human love seeking to perpetuate its fellowship. It is not worship that He asks, it is communion. It is therefore a fundamental perversion of the Lord's Supper to change its character of fellowship with the human Christ into a worship of the Divine Christ. It is not

the "real presence" of the Divine that we seek, it is the "real presence" of the human. With what a gratified complacency He commends the Church at Ephesus: "Thou hast borne, and hast patience, and *for my sake* hast laboured, and hast not fainted!" Even in the solemn processes of the last judgment, with what a sublime self-consciousness He blends this strange pathos of human feeling with the lofty principles of Divine award! "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have *done it unto me.*"

How deeply human affections must enter into the heart of the Divine Lord! Are they not indeed the great reason and glory of His incarnation? He became a perfect man, therefore He craves the love of human hearts. Such affections are the power of His priesthood, the spell of His intercession. He is "such a high priest as becomes us, because he can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." They are the special endearment of the Father's house, the inspiring rapture of the heaven of the redeemed, giving all its tenderness to their intercourse with Him. How confidently we may rest in His love now! how greatly we shall rejoice in it then! It is so rich and tender and faithful because He is the "Son of man," and because we obey, endure, and overcome for His sake.

2. What power of constraint such a motive exerts upon our practical religious life.

How directly and resistlessly it appeals to all

generous natures, to whatever is highest and noblest in any nature! If we be capable of any chivalry of sentiment, of any unselfishness of affection, of any spirit of martyr consecration, what can so appeal to it and excite it? “Do this for my sake.” Yielding to such motive, how it elevates and constrains us! We rise to a more loving sympathy with His purposes, we are stimulated to a more urgent solicitude and vigilance against whatever might oppose them. We cherish a more earnest and passionate and practical solicitude for their accomplishment. How we love and pray and serve! “For his name’s sake they went forth.” “For the work of Christ he was nigh unto death.” “Ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake.” What a note it is! How it rings through the Christian ages! How it thrills the Christian heart! What enthusiasm it inspires! What consecration it constrains! Who thinks of restraining service, of checking fervours, of calculating gifts, when it is “for his sake”?

What a *test* of service it is! How much we do, in worship, in toil, in gifts, that touched by this Ithuriel’s spear would spring up out of its apparent piety and beauty into ugly forms of selfishness. How largely low and selfish feelings enter into even our best services! What unworthy motives deteriorate them! How we “speak with the tongues of men and angels;” and “prophesy;” and “have all faith;” and “bestow our goods to feed the poor,” and “give our body to be burned,” and are “nothing!”

Our lack of Divine charity neutralizes the most laborious service, vitiates the most costly gifts. Even in the high and holy things of Christ's Church and kingdom, how much is done for self that we think we do for Him! How difficult it is to give "even a cup of cold water *for his sake!*"

But how the lowliest service is dignified by such motive! It may be *but* the gift of a cup of cold water; it may be *but* the offering of two mites; it may be *but* the menial service of a slave: if we do it "heartily as unto the Lord," He accepts it as a service to Him, as much as the worship of the saint, or the toil of a missionary, or the sacrifice of a martyr. Great love glorifies the meanest work, great motive makes the lowliest service saintly and Divine. Men treasure more than jewels the veriest trifles, if only love offers them. Nothing is little that expresses a loving heart.

All may of Thee partake,  
 Nothing so small can be,  
 But draws, when acted for Thy sake,  
 Greatness and worth from Thee.

If done beneath Thy laws,  
 E'en servile labours shine;  
 Hallowed is toil, if this the cause,  
 The meanest work Divine.

3. Finally, what a power of judgment there is in such an urgency! What perplexity and anguish it causes to transgressing men! It disquiets not the conscience only, but the heart; crushes it with the sense of ingratitude as well as with the sense of sin.



How it overwhelms men with feelings of meanness and shame! How furtive rejectors of Christ are! How lacking in manly generosity! They are guilty of more than sin, of “things whereof they are ashamed.” As they pass by the Christ upon His cross they “smite upon their breast” much oftener than they “wag their heads.” He is a reproach to them, such as a whole decalogue could not inspire. He who refuses to Christ his heart or his service turns from Him, not with the bold bad feeling that resists right only, but with the base reproachful feeling that is ungrateful for love.

What a grave portentous state of feeling is indicated when a man can “look upon him whom He has pierced,” and *not* mourn! He who can resist the appeal of Christ’s great love, who even “for Christ’s sake” will not turn from sin, is well-nigh “past feeling.” Neither earth nor heaven can supply a stronger urgency wherewith to ply his hard unloving soul. What an unutterable condemnation is implied in sorrowful wail of wronged and hopeless affection! “Come, judge between me and my vineyard. What could I do unto my vineyard that I have not done unto it?” May the merciful God save you and me from falling into it.



XII.

Spiritual Power.

*All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.—*  
I COR. iii. 21-23.

## XII.

THE apostle means that Christian men in proportion to their religious attainments acquire spiritual power over all the things of human life ; they so develop spiritual feeling and faculty, so en-throne religious principles and affections, that every-thing is subdued and subordinated to religious uses. All things serve their religious life. It is interesting and important to note the process whereby that which is spiritual thus comes to be enthroned in the life of a man.

First, the apostle says a good deal about self-renunciation ; which, according to its character and object, may be either the wisest or the most foolish, the noblest or the basest thing that a man can do. There are conditions in which it is the very highest wisdom of a man to renounce his own wisdom, and to submit his judgment to the greater wisdom of others. It is so whenever a man's knowledge is insufficient, and the larger know-ledge of another is available for his guidance. A

man ignorant of chemistry, or astronomy, or mathematics, or engineering, would evince the greatest wisdom in renouncing such judgments as his own small degree of knowledge might enable him to form, and in submitting himself implicitly to the guidance of a man of science. He would not thereby abdicate his reason; he would simply use his reason in the most rational way, by seeking for his guidance the greatest intelligence of which he could avail himself.

This is simply what the apostle means when he demands that in spiritual things, the things that pertain to the truth of God and to the true life and duty of the religious soul, we do not "glory in man;" do not trust, that is, in mere unaided powers of human intelligence. Our religious life needs the revelation of God, it is not sufficient for its knowledge that we interrogate our own consciousness, reason out our own subjective philosophy of religion, or even draw upon human experience. We can know God, His purposes concerning our forgiveness and salvation from evil, our moral renewal and worship and service, our hope of immortality, only from what He Himself may tell us.

We have religious natures, and without any revelation from God we are conscious of certain religious feelings and necessities—just as we have physical natures, and are conscious of hunger and thirst, independently of any teaching of the physiologist and chemist—just as we have intellectual natures,

and are conscious of the faculty and craving for knowledge, independently of the schoolmaster. But each department and faculty, whether spiritual, physical, or intellectual, needs teaching from without, beyond what its mere existence and experience can give it. Just then as our physical nature needs from men of physical science teachings concerning the qualities of food and the laws of health; and our intellectual nature needs from men of learning teachings concerning history and philosophy, and art, and science; so our spiritual nature needs teachings from God concerning spiritual religion.

It is, therefore, the very reasonable demand of the writers of both the Old Testament and the New that we do not trust for our religious knowledge to our own unaided instincts and reasonings, but that we seek it from Him who, as the source of all religion, alone can give it. As sufficient for the teaching of religious knowledge, "the wisdom of this world," the unaided instincts and thinkings of even the wisest and the most profound will "come to nought." None of these out of his own consciousness can evolve a true doctrine of the eternal God, a true theory of His saving purposes, a true basis of religious life and worship, a true forecast of life hereafter. Concerning all these things God must be our teacher, for they are things without us and above us, things "unseen and eternal."

The man of inferior intellect and learning, to whom God has spoken concerning these things, is

clearly a much more highly qualified religious teacher than the greatest philosopher or scholar to whom no such revelation from God has come. Unless, therefore, such "glorying in men" was renounced, spiritual power could not be attained.

Then factions had sprung up among these Corinthians, men who were making watchwords of mere accidents of the Christian gospel, or were substituting mere ritual for its spiritual essence;—noisy disciples of different masters, making them their religious authorities, not in virtue of their higher revelation from God, but in virtue of their learning, or eloquence, or circumcision; thus turning away from the high spiritual teaching of the true apostles of Christ, corrupting the purity, and destroying the fundamental truth of His gospel. Faction such as this was fatal. He who substituted a party leader for Christ accepted a part of the gospel instead of the whole, one aspect of it instead of its many-sided completeness. It was simple, entire loss; no one gained, every one lost. They who thus gave themselves up to faction, therefore, could never be men of spiritual power. Let them receive Christ as their teacher and Lord, Christ in the entirety of His gospel and the fulness of its life, and they would become men of spiritual power, learn the highest uses of all things, so that all things should subserve their religious progress and welfare. All things material and spiritual would contribute to their religious life. This, I think, is the way in which



the apostle's thought shapes itself to this grand utterance of the supreme proprietorship, the regal power of a Christian man.

Now clearly this is the true conception of human life, this was God's first ordination concerning it, that everything in life should be so used as to minister to the piety and virtue of the religious soul. This was the dominion over all things that God gave to the spiritual man whom He created. All things were to serve him, he was to have dominion over all things. It would be a very meagre and inadequate interpretation of this ordinance of lordship, to say that they were to minister to his physical necessities as food to eat, as slaves to toil for him, as beauty to delight him. This is the most ignoble conception of service, the dominion of a sensuous, indolent, selfish despot. Surely it was to be the higher service of his moral nature; that in him to which all things were to minister was his spiritual soul, that which was "made in the image of God." They were to serve his body also, but much more to serve his soul.

How then do things serve the spiritual soul? Not by enthroning it an absolute despot, not by obsequiously submitting to its will and gratifying its passions—that were a miserable service to a religious soul. Rather by purifying and perfecting it, making it nobler in desire, loftier in feeling, more spiritual in character, more unselfish in aim. Whatever the

most makes my soul spiritual and godlike the most serves it. The soul is not always, not often perhaps served by mere submission. It is a doubtful way of making a soul good to gratify its ignorant and inferior desires. The physician does not serve the health of his patient by pandering to his fancies, nor the teacher the mind of his pupil by gratifying his indolence. In the formation of moral character we are often served the best by being resisted. If my will is wayward, let its imperativeness be withstood; if my passions are impure or selfish, let their gratification be denied; if my disposition is arbitrary or impatient, compel it to exercises of self-denial and patience; if I am proud, or ambitious, or worldly, let me be resisted, and mortified, and humbled. This is the true service of a religious soul; to make it a noble soul, a pure, unselfish, ministering soul, by chastening its waywardness, and pride, and self-indulgence.

How did the Divine Master attain His lordship of things? Not by making them minister to His own self-indulgence or pride, but by Himself ministering them to others. They served Him by enabling Him to serve. He ruled by serving, which is the highest rule of all. "He that will be greatest among you, let him be the servant of all."

Things serve us religiously by making us religious; by so exercising the principles and affections of the soul, as that all their evil and weakness are purged out of them, and all their good developed and per-

fected; so that when a man comes to possess all things—in the true sense of possession—when all things are really ours, they are so by becoming ministers to our most noble and spiritual feelings; they are ours by helping our highest life. The man himself has come to be such, that whatever thing he touches, whatever thing he looks upon, whatever his experience of it, it elicits and strengthens his best principles and affections; makes him a better man, loftier in thought, more pure, religious, and spiritual in character, more patient and unselfish in feeling. And when this is the case, when a man thus uses all things rightly, makes them serve his highest interests, he is then in the greatest sense Lord of all things; he gets out of them the greatest good they can minister.

They may not be his personal property, he may not get out of them gold, or food, or animal gratification, but he gets out of them pure, strong, glad feeling. I look at my neighbour's estate just as I look at the clouds or the mountains, at its wooded slopes, its grassy softness, its foliage and flowers, its lakes and meadows. I get no gold out of it, I could not sell it nor change it; in the lower material sense it is not mine; he is the rich man, I am a poor man. But if it excite in me high imaginations, religious sentiment, pure affections; if it gratify my sense of beauty, or inspire my feeling of poetry; if it minister to the harmony and purity of my emotional nature, as nature always will do; if it lift my heart to com-

munion with the Creator, and excite in me grateful and worshipping homage and love, it has served me in a far greater way than its money rental could have done, it has satisfied a much nobler part of my nature. Nay, it may have thus enriched me with all that is noblest in human life, while to its technical possessor it may have ministered only sordidness and pride and sensuality. I am the rich man because of it, he is really the poor man; I have the noble and religious feeling, he has only the poor gold. He may "gain the world and lose his soul," I may gain my soul by the very world which he possesses and misuses.

This surely is the true lordship of things, the lordship with which the Creator endowed the man made in His image—the use of all things for his religious good. How by sin he lost this power of religious use we all know. Nay, was not his sin precisely this, that he began to use things wrongly—for his animal passions and not for his religious soul, for his selfishness, his lust, his domination, eating and drinking, money getting and climbing to power, for purposes that were base and selfish, not noble, benevolent, and self-sacrificing—so that instead of being made to serve the religious soul, all things are made to serve the carnal nature. Thus a man eats and is a glutton, drinks and is a drunkard, heaps up gold and is a miser, acquires social power and is a tyrant, or is puffed up with pride. What terrible uses of things men make; they "serve divers lusts;" the man be-

longs to them, they do not belong to him ; so soon as he acquires them they begin to dominate and debase him ; he becomes morally and religiously the slave of the lusts to which they pander, to the "corruptions which are in the world through lust." Thus the true order of a man's life is reversed, and instead of ministering to what is best in him, and making him a better man, things minister to what is worst in him, and deprave and degrade him.

This then is the redemption of Christ—the deliverance of a man from his base and sinful bondage. He is "manifested to destroy the works of the devil," He breaks the bondage of our lusts, "says to the prisoner, Go forth." He restores our spiritual soul to the throne from which it has been deposed ; again bestows upon us moral power ; puts all the mere things of life into subjection to great religious principles, endows us again with the dominion which God gave us when He created us. So that when a man has fully realized Christ's salvation, he is "made free from the law of sin which is in his members." His spiritual soul subordinates to itself all the material things of his life, makes all things serve it, all things help to perfect it. "The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus makes him free from the law of sin and death." "Sin has no more dominion over him." He is restored to full moral power, so that he resists temptation to evil, and "perfects holiness in the fear of the Lord." This is Christ's salvation of a man, "He saves him from his sin."

I may not dwell upon the process, a word or two must suffice.

1. Christ sets forth, as none before Him ever did, the supremacy of spiritual things. What a great and urgent element of His teaching this is, "that a man's life consists not of the abundance of the things that he possesses!" How invariably and emphatically He puts spiritual things first, urges men to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness!" How strongly he made men feel how great, how grand a thing it is to be good; what a Divine dignity there is in a godly, virtuous character; that it is the supremest folly and ignominy for a man to gain the world and lose his soul; that there is nothing that could be accepted in exchange for his soul!

It was a simple, sublime religious teaching; and it fell upon the hearts of men eagerly seeking the world, and giving their souls for it, as men are doing now; and it startled them into the consciousness of their folly, it compelled them to admit that a pure pious soul was a greater possession for a man, a greater blessedness, than the world.

2. Jesus Christ was an embodied instance of His own teaching. He used all the things of life for spiritual ends, sacrificed all things for the accomplishment of religious purposes. Never were riches and honours so signally refused, never were poverty and hard service so deliberately chosen. It was never for a moment a calculation with Him between material advantage and religious service. The con-

ception of Jesus of Nazareth scraping up riches, climbing to worldly power, seeking self-indulgence, is simply impossible. By sheer necessity of nature He chose things that were spiritual, virtuous, and benevolent. The history of the world presents no such instance of simple indifference to everything else, of entire self-sacrifice for what was holy and beneficent. Jesus of Nazareth was the supreme example of holy consecration and fidelity.

3. He gives men spiritual power to recover their moral heritage. The consciousness of guilt, of condemnation by God, of separation from God, disables us. He delivers us from it, procures for us the forgiveness of sins, reconciles us to God, so that we stand before Him in glad acceptance, free to break away from our old life of bondage to spiritual lusts, free to begin a new life of spiritual character and purity. He confers upon us the gift of a new life, quickens by His Spirit the religious soul within us; so that the principles, preferences, determinations, and yearnings of a religious life spring up within us.

4. He gives us the assurance of His own presence and help in our struggle to make the spiritual supreme. He has "overcome the world." He will be with us in our warfare with sin; He will inspire us with His own spiritual power, so that "sin shall not have dominion over us." "We are more than conquerors through him that hath loved us;" nothing shall "separate us from his love;" no one can "pluck us out of his hand."

We all understand the springs of moral power that there are in the Christ. It is our familiar religious experience. No man realizes what Christ is without becoming conscious of it. Myriads of men have been raised by Him to this position of spiritual supremacy, saved by Him from their sins; so that under His inspiration they have begun to subdue the world, the flesh, and the devil, to enthrone in their souls God and goodness, to use all things of life for holy purposes, they have begun the warfare with evil within and without, which is accomplished gradually, but which ends in absolute spiritual victory. It is through Jesus Christ that we are filled with moral power. "All things become ours."

Concerning the separate ministries which the apostle enumerates, and the ways in which they serve the religious soul, I can scarcely attempt to speak: they constitute a philosophy of religious life, the exposition of which might fill volumes. It is not, however, so important to dwell upon particulars as it is to grasp principles. A principle fully apprehended enables us to interpret all particulars. A few rapid words in conclusion must suffice. "All things are yours."

1. The different religious teachers whom the Corinthians had perverted into rival leaders,—Paul, Apollos, and Cephas. These did not exist as representatives of rival parties, but as possessors of diversified gifts for the service of the whole: each with his individual endowment contributes to the



general edification. It is therefore a folly and a loss to refuse any one of them, or to give oneself exclusively to any. You may choose the very best of preachers, the most intelligent, the most spiritual, the most edifying. He may be better than any other single teacher, he is not so good as all; and if you get so fascinated by him as that you cannot listen to any other, as that all others make you impatient and discontented, you suffer loss, you can receive God's truth only in his conception and form of it, only with his individual limitations and partial apprehensions. There are other forms and departments of God's truth, these you cannot receive. Peter has a ministry of truth, and Apollos, as well as Paul.

There can be no greater discredit of either preacher or hearer than an excess of fascination and enthusiasm, which puts the preacher above the truth that he preaches, and makes all other ministries distasteful. It is to make the "earthen vessel" more than the "heavenly treasure," and to put "the excellency of the power" in man rather than in God.

In preaching, as in everything else, God ministers to us by diversities of gift; not merely that it may be possible for each to find the ministry with which he has most affinity, but that all the ministries may serve each. A full-orbed man, a man developed in all the parts of his manifold nature, his intelligence, sensibility, practical aptitude, can become such only by a diversified ministration—Paul, Apollos, and Cephas. Many ministries are necessary for every single life.

The highest spiritual condition is to be able to use all, gladly to receive from each the gift that he may minister. He who has no greater word to say than "I am a Congregationalist, a Presbyterian, or an Episcopalian; I am a follower of Cranmer or of Laud, of John Owen or of Wesley," is but a poor segment of a Christian. These are not his property so much as he is theirs. The greater, nobler word to say is, "All these are mine; I use them all for my spiritual edification, and get from each whatever he can contribute. I am not eager to be a Christian of a certain sect, but a Christian larger than all sects, recognizing all, and using all for my own religious life and for the religious life of the world." The entire religious ministry of the Church is ordained and inspired for each. All its sacred writers, all its great preachers, from Paul to John Bunyan, from Augustine to Whitefield, all are the property of the men whom Christ liberates and inspires.

With this teaching concerning a diversified ministry, the apostle might have stopped. His argument required no more. But after his manner he generalises the special case into a principle, and is led on to speak of other things which in like manner are for religious uses. As if impatient to assert his great principle, he passes by a single bound from divers ministries of the gospel to the entire universe of things. "All things are yours." And to take the most inclusive first; "The world" is yours—in all its forms and diversities of existence; which is simply a

general assertion of the principle that I have been expounding, for clearly it could be affirmed only in a moral, not in a material sense. The world belongs to no man in the sense of material proprietorship. But all men may use it for religious purposes. Does it mean that as God intended it the world was an abode only for good men, not for evil; that if evil men now possess it it is because they have become evil, and that at last there shall be "a new heaven and a new earth, wherein righteousness shall dwell"? All its provisions and purposes are for good, not for evil. There is nothing in it as God made it that is not very good: wickedness possesses it by usurpation, not by right.

More probably he is referring to the way in which the world as it is serves religious uses in religious men. There is no material thing that may not minister religious influences, serve religious purposes. This wonderful dwelling-place of ours is a school for our instruction and discipline, a battle-field for our warfare, a theatre for our service. Everything in it may be an instrument of service or of discipline. "Whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, we may do it to the glory of God;" and when we use its equipments the most religiously, we are the most in harmony with the purpose and feeling of him who made it.

The providence of the world is ours—the ordering of things by the loving Father for our religious welfare, the chastisement as well as the caress. There

is no sorrowful thing that may not minister joy, there is no joyous thing that may not be a sanctity. God intends all things for our use, and makes "all things work together for our good," if we love Him.

And the history of the world—its movements and experiences, its vicissitudes and progress, the failures of the foolish, the achievements of the wise—all are for our use. Above all, its development, the growth of its ages, its higher civilization, and learning, and social good, and sanctity, and power. The world is more to us than it was to our fathers, for it has accumulated and developed more.

And "life" is ours; not again as a distinctive possession, but for distinctive religious uses. Good men get the most out of life, they realize most in the simple consciousness of life.

We live in deeds, not years; in thoughts, not breaths;  
In feelings, not in figures on a dial;  
We should count time by heart-throbs. He most lives  
Who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best.

It is a grand thing to feel that you are a living man, when you are living unto God. It is a grand thing to exercise the faculties of life, when you are employing them for the noblest purposes. It is a grand thing to use manifold attainments of life, when you are using them as talents committed to you for the good of men and for the glory of God. Life has grand uses for a good man. The greatest life is the life that is "hid with Christ in God."

And "death" is ours—that which living men shrink from, as dislocation and destruction, because it puts an end to the consciousness and joy of physical life. Only a Christian man could speak of death as a fruitful heritage, as a minister of good. This the redemption of Christ effects; out of death our highest life comes. "Death is swallowed up in victory;" in the grander, holier, perfect life of God.

The mention of "things present" is little more than a rhetorical repetition of the affirmation that the world is ours—the things of the present life, its ministries and experiences.

In specifying "things to come," the apostle adds a distinct element to his enumeration. The things of the future, which God reveals to our knowledge here, are ours not only in reversion, but as present religious forces and influences. They are "powers of the world to come," which greatly help us here; they are for the uses of our faith, and sanctity, and hope, and joy.

This is the apostle's rapid summary of the things that he rhetorically includes under the general saying, "All things are yours." These things, with all the particulars that are included under them, are the economy of life, which God has ordained for our religious use.

But it would be impossible for him to leave it here. By a sudden and rapid reference he affirms the specific ground upon which this great economy of things rests. These things are ours, for religious uses,

because "we are Christ's." The things would be available for religious uses whether we were Christ's or not, but only Christ enables us so to use them. He confers power to use these by making us His own. He renews our religious souls, creates within us faculties of a new religious life, gives us the regal dominion of things by filling us with regal power, changes our entire thought and feeling about things.

If God were suddenly to bestow upon a man the eye of an artist or the imagination of a poet, he would give him a new use of things, a new possession in them. It would be like opening a blind man's eyes; the things would be as they had ever been, but he would be different. Uses depend upon the user. Christ opens the eyes of our spiritual understanding, purges the affections of our spiritual soul, "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit given unto us." It is as if a new moral universe were called into existence. We see in everything new meanings and purposes, we use everything for new ends and in new ways. It was an old Pagan maxim, "The wise alone are kings:" of Christian men it is infinitely more true that the spiritual alone are kings. They only understand the right uses of things, they only have inherent power to use them rightly. Because we are Christ's, we share His property in all things, and partake His moral power over them. We have with Him a vital fellowship of idea, and power, and use. We possess all things because Christ possesses us.

“And Christ is God’s.” The thought is run up to its last issue. God is all and in all, and in Christ we realize God’s idea of life, we most entirely subordinate life to Him. “The head of Christ is God,” Christ is the mediator of God’s purposes. All life has its ultimate root in God, it flows from God, is inspired, sustained, and blessed by God. Through Christ our spiritual life is reunited to God’s life, and we are restored to the life of spiritual purity and power and perfectness for which God intended us.

The argument is grandly wrought up to its climax. Our life rests in God as its goal, His life is our life, and our uses of life are His ordination. “Be of good cheer,” says the Divine Master. “I have overcome the world.” Through Him we overcome it too. “Because I live ye shall live also.”

Brethren, a life thus full of moral power is worth living. No ordinance or process of God’s creation is grander than a religious man’s life, a life of sanctity and strength and victory. A life of moral weakness and failure, in which the spiritual nature is ever being overpowered by some base passion, by some foul lust, by some mean selfishness, is the meanest, most miserable, most shameful of all things. To see a man overcome of gluttony, or drunkenness, or licentiousness, or avarice, or worldliness, or selfishness, is pitiable in the sight of all moral beings.

“Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” This is the no-

bility of Christ's salvation ; it not merely rescues, it transforms us ; it not merely shields, it inspires us ; delivers and enthrones our soul, makes us spiritually free, fills us with spiritual power.

“Ye are Christ's.” Is it so with you, my friends ? Are you indeed living the life which alone is worth living, the life which is “hid with Christ in God” ?



XIII.

The Sorrow of Development.

*They say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.—JOHN xx. 13.*

### XIII.

NOTHING could have been more natural than Mary's sorrow, and yet nothing could have been more incongruous. Her sorrow was possible only because of her ignorance. Had she understood things as they really were, her only possible feeling would have been ecstatic joy. As she imagined it, the precious body of her Lord had been cruelly taken from its sepulchre; as the fact really was, it had gloriously risen. She had, as she thought, been deprived of that poor consolation which bereaved affection finds in hovering about a grave; the body of her Lord had really been restored to her in a life more glorious than any that she had known in her closest fellowship with Him. She thought that the sepulchre had been rifled; its stone had really been rolled away, the sepulchre had really been emptied by the power of resurrection life in her Lord, who had come forth to fill heaven and earth with His glorified and immortal life. That which seemed a pathetic loss was really the greatest gain that ever

blessed human hearts and hopes. It is a parable of the way in which we often misconceive the true character of the processes that are going on around us. It is a resurrection; Mary thinks it a dishonour to the dead.

Another characteristic of her mistake is that she misconceived and sorrowed when the truth and the joy were so near her, nearer to her than to any living being; when so little would have explained and transformed it all. The risen Christ stood before her, she saw Him and spake to Him, only she supposed that it had been the gardener. She looked upon the true thing, only she failed to understand it. So near to truth our greatest errors may lie, so near to the springs of joy our bitterest sorrows may rise. Nothing but Mary's own misconception hindered all her grief from vanishing, and her joy from bounding at once into rapture. It makes no difference that her misapprehension was natural, inevitable even. Its effect was the same, she sorrowed only because she misunderstood. No doubt the physical appearance of Jesus had altered. Possibly there had passed upon His resurrection-face a mysterious change of expression, analogous to that which thrills us as we look upon the face of the dead, when we confess that we should not have known them. The quickening of the new resurrection life may have wrought a change greater than the expiring of the old mortal life. The disciples on the way to Emmaus did not know their Lord.

Mary, too, had withdrawn her thoughts from anything like expectation of the reappearance of Jesus. She had accepted His death as an irreversible fact ; she was absorbed in her grief, in the vague thoughts and ponderings which follow the stun of a great blow. How often we open our eyes upon things without seeing them ! It is not the mere organ of perception that sees ; vision depends upon the sensorium to which the perception is transmitted, and that again depends upon our moods. Where thought and feeling are absorbed as Mary's were, they may so affect us as that the senses cease to be means of communication. The eye transmits no vision, the ear no sound ; for Mary no more recognized the voice of her Lord than she did His figure. He spake to her, and she supposed Him to be the gardener : so that they may be Divine voices which we think to be only human. How often Christ speaks to us Divine things through human lips, and we recognize neither Him nor them. Mary's state of feeling both dimmed her eye and dulled her ear ; she stood close to her greatest joy, and felt the bitter sorrow of desolation.

But because the sorrow was merely the effect of her ignorance, because the sorrow was simply a mistaken joy, because the sorrow was so near to her joy, the transformation of the sorrow into the joy was so easy and so prompt. Two words suffice—a word of interrogation from her Lord, a word of recognition from Mary—Mary! Rabboni! and the

fulness of both their hearts was expressed. Our Lord makes to her no formal or important communication; He simply gives emphasis and intonation to the pronunciation of her name. We all know how much meaning a full heart may put into the simplest word. Meaning is conveyed not so much by thought as by sympathy. A cold orthodox discourse full of most vital truth may convey but little meaning because it is inspired by no feeling. The simplest word of sympathy, a mute clasp of the hand even, will convey divinest meanings, and liberate the deepest feelings of the religious life—feelings of penitence, and trust, and hope. A tone reveals to Mary her Divine Friend. More than most things the voice is the expression of a man. A hard, selfish nature cannot put tenderness into the tone of a word, a tender sympathetic nature cannot speak harshly. Some tones are like June softness, others bite like the east wind.

A word was all that was needful for the revelation of Christ to Mary. A word was all that was needful for the expression of Mary's love and worship to Christ. No memory is so infallible as that of the ear. A voice that we have not heard for half a century is far more certain evidence of identity than a face that we have not seen. This simple utterance of Mary's name would summon to her thought and heart a thousand memories of precious words and tender intercourse. It was the index to their entire fellowship, it was the key that opened the door of

her past experience. "He calleth his sheep by name."

May we not take this as a parable of many of the misapprehensions of our life.

I. Of the way in which we misapprehend the actual facts of our experience.

II. Of the way in which we misapprehend the processes that God is conducting with us.

I. How we misapprehend the true character of the things that befall us—mistake the Christ for the gardener. God comes to us, but He does not come in the form that we expect, and therefore we do not recognize Him at all. How difficult it is to recognize the Divine presence in some human things; the form is too material, too humble; God would not come in such a lowly prosaic way. It is a misfortune that befalls us, not a providence; it is a cruel mocker who has taken away the body, it is not a Divine hand. We see things happening; they are to us the mere crucifiers, the Roman guard, the unjust Pilate, the shouting rabble. Mary thought only of these adversaries of God, frustrating His purposes. How did Peter afterwards interpret what they did? "For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were gathered together; for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done."

Had the disciples, had Mary at the time of the

crucifixion, seen the Divine hand working as they saw it afterwards, what a revolution in their thoughts and feelings it would have wrought ! How could they imagine God's hand to be in atrocities so great ! And yet it was, as it is in many things of life over which we wring our hands and wail. We think of them as without God, and of God as having nothing to do with them ; and so life is to us a hopeless enigma and a bitter grief.

Again:—How often it is the Christ, when we think it is only the gardener. A preacher uttering vague thoughts in a blundering way : yes, but Christ may be speaking through him to human souls. The chancest meeting in the street ; yes, but it may be Christ diverting the entire course of our lives. A heretic propounding some strange doctrine : yes, but it may be Christ breaking up the hard mould of our Pharisaic orthodoxy. An ignorant evangelist propounding the crudest views of Christ, and moving thousands of hearts ; is it not Christ teaching us that life in any form is better than moribund propriety, and ritual, and learning ? A man is not always at Church or saying prayers, but he is scrupulously upright, benevolent in little ways : he makes good shoes, he is a conscientious servant. Is there not more of the Divine in this prosaic form of the gardener than in much of our formal Church service. Should we not learn to see Christ in every form ? And is not half the sorrow of our life because we do not see Him where He really is—in providences, in rough forms of



character, in homely forms of work, in diversified forms of theological thought, of Church life, of religious fidelity and goodness? In a thousand things of life it is to us only the gardener, not the Christ, because our eyes are blinded by prejudice, perhaps by sorrow for things as we think they are; we lack spiritual perception, we have no light of faith.

I wish, however, to dwell rather upon the other form of misapprehension.

II. The way in which we misapprehend the processes that God is conducting with us.

We weep in bitterness over a lost blessing when it is simply the transformation of a lower blessing into a higher one. "That which thou sowest is not quickened except it die." We see only the dying, and are blind to the quickening of which it is the condition. "It is expedient that even the Christ should go away, that the Comforter may come to us." We cling blindly to the bodily presence of the Christ, and think that to lose Him is to lose all. How we weep over the grave of buried things—lost beliefs, lost habits of virtue and religion, lost forms of service. Something has disabled them and slain them, their very forms are stolen from us; and we weep in bitter desolateness as if truth, or usefulness, or goodness, or even the Christ were slain, when they are simply being transformed into blessings of higher religious life. It is as if the husbandman were to weep over his decomposing seed corn, as if the child were to weep over his outgrown clothes, as if the lad were to deem

learning lost with his disused school-books. We cannot read the great lesson of life which in a thousand ways God is teaching us, that

We rise on stepping-stones  
Of our dead selves to nobler things.

But all this is because of our ignorance, our limited and partial ways of looking at things. We see only things as they now are,—the truth, the blessing that we possess at the moment; as Mary and the disciples saw the Christ before His death, never dreaming of the greater Christ of the resurrection. Our present possession is so full of comfort and help that we think of nothing higher, and we are alarmed at every indication of loss or change. We are contented to remain as we now are; our truth, our Church, our Christ, our service, if they continue to bless us as they do now, we shall be content.

But God's purpose is to lead us to higher realizations, to greater faith, and nobler life. When the plant becomes pot-bound the gardener breaks the pot that binds it, as the first essential condition of its development. So God breaks the moulds in which our religious life is cast and bound; the old forms of our faith, and life, and service, and blessing. Before Christ can be to the disciples the Christ of resurrection life and glory, He must be crucified and entombed. And the ignorant affection of His disciples weeps; they see only the cross and the sepulchre, and think that His great mission, His Divine life all end here. But had He not died, He could not have

risen. Had they not thus lost their mortal Christ, they could never have rejoiced in their immortal Christ. They did not know that this was the necessary process of change from the lesser blessing to the greater. Had Mary known what the angel of the sepulchre knew, even the crucifixion would not have produced such darkness and sorrow. It was only her ignorance, that could not receive the teaching that "thus it behoved Christ to suffer." If the Jews had understood how their economy was being grandly fulfilled in Christ, how their typical and local worship was passing into spiritual, essential, and universal forms, they would not have regretted the overturn of their altars, the destruction of their temple.

We cling even to the dead forms of things that once lived to us, because they have been precious and helpful; old creeds, old ritual, old methods of working, old buildings even. If we understood God's great laws of development, we should obey Christ's great word, "Let the dead bury their dead: follow thou me."

Let us try if we can receive into our minds and hearts this necessary law of our life. If as individuals or as Churches we are to advance from the lower to the higher, we must be content to see old things die, in order that they may have a better resurrection. Else we may be blindly and bitterly weeping or moaning to others, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him," when in glorious resurrection life the

Lord Himself is standing just before us, unrecognized only because our eyes are blinded by ignorant sorrow. If we would make progress we must forget things behind and learn the fresh and nobler forms of things before. Christian growth lies not in the past but in the future.

The parable has its applications in almost every department of belief and life. I can only suggest two or three representative particulars.

1. Our theological beliefs advance to more perfect truth by the falling away of old forms and the development of new ones. Neither by the individual nor by the Church is absolute theological truth attained all at once. The early Christians did not attain it. The Nicæan Fathers did not attain it. The Reformers of the sixteenth century did not attain it. At no one point in the history of Christianity could it be said, "Our creed is perfect truth, without defect of statement, without admixture of error ; truth in its highest spiritual conceptions." From the Day of Pentecost until now we have ever been advancing from more imperfect to less imperfect conceptions of truth, from lower forms of evidence to higher. In educating your children you begin with a picture alphabet and end in abstract reasoning ; or you begin with simple commands, and demand of the ignorant unreasoning child simple obedience. He cannot understand reasons, he has blindly to do things. When the child passes into the youth you appeal to his intelligence and reason, and he obeys because he sees the right

and reasonableness of obeying. But when the youth becomes the grown-up man, the very law of obedience is superseded. It has so educated his mind and heart that he has become a law unto himself. He does things that are right and reasonable without thinking of law, simply from the promptings of his own nature. And you do not think that moral safeguards are relaxed when the youth obeys from reason and the man becomes a law to himself. The higher law of liberty is far stronger than the lower law of authority.

So God educates us in the relations of our life to Him. The evidences which attested Him to the older Church were the flood, the destruction of Sodom, the miracles of Egypt and of the wilderness; then came the teachings of the prophets, when miracles ceased, and the intelligent reason was appealed to; then the spiritual economy of Christ, when the appeal was to the educated spiritual consciousness, and men believed in Christ not because of His miracles, not because of His intellectual arguments, but because He spake directly to their spiritual souls—"told them all that ever they did," met their sense of spiritual need. "He that is of the truth heareth my words." The supreme appeal to the truth loving heart is truth; the healthy eye needs no proof of light but the sun.

(1) Proofs of the being of a God are changing. Our fathers used to think that they could absolutely demonstrate it. But as the methods of science be-

come more exact and exacting, proofs of a purely intellectual character are showing their insufficiency ; we cannot establish them so conclusively as was once thought. The proof from causation, the proof from design, the proof from miracle, the proof from special providence, are of course as absolutely true as ever. God is the great first cause, God has designed all things in perfect wisdom and for great ends, God has wrought miracles, God does govern men by special providences ; but our intellectual faculties cannot so absolutely demonstrate these as to silence gain-saying. A keen dialectic can discover flaws in the reasoning, incompleteness in the demonstration. We are fain to put them among contributory evidences ; they

Thicken other proofs  
That do demonstrate thinly.

We are thrown more upon great spiritual proofs ; upon the instincts, consciousness, and experience of our own religious nature, upon the moral phenomena of the human world. We come to feel that the most conclusive of all proofs of the being of a spiritual God is that we are spiritual men. Our spiritual souls answer to His spiritual nature as the wards of a lock to its key. If there be no spiritual God, then spiritual men are the greatest anomaly and mockery of the universe. We do not prove God by argument so much as we see and feel Him.

And is not this proof far more conclusive than any which rests on mere reasoning from material pheno-

mena? And yet how many think material proof more satisfactory than spiritual proof! Let one of their arguments from external evidence be disabled by facts of science, or by logical sequence, they feel as if God Himself were disproved. "They have taken away my God and I know not where they have put Him."

But may not this very discomfiture of scientific proof be simply the means of driving our belief in God to the higher ground of spiritual demonstration? I believe that God is because my spiritual soul is, because His being appeals to it, because He fills it with life and light. Now we believe not because of the word or the proof of material science, but because we have seen Him ourselves. The most ignorant peasant whose soul is filled with the life and light of God has a much surer ground of belief in God than all the evidences of Paley could give him, valid and cogent as these unquestionably are. The consciousness of life is greater than the demonstrations of the physiologist.

(2) Our conceptions of the character and feelings of God change and develop with our spiritual education. It is so within the compass of the Bible. In the earlier books the predominant conception of God is that of sternness, terrible in His judgments, holy, majestic, distant. How this is softened in the time of David and the prophets! Who could imagine Abraham writing the twenty-third Psalm or the fortieth chapter of Isaiah? When we come to the

New Testament—to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of the Sermon on the Mount, and of the discourse at the Last Supper, the God of Paul and of John—the revolution of feeling is almost startling; the feeling of sternness is almost gone, and is superseded by that of yearning, melting tenderness. It is simply the education, the development of the idea of God, men rising from the feeling of law and government to the feeling of love and fatherhood.

And the development has never been arrested. Every generation has attained to a higher conception of God than its predecessor. To us God is more of a gracious, tender Father than He was fifty years ago. We think more largely, we rejoice more lovingly in His fatherly love. Old men see this with apprehension, they cling to their old Calvinism, they will tell you that the sense of righteousness has relaxed with the sternness of law, that our boundless, joyful rest in God's love is emasculating, that holiness is not quite so secure under the constraints of love as it is under the constraints of law. Nay, but is not God's hold upon our affections stronger than upon our fears? Is not the Divine Father more than the Divine Magistrate?

(3) Are not our conceptions of Christ Himself ever rising in truth and spirituality? Less and less we "know him after the flesh," more and more we know Him after the Spirit. Take for example *His Incarnation*. How its idea develops in breadth and meaning and human fitness. Less and less it is an arbitrary



conjunction of two different natures ; more and more it is a coming together of related natures, of profound and wonderful affinities. Man bears God's image, therefore God takes upon Him man's nature.

Every age adds something to our understanding of this "great birth of time." Not only do the thinkings of holy men accumulate, but the general level of spiritual character, intelligence, and sympathy is ever rising higher. We understand more of Christ because we are more Christlike. Each generation rises above its predecessor. As a whole, Christendom is more holy, more spiritual, and therefore more discerning than ever it was before.

When we are asked about the Incarnation we do not so eagerly have recourse to proof texts, to the narratives in Matthew and Luke, to disputed passages in the epistles. What battles our fathers waged about the meaning of Greek words, the deciphering of Greek letters, as if our belief in the Incarnation rested entirely upon them. What is the true reading of the phrase, "God was manifest in the flesh"? Bring the microscope and determine the true letter. We do not say that such investigations are unimportant, no true thing may be disregarded or deemed lightly of. We say only that these things do not determine the great doctrine of the Incarnation as men once thought they did. We depend less upon proof texts, more upon great spiritual evidences. As with the being of a God, so with the Incarnation of the Christ, the proof may be argued on purely intei-

lectual grounds, but we have come to think that the supreme proof is the religious and spiritual demonstration. I must believe in the Incarnation, because it so exactly and fully meets all the necessities of my spiritual nature. So I believe in the magnetic pole, in gravitation, in electricity, not because I can demonstrate any one of them, but because, assuming them by hypothesis, they perfectly account for all the phenomena. I assume the being of a God, I assume the fact of the Incarnation, and they perfectly account for all the phenomena of my spiritual nature and condition. I do not surrender the Incarnation when I rely less upon proof texts, I find it more gloriously demonstrated in the domain of my spiritual experience.

So we give more emphasis than our fathers did to *the human element of our Lord's nature*. Where they debated about His Divinity and devoutly worshipped Him as God, we think of His humanity and rapturously love Him as man. Where they cast themselves at His Divine feet, we cast ourselves upon His human bosom.

After all, the predominant recognition of transcendent Divinity in the Christ is not so grand a conception as that of transcendent humanity. It is not that we believe in the Divinity the less, but the distinctive idea of the Incarnation is "God manifest in the flesh." And when we subordinate this we lose all the distinctive preciousness—all that as distinguished from the Father the Christ is to us. He

does not merely hide Divinity behind a veil of flesh and blood, He embodies it in humanity, so that He can live, and suffer, and sympathize, and die; die on the cross for our sins, then rise from the grave and ascend to heaven as a proper man. All that in the Christ is distinctive, conspicuous, and precious, is human rather than Divine. It is not God who lives our human life, who dies on the cross, who rises from the grave—it is man. It is not God who institutes the Lord's Supper as a form of worship, it is man who institutes it as a means of loving remembrance and fellowship. It is as man that He is an example to me, is "touched with the feeling of my infirmity," and is infinitely precious to me.

How this feeling of our Lord's proper and perfect humanity has entered our religious life during the last fifty years—what tenderness, and inspiration, and strength it has given it! Had it always been fully cherished it would have made Mariolatry impossible. I do not the less feel His Divinity, I realize it in more glorious ways. I do not thus weaken the argument for it, it rises to the greatest of all demonstrations. He is Divine because He is so grandly, so perfectly, so tenderly, so helpfully human. "He is such a high priest as becomes us."

Much more marked have been the changes through which the *Doctrine of Atonement* has passed. There was the strange idea long held by the early Church, that the death of Christ was a ransom price paid to the devil to induce him to surrender the souls that

he held ; then there was the theory that it was the necessity of a struggle between justice and mercy ; then there was the forensic theory, which held that it was a legal process, after the analogy of our courts of justice ; then there was the commercial theory of a purchase price exactly measured, so much suffering for so many souls ; then there was the predestinarian theory of an elect number foreordained to be saved, not one more, not one less. We have attained larger, freer, more spiritual conceptions of it, as a grand moral process, embodying great principles, and satisfying eternal righteousness and love.

And every generation has felt, in the giving way of its special theory of the atonement, as if the atonement itself must be surrendered. The cry started to the lip, "They have taken away my Lord." It was only the chrysalis that was falling away, the old imperfect form, that the atonement itself might be more grandly conceived. Through all the changes, the great essential principle of a propitiation for sins was firmly grasped.

2. Men's theories about the Bible undergo change and development. The older and more imperfect conception falls away, dies as the seed corn dies ; newer and more adequate conceptions evolve out of it. We get nobler conceptions of its inspiration. We get more spiritual conceptions of its meaning. It is the very lowest theory of the inspiration of the Bible, that every word of it, every letter of it, is divinely dictated. This

is to reduce the inspiring process to a mere mechanical operation, and the inspired penman to a mere amanuensis. It is surely a higher conception to conceive of the entire moral nature of the sacred writer, his understanding, his affections, his individuality, as engaged in receiving and recording the Divine revelation. And yet when you assail the mechanical theory, which the facts utterly discredit, in order to assert the spiritual theory, which is broader and stronger and nobler, men cry out that you are bereaving them of the very ark of God. They cling to the letter, which killeth all moral agency and life, and are afraid of the Spirit, which really makes both the writer and the book a living power.

Astronomy proves that the sun does not go round the earth; geology proves that the matter of the globe was not created six thousand years ago; physical science proves that the first chapters of Genesis are not a scientific account of the creation; historical research proves that the writers of the Bible were sometimes mistaken in both their facts and their figures. We are driven to the conclusion that it is in its religious teachings that the Bible is absolutely true, and that in the scientific and historical embodiments of the religious teachings the sacred writers simply expressed the notions of their times; that the Bible does not profess to be a Divine revelation of science; that it would be fatal to many conditions of human life were it to do so. And weak

theologians get frightened, they think that every human element of the Divine Incarnation must be as infallible as the Divine element; they tremble at the thought of having to use the Bible in the exercise of spiritual principles and feelings, and they cry out in terror, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him."

As the one true and supreme religious book of the world; as the authoritative record of God's great revelations to men; as the book of transcendent spiritual truth; as the shrine of the Divine words of Christ, the Bible cannot be taken from us. So long as man has a religious soul, so long will the supreme spiritual truths of the Bible appeal to it and demonstrate itself as "the word of the Lord which endureth for ever." It is not the dead letter, but the living oracle of the revelation of God.

3. Similar things may be said concerning conceptions of the Church.

Every development of Church life and liberty and spirituality has been enabled by the throwing off of some old restrictive ecclesiasticism. And the emancipating process has caused alarm, as if the assertion of liberty were a recklessness of obligation, a rushing into license. So no doubt the Samaritan woman felt when our Lord disparaged both Gerizim and Jerusalem by His great assertion of nobler and more spiritual worship. How the Temple Jews would despise the worship of the Upper Room; and yet there the promise of the Father was realized.

How men have guarded the old idea of the Christian Church as a sacred organization, a privileged and exclusive community, into which all Divine sanctity and favour were gathered, outside of which were only uncovenanted mercies. The Church society was of God, everything outside it was of the devil. Church worship and doings were holy, all others were illicit, if not sinful.

We are a garden walled around,  
Chosen and made peculiar ground.

The older conception was of a Divine right which involved a virtual infallibility, the logical result of which was intolerance and persecution. The modern form of it is a spiritual exclusiveness, which on the one hand jealously guards access to it, and on the other is more than suspicious of all who are not of it. In manifold forms the Christian Church has been and is as intolerant as Old Judaism itself. And when men began to ask whether organized Church societies, however legitimate and expedient in themselves, were really identical with the Saviour's conception of His Church; when, as at the Reformation, and from time to time since, a more liberal conception has denied the Divine right of ecclesiastical organizations, has recognized true disciples of Christ who belonged to no such organizations; and has claimed that the New Testament Church of Christ was something more than the aggregate of Church societies, that it included all men everywhere who truly loved Him, whether their names were

found in Church registers or not, the timid got alarmed, and thought that the Church itself was being denied.

So again it has been when unjust prerogatives have been disallowed,—the Pope dispossessed of his temporal power, the English Church deprived of its power to compel uniformity, to interdict from civil office, to coerce pecuniary support, to monopolize marriage and burial; and so, again, it will be when its false and injurious alliance with the State shall be finally severed. At every step the cry of alarm, and sacrilege, and infidelity is raised, and that which is really emancipation, and advance to higher spirituality and greater moral power, is regarded as the destruction of sacred and precious things. Every step is an advance to purer and stronger forms of life. So, too, when godly men not of our Church compel the recognition of their godliness; so when barriers round the table of the Lord are broken down; so when the ecclesiastical conditions of Church membership are made easier. Every prop of superstition, arrogance, and fanaticism when stricken down provokes a cry of alarm. But only in genuine spiritual life can the Church be strong and secure, and it is strongest when spiritual life is freest and most spontaneous. Thank God the days of ecclesiastical protection are passing away, and days of intellectual and spiritual freedom are coming.

4. So again, good men are terrified when the per-



sonal religious life of a man is emancipated from mere precept and tradition, and thrown upon living principle and intuitive love, when bonds of asceticism are broken, and the Divine use and good of all things is freely enjoyed. What unwritten traditions have hampered and distressed the religious life about the right use of material things, about reading, about amusements, about dress, about society! Think of monachism, of the sumptuary laws of Calvin, of the discipline of Methodism, of the rigid ritual of the Friends. How many pious people of the past generation deplored it as an apostacy, and deemed religion itself imperilled when Methodist close bonnets and Quaker coats were laid aside! How much faith has rested in the cowl of the monk or the hood of the nun, or the vest of the Anglican; and how weak the faith that so rests! No religious life is strong that rests on prohibitions. These are the necessities only of children or of weaklings. The life that is strongest and most secure is that which is a law unto itself, which has the franchise of the creatures of God, and which, guided only by its own holiness and love, "proves all things, and holds fast that which is good."

5. The same principle would apply to the course and process of God's providential dealing with our life. He smites away the lower good in which we have rested, and in which we have found strength and joy, that He may put us in possession of the higher good which otherwise we should not seek. "As the

eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings," pushes them out of their nest to compel them to fly, so the Lord deals with us. Lower forms of good, like the sheath of the corn or the kernel of the nut, continue while the good is forming and maturing : then they loosen and fall away. It seems exposure and destruction, it is really development. Friends upon whom we have leaned, health in which we wrought out the first processes of life, property which helped some early virtues, these were the husks and props of our strength. They fall away, and we cry out in helpless desolateness ; the good of our life has failed, its pleasant things are laid waste. "What good shall my life do me?"

Nay, but these simply hindered and concealed our real life, they are but as the fleshly Christ ; they perish, and we are thrown upon more spiritual things, we develop into a nobler life. "That which thou sowest is not quickened except it die." Had these continued we should never have become spiritually great—great in patience, in trust, in spiritual satisfactions. They are the "afflictions which work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." God fulfils our life in grander ways than we purpose or imagine. He "girds us, though we do not know him," makes loss the means of gain.

6. The crowning illustration is the life that comes through death. How we weep over our dead, wail the desolation they leave, give ourselves up to des-

pair. "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother would not have died." True, but neither would he have been raised from the dead. Our dead friends are more to us than when they lived; not more to the bodily sense, but more to the spiritual soul. There is more of sanctity, spirituality, tenderness, inspiration in the thought of them, in our fellowship with them. The ministry of dead friends is greater, more cogent, more full and precious than that of living friends. Christ risen was, to Mary and the disciples, more than Christ before His death. Hitherto they had "known Christ after the flesh, henceforth they know him no more."

Let us then accept this economy of change, destruction and development. If our good things do not fall away from us and perish, they will only hinder better things still. God must bereave us of the lower in order to enrich us with the higher.

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

"The outward man must perish, in order that the inward man may be renewed day by day."

It is a law of life which, if we did but understand and would but accept it, would explain a thousand things that are mysterious and painful to us, and would facilitate reform and progress in many things of our religious life that now are but partially realized because of our resentment of it. It would give us an intelligence, and trust, and strength, and

peace in the changes which occur, which would be the joy and glory of our piety. Happy they for whom Christ needs to speak only a word, whose own religious consciousness recognizes and responds to it, with a start of surprise, a recognition of unthought-of meaning, a flood of wondrous grateful joy; and who thus, by spiritual intuitions as it were, bound to the higher life to which He calls them.







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