THE WORD OF THE CROSS

THE WORD OF THE CROSS

AND OTHER SERMONS

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I

THE WORD OF THE CROSS

"The preaching of the cross."—1 Cor. i. 18 (A.V.).
"The word of the cross."—1 Cor. i. 18 (R.V.).

Our text is not a sentence of Scripture, as texts usually are, but a single expression. It is, however, an exceedingly striking expression. That is, perhaps, not apparent from the translation of it which is given in the Authorized Version. The "Preaching of the Cross," as the familiar rendering is, does not do justice to the original phrase. The "Preaching of the Cross" suggests what may be described as evangelical preaching—that type of preaching which makes the Cross its chief, and indeed its only, subject. A distinction seems to be implied between various kinds of discourses—ethical, philosophical, biographical, and so on—but these are all left out of account; and the discourses, which are declared to be invested with the power of God unto salvation, are those which concentrate on "Jesus Christ and Him Crucified." The "Preaching" that is worthy of the name of

preaching, the "Preaching" that avails to save sinners, is—our text seems to insist—the "Preaching of the Cross."

Now, the truth of what has just been said will probably not be called in question by any of us. It summarizes what we believe. But the reference in the original is really to another matter. The phrase does not contain a covert criticism of certain types of preaching, and an explicit commendation of one particular type alone. It does not bring under the reader's notice the question of what constitutes apostolic and evangelical preaching at all. Accurately translated, as it is in the Revised Version, the expression, which St Paul used, is "The Word of the Cross." The Cross, and not any human being, is represented as the speaker. To the Cross there is attributed a power of utterance. It has something to say, something audible to reveal to those who have "ears to hear."

Inscriptions on ancient monuments, erected to celebrate an historic incident, or the virtues of a person who had departed this life, not infrequently began with the Latin words "Sta viator!" The English equivalent for that arresting phrase is, "Stay, Oh traveller!" It was an invitation, or rather an appeal, addressed to passers-by, to halt and consider what it was, or who it was, that the

monument commemorated. "Sta viator! Stay, Oh traveller!" is the salutation of the Cross to wayfaring mortals. The Cross has a word to communicate to each one of us.

The "Word of the Cross." We cannot repeat the phrase over and over again to ourselves, without perceiving its impressive character.

There are some who magnify the pathos of the Cross, and there are others who extol the heroism of it. It excites emotion in the breasts of those who contemplate it. There streams from the Cross an influence which produces a sense of awe and wonder. But it speaks as well. Its message is deeper and richer than that which can be conveyed through the presentation of the crucifix. It is charged with the capacity not only of quickening feelings, but also of awakening thoughts. In one of his noble frescoes, Giotto does justice to that fact. Faith is represented by him in the form of a figure holding a cross in one hand and a scroll in the other. The Cross is interpretable. The understanding of beholders is appealed to. It gives utterance to a word.

On the other hand, there are people who acknowledge that the essence of the Gospel is of the nature of word. That is to say, they recognize that it affects not the emotions of man only, but the in-

telligence also. It can be explained in terms of ideas, and presented as a coherent body of truths. The experience of believing, they admit, is not just an intense wave of feeling breaking over the soul, a vague stimulation of the sensibilities. It is the grasping and holding fast of great conceptions about God and His Love. But they deny that it is of any importance to ask, whence those sublime conceptions originated. They allege that the Christian religion is independent of history. They are prepared to accept with complacency statements to the effect, that the Gospel-narratives are creations of human imagination, and that such a person as Jesus Christ never even lived on earth. What alone is of moment, in their view, is the Christian system of ideas—ideas which, they declare, accredit themselves.

That is what the apostle calls "making void the cross of Christ." It was done in Corinth long ago; and it is being done, in the name of modern enlightenment, to-day. The Word—the message of the Gospel, as it might be written down on paper, or spoken by a human voice making intelligible sounds—is not the fruit of high-winding speculation. It did not evolve itself out of men's minds; we neither know, nor need to know, when. It is not the articulation of the penetrating insight

and daring theorizing of forgotten poet-philosophers. The Word is the meaning of a fact, of an historical event. And that fact, that historical event, which cries to mankind, is the Cross of Christ.

The "Word of the Cross" cannot be expressed by human lips as a single Word. The tongue of man would stammer hopelessly, if it tried to pronounce it. It is a Word so profound and glorious, as to be unutterable by you or me. Yet the strange thing is, that though we cannot articulate it, we are familiar with it. We are unable to reproduce it in our speech. It is beyond our power to do so. But we are able to hear and understand it, like children who know what is said to them, even when they have no command of language themselves.

(1) The "Word of the Cross" is addressed, in the first place, to our *consciences.* It is that fact which gives the Cross its title to a universal hearing. Otherwise, its speech, while significant and moving, could not authoritatively claim the attention of mankind at large. The Cross draws all men to itself, because it has something to say which concerns all. No human being can afford to shut his eyes to the spectacle of the Cross, or close his ears to its voice. "Sta viator!" it cries; "Stay, Oh traveller, whoever you be, and from whatever land you come!" The Cross appeals to every way-

farer on the journey of life. It beseeches all who would pass by in preoccupied haste, to tarry and listen. For it has that to communicate to each one of us, which relates to our deepest necessity.

Our deepest necessity may not be the necessity which is engaging us at the moment. Some anxiety, the object of which is of no great worth and the satisfaction of which promises but a transient measure of happiness, may be absorbing our thoughts. But when things fall into their true proportions, as they do at times with all of us; when the issues of life and conduct are seen in their proper perspective, as they are by every one at certain seasons; when values are rightly adjusted and interests range themselves in their due order; then we perceive what our deepest necessity is, and are affected by its urgent demands. Set squarely over against reality, undistracted by the glamour of worldly affairs, stripped of the cloak of self-excusings which we are tempted to gather round ourselves, divested of the mask wherewith we would fain disguise ourselves and play a part before our fellows—out in the open, self-discovered, remembering, solitary—we realize that what we need above everything is the forgiveness of God.

Is it not so? Are there any alarms like the alarms of a guilty and awakened conscience? Who does not know what it is to loathe oneself, to stand aghast at the folly of one's doings, to experience a shudder of shame and terror at the secret treachery and selfishness of one's life? Neglected by others or unintelligible to others, the "Word of the Cross" is understood by all such persons. For it utters what they most need to hear, but dare not hope that they will ever hear. The Cross announces to you and me the forgiveness of God—announces it with assurance, as only a Cross could, which held on its outstretched beams the Sacrifice which took away the sin of the world—as only a Cross could, which revealed the tragedy involved in Divine forgiveness.

(2) The "Word of the Cross" is addressed, in the second place, to our *hearts*. It is a Word of rich and abundant consolation. The Cross not only confronts the sin of the world; it also recognizes and calms the sorrow. Its message, as directed to this need, may not be appreciated by every one. For there are some too young to understand what sorrow means, while there are others who seem to have grown old without ever having passed through its fires. To such persons, the feeble words

of the preacher, when he touches on the subject, have, of course, an irrelevant sound. But so also, as a matter of fact, has the profoundly consoling "Word of the Cross."

Those, however, with whom things have not always gone well, who have seen their hopes frustrated, who have stooped beneath a burden of disappointment, whose homes have been overshadowed with darkness—they know the anguish which the Cross alone can comfort. Their hearts, scarred with old wounds and torn with recent sufferings, are sensitive to its healing accents. They have ears to hear the syllable of consolation in the great "Word of the Cross."

Why should the "Word of the Cross" possess this virtue? Why should it minister peace to those who are in trouble, and prove a balm to the afflictions of humanity? I cannot answer that question fully, and, though you ask it, you do so with no expectation that it will be answered fully. But I sometimes think that I have got a glimpse of one reason at all events. Never was the Divine Providence more enigmatical and more apparently unjustified, than it was in the life of Jesus Christ. Never was there a more amazing lack of correspondence between merit and lot, than there was in His case. Hatred and mocking, betrayal and

scourging—for Christ! A season of unspeakable agony in Gethsemane, condemnation to death by the rulers of Israel and the Roman procurator—for Christ! A Cross amidst the derision of the by-standers—for Him "Who knew no sin, and in Whose mouth guile was not found!" There is no expression in human language can do justice to the appalling discrepancy between the deserts and the experiences of the Son of God at the hands of the Father. It is that fact, it is the victorious way in which He accepted the Father's Will and justified the Providence ordained for Him, that makes us feel that our sorrows are included in His. The Word of the Cross, speaking out of an ordeal before which our particular sufferings pale into insignificance, reconciles us to their weight and consoles us. "Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows."

(3) The "Word of the Cross" is addressed, in the third place, to our *wills*. Its message, as directed to the will, is not heard by those who have not first received with wonder and gratitude its message, as directed to the conscience. They are not aware of being under any debt of obligation for its assurance of forgiveness, and, consequently, they are actuated by no impulse of grateful obedience. But even in the case of those of us

who believe that we have welcomed the Word which the Cross speaks to the conscience, is there not a reluctance to hear it out when it speaks to the will ?

We forget, I think, or we choose to ignore the fact, that the vicarious element in the death of Christ is not only the ground of our forgiveness, but also represents a principle of Christian conduct. The Cross, most emphatically, announces pardon ; but it surely imposes a law upon our life too. We must listen to it with our wills, as well as with our consciences and hearts. " For their sakes," said Jesus, " I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified in truth." That means that our wills are called into action in the process of salvation. It is a common-place of Christian testimony to speak of " bearing the Cross." We accustom ourselves to the idea that the Cross comes to us only in the form of untoward events and distressing experiences, and that the right attitude for us to adopt is one of patient resignation. No one dare deny that it does so come, and that the right attitude in the circumstances is such as we have described. But it does not come only in that form ; we are not to wait and wait until it comes in that form, before we begin to bear it.

The Cross is to be taken up. It comes to us as a principle of action to be obeyed in choices and purposes. It is to "be borne" daily, and manifested in a life of self-sacrifice. Conformity to the Cross is "foolishness" in the eyes of those whose ruling passion is to promote their own interests with the utmost prudence, and defend them with the utmost jealousy. What a "fool" a man is, who does not seek the amplest satisfaction of his desires; who actually thinks of others before himself, and impoverishes himself for the sake of Christ's cause! It is so contrary to our natural feelings to sacrifice ourselves, that the apostle's term is the only appropriate one: it is downright "foolishness."

And yet, it is such "foolish" men and women, and they alone, who are taking the religion of Christ seriously, and are not playing with its obligations. And it is only in the spirit of apostolic "folly" that the tasks of the Kingdom of God at home and abroad will ever be faced and fulfilled with the certainty of success. Heathendom will never be converted by the measured, unbelieving, conventional devotion, which characterizes a great part of Christendom. God forbid that it should ever be converted to such a devotion! For the "Word of the Cross" calls

for a service, conceived and carried out in another spirit altogether, calls for a love which devises heroic things, and for a will which is in complete captivity to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

II

THE POTTER

"I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels."—JEREMIAH xviii. 1-4.

WHAT did this Jerusalem potter think of the man who stood watching him intently one day, as he plied his trade? The occupation by which he earned his bread was an interesting one. Like children caught by the clang and glare of a smithy, people were in the habit of glancing into his booth as they passed, and occasionally they paused for a few moments to see a vessel completed. But in all his experience, he had never come across a person so fascinated as this strange figure seemed to be. "And yet," as the potter, perhaps, remarked afterwards to his companions, when he was telling them about the incident:—"And yet the idle fellow went away without making a single purchase."

If the potter was human enough to be disappointed with the result of that observer's close study of his work, the observer himself was quite

satisfied. He had not come there with the intention, as we would put it, of doing shopping. He had not been deliberating what he would buy, only to arrive at the conclusion, after a careful scrutiny of the articles displayed for sale, that there was nothing that he really wanted, and nothing that tempted him. There were no regrets in his mind that he had failed to find an opportunity for spending his money. He had been a spectator of a parable in deeds. The operations of the craftsman had been teaching him profound lessons. For his was not a stolid, insensitive nature like that of Peter Bell, concerning whom Wordsworth says in the familiar lines,

> A primrose by a river's brim
> A yellow primrose was to him,
> And it was nothing more.

In the materials handled by the potter, and in the way they were manipulated by him, Jeremiah, with a mind like our Lord's, perceived a symbolic representation of great and central truths. Wares were bought by him that day, to be sure; but they were of a spiritual kind, and the Jerusalem artificer had not been the conscious seller, at any rate.

Let us try to stand beside the prophet in imagination, and give our attention to the things that fell

under his notice, on the occasion described in this passage.

(1) First of all there is the *clay*.

It is the raw material out of which all the varied utensils and ornaments, that lie scattered about the potter's premises, are made. It is the stuff of which each vessel, no matter what its shape may be, is composed. There resides in it the promise of becoming an object of usefulness or of beauty, once it has been subjected to the process of manufacture.

The clay is an emblem of your life and mine. Our lives possess a capacity similar to that, which belongs to it. There are possibilities in us that admit of being realized. Out of the undeveloped material, which the fact of our existence in time represents, there can be produced forms and modes of personality of the most diverse kinds. Like the clay, we yield to treatment. Our natures are plastic. Powers of body and mind and will, abilities of a physical, an intellectual, and a moral order, manifest themselves. Character expresses itself, and more and more tends to stereotype itself on settled lines, and to harden into a permanent shape. Whereas in the early period, there was little by which to distinguish one life from another; in the later, peculiarities assert them-

selves, differences are conspicuous. We display our individuality not only by the features of our face, our height, our speech, our manner of walking, but in a multitude of characteristic ways, definable in some cases, but in others too subtle to be explained in words.

To compare this human life of ours to clay is not to state the whole truth about it. For clay is a substance passive and inanimate. It cannot leap from the hand of him who takes hold of it; it is unable to defeat his purposes by an act of its own conceiving; it cherishes no feelings of approval or resentment at the treatment to which it is exposed. But to us belongs freedom—a freedom which, though it is limited in its range, is nevertheless a real prerogative of self-determination within a certain compass. And reason is ours too—that Divine endowment whereby we are able to think, and construct a theory of the universe for ourselves, and plan what we shall do, and reflect upon the events of time. And our natures are gifted with sensibilities also—we are susceptible to emotions and affections. Desires are kindled within us, hopes and fears sway us, our hearts know the pleasure of satisfaction and the pain of disappointment.

Yet while between man and clay there is this

great difference, which, in a few of its most obvious and essential details, I have rapidly described, they resemble one another in a certain respect. And it is that resemblance which came home to the prophet's mind. They are subject alike to effects being produced on them by a cause outside themselves. We know this about ourselves, that our lives do not consist of a series of experiences which we determine beforehand. We have not the choosing of our future, any more than we had of our past and of our present, in all the circumstances of it. The orbit of our career does not follow the path traced by our preconceptions and wishes. Things happen to us—bringing unexpected joys, or unlooked-for sorrows. Events take place, in whose initiation and accomplishment we had no part. Nay, we are often denied even the opportunity of foreseeing them and preparing for them. They occur without any premonition. Perhaps we are apt to forget this fact about the circumstances of our lives. Incidents of an ordinary kind, while they befall us in the character of unanticipated happenings, are not sufficiently unfamiliar to remind us of it. But when any great event takes place—any event, that is to say, which is fraught with serious consequences to us and ours, and which transforms our whole out-

look ; when God asserts His power in our life either in His Providence or His Grace—then we realize that, in a true sense, we are clay.

(2) The second thing that arrests our attention, as we stand beside the prophet, and look into the potter's booth, is the *wheel.*

The clay is set on the wheel, and the wheel moves with rapid revolutions. Up from its whirling centre there emerges the vessel, growing into definite shape moment by moment. The wheel is an indispensable implement in the craft of the potter. Its rotations are necessary to the production of the ware, which he aims at manufacturing.

The wheel is an emblem of time and its manifold changes. You and I are set in time, as the clay is set on the circling wheel. We are exposed to its vicissitudes ; we are affected by its powers. How ruthlessly it seems again and again to deal with us ! To what experiences of suffering and deprivation does it subject us, as it bears us along in endless motion.

Yet as the clay remains nothing but shapeless clay till it is placed upon the wheel, as the wheel with its swift revolutions is essential to the process of making an earthen vessel, so time, with all its ordeals, and losses, and perplexing events, is

essential to the formation and fashioning of the character of man. The contention of time, its temptations and tests, its discipline and struggles, supply the opportunity for our realizing the capacities of our manhood and womanhood. We are not born into a changeless order of existence — a still and static world. We are born into an order that is ever changing, and into a world that is in a state of constant flux. And that lot is appointed for us in order that we may develop powers of knowledge and will that are latent within us, and become what our creation gave promise of our one day being.

What a brave philosophy of human life; how simple it all seems; how easily stated! It is not against these conditions in general, amidst which we are placed, that we are inclined to cry out. When the necessity of them is explained to us, we are ready enough to recognize their inevitableness, and acquiesce in their appointment. Reality is acknowledged to be rational.

But it is not with the elements of a theory, which has commended itself to our reason, that we have to cope in our life from day to day. It is with the hard facts of personal experience —this event which has happened to me, that

event which has happened to you—not theoretical trials, but actual, grievous ones, which make the heart bleed. It is against these conditions in particular that we cry out in expostulating anguishment.

(3) But there is another object which meets our eyes as we watch with the prophet. It is the *hand of the potter.*

The wheel is not self-moved; its rotations are controlled by the potter. And the strain and stress to which the clay is subjected as it sweeps round and round, and rises up in the form of a vase or a cup, like a plant growing from its root, are directed by him. No vessel in that booth made itself, or was made by the wheel. One and all took their shape, and were moulded after their respective patterns, under the skilled and experienced hand of the potter.

The hand of the potter is an emblem of the Hand of God. We are apt to think exclusively of the wheel, and to ignore the Hand. As if time itself organized the events of our lives, and laid us at their mercy. Whereas it is God Who affects us with His providences, and seeks to mould us for His own purposes. The things that befall us, and from the occurrence of

which we shrink, the ordeals that we are exposed to, the disappointments that fill us with sorrow, are ordained by His Wisdom and Love. And such is His grace, that, when by our folly or rebelliousness, we mar His work, He is willing to take us again and refashion us with long-suffering patience.

Shall we not then seek to submit ourselves anew to the Will of God, and lend ourselves to the discipline and control of Him Who delighteth in mercy? The Hand that guides our destinies—let us strive to believe it—is no iron Hand of relentless force, violent in its smiting, as we are sometimes tempted to think. Its actions have been revealed to the eyes of men in the Hand of Jesus Christ. It is the Hand that took hold of a blind man and led him out to be healed, that was stretched out to rescue a sinking disciple, that was laid upon little children, that was pierced by cruel nails for our sakes. That is the Hand which apportions the changing experiences of our earthly lot, and which gives and withholds in the case of each one of us. That is the Hand which gropes around our hearts to touch into life chords of trust and assurance and obedience to-day. Oh! to have quickened within us a great and victorious faith in the Love which

directs the working of the Hand of God—to be able to say,

> So take and use Thy work,
> Amend what flaws may lurk,
> What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past the aim!
> My times be in Thy hand,
> Perfect the cup as planned,
> Let age approve of youth, and death complete the same.

III

THE GOSPEL OF GOD

"The Gospel of God."—Rom. i. 1.

The word Gospel is so well-worn, that it slips over our tongues smoothly. As a rule, it is loaded with so little precise meaning, that it does not come hard and straight at the minds of those who hear it, and make a distinct impression on them. But, familiar though we are with the word, both when it is used by itself, and when it is used along with certain qualifying phrases, we can scarcely fail to be struck by the particular expression, which forms our text this morning :—" the Gospel of God."

It occurs very seldom in the New Testament. We find it once in the Revised Version of St Mark's Gospel, and once in the writings of St Peter. The apostle Paul uses it five times in all—three times in his First Epistle to the Thessalonians, and once in his Epistle to the Romans, and in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians. A single instance of its usage, in a modified form, is to be found also in the apostle's address to the elders of the Church

at Ephesus, and in his Pastoral Letter to Timothy. The infrequency of its occurrence, therefore, may be taken as accounting for the fact, that the expression arrests our attention when we come across it in our reading of Scripture.

When we wish to distinguish the four Memoirs of Christ from the rest of the contents of the New Testament, we refer to them as the Gospels. That designation, which only came into vogue during the second century, marks off those biographical writings from the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles, and the Revelation of St John.

Again, when we wish to describe in a single word the truth which the Church of Christ professes to believe, and the message, which the Church of Christ is required to proclaim to the world, we speak of the Gospel. The Gospel is the creed of Christian people; it is the sum and substance of the faith which they are bound both to "hold fast," and to "hold forth."

Now what is the subject-matter of the Gospel? In his Epistle to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul makes use of these expressions—the "Gospel of your salvation," and the "Gospel of peace." But "salvation" and "peace" do not represent the subject-matter of the Gospel. They declare its purpose and issue. The Gospel is meant to bring

to men, and it does in fact bring to all who accept it, the wide and complex blessings indicated by these two great words. The subject-matter proper of the Gospel, however, is announced by our text. It is God Himself.

A question emerges here—a rudimentary question, if you like, but one of the first importance for all that. We cannot make progress, unless we state it and reply to it. If the Gospel is the Gospel of God, if, in other words, the truth and the message distinctive of the Christian religion, relate to God, from what source is its knowledge of God derived? The answer is, from a record of historical facts, from the story of a human life. We do not deny that true knowledge of God can be reached by contemplation of the glory of the heavens and the order of nature, by reflection upon human experience and the testimony of conscience, by reasoning and intuition. We are not to be understood as denying that. But what we affirm is, that the knowledge derived from those sources or by those methods is not ample enough, not authoritative enough, to constitute a Gospel. It lacks richness of detail, if not certainty; and it does not afford satisfaction to our deepest moral necessities, and our profoundest anxieties. Knowledge—authentic, plain, corresponding to the needs

of humanity, and worthy of being called a Gospel—is only to be obtained through the mediation of Jesus Christ.

By far the commonest designation of the Gospel in the New Testament, as you are aware, is the "Gospel of Christ." You can hardly turn to a page at random without finding those words in some of the verses. Our text is of much rarer occurrence, as we saw. When we bring both forms together, we are able to see certain old truths in a new light.

(1) Take them in this order, first—"*The Gospel of God is the Gospel of Christ.*"

If that is a proposition which we do not actually meet with in the New Testament, it states what every New Testament writer assumes and thoroughly believes. The knowledge of God, which they are all conscious of enjoying, is recognized by them as a mediated knowledge, as having been revealed to them through Jesus Christ. The God, in whom they believe, is the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. They have no doctrine concerning God to communicate, that is based merely on philosophical speculations of their own, or on traditional ideas inherited by them. They write as those who have found God in the man Christ Jesus.

In the facts of the history of Jesus of Nazareth we have the revelation of God. That whole career in Galilee and Judea is an unveiling of the heart of God. It is not God postulated as the First Cause of all created things, identified as the Ultimate Principle of the Universe and the Absolute, felt as an encompassing Presence by sensitive minds—it is not God, so apprehended and conceived of, that is the immediate subject of the Gospel. It is God manifest in the flesh. All the compassion and mercy, the purity and truth, the justice and holiness, the gentleness and brotherliness of Jesus Christ declare to us what God is. In His life and death we behold the righteousness and love of God. There is a Gospel of God to be preached and accepted, because there has dwelt in the world, and given Himself up for mankind, One, "Who was the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His Person." "We ought not to think," said the apostle Paul at Athens, "that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and device of man." "Being the offspring of God," we ought not to think that. Through no such medium, however exquisitely treated, can God be worthily represented. There is one, and only one, medium capable of revealing Him, adapted to so sublime an office; and that is this human

life of ours purified and perfected for the purpose. And in the fulness of the time, the Word was made flesh, Immanuel appeared in our midst, God manifested himself in the sinless human life and incorruptible experience of Jesus Christ.

(2) Reverse the order of the words, now—"*The Gospel of Christ is the Gospel of God.*"

The truth embodied in that statement, if it is not expressed in so many words in the New Testament, is implied in every chapter. It requires to be emphasized at the present day, for various interpretations are being given in our time to the Gospel of Christ.

There are some, for instance, who think that the very heart of the Gospel consists of the enunciation of an economic principle of society. His name is being acclaimed in many quarters as that of a revolutionary leader.

There are others who tell us that the essential and imperishable element in the Gospel of Christ is our Lord's precepts with regard to conduct. Everything else is either of a legendary character, the embroidering of human fancy, or of merely transitory significance.

There are others, still, who declare that the fundamental thing in the Gospel of Christ is the prediction of the consummation of history, and

the existing world-order. The main stream of the message of Christ is to be traced in the apocalyptic utterances.

That the teaching of our Lord has direct bearings on the relations between man and man in society, that it sets up a standard of goodness and lays down principles of duty, that it prophesies in language of the greatest solemnity the coming of a day of judgment, no one acquainted with the facts will dream of disputing. Nevertheless we are right in asserting that the central and supreme subject of the Gospel of Christ is God—the Divine Character, the Divine Mind, the Divine Will—revealed in the words and work, in the life and death, of Him, whom His fellow-townsmen could not get away from thinking of, as just the carpenter of the place.

That the central and supreme message of the Gospel of Christ consists of a revelation of God can be established along several lines of proof.

To begin with, Our Lord's teaching about individual conduct and social duty furnishes convincing evidence. He never spoke in the character of a moral philosopher simply. The authority, which He enlisted to support His words, was not the secular interests of society and its members. The sanction, under which He announced the

principles of ideal action, was the Father's Will. He promulgated no ethical doctrine apart from its religious origins. Nor did He expect His teaching to be obeyed, except in the case of those who accepted it as a whole, and experienced that relation to the Father on which it was founded.

Again, our Lord's consciousness of Himself makes it plain that the essence of His Gospel lay in a revelation of God. His claims were not the arbitrary assertions of a masterful and self-confident mind. They were based on His consciousness of union with the Father. From that consciousness they derived their insistent authority, and in the interests of that consciousness of Himself as the Revealer of the Father they were always advanced. "Come unto me," He could say, not because He had found in Himself, and called into exercise, native powers that encouraged such an exalted attitude towards His fellows; but because He knew that His union with the Father justified it, and obliged Him to issue such a personal invitation.

Once more, the fact of His death has a direct bearing on the question we are considering. The death of Christ can be and ought to be studied from a variety of standpoints, in order that its wealth of meaning may be laid hold of. The Father's Will was operative in it, and so was the consenting

Will of our Lord Himself. But what were the historical causes of Christ's death? The Jewish authorities, we know, defamed His character, and even went the length of declaring that He was possessed by a devil. But their hatred was too deep to be satisfied with the utterance of venomous words about Him, and the spreading of malignant calumnies about His conduct. They saw in Him a betrayer of their ancient law and the traditions of the elders. He presumed to amend the precepts which had been handed down from their fathers, and He dared to put a new interpretation on the observance of the Sabbath. His words in condemnation of their behaviour, and of their religious principles and practices, stung them sharply. But what most of all roused their anger was His claim to be the Messiah, Israel's long-expected Redeemer. His assumption of that sacred rôle, His exploiting of the national enthusiasm in that capacity, His dragging down, as they thought, of their most honoured ideals to the mire, was more than they could endure. It was nothing short of blasphemy. And so they compelled their Roman masters to arrest Him on a charge of sedition—imputing to Him the very Messianic ideas which He repudiated and they cherished, and His repudiation of which was the cause of their

fury against Him. His being bracketed as an alternative with Barabbas in the procurator's offer of release, and His being crucified on Golgotha between two malefactors amid the jeers of the populace, were circumstances entirely in keeping with their feelings about Him. For in their own minds, they reckoned Him a pestilent person, and "numbered Him with the transgressors." He was "a transgressor." What He transgressed was their narrow, legal, national ideas about God. And He did so by the revelation of Divine Fatherhood and human Brotherhood, which His interpretation and fulfilment of the Messianic office announced to them, and to the world. He died because of the character of His manifestation of God.

Everyone knows that the word Gospel means good-news. All good-news is gospel, be it news from far or from near, about some success achieved by ourselves or our friends, about the health and welfare of those whose lives are bound up with our own, about the discovery of a remedy for human suffering, about the settlement of an international complication which is menacing the peace of the world. But the news, which is good beyond all other news, is the Gospel. And such news, surely, is news about God, the revelation to us of

the grace and glory of the Divine nature. That is the Gospel; at least it is so to all who are hungry to know God, whose hearts and consciences, seeking for the greatest of all human experiences, a right relation to God, cry out, "What must we do to be saved?" The New Testament exists to meet that question, and its answer is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." The Gospel of God, in all its sufficiency for the ignorance of man and the conscious guilt of man, is to be found in Him. The revelation of God, which Jesus Christ mediates, is not by intimation like the revelation of the prophets, not by oral communication of great truths that captured and convinced a mind in high moments, but by being—a revelation in a human life, and through all the channels whereby a human life is able to express itself. But the answer of the New Testament has no meaning, and does not possess the character of good news, for those who do not feel the necessity of asking the question to which it corresponds, who are not mastered by the need of coming into a right relation with God. In the case of such, however, as are haunted by the most urgent of human inquiries, it becomes extraordinarily relevant and intelligible. To them it is glad tidings of great joy, the Gospel of God, news so good that it won't keep. They feel obliged to

communicate it, and can acknowledge no limit to the obligation. Secular information may for various reasons require to be guarded, or imparted sparingly, but the Gospel of God demands world-wide proclamation. To be without interest in its propagation is to be in complete darkness with regard to its character, and to be a stranger to the wonder of its revelation as the Gospel of God.

IV

ONE DAY AND A THOUSAND YEARS

"Forget not this one thing, beloved, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."—2 PET. iii. 8 (R.V.).

THE language, which the apostle uses by way of preface to our text, shows that he regarded it as expressing a truth of the utmost importance. He seems to take it for granted that those to whom his letter is addressed will not be able to bear in mind all its contents. He does not expect them to remember every sentence that he has written. He does not ask them to do so.

But there is one statement which he urges them to retain in their memories, as "a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation." So long as they continue to treasure it, he will be abundantly satisfied. They may allow the rest of his words to fade into oblivion, but he bespeaks a different fate in behalf of these :—"One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."

What led to the apostle to lay stress on this particular verse of his epistle is made plain by the context. A time was approaching when his Christian brethren would be taunted with having looked for the Second Advent of Christ, and looked for it in vain. They would be subjected to mockery and ridicule on account of their continuing to cherish a hope, which only left them disappointed as the weeks and months went by. The ordeal would be a trying one; but there was no reason why they should not come through it triumphantly. It behoved them to bear in mind constantly that God did not measure time according to human standards of reckoning. Long and short, when applied to a period of duration, were not the same in His apprehension as in man's. "With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." The postponement of the consummation of all things, by the manifestation of Christ in glory and in judgment, was due to no slackness on God's part to fulfil His promise. If He seemed to be slow in giving effect to His word, and in winding up the course of history, the reason lay in the greatness of His mercy. That event, fraught with solemn and universal consequences, was only delayed, because "the Lord is long-suffering, not willing that

any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

Now, when the apostle charged his friends not to forget the sentence, which we have chosen for our text, he did not mean that they were to repeat it over and over again to themselves, until they could not get it out of their heads. The language was indeed striking, and could hardly fail to arrest the attention of readers. But it was not words that the apostle wished them to lay hold of and retain; it was thoughts, expressed and conveyed by words. And we must take care lest all that happens, as a result of our study of this memorable verse, should be to start a ringing in our ears, and a singing in our brains. The construction is so impressive, the words are chosen with such skill, that we are apt to be captivated by their sound, and left in a state of bewilderment as to their meaning.

(1) Consider them, to begin with, *in relation to the Divine estimate of time.*

The terms "great" and "small," when used by us, are always and merely relative. They necessarily imply a comparison of one magnitude with another, and, apart from such a mutual reference, they can never be applied justly. For what is great, when compared with one quantity, becomes at the next moment

small when compared with another, and vice versa.

To the man who owns but a shilling in the world, a neighbour with five pounds seems well off. But the possessor of five pounds thinks himself in anything but affluent circumstances when he measures his resources against those of a friend who has a hundred pounds. The latter, estimating his wealth alongside that of a person with a thousand pounds to his credit, feels himself to be virtually impecunious. A fortune reckoned by thousands of pounds seems like poverty in comparison with riches which run into figures of hundreds of thousands. With a multi-millionaire, I suppose, one shilling is as a thousand pounds—or, at any rate, a thousand pounds are as one shilling.

Take another illustration of the same idea. In the eyes of a child, a youth well on in his teens has the gratification of being reckoned a grown man. To those who are still in their early and enviable twenties, a person who has seen forty years is too old for anything, and ready for the shelf. Seventy or thereby, on the other hand, seems to be a great age to people who are still on what they call " the sunny side " of fifty. But by the nonagenarian we are all, no matter how grey our hairs, how rheumatic our joints, or how wrinkled our faces,

tolerated as more or less juveniles. And yet he himself, venerable on account of his years and his experience, looking back over his life, feels that "his days are as an handbreadth," and that "they have passed away as the swift ships."

In comparison with one day, a thousand years wear the appearance of a long stretch of time. But in comparison with eternity, a thousand years shrink into insignificance and become as one day. God knows "no beginning of days, nor end of years." He inhabiteth eternity. He is, and was, and is to come. To Him there is neither past nor future, but an eternal Now. Memory and expectation have no actuality, in our sense of these words, in the ever present experience of the "I am" —"the High and Lofty One whose Name is Holy." Has such a conception of the Divine Unchangeableness, of God as being "the Same yesterday, and to-day, and forever," any direct message for your heart and mine? I think it has. Many of our sorrows derive their poignancy, do they not, from the fact of separation by space or time. It affords us no little consolation when some one brings us the news that he recently saw, or that he hopes soon to see, a dear friend of ours in a far-off country. And if the knowledge that a fellow-creature has a fresh recollection of such intimacy, or a good

prospect of it before long, affects us in that way, should not the assurance, that those, whose welfare touches us deeply, are always present to the mind of God, comfort us greatly? As it is with communions broken by ranges of space, so also is it with those interrupted by intervals of time. God bridges the separations established by both elements. Those who have passed hence, and we who remain, are ever together in the immediate consciousness of Him Who transcends time, and are compassed about by the self-same Love of the Eternal Father.

(2) Consider, in the second place, *the meaning of our text in relation to duty.*

The two clauses are supplementary to each other in their teaching; and, in order to realize the truth of that statement, we must examine them in turn.

(*a*) The first clause asserts that "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years."

A more graphic way of emphasizing the value, which attaches to the simplest and most obvious unit of time, could hardly be imagined. One day—from sunrise to sunrise—how brief and unimportant a period it seems to us, who are more accustomed perhaps to think in terms of weeks, and months, and years. Yet the response, which we give to a single day's obligations and temptations and

claims, is of the utmost significance. We make history; we give direction to our own destiny and the destinies of other lives, by the choices we form, the words we speak, the deeds we accomplish. As moral and spiritual beings, we cannot express ourselves in action and speech otherwise than in a momentous manner. The results are registered in our characters; and the characters of those around us are affected also. "He that is faithful in that which is least," said Jesus, "is faithful also in much; and he that is unrighteous in that which is least, is unrighteous also in much." Limited in their sphere, restricted in point of tir e though our opportunities may be, what we make of them is never a small matter. There pertains inevitably to a human life—be it long or short, be it spent in conspicuous surroundings or in obscure—a great worth, a tremendous solemnity. For, with the Lord, "one day is as a thousand years."

(*b*) The second clause asserts that "a thousand years are with the Lord as one day."

By our conduct we not only declare our personal attitude to the Divine Will, but we also serve a Cause, we contribute to the coming of a Kingdom. The Cause may be the cause of righteousness, and truth, and purity: or the cause of sin, and falsehood,

and evil. The Kingdom may be the Kingdom of light, or the Kingdom of darkness. By our fidelity we hasten the establishment of Christ's reign upon earth: by our infidelity we oppose and retard it. All things are not yet put under His feet, but they shall be. His Kingdom is sure to come—sooner or later. The fact of its being delayed does not affect the necessity under which we lie of being absolutely loyal to its interests. We must serve, as if the one thing wanting to bring about its consummation was the single-hearted zeal of each one of us individually. Beyond that we need have no concern. God never wastes time. If His purposes take a thousand years to reach their fulfilment, it is because, for reasons hidden from our knowledge, they require a thousand years. He never loses sight of His august designs during a period of that length. They are ever in His mind, and are furthered by Him from stage to stage with the energy that we could conceive them commanding, were they designs whose accomplishment was practicable in a single day. Forget not, when you are tempted to think that the King's Cause lags, forget not that He is never slack concerning His promise. With Him "a thousand years" of laborious process and effectuation "are as one day."

God is working His purpose out, as year succeeds to year,
God is working His purpose out, and the time is drawing near,
Nearer and nearer draws the time, the time that shall surely be,
When the earth shall be filled with the glory of God, as the waters cover the sea.

(3) Consider, in the last place, *the application of our text to the Divine care for human beings.*

To appreciate aright its message on this subject, we must again look at the two clauses separately.

(*a*) "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years." These words suggest to us a most encouraging and uplifting truth. Tennyson refers to a certain aspect of it in one of the cantos of "In Memoriam":—

O days and hours, your work is this,
To hold me from my proper place,
A little while from his embrace,
For fuller gain of after bliss.

That out of distance might ensue
Desire of nearness doubly sweet;
And unto meeting when we meet,
Delight a hundredfold accrue.

But even more apt by way of commentary on this clause of our text is a sonnet by Keats. Addressing a friend, Keats says:—

O that a week could be an age, and we
Felt parting and warm meeting every week,
Then one poor year a thousand years would be,
The flush of welcome ever on the cheek.

The poet's idea is that, if every time his friend

and he met they could meet as though they had not seen each other for a long time, their interest in one another would always be fresh and keen.

> "O to arrive," he says, "each Monday morn from Ind!
> To land each Tuesday from the rich Levant!"

What is a matter of desire in this poem with respect to the relationship between Keats and his friend, is a matter of fact with respect to the relationship of God to us. He meets us day by day with an interest that is ever warm; He waits for us "with a flush of welcome." "His mercies," as a prophet says, "are new every morning." "One day is with Him as a thousand years."

(*b*) And the second clause has something of a similar kind to tell us:—"A thousand years are with the Lord as one day."

The experience that lay at the basis of the poet's desire,

> To arrive each Monday morn from Ind!
> To land each Tuesday from the rich Levant!

is true of more friendships than that which existed between him and the person to whom he wrote his sonnet. We are apt to wear out the patience of our friends. Is it not the case that they can see too much of us at times, that intervals of absence, so far from impairing their affection for us, really stimulate it? Their interest in us increases during

periods of enforced separation. But God's patience with us, though we tax it grievously by our fretfulness and folly, is like a fountain that abounds with water. He is long-suffering toward us. Forget not this thing, how much you and I are debtors to the forbearance of God. If we exercise our memories sincerely at all, it will be impossible for us to forget that. Yet His compassions fail not. The Creator of the ends of the earth, our Father, fainteth not neither is weary. "A thousand years" of ministries of Love and Care "are with Him as one day."

V

THE SUPREME DEPRIVATION

"Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me."—PSALM li. 11.

THERE is no clearly marked sequence of ideas in the Fifty-first Psalm. What impresses us, as we read its verses, is the absence of plan and order. The Psalmist is not intent on producing an artistically balanced and carefully finished poem. Like the swirling waters of a stream in high flood, wave overtaking and mingling with wave, the thoughts and emotions of the penitent's heart pour themselves forth in confusion. "An extreme emergency," says Professor A. B. Davidson, "does, no doubt, sometimes give something like a supernatural balance and calmness to the mind, but many times the agitation betrays itself in the abrupt and fragmentary character of the exclamations." The anguish of this Psalmist is undisguised by any "supernatural" self-control. Acknowledgments of guilt, cries for forgiveness, promises of gratitude, and vows of obedience in the future surge up and break into one another. In a series of disjointed

ejaculations the soul of a suppliant, exercised by contrition, is revealed.

Dr Chalmers described the Fifty-first as the most deeply affecting of all the Psalms, and the one most applicable to himself. Men and women in every age have borne a similar testimony, if not by an explicit statement to that effect, then at all events by their practice. They have found in it the story of their own lives. Its language, with all the veracity of unborrowed and unstudied speech, has expressed the remorse and repentance by which they were smitten. Again and again have the words of confession and entreaty for pardon been informed with the passion which originally inspired them. The Psalm is a sacred record hallowed by the tears of penitents from generation to generation. It is a sanctuary, to the study of any part of which we dare not advance save in the spirit, which Eastern people from time immemorial have symbolized by the reverent action of "taking their shoes from off their feet."

There is a peculiarity about verse 11, which, though obvious enough, may perhaps have escaped your notice. It contains two petitions, and these, unlike all the other petitions in the Psalm, are negative in form. What is passionately urged is not that something should be done, but that

something should not be done. Deliverance from a possible tragic separation from God is earnestly sought for. That alarming experience is represented under two aspects. On the one hand, the Psalmist recoils from the idea of his being excluded from the Divine Presence, expelled from the secret place of the Most High. "Cast me not away from Thy presence." On the other hand, he dreads the possibility of God's leaving him, withdrawing Himself from the fellowship which has hitherto subsisted between them. "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me."

The petitions are ultimately one, inasmuch as they both contemplate with despair the breaking up of a highly prized communion. But the standpoints, from which they describe the coming to pass of that mournful event, are different. With regard to the first form which the prayer takes, Sir Richard Baker says, "God indeed hath a presence of being, and this is everywhere. And He hath a presence of power, and this is everywhere. But He hath a presence of grace and favour, and this is not everywhere. This is the presence which I so much long to keep, which I so much fear to lose."

Let us concentrate our attention, however, on the second form. The language employed is quite

adequate to express the deepened meaning which New Testament teaching imparts to it.

(1) Consider, in the first place, *the magnitude of the loss which is deprecated in the words of our text*:— "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me."

Think of some of the deprivations to which human beings are exposed in this world. The mentioning of a few will be sufficient. Others will occur to you from your own experience of life.

Here is a man, for instance, who, after years of patient waiting and economizing, has ventured to risk all his savings in a business of his own. He has taken the best available advice, and been slow to commit himself. The enterprise on which he has finally decided to embark is, in every respect, an honourable one. There ought, he reckons, to be an opening for his energies, and a sphere for his talents. The element of chance is not ignored by him, but the calculations he has made, and sought to verify over and over again, encourage him to proceed. And so at last, with not a little anxiety, he takes the final step. But disappointment after disappointment proves to be in store for him. Ill-fortune pursues him week by week. Try as he may, he cannot stem the tide which sets against him. There is no disguising from himself of the fact, that his little capital, made up of hard-won

earnings, is gradually being taken away from him. Those of us who have seen the thing happening know what it means to a home.

Take another case. Here is a man who has been leading an active life since his boyhood. His work has been full of interest to him, and success has attended his labours. With a zest that has commanded the admiration of his fellows, he has thrown himself habitually into whatever he happened to be doing. Never idle, he has acted on the principle of laying hours of business and leisure alike under tribute to his appetite for enjoyment. Conceive the feelings of such a person, when, in the zenith of his powers, he is confronted with the intimation that his eyesight is rapidly going. How blank must the future appear to him in view of the prospect of a calamity of that kind. For one so alert as he, with a brain eagerly formulating schemes for obtaining a larger return of wealth and happiness than he has ever before secured, to be arrested suddenly in his career by the fact that he will soon be blind, must be an appalling experience. "Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun."

Again, think of the state of mind of people when they are told, or when they begin to realize for themselves, that they have not long to live. In

most circumstances it is a painful announcement to be entrusted with. News of this kind has to be "broken," as we say—given in fragments and not as a whole. In most circumstances it is a sad discovery to make.

> Our hopes and fears
> Start up alarm'd, and o'er life's narrow verge
> Look down.

Only the few whose sufferings are very terrible, or whose infirmities are very burdensome, or whose faith is very bright, express a keen desire to be gone. The many, unreconciled or reconciled but partially to the great change that awaits them, cling to life and cry to be spared. "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life."

These are sore deprivations of which I have been speaking—the loss of worldly possessions, of sight, and of life itself. But grievous as they are, they are not for a moment to be compared with that which is contemplated in the prayer of the Psalmist:—"Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me."

(2) Consider, in the second place, *what is entailed in this supreme loss.* I shall not attempt to enumerate the various offices fulfilled by the Holy Spirit, as these are recorded in the Scriptures. Let me try rather to indicate certain disastrous results

in experience of His withdrawing His gracious influence.

To begin with, there is the inability to appreciate oodness and purity, and to respond sympathetically to everything that is tender and unselfish and innocent. He is not to be envied who has forfeited the capacity of being touched to the finer issues of his nature. Let a man have developed the highest intellectual powers, or cultivated the most wonderful practical aptitudes: his attainments in these respects will but poorly compensate for his losses in the deeper and rarer sensibilities of the soul. To be unreproved by the generous actions of others and ready only with discrediting reflections about their motives, to be unmoved by deeds of self-sacrifice and unsusceptible to the glory that is radiated by the patience of many around us, to have no tears of sorrow for sufferers or of joy for those who are showing a brave face in the midst of their troubles and fighting manfully against the temptations which daily beset them—that is a condition, from which we may well pray to be saved.

Again, when a man ceases to hate sin, one of the disastrous results, to which I have referred, manifests itself in his experience. A sensitive conscience bespeaks the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

But when no revulsions of feeling occur against the idea of our choosing the baser alternative, when we have accustomed ourselves to the fact of evil in our own life and in the world, and are past the stage of shuddering at it and vehemently opposing it—then we are strangers to the company of that sacred Guest, whose presence inspires the heart with holy detestation of sin. A man may succeed, as the world counts success, although he is thus deserted. He may amass riches, and come to honour on account of his knowledge or his skill, although temptation has ceased to have any genuine meaning for him. His name may be on every one's lips as an example of what industry can accomplish, although the struggle against the real foes of human well-being has been abandoned by him. But all the while he continues to excite the astonishment and envy of multitudes, he is dead—dead to the great distinctions and to the cause of God, in vindication of which the Son of Man laid down His life.

Once more, there is an utterly secular state of mind and heart, into which men and women can only too easily settle down. It may be induced in various ways—by ambition, by yielding to care, by the neglect of religious exercises and habits of devotion. The higher affinities, in which our

nature seeks to express itself, are crushed. No value is attached to that conscious relationship to God, which it is man's privilege to take advantage of. The joy of access to Him, and of entering into the secret place where He communes with those who confide in Him, is despised. The thoughts and ideals, the assurances and hopes which the friendship of God inspires, are treated as negligible items of human experience. Only that which appeals to the senses, which can be seen and touched, only what ultimately is material, is regarded as important. The sort of interest that satisfies curiosity or pride, appetite or the instinct for amusement, the interest that can be made the subject of boasting or the object of envy, is recognized as alone worthy of being prosecuted with enthusiasm. And so a human life, charged with infinite promise, becomes impoverished in its desires, stunted in its attainments, shrunken in its aims and outlook.

(3) Consider, in the last place, *the spirit in which this prayer of the Psalmist's should be uttered.*

On the one hand, it is to be offered up in fear. That, against the happening of which the petition makes entreaty, is a real possibility. We know it to be so. Therefore we ought to be alarmed, lest in our case it becomes an actuality. Not

because God is an arbitrary Being, Who does according to the counsel of His Own Will, ought we to cherish this feeling; but because sin grieves Him. His withdrawal of Himself is never a capricious action. He cannot dwell with evil. The Old Testament writers described God as a "jealous" God. He revealed Himself to them in that character. They found that His Spirit departed from men, when they regarded iniquity in their hearts, and practised it in their speech and conduct. The supreme penalty of habitual and unrepented sin does not consist in physical torments, or outward adversities, though these sometimes follow on wrong-doing. It consists in a deprivation, the disastrous significance of which human language cannot express—a deprivation which, sin being what it is and God being what He is, ensues as an inevitable consequence of wilful and persistent indulgence—the taking away of the Holy Spirit.

But, on the other hand, the prayer is to be offered up in humble assurance. We know of no other province except the soul of man, in which the Holy Spirit exercises His secret functions. There may be other regions, there may be other intelligent natures differently constituted from ourselves, in which He carries on His hidden and noiseless work. But all that is revealed to us is, that the

gracious office which He fulfils is that of regenerating mankind, of applying and giving effect in humanity to the redemptive purpose of God declared in the life and obedience, the Passion and death, of Jesus Christ. Is it likely then that He will forsake a human life willingly, abandon His saving ministry in the case of even one individual? Not unless His overtures and entreaties are steadily rejected, not unless through obdurate indifference and sullen impenitence the ear is stopped to His voice and the door of the heart is closed against His entrance. He bears with us long, and is ever faithful to His task. He is God, and not a man that He should be turned aside from His purpose. The interest in us that binds Him to His gracious work is the interest of everlasting Love.

Spirit of purity and grace,
Our weakness, pitying, see;
O make our hearts Thy dwelling-place,
And worthier Thee.

VI

A MOMENTOUS DISTINCTION

"Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to Thy loving-kindness remember Thou me."—PSALM XXV. 7 (R.V.).

THERE are nine Psalms which are written in acrostic form, and the Twenty-fifth is one of them. The particular principle, which it observes, is that each verse in the original begins with a word whose first letter is a different and successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The scheme, as a matter of fact, is not carried out with absolute accuracy, but the irregularities do not call for special notice.

It will be evident to all that a framework of this kind necessarily imposes fetters on the freedom and progress of poetic composition. Intended probably as an aid to memory, it inevitably restricted authors who adopted it to subjects of a certain type. Themes, that had to be developed logically or historically, could not be brought into conformity with its artificial conditions. But it proved a suitable medium for giving expression to prayers and meditations, utterances of faith complete

in themselves and independent of any connection with what might happen to precede or follow. The Twenty-fifth Psalm is made up of staccato sentences of that character.

In his delightful book entitled "The Psalms in Human History," Mr Prothero describes an incident familiar to us all, with which this Psalm is associated. In 1685 a commission sitting at Wigtown condemned two Cameronian women, Margaret Maclachlan, an elderly widow of sixty, and Margaret Wilson, a girl of eighteen, who refused to abjure what was known as the "Apologetical Declaration." They were sentenced "to be tied to stakes within the flood-mark in the Water of Blednoch where the sea flows at high-water, and there to be drowned." The sentence was carried out on the 11th of May 1685.

"Twice a day," writes Mr Prothero, "up the deep channel of the sluggish Blednoch, fringed by steep and sloping mudbanks, sweeps the yellow tide of the sea. Stakes were set in the ooze of the tide-way, to which the two women were bound. The elder woman, Margaret Maclachlan, was set lower down the river, that the younger sufferer might see her struggles, and her course finished, before she herself was reached by the rising sea. Pitying her youth, the executioners tried to save Margaret

Wilson. As the water swirled about her body, she was drawn to the edge of the bank and offered her life if she would say, 'God save the King,' and take the test. She was ready to say 'May God save the King, if He will,' for she desired, she said, the salvation of all men; but she would not forswear her faith or take the test. So she was once more secured to the stake and left to her fate. With her fresh young voice, as the salt waves curled above her breast and all but touched her lips, she sang the Twenty-fifth Psalm:—

> My sins and faults of youth
> Do thou, O Lord, forget;
> After Thy mercy think on me,
> And for Thy goodness great;

and so continued singing till her voice was choked in the rising tide."

"This Psalm," says Dr Maclaren, "has no marks of occasion or period." It deals with facts of experience, which characterize the relationship of the human soul to God in every age and under every condition of existence. As regards our text in particular, no paraphrasing has to be carried out, no substitution of modern for archaic phrases has to be made, in order to render it a natural and sincere form of speech for you and me to employ. It is that as it stands:—"Remember not the sins

of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to Thy loving-kindness remember Thou me."

We shall perhaps arrive at a clear understanding of the issues involved in this prayer of the Psalmist's with its negative and positive petitions, if we proceed along the line of considering two principles which govern our thoughts about ourselves.

(1) The first principle may be called *the principle of self-extension.* Though the word may sound somewhat unusual, the process of experience to which it refers is familiar to every one.

For example, we all identify our bodies with ourselves; and if any part of our bodies is regarded as more conspicuously ourselves than another, it is our head and particularly our face. "Who is this?" a friend perhaps asks, pointing to a photograph in an album, which he has happened to open. "Oh," we reply in colloquial speech, "that is me, when I was a boy."

The clothes which we wear, and while we are wearing them, are assimilated by us in the most intimate fashion. "Who touched me?" asked Jesus on one occasion, when a suffering woman ventured to lay her hand on the hem of His garment.

For the purpose of revealing or establishing our identity, we generally, of course, give our names.

But sometimes we feel obliged to go further, or not so far, as the case may be. The question, "Who are you?" can be addressed to us in a spirit of inquisitiveness or in a tone of insolence, that merits no answer. But if the person who puts it has a good right to do so, or does not offend our susceptibilities by his manner, we are ready with a reply which is apposite to the circumstances. For special reasons we associate our personalities with our relatives, our property, or our vocation in life. "I am so and so's brother," we say; or "I'm the man to whom such and such a house belongs"; or "I'm a doctor, or a teacher, or a mechanic."

We definitely extend our individuality, also, to any object in which we happen to be deeply interested for the time being, or upon which our efforts are being expended in a signal manner. "Where am I?" a player says to his partner, though the "I" in question may be nothing more than a ball which he is using in a game, and cannot find.

Again, the reputation which we enjoy in our own circle of friends, or in the community at large, represents a further extension of our personalities. To be aware of what that is, is apt to make us self-conscious and encourage us to play a part. But, whether it be for good or for evil, the fact remains that most of us are able to recognize our-

selves when a reference is made in speech or in print to an unnamed person with certain qualities. Other people, at any rate, understand by the adjectives that are used, by the appreciation or criticism that is expressed, who is the subject of discussion. The cap, as the saying is, may not fit; but it is intended for our heads all the same. We may neither be so estimable nor so despicable, as those who make us the theme of conversation or writing think we are. That raises another question which is irrelevant at present. The point to be emphasized meantime is, that a certain conception of our characters and capabilities exists in the minds of those who are more or less acquainted with us; and whether we approve of the notion they have formed or not, we are compelled, if we get to know what it is, to acknowledge that it represents us. Such an acknowledgment is presupposed even by our action in repudiating the justice of the prevailing conception.

(2) More need not be said about this first principle —the principle of self-extension. The second stands in closer relation with the words of our text, and, for want of a better expression by which to describe it, we may speak of it as *the principle of self-distinction.*

The process of experience, to which reference falls to be made now, is every bit as familiar as the previous one. It is of an opposite kind. I shall not stay to show how it works out in connection with all the former illustrations. Three examples of its application will suffice.

To begin with, while there are some interests which lead us to identify ourselves with our property, there are others which have a contrary effect. We distinguish ourselves from our possessions. "My daughters," wrote Lord Houghton after a destructive fire had taken place at his country seat, "have lost their letters, their journals, their mother's jewelry, their love-letters (if they had any), their keep-sakes, photographs of the dead and living, every scrap and every memorial of their past lives, their birthday presents, their early poems—but they have their lives before them." His Lordship's daughters, though all their belongings had been destroyed, still survived. For they were other than the things which were theirs, and which had perished. And while for special reasons I may be willing to describe myself as the person who owns a certain coat, the coat is not me. It is only my coat. A thief or an absent-minded guest may go off with it, to my great inconvenience. But I, who am left to deplore the loss, am myself.

The coat is only a separable, even if prized, accident of my personality.

Again, while we extend our individuality to our bodies and say to the person next us in a crowd, for instance, "You are crushing me," we also distinguish ourselves from our bodies. We speak of them as our bodies; and we imply by that pronominal manner of speech, that we, our true selves, decline to be confounded with them. Personally I never like to hear people say in a house of mourning, "I shall take a last look at him." It is a lifeless body, face and hands very dear to them, on which they turn a fond gaze. But it is not on their friend that their tearful eyes are fixed. He is not lying in their presence, cold and blanched. He has passed into the invisible world, where God reigns in His Love, even as He reigns here. And, though the habit is universal, there is something utterly pagan in the reference to a burial as the burial of a person. For we never take part in such a service. The solemn office is only rendered to what is perishable about those "whom we have loved and lost awhile."

Once more, while we cannot prevent people forming an opinion about us and estimating our worth, we have our own ideas about ourselves. Between what others think of us and what we

know about ourselves, we draw a distinction. To see ourselves as they see us, does not necessarily imply that we are up against the truth. A man may feel that the reputation he possesses is altogether an unfair one, based on unconscious misunderstandings or malicious interpretations of his life and conduct. The mean and selfish dog that society makes him out to be, he may be aware he is not. The stigma which is attached to his name may be a brand which he knows to be undeserved. Or, on the other hand, he may be afflicted by the knowledge that his reputation stands too high. The worth attributed to him may only too acutely be felt by him to be the estimate of generous ignorance. "I often have a kind of waking dream," wrote Dean Church. "Up one road, the image of a man decked and adorned as if for a triumph, carried up by rejoicing and exulting friends, who praise his goodness and achievements. And on the other road, turned back to back to that image, there is the very man himself in sordid and squalid apparel, surrounded not by friends but by ministers of justice, and going on, while his friends are exulting, to his certain and perhaps awful judgment." Of such a kind as that may be the distinction, which some of us draw between what we are

aware that we are, and what others conceive us to be.

(3) *How far can we carry this principle of self-distinction?* We have seen how it may be applied to separate our identity from our property, our bodies, and our reputations. Can we carry it any further?—that is the question, for which the discussion that has gone before has been a preparation. Would we like to carry the principle any further? Dare we venture into the region of experience where conscience is most jealous of its interests and rights, and distinguish ourselves from our characters, from what we have been and done? Is the principle valid when it is laid hold of to drive a wedge between "the sins of my youth and the transgressions of my later years," and myself?

"Sing me a song," wrote Robert Louis Stevenson:—

> Sing me a song of a lad that is gone,
> Say, could that lad be I?
> Merry of soul he sailed on a day,
> Over the sea to Skye.
>
> Billow and breeze, islands and seas,
> Mountains of rain and sun,
> All that was good, all that was fair,
> All that was me is gone.

"All that was me is gone." Am I therefore forever identified with those base surrenders of my

youth, and those vile treacheries of my adult days —the guilt of which I cannot shake off by a deep and prolonged shudder of shame? Am I disqualified henceforth for experiences and attainments of another order, and condemned and enchained to a life of servitude? Am I only what I have been, and must I ever be what, by my choice, I have become? Is there no escape from my past? Does God distinguish between my sinful record and me?

The Psalmist, penetrating with his sense of desperate need into the Divine Nature, made the great venture of entertaining this hope. That his hope was well-grounded, we know. For revelation has scattered the shadows of uncertainty since his time, and shed a glorious light over the human race. The Son of God has come, and given us an understanding of Him that is true. By the sacrifice of Himself, He has satisfied the claims of eternal righteousness. What we could not establish for ourselves by argument, He has announced. We may not be able to state the doctrine of the atonement in a way that will pass the tests of the schools of theology. But we know what the Cross signifies for us: we know how the atonement applies in our experience. It sustains the faith, it justifies to our consciences the belief, that there is forgive-

ness with God. It enables us, without disavowing our responsibility, to repudiate the character in which we have hitherto expressed our spiritual capacities, and denounce it as "not we, but sin." It declares with a voice of authority, which no stinging taunts of recollection nor challenges of memory can silence, that by union with Christ we are delivered from the bondage of evil, and emancipated from the chains of causation which our past has forged, and which would bring us to death. It promises us a future of victory in which "all that is good, all that is fair, all that is us" will be fulfilled, for a power mightier than our own will be enlisted in the fight. "Not we, but Christ" will win the day.

God does distinguish between our past and us. A new beginning is offered to every one. To the opportunity of His mercy and grace let us give a great answer of faith and obedience.

> My sins and faults of youth
> Do thou, O Lord, forget;
> After Thy mercy think on me,
> And for Thy Goodness great.

VII

TURNING THE OTHER CHEEK

"Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also."—MATT. v. 39.

WHEN we come upon a saying like this in the Gospels, "Whosoever shall compel thee to go one mile, go with him twain," the reference is not at once obvious. We need to be informed or reminded that the precept, which it enunciates, is based on a practice which prevailed in the days of the Roman Empire. Peaceful inhabitants of a district, through which troops happened to be marching, were liable to be called upon to assist in the transport of the soldier's baggage. Under martial law they were obliged to convey it as far as the military authorities were pleased to appoint—it might be for a long or for a short distance. Suppose, said Jesus to His disciples, you are impressed into service of this kind for a stage of one mile: after you have discharged that enforced task, keep the bundles on your back, and volunteer to go a second mile.

But when we read the words of our text, we don't

require to quote ancient customs in order to explain their significance. A slap on the face has been a slap on the face, since it was first administered and received, until now. It causes as painful a sensation to-day as it ever did. It is as insulting an experience in the twentieth century as it can possibly have been two thousand years ago. There is nothing distinctively Oriental, or peculiarly characteristic of the conduct of Roman soldiers, about this familiar method of assault. The sense of indignity and affronted self-respect aroused in the breast of a person so treated is intelligible to us all. Human nature still resents such rough handling, and does not take kindly to the suggestion, or rather to the demand of Christ, that when we are smitten on the right cheek, we are to turn the other also.

(1) The first thing to be remarked in connection with this saying is, that it *prescribes the duty of Christians as individuals.*

Our Lord is not laying down a principle here with regard to the attitude which an organized society ought to take up towards those who infringe its laws, and disturb its peace. A State is bound to resist evil, and secure the persons and property of its citizens against molestation on the part of wrong-doers. When the officers of the law

apprehend a criminal, and a judge or a magistrate inflicts a penalty on him, these men are not acting in a private capacity but as representatives of society. A community, which winked at offences, and permitted thieves and housebreakers, lecherous brutes and drunken bullies, and the like to do as they pleased, would very soon be reduced to a condition of utter chaos. Order must be maintained in the interest of the common welfare, and punishment meted out to those who prey upon their fellows and do them hurt. Our Lord does not mention the maxim from the Old Testament (v. 38) in order to condemn it as a principle of civil law. For it is a sound, if tersely expressed, one for the guidance of those whose business it is to dispense justice :—"An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth."

Again, the duty of the individual Christian, when injury is done to some one else, is not defined by this saying of Christ's. The question, for example, of what it would be right for you or me to do, if in our presence a helpless child or a defenceless woman was being cruelly treated, does not arise in connection with our text, and is not settled by it. Certainly it would be no part of our duty in such circumstances to assist the scoundrel to wreak the full measure of his violence on his victim,

any more than it would be incumbent on us to encourage with whispered directions or significant gestures a burglar, whom we happened to discover in the act of attempting to force a noiseless entrance into our neighbour's house. The words we are considering concern the attitude and conduct of Christian men and women, who have themselves been injured, towards those who have injured them. "It is our cheek we are to turn," says Robert Louis Stevenson. "When another's face is buffeted, perhaps a little of the lion will become us best."

(2) Our attention should be directed, in the second place, to the fact that *it is not a strictly accurate description of this saying of Christ's to call it a commandment.*

It is not a commandment in the same sense as "Thou shalt not steal" is a commandment. In the latter case a clearly defined course of conduct is prohibited. This commandment, as the Shorter Catechism says, "forbiddeth whatsoever doth, or may unjustly, hinder our own or our neighbour's wealth or outward estate." The obligations it imposes on us are explicit and direct; the scope of its application is indicated plainly by the very terms in which it is stated.

But we recognize at once that no such precision

and circumscription of sphere within which it is authoritative, characterizes the injunction, "Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." Obviously it is not to be regarded as simply laying down the line of duty which ought to be followed by those who are actually and literally "smitten on the right cheek." Those who subject one another, on occasions of great excitement of feeling, to treatment of this kind are for the most part of a youthful age. It is not alone to their unrestrained behaviour and quickness to strike out in return that the words of Christ refer. Their application is wider far than that. The range of experience, which they cover, embraces many provinces of our common adult life. And because we require to interpret and think out the meaning of the saying, paraphrase it in relation to a variety of circumstances and situations, we cannot, with strict accuracy, call it a commandment.

It was not our Lord's purpose to provide His disciples, and their successors in the faith, with a code of rules and regulations. If the Gospels are examined carefully, it will be found, I think, that the only subject, on which His statements with regard to moral relationships are detailed, is that of the sacredness of the marriage tie. In

these days when the idea that love and lust are synonymous is being encouraged in many quarters, when the frenzy of sensual desire is supposed to justify any breach of virtue, when wide acceptance attaches to the notion that the promises given in marriage are of the nature of terminable undertakings rather than solemn vows, the words of Christ on the subject of divorce require to be burned into the conscience of Christendom. But with the exception of this subject (and that an exception of the kind was made is a startling circumstance) our Lord's method of teaching did not consist in laying down definite and systematic directions for conduct. Instead of particularizing, He sought by arresting utterances to quicken the consciences of his hearers, and make them reflect. The day was past when, by painstaking accommodations to an external law in the way of observances and avoidances, a man might feel that he had fulfilled all righteousness and earned the approval of God. Christ aimed at communicating His own eternal Spirit to His followers, that they might perceive with the eyes of their souls what goodness and conformity to the Father's Will meant, and be inspired with a passionate eagerness to realize that gleaming ideal. His life was their light. In that light they learned to

see clearly. His words were like shafts of light striking in on their darkness, disturbing and dispelling it, revealing fresh possibilities of obedience and reaches of attainment, stimulating new compunctions and desires. The saying before us is not properly understood, if it be regarded as a bare commandment. It is a communication in language, a sacramental mediation, of Christ's Spirit. Its content is not to be prosaically spaced out within the limits of the actual expressions used. It is an appeal of love to those who have ears to hear it, and hearts to respond to it. It glows with the fire of moral enthusiasm, and the authoritative claim of holiness. "The words that I speak unto you," says Jesus, "they are Spirit, and they are Life." "Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also."

(3) Notice, in the third place, *the attitude towards our fellows which our text prescribes.*

I have chosen to describe the saying as an appeal of love rather than a commandment. It is expressed, you will observe, not in terms of a general principle, but in the arresting form of a graphic instance. The action of turning the other cheek to the smiter is a specimen of the kind of conduct which Jesus requires His followers to exhibit. If their lives are really governed by His Spirit,

they will be found cherishing this temper, and cultivating this mode of behaviour, in relation to others.

It is an appeal of love—of the love wherewith Jesus loved us and gave Himself for us. It does not claim our attention, and demand our compliance, with the abrupt dictation of a mere precept. It addresses itself to our hearts and consciences with all the strength and entreaty, which its perfect embodiment in a life makes possible. Thus did Jesus Christ live amongst men. In self-forgetful love He went about doing deeds of mercy and kindness, teaching and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, seeking and saving those that were lost. When He was reviled, He reviled not again ; when He suffered, He threatened not. He endured the gainsaying of sinners against Himself. The urgency and inextinguishable fervour of His love for men bore Him through the agony of the Garden of Gethsemane, and the Passion of Calvary—held Him with a faster grip than that of deep-driven nails to the awful ordeal of the Cross. It is the love of Christ which finds speech, and appeals to us in these words, " Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also."

It is the love of Christ which constrains us, when we seek to give effect to this Spirit in our lives.

Towards those who misunderstand and despise us, towards those who vex us and make life a burden to us, toward those who put obstacles in our path and wrong us, this is the attitude which our Lord prescribes, and to which He Himself was ever faithful. There is no limit to the patience and forbearance which we ought to display for His sake, no length to which we ought not to be prepared to go in the way of endurance and gentleness. You will look in vain for indications in the Scriptures as to the precise circumstances that are to call forth this temper, and for explicit guidance with respect to the course that you ought to take on any given occasion. "A religion of love," as Dr Denney has said, "cannot be a statutory religion." Every day of our lives abundant opportunities are presented to us "to turn the other cheek also." And the ability to recognize such opportunities, as well as the moral power to respond to them, cannot be acquired save through daily communion with the Spirit of Christ.

When our Lord spoke these words, He expected that they would sink into the hearts of His followers, and bear fruit in their lives. He looked for the manifestation of His own Spirit of love in the characters and conduct of those who heard His appeal. And imperfect and inadequate (as they

themselves would have confessed) though their obedience was, He was not wholly disappointed. Nor has there been a single generation since that has not included men and women, whose lives bore signal and romantic testimony to the spell and power of His Spirit.

"If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing," the servants of Naaman ventured to say to their indignant master, "wouldst thou not have done it?" Human nature has always had a partiality for "great things." It is disposed to believe in the efficacy of the single dramatic deed. And it attaches much importance to, and is ready to build high hopes on, the results of elaborately organized movements, comprehensive legislative enactments, or diplomatic coups. But the Kingdom of God is most effectually advanced by the ministry of its members in the "small" and familiar things of daily life and social intercourse. The creation of large opportunities is of no avail, if those who must realize them are morally unequal to them. "When a Christian spirit is spoken of," says the author of 'Ecce Homo,' "it may be remarked that a forgiving spirit is usually meant." People who do not profess to be Christians know what the essential characteristic of a Christian life is—know, as Jesus Himself said they would know,

what differentiates discipleship from a condition of detachment from the privileges and obligations of its fellowship. They watch for the "turning of the other cheek," for the conquest of revengeful feelings, for the overcoming of the temptation to strike back in resentful word and deed. In that self-controlled and self-sacrificing demeanour, so hard to acquire and cherish, they recognize the likeness of Him, Who was "meek and lowly in heart."

VIII

FAITH AND LIFE

"That life which I now live in the flesh, I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, Who loved me, and gave Himself up for me."—GAL. ii. 20 (R.V.).

MARTIN LUTHER, commenting on the paragraph from which our text is taken, writes thus:—"It seemeth a very strange and monstrous manner of speaking to say—'I live, I live not: I am dead, I am not dead: I am a sinner, I am not a sinner: I have the law, I have not the law.' But," the Reformer goes on, "these phrases (seemingly strange and monstrous) are sweet and comfortable to all those that believe in Christ." The form of statement employed does not involve a real, but only an apparent, contradiction. No law of logic is broken by the apostle when he first affirms, and then proceeds to deny. It is his striking and characteristic method of expressing deep facts of experience—as any one may perceive who has patience to consider what he means.

Very plentiful is the ore of Christian truth

deposited in the rich seams of this passage of Scripture. Take that splendid claim for example:—"I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." "If any one knocks at the door of my breast and says, 'Who lives here?' my reply is, 'Jesus Christ lives here, not Martin Luther.'"

Or, consider how inexhaustible is the vein marked off by this language:—"The Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself up for me." "Read," says the Reformer, "with great vehemency these words 'me' and 'for me,' and so inwardly practise with thyself, that thou with a sure faith mayest conceive and print this 'me' in thy heart, and apply it unto thyself not doubting but that thou art of the number of those to whom this 'me' belongeth."

But let us endeavour to bring forth and out into the light of as clear understanding as we can, the wealth of meaning contained in the clause:—"That life which I now live in the flesh, I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God."

Our text admits of being resolved into three distinct statements, and these we shall examine in turn.

(1) First of all, the apostle's language may be interpreted in this sense:—*What I do with the faith is to live by it, or in it.*

In other words, Paul tells the Galatians, and

the readers of his epistle in every land and age, that in his case the Christian faith was the informing and governing principle of his life. Such an announcement at once starts the question as to the place which people generally give to the faith in their experiences.

There are some who receive it, and who would resent the suggestion that they did not believe it. But "believing" it means, as far as they are concerned, little more than the giving of it house-room in their minds. It is accommodated on the same terms as a guest, who is not supposed to require any consideration, and whose presence is of no account in the ordering of the household arrangements. A certain ideal worth is attributed to its truths, but they are not allowed to exercise any authority in the practical affairs of life. They are treated like pictures, which are regarded as incongruous with the furnishings of the apartment where we transact the serious business of the day.

There are others, of whom it is not going too far to say that they look upon the Christian faith largely as a shroud. Wrapt about by it in death, they are satisfied that they need anticipate no sad awakening in the world to come. Like impenetrable armour, it will clothe them with a sure defence

against all the alarming possibilities of woe that threaten the voyager on time's further shore.

I do not deny—the ministry of the Gospel would be utterly betrayed by me if I dared to deny—that "the faith which is in the Son of God" is a faith in which a man can securely and calmly pass under the power of death. It lays hold of a salvation which is fraught with abundant consolations for that hour, and which promises fulfilments hereafter of the most joyous and uplifting kind. But it is wrongly conceived of, if it be regarded as a condition of mind and heart, an appropriation of guarantees, which is opportune solely for the closing scenes, and the last moments of life. "The faith which is in the Son of God" is a power: but it is not a power designed to come into effect, and reserved for exercise, only in the article of death. It is an energy of spirit, kindled by the consciousness of what the Son of God has done for us, which enables us to conquer the fears and temptations of life, even as it enables us to overcome the terrors of death. If it serves with gentle virtue to close our eyes, it operates also as a salve to open them. To die ought to be an act in the case of Christian people, rather than a mere passive experience—an act of consciously committing ourselves humbly, yet confidently, into the

merciful hands of our Father in Heaven. And it can be so transformed in its significance in spite of its attendant anguish; it can be made an act of consciously entrusting the spirit to God, through the assurance communicated by "faith in the Son of God."

But no less ought living also to be an act, a series of acts, in the case of Christian people, rather than an aimless and unsteered drifting down the current of time. And life in all its phases, in its contests with evil, in its self-originated enterprises, in its responses to changing and unexpected circumstances, in its familiar trials, and in its last dread ordeal, can be invested with this victorious character. For "the faith which is in the Son of God" commands resources that apply to the manifold needs of our human lot, and that are meant to be realized by us from day to day in "the life which we live in the flesh."

(2) Turn the verse round, and look at another facet which it presents. The apostle's language may be interpreted, I think, in this sense also:—*If it were not for my faith in the Son of God, I could not live.*

That is a statement which we are justified in paraphrasing out of our text. "I could not live," says Paul in effect, "were it not for my faith in the

Son of God." Are we, then, to conclude that no man can live unless he believes as the apostle did? Perhaps that is not an inference which the strict canons of reasoning themselves will permit us to draw, and acknowledge as valid. But it is substantiated by a better test—the test of experience. Life on the Christian level can only be lived, when there is faith in the Son of God.

Everything depends, you will notice, on what we mean by "life" and "living." We can continue to exist, carry out the process of respiration, be affected by outward things and affect them in turn, see and hear and move about, without discovering any necessity for believing in Jesus Christ.

We can think, our minds can work, we can reason and form decisions, we can mix with other people, contribute our share to the general conversation, engage in the pursuits of business or the amusements of leisure hours, without finding such exercises of intelligence and will impossible apart from "the faith which is in the Son of God."

But when "life" is understood in relation to higher interests, when it is held to signify the experience of communion with God, the devotion of our manhood and womanhood to His Will, the service of great purposes of goodness and love,

the entertainment of hopes which are bright enough to enlighten every darkness, then we cannot live in that sense unless we are united by faith to Jesus Christ. For He is the Mediator of all these blessings and spiritual attainments. He has secured them forever to us by no mere verbal assurance that they are available—an assurance that might be doubted—but by paying the price of His own life for them, by giving Himself up.

You cannot prove, as I was careful to admit before, by the application of any principle of inference that, because Paul could not "live" in this inward, and exalted, and most real sense of the term, apart from his relationship to Jesus Christ, therefore no human being can. But experience teaches us the truth of that conclusion —teaches us that the Pauline impossibility is one common to mankind. As a matter of fact, the "life" won't live without faith in Jesus Christ; it won't gather to itself vitality, and develop. Conscience, untampered with, declares what we are, and condemns us to alienation from God. The law in our members treats with contempt our efforts to realize the ideal of righteousness, and purity, and charity. The pain and sorrow of the world, poverty, loneliness, disease and death

extinguish our attempts to be cheerful in our views, and hopeful in our outlook.

The life, I repeat, won't live ; it won't come down out of dreamland into actuality ; it won't assume being and fulfil its promise circumstantially ; it cannot be lived in the flesh by you and me—this rich and abundant " life " of fellowship with God and communion with His Will—unless it be originated, and quickened, and sustained by " the faith which is in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself up for me."

(3) That leads us to set our text at a third angle. Paul's language may be interpreted as meaning this also :—*The way I live is accounted for by the faith I cherish.*

Let me recall to your minds the statements into which we have already translated the apostle's words. We felt justified in casting them into the form of these two assertions :—(*a*) " What I do with the faith is to live by it," and (*b*) " If it were not for my faith in the Son of God, I could not live."

There remains to be expressed this further thought, which is plainly embodied in the text :— " The way I live is accounted for by the faith I cherish."

" That life which I now live in the flesh," says the apostle. A change had taken place in the scheme

and character of his life. The old principles on which it had been organized had all been abandoned. The fountains of desire, from which he had previously drawn his motives for action, had been completely forsaken by him. He is not ashamed of the life which he is now living. On the contrary, he is prepared to have it subjected to the keenest scrutiny, and examined in the light of whatever tests his brethren may care to apply to it. One of the remarkable things in Paul's Epistles is the frank, and seemingly egotistical way, in which he constantly refers to his life and conduct, and challenges criticism. It is not that he is conscious, as he says himself, of "having already obtained, or of having already been made perfect." He is well aware of the infirmities that have yet to be overcome in his nature, and of the defects that have yet to be made good in his obedience to the Will of God. But he is absolutely certain that his life is moving on the right lines, that his character is being disciplined into conformity with the only true standard of excellence. With regard to that fact about himself he will admit no suggestion of doubt. It is a matter with him that is beyond argument or dispute. At the risk of being misunderstood, he is ready to claim that his life has an exemplary significance in this connection.

How can he go to such a daring length? How can he approach so near to the verge of self-complacency, and quote with satisfaction, "that life which I now live in the flesh." The answer is, because he is utterly unconscious of any merit attaching to himself on account of what he is, and of what he aspires to become. He is alive to the fact—it is as clear as daylight to him—that the origin of "that life which he is now living in the flesh" did not lie in ideal proposals which he made to himself, and that the progress he has achieved was not owing to his having summoned to their service all the latent forces of his moral nature. "That life" was begotten by the revelation to him of the love of the Son of God, and was sustained and developed by the same gracious vitalizing power. Therefore as its commencement was due to Jesus Christ, and its continuance and welfare depended on Jesus Christ, Paul could adduce "that life" of his, could instance himself, as an example to all.

Can we adduce ourselves? Can we claim, in no presumptuous or self-laudatory manner, that there are distinctive features about our life that are only to be accounted for by our faith in the Son of God? Is it a matter of secret or avowed gratification to us, that we are what we are through the exercise of our natural capacities—self-made men and

women? Or, are we conscious of being different from what we would have been, if we had been left to our own resources of mind and will? Are there things that we have been able to do and things that we have been able to bear; are there great interests that dominate us, and high and glad hopes that inspire us, none of which would have been possible had the ordering and development of our life been in our own hands? Is our experience, the actual texture of our ideas and desires and purposes, compatible with the most ordinary explanation? Or, does it present a problem, the solution of which is only to be found in the grace of Jesus Christ? "That life which I am now living in the flesh"—does it testify to anything but my own cleverness or folly; is it adducible as evidence of the redeeming power of the Son of God, "Who loved me and gave Himself up for me"?

IX

ALTHOUGH THAT WAS NEAR

"And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt: But God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea."—Exod. xiii. 17-18.

THERE were two routes which the Israelites might have taken to reach their destination. One was the great Northern highway, which armies of invasion, before and after the period of the exodus, were in the habit of traversing. It was short and direct, and afforded an entrance to Canaan by easy gradients from the South and West. The other was very much longer and more roundabout. It struck towards the East, and, after crossing desert and mountainous regions, descended to the plain with the formidable obstacle of the Jordan athwart its course.

What part Moses played in deciding between the alternatives is not mentioned in our text. That he did not act hastily, nor issue his orders until

he had made a careful survey of the whole situation, we cannnot doubt. The Bible is a providential history all through; and, in particular, it is concerned with the providential character of the events which occurred at the exodus. So, we are not told what Moses, who was the human instrument, did, but what God did. He chose the more circuitous way; and, instead of leading the people by the Mediterranean seaboard, He conducted them towards the wilderness of the Red Sea. He therefore declined the common route, and selected the more unlikely, "although the former was near."

There are many circumstances connected with the narrative of the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, which are exceedingly perplexing to the modern mind. But the passage before us is distinguished by this feature, that it furnishes us with a graphic illustration of God's method of dealing with men and women in every generation. That has probably struck many of you already; and what I propose to do is simply to attempt to put into words the thoughts which have been passing through your own minds.

(1) Here, in the first place, is *the record of an historical fact*:—"God led not the Israelites through the way of the land of the Philistines,

although that was near; but God led them about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea."

It is the fact mentioned in this passage which I wish alone to emphasize at present. God chose the longer road for His people.

And He often does that still. Our plans for the future are all characterized by features corresponding to "nearness in respect of distance." It is most natural that they should be. Our minds could hardly work healthily on any other principle. We set before ourself certain goals, and we reckon on being able to reach them "as the crow flies." But our course is checked. Events do not fall out according to our calculations. We are led by a path which occasions disappointment to us. It breaks off at an angle, and runs steadily on in a direction we never anticipated.

For instance, we project our thoughts into the years that lie ahead of us. We conceive ourselves arriving at old age in the same happy fellowship which we at present enjoy. Good health and a fair measure of temporal prosperity are to be our portion. Our children are to grow up strong and active, and to be well settled in life. An atmosphere of peace is to surround our home, and our hearts are to be filled with a quiet gladness.

The course of events leading up to such a con-

dition may be termed the " near " way. But the way, by which we are actually led, may turn out to be utterly different. It may have more of the qualities of the wilderness and the mountain about it. The fellowship, that meant so much to us and the continuance of which was always taken for granted by us in our forecasts, may be broken. Physical strength may give way before we are far on, and failure attend all our efforts to provide for the day of necessity. A son or a daughter, a brother or a sister, may be disabled in the struggle of life, and become a source of grave anxiety. Steep, and hard, and lonely—very circuitous and desolate in comparison with the road of our dreams —may be the track by which God brings us through the years.

Again, there may exist in our hearts a desire to render effective service to the cause of Christ in the world. Cherished not as a mere sentiment, but, in all sincerity, as an actual purpose, it may represent the great ambition of our life. And our idea may be, that some day we shall be able to realize it in a satisfactory manner. When promotion in the particular line of life we have chosen has come to us, we shall find ourselves in a position to do something worthy. With more leisure than we are able to count on at present, with ampler

means than we command just now, we shall be free to devote ourselves with enthusiasm to good works and the interests of the Kingdom of God.

Such a prospective preliminary career, as that ideal involves, has all the characteristics of a "near" way to the end we contemplate. But instead of ordaining that we shall follow it, God may never release us from the common full-timed toil of daily work. Relief from drudgery, and the strain of trying to make ends meet, may be denied us. The opportunities afforded to us for service may be confined to the ordinary duties of our calling, and to such hours as we can snatch between periods of labour and rest. And all that we are ever able to give may be but little in amount.

But I need not multiply instances. There is no one who cannot bear witness to having received the kind of providential treatment, which is described in our text. The condition in which we wished to be secured, the ordeal out of which we sought to be delivered, has not been the same in the case of each of us. But with respect to the fulfilment of particular desires of our own, in connection with the attainment of some end or other, we have had experience of postponements and the heart-sickness of deferred hopes. If we exchanged confidences, we would find it to be so. Young and old

would have a story to tell similar in essentials, if not in details. Although in imagination we were able to discern, or plan the engineering, of a " near " way for ourselves, God never opened it up. The road He did appoint for us was long, and made, as we thought, an appallingly wide detour.

(2) Notice, in the second place, *the reason why the route* " by the wilderness of the Red Sea " *was chosen in preference to the other.* " God led not the people through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near ; for God said, lest peradventure they repent when they see war."

As far as convenience for travelling was concerned, the direct Northerly route by the Mediterranean sea-board had everything in its favour. Its general course was familiar ; caravans, organized for the despatch of political or commercial business, frequented it ; the stages that were feasible for a marching company were well known, and the halting stations were unmistakable oases. But in the case of an enterprise like that on which the Israelites were embarked, the Philistines, who inhabited the rising country that sloped upwards from the South and West towards Canaan, had to be reckoned with. That warlike people held the gateways to the promised land, and needed no encouragement to dispute the

passage of a migrating nation through their territories. The Israelites were unfit to engage in battle. Their spirits had been crushed by oppression, and they could never have stood up to the Philistines, who were inured to fighting. A rabble of shepherds and brickmakers, they would inevitably have proved stubble to the swords and chariots of a well-trained and well-officered attacking army. To have marched them Northwards would have been to expose the tribes to certain disaster. They had everything to learn in the matter of discipline, and in the use of weapons. Impeded by their families and belongings, they would have given way at the first charge, and placed themselves at the mercy of their enemies. The exodus would have turned out a fearful blunder. And the last state of the retreating survivors would have been worse than the first. Therefore it was, that "God led not the people through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; but He led them about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea."

How often, and in what various provinces of human experience, has it been proved that the "near" way is not necessarily the best way! "Short cuts," both in the case of actual expeditions by land or water, and in the case of schemes under-

taken to secure financial prosperity, or professional status, or social well-being, have time and again turned out to be avenues to disaster. The wisdom, that prescribes caution and is shy of bargains in the matter of time and labour, is only too apt to be scouted as the lore of an antiquated philosophy of life. Yet evidence, sufficient to convince those who are not infatuated, is never wanting that the course attended with the least apparent trouble frequently issues in the most grievous failure to attain its end.

The long way was the right way for the Israelites. The Bible narrative makes that quite plain. Yet, at the time, it must have seemed strange to them to be obliged to march in so unpromising a direction. With the exception of Moses and a few others perhaps, none of them can have understood the reason for the Divine choice. And when God leads you and me by a road which is longer and lonelier and bleaker than that which we had mapped out for ourselves, it must be the right one. We should seek to believe in His guidance of us, even when we are utterly unable to perceive the meaning of His appointments. It is not easy to do so at all times. A single act of faith will not suffice to establish us in this confidence. Day by day as we journey on, we must strive to

reaffirm our trust in Him, and assure ourselves of the wisdom and love of His perplexing dealings with us. Religion only becomes real to you and me when we relate its great ideas and sentiments to the actual incidents of our experience. A faith that is subjected to tests and that survives the process becomes our own in a genuine sense. It ceases to be held as a doctrine and becomes a principle of thought and life. We believe, instead of thinking that we believe. "It is not in man, that walketh, to direct his steps," testified a prophet long ago. And when God, to Whom alone this prerogative belongs, "directs our steps" into an unfamiliar and rugged path, shall we not stay ourselves on the thought that it is of His choosing, and on the promise that His presence shall go with us and give us strength ?

(3) Notice, in the last place, *the great purpose which God had in view* with regard to the Israelites. It is expressed in these words :—"For God said, lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt."

The one thing to be provided against was the possibility of the tribes going back to Egyptian bondage. Canaan was their destination, and to set them on their way thither was the aim of God's leadership. His conducting of them by the un-

likely route of the wilderness of the Red Sea, in order to avoid a conflict with the Philistines, was but a single episode in the carrying out of His august plan.

God has a similar redemptive purpose concerning you and me, and by it His dealings with us are governed. Judge His guidance of you by any other conception, and you will be baffled in every attempt to explain its relevancy and rationality. The course, which His Providence takes, will never conform to any idea of our own regarding the ends to be pursued by us here—never, so long as God is God. There is no snatching the helm of the universe out of His hands. He orders the events and circumstances of our lives to promote our fellowship with Himself, to constrain us from the heart to say "Thou art my God," and to prevent us from falling into a condition of estrangement from His Will. The God, Who at times leads us by a longer way than we had anticipated, is not an arbitrary Master of men, Who changes His plans at intervals and fumbles over the appropriate means to carry them out. He is a Redeemer from everlasting to everlasting; and the exigencies of our Redemption determine Him in not choosing for us another way, although it be "near." His Providential appointments always subserve the purpose of His grace—

which is to bring us into the goodly land of intimate communion with Himself, and of likeness to Him, Who was led by the desolate and flinty path of suffering, that He might become the Captain of our salvation.

X

FOUND IN CHRIST

"That I may be found in Him."—PHILIP. iii. 9.

THE apostle admits us here into the very sanctuary of his being. There stand revealed to us on this page of Scripture the forces and ambitions, which determined and governed his life. The impression produced on us resembles that which attends the contemplation of the huge shafts and cylinders, which drive an ocean-liner through the water. What energies wrought within him! What eagerness of mind, what enthusiasm of feeling, what resoluteness of will! And all this tremendous activity was generated by the fires of a single devotion, and concentrated on a single object.

If you subtract from the experience of the apostle Paul his relationship to Jesus Christ, there is only a shell of a personality left. Christ lived in him, and he lived in Christ and for Christ. To set aside the fact of this spiritual union, when attempting to exhibit the man as he was, is to foredoom to failure one's effort to paint a portrait of the original

subject. It is to proceed to give a biography of him, which ignores the most impressive items in his own testimony with regard to himself; and it is to leave unexplained all that is most characteristic about him—his beliefs, his desires, his hopes, and his labours. There is no accounting for Paul, a caricature and nothing more is the result of trying to represent him, apart from what Jesus Christ was to him.

It is important that we should have a clear perception of the apostle's standpoint in this passage. Elsewhere in his writings he gives ample expression to the debt of gratitude, under which he was conscious of lying to Christ. Again and again he returns to the benefits that came to him through Christ, without money and without price of his paying—the assurance of forgiveness, the sense of acceptance with God, the peace which passed all understanding, the renewing of mind, the confidence of sonship, the hope of glory. "Christ is made of God unto me," he could say, "Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption."

In other words, he describes how he has been affected *by* Christ. He records his experience in having received the grace of God—the wonder and joy of salvation.

But in this section of his Epistle to the Philippians he tells us how he is affected *towards* Christ. The two things go together like the sides of a coin. Both elements are present in the experience of Christian people. And there exists a direct correspondence between the one and the other. According as a man is affected *by* Christ, so will he be affected *towards* Christ. "To whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." That principle, which our Lord enunciated at the table of Simon the Pharisee, has a wider application in reference to Himself. The profounder our sense of obligation to Him, the livelier will be our interest in Him. The deeper and more varied our needs, and the richer and more appreciated the satisfactions which we receive from Him, the greater will be our gratitude to Him, and the harder will our souls follow after Him. Paul, who was conscious of owing everything to Christ, whose capacity for measuring Christ and obtaining from Him was developed to the utmost, was affected towards Christ with a corresponding intensity of grateful feeling. He was consumed with desire to establish a yet closer intimacy with Him, to enter into a more confirmed state of union with Him. "Not as though I had already attained," was his cry, "but I press on."

The ardent emotion of the apostle's heart leapt out in three great flames of longing—that he might know Christ, that he might gain Christ, that he might be found in Christ.

No one ever *knew* Christ more intimately than Paul did. Gifted by nature with rare powers of insight and sensibility, he had exercised them to the full on the Person of his Lord. "Life," as it has been well said, "had set him at the point of view for realizing now one significant fact about Christ, now another." Enlargement of understanding had accompanied and accrued from apostolic activity, as is always the case. But many-sided and profound as his knowledge was, there was no satisfying him. Unsearched riches in Christ inspired him with a vehement eagerness to mine away in quest of them.

No one ever *gained* Christ more signally than Paul did. The privileges which he enjoyed by birth and training, and the high position he had won in Jewish religious circles by his strictness and zeal, were renounced by him when he became a Christian. Ever since his conversion he had made it his aim to interpret life and duty according to the mind of Christ. The estimates he had formed of the relative value of competing interests and alternative lines of action, had not been cherished

by him as mere sentiments. Decisions had invariably been framed on the strength of them. They had been adopted as the working principles of his conscience. His conduct had been based on no other standards. So that he had gained Christ in a most genuine and practical way, and had kept on gaining Christ to the increase of his wealth of moral experience. But to such lengths will the spirit of covetousness for the best gifts—for God's unspeakable Gift—go, that the ambition of his old age was for still larger acquisitions.

No man, surely, was ever *to be found* in Christ more unmistakably than Paul was. Wherever he might chance to be, in Jerusalem or Ephesus, Antioch or Athens, Corinth or Rome; whensoever he might happen to be tested—on his tours, during a shipwreck, before his judges, in the lists of controversy; under whatever circumstances he was exposed to discovery, he was to be found in Christ. But as though this relationship to Christ had never been effected before, or were only a matter of recent date, the apostle was moved by a great impulse of desire to have it sealed and secured beyond all question.

Let us consider that last aspiration of the apostle's in a little more detail.

(1) First of all, I would draw your attention to the fact that *we are able to find ourselves.*

It is quite usual in ordinary conversation for a man to say, that he found himself doing or saying a certain thing on a particular occasion. The impression which he wishes to convey is that, up to this point, his conduct had not been attended by any larger measure of thought than was required for the mere fulfilment of it. He had not been acting or speaking with deliberation, and a clear recognition of what he was about. His behaviour had perhaps been imitative, or due to habit, or the result of some physical or mental influence under the power of which he had been brought. Then all of a sudden he awoke to self-consciousness. He saw himself, and heard himself, as distinctly as other people had been doing while he was absent-minded. He found himself using certain words, and performing certain actions. Sometimes this condition, out of which a man declares himself to have been shaken or to have passed, is made a ground of excuse for what he has been guilty of saying or doing. At other times it is simply referred to as a phase of his life, which came to an abrupt and interesting termination.

Now it is undoubtedly the case, that this experience of self-discovery can be cultivated by each

one of us. More than that, it ought to be cultivated by each one of us. If, with all our finding, we never try to find ourselves, we are neglecting by far the most important object of investigation within our compass It is our duty from time to time to study ourselves, to review our conduct, to subject our motives to scrutiny. I am not pleading in favour of such a practice of continual introspection as can only lead to morbidness. What we are under the necessity of doing is to beware of taking for granted, that the standards, by which we have become accustomed to regulate our behaviour, and the principles, on which we have for long been in the habit of founding our judgments, really express the mind of Christ. It may be that they do to some degree, but we must make sure of the fact and learn to repair defects. "The unexamined life," wrote Marcus Aurelius, "is not worth living." We ought to question ourselves periodically and faithfully concerning the sources, from which the guiding ideas of our minds, and the prevailing choices of our wills, come. We must ascertain to whom or to what the character, which our thinking and our conduct assume, is primarily due. We must find ourselves, and find whether we are in Christ.

(2) Again, let me remind you that *we are*

found by the events which happen within our experiences.

There is nothing unfamiliar about that thought. During periods of anxiety occasioned by international complications, no question is more frequently discussed than that of the state in which a hostile movement by a foreign power might possibly find the defences of this country. Persons placed in positions of responsibility, like ship-captains or engine-drivers, are constantly being commended for having shown, what we describe as remarkable "presence of mind." Some emergency or other arose, and found them ready to cope with it.

In the case of every one of us, what we are and where we are is being proved daily by the things that happen to us. A problem, simple-looking enough perhaps, comes up for solution. What do we make of it? An opportunity for doing some one a good turn, or helping on a cause, is presented to us. What response does it get from us? A stroke of good fortune, as the saying is, befalls us. How do we take it? A wrong is done to us. How does it affect us? A sore disappointment occurs to us. In what spirit do we receive it?

These and similar incidents have the effect of finding us. Through them, since they are of His

appointment, God finds us. The reaction, which they occasion in our minds and hearts, is a disclosure of our moral and spiritual state. The evangelist Luke, describing the scene in the courtyard of the High-priest's house that night on which our Lord was betrayed, tells us, you will remember, that "a certain maid saw Peter, as he sat in the light of the fire." The flames, reflected on the disciple's face, lit up his features and revealed his identity to her. She recognized after a moment or two's study who he was. "Yes—No—Yes—The Galilean!" And in the light of life's ordeals, in the illumined circle which prosperity and adversity, temptations and injuries, the claims of duty and the afflictions of sorrow, cast around us, we are exposed. The temper we display, the attitude we take up, the feelings we entertain, the ideas we cherish, the decisions we form, declare in what soil the roots of our characters are being nourished. The events of this present life, I say, test us and find us. Do they find us in Christ? The solemn and unfamiliar circumstances of the world to come will likewise test us and find us. Will they find us in Christ?

(3) Finally, I would ask you to bear in mind that *we are found by those persons with whom we come in contact.*

In our everyday speech we acknowledge that fact of mutual discovery. For example, some scheme is set on foot, and a representative of the parties most deeply interested in its success is deputed to wait upon us and put its claims before us. He comes to see us, and we have a conversation on the subject. He goes away and reports, that he found us favourably disposed, or cold, or hostile, as the case may be.

We look in upon a person who has been laid aside by sickness, or crushed by a great loss, or subjected to the anguish of bereavement. He finds us sympathetic, or incapable of appreciating and sharing his pain. And we find him patient and resigned, bearing his cross courageously, or sullen and rebellious.

But it is not only in circumstances like those which I have been describing, that we find one another, and are found by one another. In the ordinary routine of life the same process goes on. We may try to disguise ourselves for a time, but sooner or later the domino drops off. The truth about us comes out. "How can a man be concealed?" exclaimed Confucius. By what we say and do, by what we abstain from saying and doing, by our looks and our laughter and our tears, we

unmask ourselves to others. Our neighbours and our friends, those who work alongside of us and those who work for us, our colleagues and our pupils and our patients find us. Our children grow up in our homes, and there comes a day when, from a remark or a glance, we realize that they have been searching us and finding us. It is inevitable that we should be found. It implies no inquisitiveness, or impertinent curiosity on the part of others, that they do succeed in finding us. What and where, in God's name, would you have yourself found? Is it not the sincere and commanding desire of your heart that, always and by all who find you, you may be found in Christ?

"In Christ." The relation so expressed is too wonderful ever to be described adequately. But the possibility of it, the reality of it, will never be gainsaid by those who have experience of it. It is an ultimate fact of the Christian life. We are made to correlate with Jesus Christ, and He with us. To keep our union with Him in repair, to renew and strengthen it, is the object of our worship. We would be hidden more deeply in Him, that, when found, we may be found in Him—undetachable from the Rock of Ages, as the single stone embedded in the granite boulder is inseparable from the parent mass. We would have our

lives and characters inexplicable—not in the sense of being ambiguous, inconsistent, veering between Yea and Nay—but inexplicable in the sense of being incapable of explanation apart from Jesus Christ.

XI

IN CHRIST

"I know a man in Christ."—2 Cor. xii. 2 (R.V.).

It is not my intention to make the wonderful event mentioned in this chapter the subject of exposition. That the apostle, looking back on what had occurred, regarded it as a most sacred privilege and honour, is evident from the context. So sensible is he that the rapture, in which he was caught up, was not brought about by any meritorious activity of his own, that he alludes to himself, in his description of the incident, in the third person. For fourteen years he had kept silent about the sublime experience; and, at the date of his writing this letter to the Corinthians, he only divulges to them such circumstances connected with it as he dare, because their attitude towards him forced him to do so. "The Corinthians," says Dr Denney, "had put a profane compulsion on the apostle; but though he yields to it, it is in a way which keeps clear of the profanity."

"I know a man in Christ." What I propose

to do is to attempt an investigation of the condition of such a man. An exhaustive analysis cannot be looked for: to address oneself, indeed, to the task at all may appear presumptuous. For, as Principal Rainy says, "The pregnant strength of that expression 'in Christ' seems to be weakened by the best explanations." At the same time, the expression occurs so frequently in the Pauline epistles, that we cannot help trying to represent to ourselves what it means. And something will be accomplished, if the result of our thinking aloud about the expression should be a rediscovery on our part of its "pregnant strength," and baffling wealth of meaning.

(1) Let us recall, to begin with, *some of the terms and phrases that are used in the New Testament to describe the experience of Christians.*

That name itself, as every one knows, has a history. It was coined by the inhabitants of Antioch, who prided themselves in bygone days on their resourcefulness in labelling people with nicknames, or distinctive appellations. Up to that time the adherents of the religion of Jesus had been called "disciples," or "believers," or "followers of the way." In other words, they had regarded themselves, and been recognized, as men and women who acknowledged Jesus Christ

as their Master and Teacher, who put their trust in Him and in His promises, and who strove to bring their lives into conformity with the example He had set. But it was at Antioch that they were first called "Christians."

Another expression which we frequently come across, especially in the Epistles, is that of "servant" or "bond-servant." This striking term represents an acknowledgment of undisputed authority. The person, who confesses himself to be a "servant" or "slave" of Christ, declares that he belongs to Christ body soul and spirit, and is entirely at His disposal. He bears record that he has been taken captive, or has passed into the possession of One who has purchased him, and that the control of his destiny, as well as the right to command his service, are prerogatives, which he has surrendered to Jesus Christ his Lord. Sometimes the figure, which defines the character of the relationship, is dropped, and the general idea of a Christian's not being "his own" is alone insisted on; as, for instance, when the apostle writes, "If any man trusteth in himself that he is Christ's, let him consider this again with himself, that even as he is Christ's, so also are we."

With regard to all these designations, which have just been quoted, we may say, I think, that they

call attention to aspects of the experience of Christians, which need little further explanation. But there are two modes of representing the religious condition of believing men and women, which aim at giving expression to profounder facts concerning their connection with Christ, than those previously mentioned do. I refer to the phrases which describe a Christian as a man "in whom Christ is," and as a man "who is in Christ." "Know ye not as to your own selves," asks the apostle of his Christian brethren, "that Jesus Christ is in you?" "If any man is in Christ," he testifies to the same people, "he is a new creature."

(2) Let us endeavour, in the second place, *to distinguish, if possible, between these two modes of expression.*

They have this in common, viz., that they not only bring into notice the fact that the essence of the Christian religion consists in a personal relationship to Christ, but they also represent that relationship as being a mutual one of the closest and most intimate nature conceivable. When Paul speaks, as he does in his letter to the Colossians, of "Christ Who is our life," he emphasizes the vital and ultimately unanalysable character of the union, which forms the basis of Christian experience,

and which is implied by both the phrases, "Christ in us," and "we in Christ."

Now, it is pretty much a matter of indifference which of these two modes of expression we adopt, if our purpose is simply to affirm the reality of this union. We might say of a person, whose fulfilment of the Christian ideal commanded our admiration, either that he was "a man in Christ," or that he was "a man in whom Christ was." What we would want to bring out would be the fact, that there did exist an inward and living relationship between such a person and Christ, which accounted for his conduct and character.

But, having recognized that the phrases may in certain circumstances be used as synonymous, we ought to bear in mind that they are fitted to describe the union, which they both attest, from different points of view. What these different points of view are, will become plain if we think of a familiar process of nature. A seed is planted in the ground, and before long it begins to grow. "How does it grow?" a child may ask you. In answer to his question, and in language adapted to his understanding, you may perhaps try to explain to him, that the principle of life lies within the seed, and that it gradually unfolds itself and manifests itself in the form of blade and ear, or of leaf and

flower and fruit. In offering the child an explanation of this kind, you are insisting on the capacity for development which resides in the seed.

But you may take another course. You may speak to him of the fertile influences of the soil, which affect the seed from without. You may tell him that, if he were to cast it amongst ashes, it would only rot and perish; for it needed the secret forces of the earth to play upon it and induce it to grow.

The analogy is of course imperfect; yet, we can regard the Christian life from similar standpoints. We may think of it as a life which is determined from within, a life which is the unfolding of an inner principle. If we adopt that point of view, then the inner principle is Christ Himself. "He in those," who are united to Him by faith, reproduces His own blessed life. They live, yet not they, but Christ lives in them.

Or, on the other hand, we may think of it as a life determined, as it were, from without, a life sustained by a nourishing and indispensable environment. If we adopt this latter point of view, then the nourishing and indispensable environment is Christ Himself. "In Him those," who are united to Him by faith, have life. They can do

all things, as the apostle says, "in Him that strengtheneth them."

(3) One or two features of the particular relationship to Christ mentioned in our text may be grouped together at this stage. "I know a man in Christ."

The *mystical* nature of the union referred to will be recognized by us all. We speak of people being bound up in each other—a husband being bound up in a wife, a wife in a husband, a lover in one beloved, a parent in a child, a brother in a sister, a friend in a friend. But no degree of interfusion of one human life with another, in the way of affection and sympathy and mutual understanding, presents us with a parallel to the sense of incorporation and dependence and security, that is signified by the phrase "in Christ." No human being has the capacity for inclusion that Christ has. No human being possesses the resources, that are drawn on by a person who participates in the fulness that is in Christ. No human being can ever be the object of the devotion and confidence and obedience, that Christ is able and worthy to command.

In order to gain some idea of the difference between the relationship in question, and the kindred one indicated by the apostle when he

speaks of Christ living "in him," we had recourse to the analogy of a seed's growth being explicable in terms either of the fertilizing influences of the soil, or of the inherent vitality of the seed itself. But when our object is not to compare and distinguish these two modes of representing the union that exists between Christians and Christ, but to render the nature of the particular union, denoted by the phrase "in Christ," more intelligible to ourselves, we must change the illustration.

And we have not far to seek for a suitable substitute. Our Lord Himself has provided us with one. "See," He says to us, "in the relationship that obtains between the branch and the vine an image of the relationship that exists between My disciples and Me. I am the Vine, they are the branches."

You cannot analyse, and reduce to simpler forms of interconnection, the organic union of the life of the branch and the life of the vine. But if the branch were endowed with intelligence, it would know by experience what that union meant. And similarly, while you cannot analyse and state in so many words the conditions which constitute the actual interfusion of a soul with Christ, every one who is really "in Him"—committed to Him, united to Him by faith, and love, and all the subtle

affections and powers wherewith the soul is able to root its life, and lose its life in a greater and richer life than its own—knows by experience what that relationship means.

Another thing that ought to receive clear statement is the fact, that if a man stands in this relation to Christ, *it is a relation into which he must have been brought.* Some time or other; through influences which he can describe in detail, or through influences which he is at a loss how to summarize; suddenly or gradually, he passed into that spiritual condition, which enables him to say to himself, as the apostle did, "I know a man in Christ."

By nature a human being is in the world, surrounded by its forces, waited upon and affected from the first by its ministries, physical and intellectual, social and moral. But by nature he is not "in Christ." That is a relationship into which he has to be drawn. A transplanting or an engrafting process has to take place. And the Husbandman, who accomplishes this work, is God. "Of Him," wrote Paul to the Corinthians, "are ye in Christ Jesus." That was the language which he used in his first letter; and this was how he put the matter in his second:—"He that stablisheth us with you in Christ is God." It is not the spade

that transplants, nor the knife that engrafts. These are but implements in the husbandman's hands. And so, in whatever order we may have passed into this state of grace; whether or not we have to acknowledge that priority belongs to others (as the apostle did, when to the greetings, which he sent to Andronicus and Junias, he added a note mentioning the fact that they were "in Christ" before him); at whatever period of our life, and under whatever influences we may have come to the knowledge of Christ, and of ourselves as men and women "in Christ"; the power that effected this result in our experience was not our own, was not man's, but the secret, persuasive, constraining power of God alone.

Finally, has a man who is "in Christ" *any responsibility for the maintenance of that relationship*? Such a question can hardly fail to suggest itself to our minds in view of what has just been said. It is "of God," that any human being is "in Christ Jesus." Does it follow that there is no part to be played by human activity in fostering that union? The apostle Paul did not hesitate to tell some of the Galatians, that they were "severed from Christ." Now, if it is possible for a man to "sever" himself from Christ, it is obvious that he must be under an obligation to take

steps to prevent himself being "severed." There are things, at least, which he must avoid doing, or saying, or thinking. To that extent, at all events, there is a call made on human activity.

But when we have a direct word on the subject from Christ Himself, we need not restrict ourselves to inferences from a statement of Paul's. "Abide in Me," says Jesus. "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; so neither can ye, except ye abide in Me." Here is an explicit appeal to the freedom of Christian men and women. We are commanded to exert ourselves in order that we may keep our union with Christ in a living condition. Whatever that injunction to "abide" means, it certainly includes not only the duty of avoiding lines of conduct incompatible with the Will of Christ, but also that of thinking very frequently about Christ, with deliberation and sincere desire to discover what He would have us be and do; and it requires us to give ourselves with earnestness to the study of His words, the ascertainment of the needs of our fellows, and prayer.

"I know a man in Christ," says Paul; and then he goes on to describe what happened to this "man in Christ" fourteen years before. There had been no break in the continuity of the apostle's

experience—no " severance " from Christ. Fourteen years is a long period of time to look back upon, and to look forward to. If you and I, who believe that we are " in Christ " to-day (and is He not all our desire ?), are spared to see fourteen years more, will we be found " in Christ " then ? Much will happen in the interval, but our immediate duty is plain : we must seek to " abide in Him " day by day by acts of devotion, and the consecration of our lives to His service. Wherever we are, in whatever order of existence we may now or hereafter have our being, it cannot be otherwise than well with us, if we are " in Christ." Any destiny is to be accepted confidently and gladly, provided it does not entail our " severance " from Him.

XII

TEACHING AND JOURNEYING

"And He went on His way through cities and villages, teaching, and journeying on unto Jerusalem."—LUKE xiii. 22 (R.V.).

THE works of many of the great masters in the art of painting not only excite our admiration as single and separate pictures, but they also become invested with a new degree of impressiveness when they are recognized as belonging to a series of studies on a common subject. For example, any one of Turner's famous sea-scapes cannot fail to arouse our enthusiasm on account of the amazing breadth and intimacy of its interpretation of nature. But when several of them are seen together, the effect produced on us is immensely heightened. The different canvases in the group seem to throw light on each other. Not merely is our astonishment at the genius of the artist increased, but our interest in the various proofs of it that are before us is rendered more intelligent by the demand made upon our minds to compare

and distinguish. The same thing is true with regard to the creations of Millet, those sympathetic representations of French rustic life that are so well known in the form of reproductions, "The Angelus," "The Sower," "The Gleaners," and "The Man with the Hoe." Each is a masterpiece by itself. But they explain, and throw one another into a fuller relief of meaning, when they are studied together.

Now in order to appreciate the graphic power of our text, we ought to look at it in its proper setting. It is one of *three* striking pictures in the long gallery of the New Testament. It occupies the middle position in the series; but we shall glance at the other two for a moment, and leave the examination of it to the last.

The fifty-first verse of the ninth chapter of St Luke's Gospel provides the subject of the *first* canvas. There we are told "that it came to pass, when the time was come that Jesus should be received up, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." These words remind us of a great prophecy in the book of Isaiah, where we read, "The Lord will help me, therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint." The idea that is emphasized is that of a resolved will. The feature accentuated in the

portrait of the Figure is His attitude of inflexible decision. "The time was come." Our Lord needed "to set His face steadfastly." Volitional effort was called for to overcome disinclination in a contest of feeling. He shrank from the mysterious darkness of the road, and from the cross that stood at the end of it. His hardening of His countenance reflected the inward victory over the instinct to recoil, and the "straitened" condition of spirit into which He had been brought. The picture thus presented to our eyes is full of human pathos and moral grandeur. "When the time was come that Jesus should be received up, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem."

The evangelist Mark, in the thirty-second verse of the tenth chapter of his Gospel, furnishes the details of which the *third* canvas of the series is composed. "The disciples," he tells us, "were in the way, going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus was going before them: and they were amazed; and they that followed were afraid." In the foreground of this arresting study we see Jesus walking alone. "Step and gesture" reveal the strong emotion under which He is labouring. Behind Him is the little group of disciples, awed into speechlessness, their eyes filled with amazement at the abstractedness and deep preoccupation of their

Master. In the background the faces of a crowd of followers are visible with intense fear written plainly across them.

But we turn from the dramatic realism of that scene to the *central* canvas represented by the twenty-second verse of the thirteenth chapter of St Luke's Gospel, and find that it is well worthy a place beside, or to be more precise, between the other two. "He went on His way through cities and villages, teaching, and journeying on unto Jerusalem." There is an unmistakable suggestion here of life, and movement, and opportunity seized. A sense of freedom and horizon is awakened in our minds. The human interest and the suppressed passion, which are manifest in the delineation of the solitary Figure who appears in the picture, appeal to us most powerfully. The Master is depicted as "on His way through cities and villages, teaching, and journeying on unto Jerusalem."

Let me draw your attention to the features in this study of Jesus from life, which are described by the two participles that occur in our text. For purposes of exposition we shall invert the order in which they stand.

(1) In the first place, He is represented as "*journeying on unto Jerusalem.*"

Jerusalem was the goal which our Lord had in view as He traversed district after district of Palestine. What awaited Him there was plainly foreseen by Him. The supreme ordeal of His career in the form of a cross of shame beckoned to Him to come and suffer its agonies. "It cannot be," He told His disciples, "that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem." The truth, for which He stood, had to be vindicated at the headquarters of error, and vindicated in face of the real issue. So He eluded the efforts of Herod to arrest or assassinate Him, and bent His steps towards the historic centre of the nation's political and religious life. Guides in the Holy City at the present day point out the Via Dolorosa to travellers, and explain that it ran about three furlongs in length from the Prætorium and the Column of Scourging to Golgotha. Nay, it was longer far than that. It stretched from Cæsarea Philippi and Galilee in the North, and passed southwards through nameless cities and villages, ere it finally merged itself in a street of Jerusalem.

"He journeyed on." The meritorious significance and saving power of Christ's death are set forth by these commonplace-looking words quite as distinctly as they are by any of the great

evangelical texts of the New Testament. For the virtue, the atoning value of our Lord's death, is not explained by His having been subjected to violence and derision, exposure and crucifixion. It lies in the fact that He accepted this destiny as the Will of God, overcame the temptation to flee from it or rebel against it, reconciled Himself perfectly to it, and "gave Himself up." A passive sufferer, not to say a protesting one, could not have been the Saviour of the world. It was the voluntary element in that which transpired on Calvary, and not the mere physical circumstances of the event, that gave to Christ's death the character of a sacrifice to take away the sin of the world. It was not that He happened to get entangled amongst forces, from whose malignant grip He could not by any possibility escape. He became invested with an eternal Mediatorship and with power "to save to the uttermost," because He consented, submitted, willed to die on the cross. So when we read of His "journeying on unto Jerusalem," we perceive Him realizing that freedom, putting into effect day by day, despite all lurid anticipations and feelings of alarm, that spontaneous and deliberate exercise of self-determination, which gave to His death a universal meaning and an inexhaustible re-

demptive efficacy, and which secured to Himself "the Name that is above every name."

"Be of good cheer, I have overcome." That is the message, which the Christ "who journeyed on unto Jerusalem," addresses to us. Faith in Jesus Christ—that living attachment to Him by mind and heart and will, which the Scriptures describe under the term faith—ought to inspire us with such courage and confidence as to transform what might otherwise be a staggering through time into a "journeying on."

What is the ordeal ahead of you that fills you with dismay, and against which you are inclined to let yourself be driven, seeing that you cannot summon up strength to go out and meet it? Is it some severe task or temptation, a coming sorrow which casts its long shadow before it, a furnace of physical or mental pain whose fires terrify you from afar?

Are you affected by a deep melancholy from the consciousness that the blithesome days of your youth are long past, and that you are growing old? Do you dread "the twilight and the evening bell"?

Are your fears occasioned by the thought of your children entering on the critical period of adolescence, of their extending their interests

beyond the home and to subjects about which they will perhaps cease to make you their confidant? Are you haunted with anxiety concerning the effect which the discovery of the sin that is in the world will produce on their young minds, and fearful lest their characters may not be able to withstand the assaults of evil?

I may not have succeeded in naming the special ordeal that distresses you. As in the case of King Jehoram, who wore sackcloth underneath the garments of royalty and was unsuspected of care, the subject of your anxiety may be a secret between your Maker and yourself.

Perhaps the experience of some of us may not correspond with anything that has been said. Our condition may be represented by a disposition to become morally indolent, and "to take," as George Meredith says, "to drifting." The future, unrelieved by the prospect of particular inevitable incidents, promising no special probation of our powers, calls forth of itself no eagerness of mind and decisiveness of will from us. It rolls out before us like a featureless waste of water. And so we are inclined to think that there is no point to steer for, as there is none to steer by. That which would make our progress across the apparently desolate sea a voyage, is not contributed by

ourselves. In other words, we have no splendid conception of what we would be at, or of what we would make of our lives. The only way, that there seems any possibility or use of making, is to be made by "drifting."

Now, whether there be in view ahead of us conspicuous landmarks that leave us no alternative but to take up some relation or other to them, or whether right on to the confines of our present field of vision there stand out no heights breaking the monotony of the prospect, our course is the same. Retaining the mastery over our thoughts and feelings, exercising the human prerogative of self-governance, we are to "journey on." The great idea is to inspire us, that the future is so ordered as to provide us and ours with occasions for performing achievements and glorifying God. In that assurance we are to advance into it, whether such occasions are to be seen looming up with threatening faces towards us, or whether there are no signs whatsoever of any such occasions within our horizon. And this is to be our attitude, not because an abstract doctrine of Divine Providence justifies it, but because One has travelled thus through time in the greatness of His strength. And our anticipations of how it will fare with us in this high enterprise are to be based, not on a

complacent or fearful survey of our own native resources of character, but on the conviction that God is faithful, and that He will uphold us by "the working of the strength of that might which He wrought in Christ."

(2) Notice, in the second place, that our Lord is represented here as "*going on His way through cities and villages, teaching.*"

How profoundly our Lord's mind was affected by the vision of the cross, that extended its monstrous arms to embrace Him, is brought out by the words which are recorded in the previous chapter to that in which our text occurs. "I have a baptism to be baptized with," He said to His disciples, "and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" And yet straitened though He was, pressed and constrained by the consciousness of what was before Him, He did not avoid the haunts or the society of men. The route which He chose for His southward journey lay through cities and villages. And, as He came to one after another of these centres of population, He taught as many of the inhabitants as were willing to receive His words. Like a person in search of a friend whom he has not seen for a long time, He looked wistfully into men's eyes for signs of recognition, and waited for displays of that interest

which would testify to a hunger of soul that He could satisfy.

In this, as in all other respects, the Master "has left us an example, that we should follow His steps." He went on His way towards Jerusalem, "teaching." The best possible preparation for any impending momentous experience consists in a faithful discharge of present duties. Whatever may be the nature of the ordeal that lies ahead of us, it will not be able to demand of us a higher attitude towards itself than that of submissively accepting it as God's Will, and endeavouring to deal with it in a true and brave spirit. For higher attitude than that, as far as human beings are concerned, there is none. And so it would be strange, if a course of conduct, which involved the disowning on our part and the casting away from ourselves of present obligations, were held to be an appropriate discipline in view of the necessity of our coping with a grave future crisis. He that is faithful in that which is least is arming himself, in the only possible armoury, with the capacity for being faithful in that which is greatest. Who can tell what fresh inspiration of faith in the redeemableness of mankind, what increase of strength, what confirmation in His sublime purpose

our Lord received, as He journeyed on to Jerusalem, "teaching"?

John Wesley, we are told, was once asked by a lady how he would spend the intervening time, if he knew that he was to die at twelve o'clock the next evening. "How, madam?" he replied; "why, just as I intend to spend it now. I should preach this night at Gloucester, and again at five to-morrow morning. After that I should ride to Tewkesbury, preach in the afternoon, and meet the societies in the evening. I should then repair to friend Martin's house, who expects to entertain me, converse and pray with the family as usual, retire to my room at ten o'clock, commend myself to my Heavenly Father, lie down to rest, and wake up in glory."

The spirit of Wesley's reply was in complete accord with the example set by Jesus and described in our text. In relation neither to the last ordeal nor to any nearer one, are we obliged to spend our days measuring the strength we can command against future provings of it. Into the darkness or the daylight of life, towards experiences which plainly await us or which are hidden from our eyes, we are to "journey on." There is no providing against

the strain of trials in front of us, no securing of the result beforehand, save by an unwavering trust in the mercy and love of God, and a life of habitual fidelity to Jesus Christ from day to day.

XIII

CHRISTIANITY AND MORALITY

"Do we then make the law of none effect through faith? God forbid: nay, we establish the law."—Rom. iii. 31 (R.V.).

THREE questions are proposed and answered by Paul in this passage of his letter to the church in Rome.

The first is designed to call attention to the spirit, which alone is congruous with the profession of Christianity:—"Where is boasting then? It is excluded."

The second brings up the subject of the range of the Divine interest in mankind, and settles it for ever as far as the New Testament doctrine of God is concerned:—"Is God the God of Jews only? is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yea, of Gentiles also."

The logical connection between the third of the series and the two, that precede it, need not detain us. The question is submitted in these terms:—"Do we then make the law of none effect through faith?"

By the " law " we may understand morality, the distinction between right and wrong, the rules of conduct which conscience lays upon us.

And by " faith " we should, of course, understand the exercise of Christian faith, the experience of believing in Jesus Christ, conscious dependence on Him for salvation, for forgiveness now and for acceptance with God hereafter.

The question then, which the apostle raises in our text, refers directly to the relationship between the Christian religion and the obligations of morality. Does religion, while transcending morality, extinguish it ? Or rather, does the Christian religion, while transcending morality, abolish its authority and abrogate its demands on the obedience of men ?

The point at issue has so far been stated in an abstract form. Let me try to put it more simply.

Look at the matter from this angle first. When a preacher urges his hearers to believe in the Gospel of the Grace of God, is he justified in describing that condition, the condition of faith, as one of relief from the necessity of fulfilling the law of righteousness ? Is the peace of conscience, which he is bound to promise in Christ's name to all who put their trust in Him, to be explained as a state of

complacency towards the claims of duty? "God forbid!"

Or look at the matter from this other angle. When a man feels moved to believe in Jesus Christ, and closes with the offer of Divine forgiveness, which the Cross announces in appealing terms to whosoever will accept it, dare he anticipate for himself in the future a life out of which effort and striving shall have gone? Is he entitled to represent the remission of his sins, concerning which he has obtained assurance, as securing to him the privilege of doing what he likes without misgivings or fear of the consequences? Is he at liberty to think of himself as exempt henceforth from the necessity of struggling against temptation; as somehow superior to the common obligations under which mankind lie; as provided with a balm, which allows him to trifle with evil and lapse into sin when he pleases, because it is guaranteed to be an infallible salve for a tender and wounded conscience? Is the law, in short, made of none effect through faith? "God forbid: nay, it is established."

"The law is established, it is set on its feet," declares the apostle, "through faith." The Christian religion, so far from annulling the claims of righteousness over men's conduct, confirms and,

indeed, reinforces them. It does so in two ways, which we shall examine in turn.

(1) First of all, *it sets before mankind a larger and richer ideal than that of ordinary morality.*

The man who believes in the atonement wrought by Jesus Christ and symbolized by the elements of the Lord's Supper, receives thereby no dispensation from the common obligations recognized by the general community. He is not absolved from the duty of conforming to them. He is deceiving himself, his ideas of what Christ has done for him are radically false, if he supposes that standards, which apply to the behaviour of others, do not apply in his case. Faith in Christ's propitiation for sin gets him off no old responsibilities. It rather involves him in new ones, as we shall see. He is obliged to be truthful, to be straightforward, to be just, to be honest. No degree of religious fervour, and no amount of courage in making profession of Christianity can compensate for the lack of these qualities. If he tells falsehoods, his assurance of salvation is a bubble of delusion; if he pursues a crooked course, he is anywhere but in the way of life; if he is unjust in his dealings, he is no follower of the Just One; if he is dishonest in his practices, his pious sentiments and experiences are the merest emotional moonshine. The Christian

has no charter given to him, which releases him from obedience to the primary laws imposed on human conduct.

What his neighbour is required to do, the Christian also is required to do. Those familiar virtues, to which reference has just been made, must be cultivated assiduously by him. "It was incumbent on the early Christians," says Gibbon, "by the strictest integrity and the fairest dealing, to remove the suspicions which the profane are too apt to conceive against the appearances of sanctity." The obligation holds good at the present day, if for no other reason than that "the profane" in the twentieth century are actuated by the same spirit as were their brethren of ancient times. The Christian religion presupposes fidelity to the common duties of life on the part of those who avow themselves followers of Jesus Christ. But it is not satisfied with the standard of conduct which they prescribe. It unfurls the banner of a loftier ideal. As a member of society, the Christian is obliged to be truthful and straightforward, just and honest. But as a subject of the Kingdom of Christ, higher obligations rest upon him. A purity in thought and imagination, a meekness under injury, a willingness to forgive are demanded of him beyond anything that is exacted by the ordinary precepts

of morality. He is required, for Christ's sake, to exercise a moderation and charity in judgment, to display a patience in the midst of suffering and adversity, to spend himself in the service of others, not according to his convenience and a measured zeal, but with self-sacrificing devotion. There are two kinds of privilege. There is a privilege of exemption from particular duties—a release from the necessity of doing all that others do. And there is a privilege of engagement to undertake additional duties—a call to do more than others do. The Christian's privilege is of the latter kind. "Do we make the law of none effect through faith? God forbid: nay, we establish and reinforce it."

(2) You will remember my having said, that the Christian religion, so far from annulling the claims of righteousness, confirms and strengthens them in two ways. We have seen how it does so by setting before mankind a larger and richer ideal. We have now to consider how it establishes and reinforces the claims of righteousness *by emphasizing their authoritativeness.*

Every man, be he a Christian or not, is aware that there is a secret voice within him, which speaks with the accents of command. Conscience issues its instructions to us not in a faltering and per-

functory manner, but in a manner that requires obedience. It declares not what we " may as well " do, not what it " is desirable on the whole " that we should do, but what we ought to do. It speaks imperatively, for it announces law.

But in the case of Christians, the imperativeness, which naturally attaches to the claims of righteousness, is quickened and intensified. And what produces this result, what makes righteousness, in all its concrete forms and applications, more urgent for them is the fact of their relationship by faith to Jesus Christ. He died for all. He resisted unto blood striving against sin, and showed us in doing so that righteousness is as real as His Passion. He died for all, that they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him who for their sakes died and rose again. Faith in Jesus Christ fixes us in a certain attitude to sin. The taking up of that attitude is synonymous with faith in Jesus Christ. We cannot truly believe in Him without adopting that attitude. It is the attitude of death—of insensitiveness to sin's appeals and promises.

And faith in Jesus Christ, who died for all, invests righteousness with a new significance for us. It retains all its old authority; but it claims our obedience and service with a new and conquering

insistence. It enlists in its interest not only the natural impulses which conscience is capable of arousing, but motives of profound and amazed gratitude. We are subject as Christians to the obligations of devotion and loyalty to a person. The Love of Christ constraineth us to renunciations and relinquishments of gross and subtle indulgences, to a life of purity and integrity, patience and self-sacrifice. "Is the law made of none effect through faith? God forbid!"

It is not going too far, I think, to assert that a genuine profession of Christianity has been shown to be compatible only with an earnest endeavour to realize a high and exacting ideal of conduct. If our behaviour day by day were actuated by motives of reason alone, if the only influences which directed or stayed the course of our lives were such as were rational in their character, then there would be a recognizable correspondence between our Christian faith and our Christian practice. But we are subject to impulses and tempers, which, though they cannot vindicate themselves over against the Will of Christ, are nevertheless strong enough at times to betray us into base deeds. Sainte Beuve, the well-known French critic, quotes with approval someone who says that the real enemy of righteousness, the last enemy to be over-

come in human experience, is the great god Pan. He means that sense of the unity of things in which the sense of their differences is lost. Nature and spirit, necessity and freedom, even good and evil are regarded by those under the spell of this divinity as fluctuating and evanescent distinctions. You may not recognize the great god Pan by that name, but his oracles are familiar to every one. Here are some of them.

When we are feeling the stress of temptation and are exerting our utmost strength to resist the assaults and seductions of evil, there sometimes comes over us the tired conviction that "the struggle is not worth while."

When we are putting up a stubborn fight against a vile proposal, and have sworn not to entertain it, the idea of surrendering is sometimes couched in the insinuating form, "that it has always been the way."

When we have yielded to a base impulse, struck our colours to our lower self, and are covered in consequence with shame and remorse and indignation, there is sometimes whispered in our hearts the suggestion that "it doesn't matter."

When we are forming noble resolutions and planning out a worthy future, when we are consecrating ourselves afresh to a life of duty and

allegiance to Christ, the notion sometimes occurs to us, a notion calculated to quench our enthusiasm, that "it will be all the same a hundred years hence."

The great god Pan is the symbolical source and author of all such maxims as these. The mood, which they engender, "makes the law of none effect," and turns moral earnestness into an excitation of folly. Congruous with whatever situations this disposition to equate all ideals down to the lowest level of passing convenience and desire may be, it is at absolute enmity with the Cross of Christ. For He died to vindicate and establish the very distinctions whose validity is at issue. Whoever else may affect to ignore or minimize the claims of righteousness, the man who believes in Him dare not. Faith in Him is not an echo from the hollow depths of indifferent hearts of the cry, "Lord, Lord"; it is a living principle of resolute wills. The salvation associated forever with the name of Jesus Christ enlists us in a great crusade, calls for heads uplifted and faces set as flint in a splendid enterprise of

> Effort, and expectation, and desire,
> And something evermore to be.

XIV

EXCEEDING ABUNDANTLY

"Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us."—EPHES. iii. 20.

THE apostle displayed great boldness in his prayer for his Ephesian friends. He took confident advantage of the access allowed to him as a man in Christ, when he bowed his knees on the floor of his Roman lodging in behalf of his brethren in Asia. They were mostly raw converts, these Gentile Christians, scarcely raised above heathen abasement; but Paul's faith regarding what they might become was not affected by his knowledge of what they had been and were. The wealth of the glory of the Father was in his mind's eye, and he made that the standard and justification for his requests. You would not have had him beseech God, when he was beseeching God at any rate, that something less than His greatest and best gifts might be given to the Ephesians. Not a few of these converts had been slaves, and thieves, and

harlots. Was it extravagant or irrational to ask that they should experience the inward strength of the Holy Spirit, and the permanent indwelling of Christ ? With their diseases grown so desperate they needed surely the most potent Divine remedies, and, being sinners, they were just the class with whom Christ came to be a guest.

Many of them were so-called scum of the city, the refuse of the streets. Was it wasting spiritual energy to make supplication for them that they might be able to understand God's plan of redemption for the world in Christ, and know the love of Christ that passeth knowledge ? They were men and women who were conspicuously lost ; but then they were precisely those whom the Son of Man came to seek and to save, and whom He had sought and saved.

Who so Pharisaically superior and self-righteous as to be offended at the magnificence of the apostle's conception regarding the future of these brands plucked from the burning ? Who so mean in his notions of the might of the Spirit of sanctification as to hold up a dissenting hand against the apostle's cry that human beings, with a history like theirs, might be filled unto all the fulness of God ? They have little to do, who take to casting stones across the centuries at these Asiatic converts. They

forget the beams in their own eyes, who are offended at the motes that once hindered the vision of those who now see God face to face. Paul believed in two great realities. He believed in the eternal purpose which God purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. He believed also in the redeemableness of man, and in the destiny of man. And he let the light of both these sublime articles of his faith shine on the Ephesians. There is no one—this is the inference of grace to be drawn—there is no one, be he or she the chiefest of sinners, who may not become a temple of God for the habitation of the Holy Spirit. Oh! for the apostle's glowing assurance, the assurance which informed and suffused his petitions in behalf of his brethren in Ephesus:—"that God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us."

(1) An *assertion* is made here, you will observe, *about God's Power*. "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think."

Paul knew very well how bold he had been in his prayer, and how confident had been his access to the Throne of Grace. But his sense of the Divine ability was very profound. And he strove to give utterance to it in an adequate manner. He conceived the severest tax possible laid on the Divine

resources by human prayer, and the utmost range imaginable given to human speculation about God's power; and he declared that God was able to do "exceeding abundantly" above all that could be asked or thought.

It can never be amiss to urge Christian people to open their minds to the reality of God's inexhaustible power. John Ruskin declares somewhere in his writings, "that the reason why preaching is so commonly ineffectual is that it calls on men oftener to work for God, than to behold God working for them." That is a just criticism, I believe. In our anxiety not to weary people with doctrine, we are apt to preach too little about God—about what He is, and what He has done and is doing for us. We require to stand still at times, and see the salvation of God. And there are few Christians who derive the exuberant confidence, which they should, from the fact of the Almightiness of their God. We are surrounded on every side by evidences and examples of human power. We are witnesses daily of what men can do by their inventions and contrivances. The influence of rank and wealth is felt by us all. We are conscious of being subject to the opinions and judgments of strong personalities. Every day it is driven home to us how extensive and dominant the power of

human beings is. Perhaps that is the reason why we are tempted to forget "the mighty hand and the outstretched arm of God." Or, perhaps, the reason is to be found, where Pascal found it, in the fact, "that when we wish to think of God, there is something which turns us aside, and tempts us to think of other things."

One of the most familiar stories in the Old Testament describes the consternation of Elisha's servant when he saw the Syrian host, which had crept up by night to invest the city of Dothan. The cordon seemed to be complete. "Alas my master," he cried, "how shall we do?" But his master, undisturbed by the presence of the hostile force, answered, "Fear not, for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." And then he prayed, and said, "Lord, I pray Thee, open his eyes, that he may see." And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw; and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.

We have all need, as much as the prophet's servant had, to have our eyes opened. We forget that the horizon, which we set, is not the boundary of reality. Receding away beyond the margin of our present vision and apprehension are infinite reaches of Divine might. When we pray for

ourselves, or our friends, or our fellow-men; when we meditate on the conflict between good and evil, that is being waged within us and around us; when we estimate the fortunes of the Kingdom of Christ at home and abroad—let us not be forlorn in spirit, but cultivate worthy ideas about the vastness of our resources in God. Sir Robert Ball tells us that the sip which a flying swallow takes from a brook goes as far to drain the waters of the stream, as the earth's absorption of the sun's rays does to exhaust the copious floods of light that the sun pours forth. The sip of a flying swallow—that is the kind of tax our faith usually lays upon God's ability to do "exceeding abundantly."

(2) Notice, in the second place, that *a particular sphere of God's activity* is indicated by the apostle:—"According to the power that worketh in us."

We are accustomed to think of the universe as displaying the glory of its Divine Maker. This earth and the innumerable worlds that people space, with all that they contain, testify to One Whose power is immeasurable. The process of time, involving as it does the controlling of all changes by law and the continual disposing and ordering of events, conveys to us some impression of the greatness of the authority that directs it.

But it is not to God working without that the apostle refers us, but to God working within. It is to God the Life-Giver that he turns our minds, to the energizing of the Holy Spirit. And that the Divine working does extend so far as to our inner life, that the Holy Spirit does exercise His power over our thoughts and impulses and the very springs of our being, is the glorious guarantee that in seeking to work out our salvation we shall succeed. For our lives are determined from within. If we are to be saved at all, we must be saved within. Place a man in the fairest world, appoint for him the most advantageous circumstances—he is capable of abusing all his opportunities. His heart and mind must be secured by the Spirit of God. The stream must be sweetened at its source, else its waters will always taste bitter. The Christian, of course, believes that God works without; he believes that his lot in life, its changes, its sorrows, its joys, its perplexities are ordered by Divine Providence. But he believes and knows that God is working within him—bending, persuading, inclining him, capturing and cleansing his affections.

Now, the apostle rests on the power of God manifested within men, just because he has been praying for inward gifts. Had he been beseeching

God for temporal, as distinguished from spiritual benefits, he would, I imagine, have confided in God's Providential goodness and power. But his requests are such as suppose the inner activity of the Spirit. And because God was present in His power in the minds and hearts of the Ephesians, He could bring that power to bear on them without measure. It was not for an impossible forth-putting of Divine energy that the apostle made supplication. Why do we beseech God on our own behalf, and on behalf of others, for such graces as love, joy, peace—the fruits of the Spirit of regeneration ? Is it not because we know that the region of our life, where these graces have their roots, is accessible to God—that there He is able to plant them and nourish them ?

Paul had experience of the power of God working within himself. It had transformed him. It had made a preacher out of a persecutor. While he laboured, he knew that another energy than his own was working in him with power. It sustained him amid all his trials ; it inspired and cheered and instructed him. His prayers were affected by it—he realized that the Spirit was helping his infirmities. By the grace of God he was what he was.

And I am certain that many of us could testify

to the power of God working within us. The evidence we would adduce might not be very startling, but it would be very real. Our first conscious choice of Christ, difficulties we were enabled to surmount, temptations we were enabled to overcome, depths from which we succeeded in emerging, experiences of sorrow or distress, dark valleys in which we were upheld by an invisible Arm, things we were strengthened to bear, and things we were strengthened to do, visions bright and glorious of the love of Christ—in all these varied ways we have had proof of the Spirit of God working within us.

Yet it should be remembered that the apostle did not derive all his confidence in God's power from the evidence of it which he possessed in himself. That evidence was convincing, it is true, and genuine beyond all questioning. But he went outside his own personal experience, and he tells us in Chapter I. where he went. He returned for assurance to the standard exhibition of Divine might. The work of mighty power which God wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead, and made Him sit at His right hand in the heavenly places—that was the supreme manifestation which constrained Paul to cry, " He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or

think." And we, too, should strive to conceive of what God is able to do in us and in others, not by the standard of what He has hitherto done, but by the "sweep and lift of His Almighty Arm" in the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ.

(3) Finally you will observe that *a basis for operation* is demanded. "Above all that we ask or think," says Paul. That implies a certain definite plane of expectation. It is necessary that we should ask or think something. For thereby we give God the opportunity of exercising His gracious power in us and through us. To the surveyor making his reckonings and calculations from either end of a carefully measured, even if short, line, the elevations of tall spires or lofty mountains will truthfully declare themselves. Archimedes, we are told, was so struck with the idea of what a lever might do, that he cried, "Give me a place to stand on, and I will move the earth." Have we ever thought of the work which God might work in us? Give Him a basis, give Him the opportunity, and He will do "exceeding abundantly" above all that you ask or think.

I do not care what a man's specific desire may be, or what notion he may entertain relative to the bearing of God's power on his life and interests. It is only necessary that he should have some

idea of what God might be to him, or do for his life, or do by his life. Give Him a footing in your imagination and heart. God may not fulfil our particular request, or gratify our particular notion. But any asking or thinking human being affords Him an opportunity. And when He gets that, blessed be His name, He does "exceeding abundantly" above all that is asked or thought.

XV

A TRIANGULAR CONSTELLATION

"Who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."—1 Cor. i. 30.

There is evidence in our text, that arrests us at once, of profound insight and commanding intellectual grasp. The great abstract terms, handled as they are with consummate skill, tell us that we are in contact with a master mind. In the passage, from which these words are taken, the apostle is engaged in showing the Corinthian Christians that they owed their standing and privileges as Christians entirely to the favour of God. It behoved them, therefore, to be humble, and not to flatter themselves that it was because they were wiser and better than other men, that they were Christians. By the grace of God they were what they were. Boasting with regard to their spiritual condition was excluded. Their relationship to God was of a peculiarly close and intimate kind, certainly. But it was not because they had sought Him with special earnestness, but

because He had sought and found them. Anything like self-congratulation, therefore, any feeling of contempt for their fellow-citizens, any attitude of superiority towards those who were not Christians, was entirely out of place. It was of God, that they were in Christ Jesus, and not of themselves. Consequently the only glorying, that was in keeping with their position, was glorying in the Lord.

Christians of the present day require to be reminded of these truths, just as much as Christians of the first century of our era did. We are tempted to pride ourselves on our privileges—to forget, indeed, as some one has said, "that they are privileges and to reckon them attainments." And, as a result, we are apt to encourage in our minds a sense of self-righteous detachment from those who are indifferent or careless, and to develop an air of cold suspicion towards those who make no profession; both of which are essentially worldly frames of mind, and utterly alien to the spirit of Christian sympathy and love.

But leaving the main subject of this section of the apostle's letter, I should like to direct your attention to the statement which he makes with respect to Jesus Christ in the course of his argument. "He was made of God unto us," says St

Paul, " wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." What a brilliant constellation of magnificent expressions.

To begin with, let us make sure that we have hold of the proper translation of the apostle's words. Two corrections require to be made. In the *first* place, the tense of the verb in the Authorized Version is wrong. It ought to be the past, not the present, " was made," not " is made." The apostle's correspondents had not always been Christians. Their Christian life had a beginning; and that epoch occurred when Christ Jesus was made of God unto them all that the apostle mentions. When our Lord suffered, " He provided," as Newman says, " not gave salvation. All was done for us, except the actual grant of mercy made to us one by one. There must be a giving or applying in the case of all who are to be saved." The gift of life came from God to the Corinthians on a definite historic occasion. In the *second* place, the four majestic terms that succeed one another are not to be taken as forming a single series, of which each is a separate and independent member. Wisdom should be recognized as standing by itself, the other three being appended to it by way of definition. Hence the verse correctly rendered Will read:—" Christ Jesus, Who was made

of God unto us wisdom—that is to say, righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." Or to revert to the figure previously used, the constellation does not consist of four great stars in a straight line. It is triangular in form, with wisdom reigning in splendour in the centre.

You will readily see, then, what the subject is, which our text brings before us. It may be stated thus:—"The significance of Jesus Christ for a man's life," or "The place which Jesus Christ occupies, and the part He fulfils, in Christian experience." "What is Jesus Christ to us Christians?" asks the apostle, "What has He been made of God to be to us?" And the answer which he gives to his own question is—"Jesus Christ was made of God unto us wisdom—or to be more explicit still, righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."

You will not expect me to attempt to define wisdom. Ever since men began to reflect, they have sought to explain the nature of wisdom. The philosophers of ancient Greece especially, those giants in the world of speculation, whose names were household words in Corinth and every Greek city, made themselves famous for all time by their efforts to solve this very problem. Nor will you expect me to quote some of the definitions which they, and other great thinkers since, have

given of this cardinal virtue. It would serve no useful purpose to do so now.

But without pretending to explore the subject with any thoroughness of detail, we can easily arrive at a good working notion of what is meant by wisdom. Let us start from what is a fact of human history, viz., that men have always asked themselves certain profound questions about life and destiny, about goodness and God. Well, the condition of being unable to answer these most practical and most pressing of all questions we name ignorance. Again, the condition of being indifferent to the necessity of having these questions answered, or the condition of being contented with trivial and shallow answers, we call folly. Ignorance, on the one hand: folly, on the other. And finally, as over against both, the condition of being in the possession of true and satisfying answers—do we not apply to that condition the term wisdom ?

Now let Christian men and women examine their experience. Does not Jesus Christ fulfil the part for each one of us of the Answer to life's great interrogations ? I do not say that we can resolve every problem into simple and clear explanations suggested to us, or discovered to us, by Him. Many things remain dark to us, and the darkness

in some cases seems quite impenetrable. But we believe with our whole heart that He is the Interpretation, that the secret is in His possession. We have Him. He is with us, and in us. Raise what questions you will, not silly conundrums and frivolous inquiries, but questions that go deep down into human life, questions that are elemental and urgent; and do you not turn instinctively to Jesus Christ, assured that the replies are personified and explicit in Him? He is our Wisdom whereby we are made wise—no oracular-looking dumb sphinx, but the living, self-communicating Response to our doubts and difficulties and fears —Jesus Christ "Who was made of God unto us Wisdom."

You will remember that we discovered that the three succeeding words—righteousness, sanctification, redemption—are to be taken as explanatory of wisdom. We shall best understand the meaning of them, if we continue to pursue the plan we have already followed. Wisdom, we have just seen, is the condition of being in the possession of true and satisfying answers to the fundamental questions which man has always addressed to himself. Three of those questions are dealt with in our text.

(1) First of all, there is the question of the *conscience*. You may phrase that question in several

ways, but in the end it resolves itself into an inquiry with respect to our moral worth in the sight of God. Searched and tried by our consciences, when they have been tempered for their work in the consuming fire of Divine holiness, we are exposed. When our real moral and spiritual condition is ascertained—the actual character we possess, the character we have developed as the result of our past life, the nature of the thoughts we think, the deeds we do or leave undone, the words we speak or leave unspoken—none of us will stand the Divine scrutiny. If we conclude otherwise, we deceive ourselves. Though we know nothing against ourselves, yet we are not thereby justified. From fictitious representations of ourselves we may derive a false suffusion of the feeling of self-satisfaction; but from a genuine perception of what we are, there can ensue nothing but self-reproach and self-condemnation.

And so what answer have we to give to conscience when it lays bare the hollowness of our condition, and leaves us to anticipate the alarming Divine reckoning? We can reply, "What we aspire to be and are not, comforts us." We can reply, "Our experience as Christians is not exhausted when what the prophet calls 'the filthy rags of our righteousness' are exposed. A righteousness,

which is by faith, is ours as Christians. To that we cleave. To its vindication of us we trust, seeing that we have appropriated it to ourselves, and can no longer conceive ourselves without it. Having it, we are able to recognize ourselves; by it we define ourselves; but let it be taken from us, and we shall cease to be ourselves. It is vital to our being, this righteousness which is by faith, and distinguishes us as Christians. Nay, not it, it, it,—an ideal laid hold of by faith. But Jesus Christ in us, incorporated with our personality, the Being we would be, is our Righteousness." That is the answer, is it not, we return to the fiery thrusts of conscience? "Jesus Christ" is the reply we make to its awful insinuations and admonitions. He is our vindicator in virtue of the glory of His person, and the ordeal He passed through. He is the High Priest of our Confession. With Him we identify ourselves by desire, and every affection and power whereby the soul is able to grasp and cling and lose its life in a higher and justifying life. This interfusion of our interest with Jesus Christ is no desperate expedient to relieve ourselves of responsibility. He was made of God to be this unto us—"Righteousness."

(2) Secondly, there is the question of the *will*.

The question of the will is a question of moral

power. Men in all ages have recognized the working of two principles in their lives—the principle of good, and the principle of evil—the law of the mind, and the law of the flesh. And they have sought for some guarantee, that the good was destined eventually to triumph in them. Cries of anguish and despair have gone up to heaven from the lips of men and women in every land, who have felt the uncertainty of the conflict, and known by experience the bitterness of falling. "Wilt thou one day, Oh my soul," exclaims the Stoic Emperor, "be good and simple, all one?" "Not what I would, do I practise," cries the Apostle in the seventh chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, "but what I hate, that I do."

When the question of "How to perform," "How to obtain the victory over the lower self," "How to make definite progress in acquiring a worthy and stable character," comes home to us, as come home to us it must if we are earnestly setting our faces in the right direction, what answer have we to give? What assurance do we possess that we shall overcome the world, and not be utterly borne down by the forces of evil and darkness, to whose attack we are continually exposed? Is not our final answer, is not our assurance, based on Jesus Christ? Is it not literally the case that you and I count

on victory over temptations as they successively occur, and look forward with confidence to developing a character sterling and strong and well pleasing to God, just because Jesus Christ is present in our lives? He is our Security. The native resources of our own wills may be precarious and feeble, but power sufficient for every conflict belongs to Him. We refuse to acknowledge our identity when we are conceived of as dissociated from Him. Christ is the supreme and essential factor in our existence as human beings. We decline to reckon up our forces, and leave His strength out of account. He is inseparable from our experience. He is self-committed to our salvation, "Jesus Christ, made of God unto us—Sanctification."

(3) Finally, there is, what I shall venture to call, the question of the *heart.*

What is this question? It is the heart's wistful inquiry concerning the possibility of a larger life, in which we shall breathe a freer air and be emancipated from the limitations of our present earthly conditions; in which we shall discover nobler capacities, and be delivered from the inward compromises that restrain us from yielding a perfect obedience to goodness; in which broken communions shall be restored, and death shall be no more, neither frustrations of hope, nor dis-

appointments, nor sorrow. It is what Coleridge described as "the hunger for eternity," the outstretching of our hands in "longing for the further shore."

Of what nature are the apprehensions which disturb us with reference to this subject? Sometimes, I admit, we sink into a state of uncertainty with regard to the reality of a life hereafter. There is so much in the present order of things to perplex us. But more often the fears, that press upon us, are not such as can be calmed by any assurance, however strong, concerning the fact of such a life. We are troubled about our part and lot in it. That its opportunities will be glorious, in the way of knowledge and fellowship and activity, we do not doubt; but we dread the possibility of our being found wanting, and proving morally incapable of responding to them. The friends whom we admire and love here, whose companionship is our delight, will rise to levels of experience that we shall never reach. We shall be forsaken and lonely. Things may occur, if they have not already occurred, in our lives, to disqualify us utterly from sharing in their joy. How we fail to interpret and take advantage of our opportunities now, we are to some extent aware. Is the ampler opportunity to condemn us, because we have not trained ourselves

by present faithfulness to meet it, but only prepared ourselves by disloyalties of all kinds to reject it ?

These are practical and well-grounded fears. Have we any answer to give to this spectre of uncertainty and despair, that haunts our hearts ? " It was not," writes John Donne, " to show us a land of promise, and then say there it is, but thou shalt never come at it. Jesus Christ came to save." He is our Answer. He will redeem us from every manner of bondage. He will bring us through— " o'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till the night is gone." In Him we place our confidence, and in His sure word of promise, that where He is, we shall be also. He is not a deliverer to accomplish for His people less than a final and complete deliverance. It is no vain and unsubstantial dream that our hearts conjure up about Jesus Christ. " He was made of God unto us Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification—and Redemption."

XVI

MARY'S TRIBUTE OF DEVOTION

"That which this woman hath done."—MARK xiv. 9 (R.V.).

BETWEEN the report of the plottings of the chief priests and the scribes to kill Jesus and the account of the treachery of Judas, like a green valley enclosed by frowning mountains, there occurs in the Gospel narrative a story of singular beauty. Our Lord had arrived at Bethany on His last journey to Jerusalem, and while He remained there, the guest, doubtless, of Lazarus and his sisters, Simon the Leper made Him a supper. Who this person Simon was, we do not know. Apparently he had once suffered from leprosy and been healed, or from some disease that had been so long mistaken for leprosy as to cause the fearful title to become attached to his name. There are those who think that he was Martha's husband, and there are others who conjecture that he was the father of our Lord's beloved friends. But there is no evidence for either suggestion. All that we can be sure of is the fact, mentioned by the evangelists Matthew and Mark,

that he entertained Jesus at a meal in his house.

That there was some kinship, however, between Simon and the members of the household dear to the Master, we can hardly doubt. For the evangelist John tells us in his Gospel that not only was Lazarus present at the supper, but that Martha also, his sister, was there, prominent in service. And Mary was one of the company too, the silent, gentle woman who had sat at the Saviour's feet and listened to the words that fell from His lips. Mary was there, with thoughts in her heart too deep for speech, unnamed, unnoticed by the guests, till, attracted by the smell of fragrant spikenard, they looked up and beheld her pouring with trembling hands the precious contents of an alabaster box over the Master's head. "Ah!" as Horace Bushnell says, "it takes a woman disciple after all to do any most beautiful thing; in certain respects too, or, as far as love is wisdom, any wisest thing." "The house was filled with the odour of the ointment," testifies one of the evangelists. And the House of God, the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, is still redolent with the sweet perfume of Mary's spikenard.

It was a simple deed with a wonderful pathos and glory about it. Nevertheless, when the dis-

ciples saw it, they had indignation among themselves because of it. The other evangelists refrain from mentioning names, but John, whose intense aversion to Judas is most marked throughout his Gospel, is careful to tell us that the censure of Mary's conduct originated with the betrayer. It was Judas who led the rest astray. It was he who described the action as waste. It was he who, with coarse indelicacy, put a money value on the ointment, and declared that it might have been sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor. "Not because he cared for the poor," says the Fourth evangelist, "but because he was a thief, and having the bag, took away what was put therein." And that the man, who sold his Lord a few hours later for less than half the sum at which he valued Mary's spikenard, could have been guilty of such hypocrisy, is only too credible.

You have perhaps on some occasion experienced the dismay of seeing a lovely ornament snatched from a table by the hands of an irresponsible infant, and dashed to pieces. Or, you have perhaps observed a foolish child take up a flower, and ruthlessly tear it to bits. That was what Judas tried to do to Mary's action. He sought to crush all the beauty out of it. And under the lash of the traitor's criticism of her conduct, Mary was already

beginning to suffer poignant pain, when Jesus interposed in her behalf. "Let her alone," He said, "why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor always with you, and whensoever ye will ye can do them good: but me ye have not always. She hath done what she could: she hath anointed my body aforehand for the burying." And then He went on to utter the wonderful testimony:—"Verily, I say unto you, Wheresoever the gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, that also which this woman hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her." What an immortality of fame for a woman's act of loving devotion. No such language was ever before or after used by Jesus concerning any human being. The little gospel of her deed was destined to be associated in all the remotest regions of the world and to the latest ages with the gospel of the grace of God. Mary's gift was to be included in the announcement of God's unspeakable Gift.

It was the action of Judas in putting in a plea on behalf of the poor that encouraged, and brought to a point, the indignation of the disciples. At first they were merely put out and irritated, as is only too often the case with men, by the unconventionality and emotional effusiveness of a

woman's deed. "Why couldn't she have kept her feelings under control like a rational being? What business had she to disturb the supper in this annoying fashion? If it had not occurred to her that it was her duty to help in serving the guests, as her exemplary sister, Martha, was doing, then at least she might have recognized the propriety of remaining quiet, and allowing the meal to proceed without interruption. There was a time for everything; and the present was clearly a time for eating and drinking, and not for sensational outbursts and demonstrations of devotion."

In the form of these or similar peevish reflections, which found expression in sharp glances, the indignation of the disciples probably declared itself at the outset. And had it not been that Judas stepped in and suggested to them an apparently sound reason for their entertaining such feelings, they would soon have become ashamed of themselves. But when he advanced the claims of the poor, and in view of their needs characterized Mary's action as wasteful, the eleven felt that he had provided them with a ground that justified their complaining sentiments. "Precisely so," they said to themselves, "Judas is right. We were conscious that something was wrong, though we could not quite explain what. It was a proper

instinct that led us to disapprove of the deed. This cruse of spikenard was probably, as Judas calculates, worth not less than three hundred pence. What an amount of good that large sum of money would have done, had it been spent in feeding starving families and clothing naked children. Instead of which it has been wasted, through the reckless extravagance of an impulsive and demonstrative woman." Yet it never occurred to them that the same process of reasoning applied with equal cogency to the money laid out by Simon on the supper of which they were partaking, and in the hearty enjoyment of which they had been interrupted. People who are given to censuring others generally manage to contract themselves out of the scope of their principles of criticism. Charity in judgment begins with them at home, and ends there.

We need not stay to apologize for an action which received our Lord's commendation. It is to be feared that there are still people afflicted with that meanness of disposition, which measures all things by a utilitarian standard. Generous hearts must lay their account with the churlishness, which will never learn to estimate the significance of their services except in terms of pounds, shillings, and

pence. Yet there are more things, and these things the greatest in life, than are dreamt of in the philosophy of those who regard arithmetic as the queen of sciences, in whose imaginations the only thing that glitters is gold, and who look upon the conventional standards of society as the final oracles of moral obligation. The spirit of Mary, begotten and evoked by the Spirit of Jesus Christ Himself, reproduced in the lives of martyrs and confessors, saints and benefactors, reformers and evangelists, has kept the Church alive, and caused it to be owned down the centuries by God as an instrument for the fulfilment of His purposes.

With regard to the plea on behalf of the poor, what our Lord said was, " Ye have the poor always with you." Their claims exist, and have to be met, of course. Deeds that are directly charitable, we are all bound to perform. " But what are the poor ? " as Dr Joseph Parker says. " Mere eaters and drinkers, gormandizers, people gathered around a trough to eat and drink ? Have they not eyes, imaginations, sensibilities, divinity of nature, that can be touched by the appeals of beauty and music and heroism and nobleness ? We misunderstand the poor when we suppose that they can only eat and drink, and that to give to them means to

give something into their hands, or something they can gnaw with their teeth. It is a base idea." Had Mary been dissuaded from performing her beautiful deed, and the three hundred pence been devoted to the charities of Bethany and Jerusalem, the poor as well as the rich in every age would have been grievously impoverished. Judas's censure is a slander on the poor, implying as it does that they would accept his preferring of their claims in such a case. Is it not amongst the poor that you meet with some of the most thrilling instances of lavish generosity and devotion ?

We are fulfilling our Lord's prediction to the letter when we are found describing what Mary did long ago. Let me indicate one or two features of that action of hers, which will ever be spoken of " for a memorial of her."

(1) *She did what she could.* The Master Himself said, " She hath done what she could."

It was not a deed performed on the impulse of the moment. The alabaster cruse of spikenard was not in Mary's possession by a happy chance. She had given much thought to the question of how she could best show her reverence and love for her Lord. Some declaration of her devotion she felt she must make. Speech did not come readily

to her. Mary's was a deep and silent nature. She was certain she could never tell Jesus to His face all that was in her heart. But might she not try to do what that other woman had done to Him in Galilee, when He was seated in the house of Simon the Pharisee? If she, with all the shame and sorrow that clung about her heart, could bring herself to perform such a courageous and lovely action, why not Mary also? It would mean exposing herself to public gaze, she that was so timid and diffident by nature. It would mean subjecting herself to misunderstanding and cruel criticism, she that was so gentle and sensitive in disposition. But if that other woman could brave the looks and the tongues of Simon the Pharisee's guests, was she to shrink from a similar ordeal, if the occasion presented itself? It seemed to be the only thing that she could do. And would she not summon up all her strength and resolution to do what she could for Christ's sake? Every man with any sensibility, and every woman will recognize that the costly part of Mary's action was the action itself, and not the fragrant spikenard which her trembling hands poured forth.

Does not her example waken new desires and purposes in your heart and mine? Our Lord

only asks us to do what we can. But what we can do is not the thing we feel able to do without any difficulty. "A pupil," says John Stuart Mill, "from whom nothing is ever demanded which he cannot do, never does all he can." We are all capable of far more than we are inclined to suppose. The impossible, as we reckon it, has a way of becoming practicable when we earnestly apply ourselves to it. We should think what we might do—that was Mary's plan—we should consider what has been done, and what others are doing. Then whether it be service in the way of speech or of action, in the way of giving or of going, we must up and render it for Christ's sake.

(2) *She did more than she knew.*

It was not given to Mary to anticipate the significance which her gracious action would have for the Saviour. How it gladdened and inspired Him in view of the awful ordeal that lay before Him! "She hath anointed my body," He declared, "aforehand for the burying." What a service she was privileged to render to her Lord! "At the brook" of her beautiful womanly tribute of love "He drank by the way, and lifted up the head." Do you wonder at the language of the Master?—"Wheresoever the gospel shall be preached

throughout the whole world, that also, which this woman hath done, shall be spoken of for a memorial of her."

Our actions always perform a ministry beyond our immediate intentions. "It is impossible," says Mark Rutherford, "to limit the effect which even an insignificant life may have." You speak a kindly word, for example, to some one, and if you think at all about what you have done, you attach little importance to the episode. But the person, whom you have treated in that manner, has an inner history of his own, and you have affected him in relation to experiences that you know nothing about. The things that wear a different appearance for him in consequence, the temptations you have helped him to overcome, the difficulties you have encouraged him to face are recorded in a book which is sealed to your eyes. And not only is such a person's own life influenced to a degree and in a variety of ways that you never anticipated, but the lives also of others, with whom he comes in contact, participate indirectly in the beneficent effects of what was to you a simple, and soon became a forgotten, incident. "Never was a sincere word utterly lost," says Emerson. "Never a magnanimity fell to the ground, but

there is some heart to greet and accept it unexpectedly." There is a promise and potency in deeds and words, in looks and hand-grasps and thoughts of kindness and love, far exceeding our poor imaginations.

(3) *She let her heart have its way.*

Once Mary had thought over what she might do, and felt the prompting to do this thing, and realized that she could do it, even though it would cost her many an inward tremor, she resolved to do it, and did it. And so her deed is spoken of to-day " for a memorial of her."

It is not that we do not devise generous things in our hearts. Most of us, all of us surely, do that. But the passage between the heart and the lips, between the heart and the hands, is too often blocked. Strive to keep these lines of communication open and in good repair, that ideal impulses may come to their fulfilment in the actualities of life. Undertake the irksome task, say the kindly and forgiving word, write the magnanimous letter, give the generous gift. Let your heart have its way. We cannot summon up the passionate feelings of devotion for Christ that inspired Mary of Bethany. But let us be true to those noble emotions that urge us from time to time, and our

natures will be deepened and enriched with larger and rarer capacities. It can never be our privilege to render such a personal service to our Lord, as Mary rendered. But, inasmuch as we do it unto one of the least of His brethren, our action is interpreted and accepted as done unto Him.

XVII

THE WILL OF THE FATHER [1]

'My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to accomplish His work."—JOHN iv. 34 (R.V.).

WHEN Jesus rejected the kindly entreaties of the disciples that He should partake of the food which they had bought in Sychar, and declared, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of," the disciples were unable to conceal their disappointment. Had they been forestalled? Had someone been beforehand with Him, and anticipated their invitation and service? That was the thought which occurred simultaneously to the twelve. How wide of the mark they were in their conjectures and interrogations! "My meat," said Jesus, interrupting their whisperings, "is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to accomplish His work." "What wonder," comments Augustine, "that the woman did not understand about the water! Lo the disciples do not understand about the meat!"

[1] Preached originally to undergraduates and training-college students.

That charge cannot, I imagine, be laid against you and me. We do understand both about the water and about the meat. We perceive the meaning of our Lord's words, and realize what it was that caused the cravings of bodily hunger to lose their grip on His consciousness. He had been engaged in "seeking and saving" one that was lost. It was the will of His Father that He should give Himself up to the vocation of Saviour, and in the fulfilment of the duties of that office He experienced the profoundest satisfaction and joy. So deeply engrossed was He in the carrying out of His mission, that on one occasion we read of "His having no leisure, so much as to eat." The needs of those who came to Him were so clamant that He could not postpone dealing with them, even although His physical strength was beginning to show signs of exhaustion. And at the well, even when He had "leisure to eat," the desire for food, which He had felt when He sat down to rest, was allayed by the interest and compassion, which the tragic secrets of a woman's history awakened in His heart.

When we speak of the Will of God, we ought to bear in mind that it expresses itself, as far as human beings are concerned, in two forms.

On the one hand it manifests itself as *the supreme*

law of life and conduct. The Will of God is goodness, the ideal that ought to be realized in thought and word, and deed by man. It is the standard, to which conformity on man's part is due at all times and in all circumstances. It represents the course our thinking ought to take, the direction in which our desires should go out, the line of speech or action we should adopt at any given moment and at every stage in our lives. The Divine Will is God's idea of what we should be, and what our behaviour should be, at each juncture in the changing conditions of our mortal lot.

Now, the life of Christ is unintelligible unless we are prepared to acknowledge that He rendered a perfect obedience to the Will of the Father. Without doubt that is an astounding article to admit into one's creed. Not that there is any valid ground in reason for rejecting it. Does not the moral ideal in every man's experience cry for a perfect realization of itself ? Moral endeavour has no meaning if it be not attended with faith in such a possibility. In the lists of life we do not feel that we are summoned to take part in a contest, the issue of which has already been decided.

> So nigh is grandeur to our dust,
> So near is God to man,
> When duty whispers low: "Thou must,"
> The youth replies: "I can."

Evil never assumes in an unsophisticated mind the character of an inevitable and necessary line of conduct. Our sense of responsibility for wrong-doing repudiates the notion that we had no other alternative than to give way to temptation. Hence while the records of history, and the facts of life as we know them, would compel us to marvel exceedingly at the phenomenon of a "sinless" character, the testimony of the moral consciousness as such, so far from foreclosing the possibility of such a character, declares both that it should be and that it might be realized.

If we are not disposed to go the length of denying the fact that God does reveal His Will through the human conscience, we are shut up to the conclusion, however unprecedented it may be, that Jesus Christ gave a continuous and complete fulfilment to it. Had there been any sin in His life, it would have expostulated successfully with His exalted claims. Any rift in the ethical consistency of His character would have brought down the whole superstructure of privileged experience of Divine Sonship, and of conviction regarding His capacity to redeem and His right to judge. On any other theory, than that He rendered a perfect obedience to the Will of His Father, the key-stone, if I may say so, which locks and co-ordinates the rounded arch of His

amazing consciousness of Himself in relation to God and to mankind, is dislodged. What we are left with in the Gospels is not the portrait of a human being, conspicuous amongst His fellows in virtue of the purity of His soul and the penetrative power of His rational and moral insight. It is the representation of a mind and character the most abnormal, incoherent, and terrifying that the records of history are able to show. If on the ground that He must have come short of the Divine ordeal, inasmuch as an admission to the opposite effect would make Him unique amongst men, it be inferred that He did come short, then the consequence of such a breach being made in the unity of His consciousness and the symmetry of His character will not be to secure for Him a place on the ordinary level of humanity. It will involve His being relegated to a position of tragical pre-eminence in the pathetic ranks of the self-deceived and infatuated. Call it what you please, the fact that our Lord at no time failed to realize and give perfect expression to His Father's Will remains by far the more credible of the alternative interpretations of His person.

On the other hand, the Will of God manifests itself in *the ordering of the circumstances of men's lives.* Hitherto we have been considering it as

the authoritative principle of conduct, both in its inner aspect as thought and feeling, and in its outer aspect as speech and action. Now I would have you think of the operation of the Divine Will in appointing to human beings their varied lots, and in determining the measure of their time on this earth. Towards the Will of God, as it expresses itself in this form and in this region of things, the ideal attitude is that of submission and acquiescence.

A single fact, then, which I wish to emphasize, steps out, as it were, at this point into a circle of light. Jesus Christ not only rendered a perfect obedience to the Will of His Father, as that Will revealed itself to Him in the form of a law of conduct, He also acquiesced unmurmuringly in the Will of His Father, as that Will manifested itself in the outward conditions of His life. He accepted these conditions as providing Him with the stage He required for fulfilling the part He was sent to discharge. He never quarrelled with His circumstances, nor complained that they were too narrow and too mean to allow Him to accomplish His mission. He hailed them as opportunities for doing His Father's Will. Have you ever reflected what the conditions of Christ's life were, which He thus accepted as appointed for Him by

His Father, and which He estimated as sufficient, with respect to the scope they afforded Him, for performing the greatest work that was ever achieved in this world ?

(1) Let me remind you, in the first place, that He *acquiesced in His Father's ordaining for Him a short life.*

The chronology of the Gospels is a matter with regard to which there is considerable diversity of opinion among experts. But we shall not be far wrong if we think of Christ as having been condemned and crucified when He was little over thirty years of age. During the greater part of His adult life He lived in obscurity. Only for a period of about three years was He definitely engaged in the work of His public ministry. How rapidly they must have seemed to Him to pass ! Between His going down into the Jordan to be baptized by John, and His going forth outside the gate of Jerusalem to be crucified by a detachment of Roman soldiers, how short the interval must have appeared !

> He was young
> Who for my sake in silence hung
> Upon the Cross with passion wrung.

And yet, brief as His time of service was, He accepted it as adequate. To Him it consisted of

a day's full measure of twelve working hours. Into it He crowded a succession of deeds of mercy. Before the clock struck, He found opportunity to utter many a word of eternal life. Behold, a Sower went forth to sow, and ere the shadows of evening fell and the darkness came down, He had cast into the furrows of the earth an abundance of grain, whereof the full harvest is yet unreaped.

You and I can hardly help anticipating for ourselves a long life. We reckon that, however it may fare with others, we at least shall grow old and enjoy a goodly length of years in this world. And so it may be. Only let us not, in view of that expectation, postpone the giving up of ourselves to God, and the rendering of the obedience to His Will which He requires of us now. For we may be disappointed. These fleeting days, so full of engagements and so taken up with a routine of duties and a variety of interests, may not be preparation days for an ampler leisure and a wider range of influence. They may represent our sole opportunity. And in any case they do represent an irretrievable opportunity. Are you satisfied with regard to the manner in which you are spending them ? Are you laying up for yourself by present loyalties no future insensibility to great and true appeals, no incapacity to respond worthily to the

possible tasks of later years, no corruptedness of feeling or sluggishness of will to prevent your rising up and giving a noble interpretation, and an enthusiastic fulfilment, to the duties which God may put in your way? I know men in their thirties or beyond who would give their right hands to be back again in their teens or early twenties, that they might slough the disqualifying habits and modes of thought which by negligence or recklessness they then contracted. Are you administering the precious trust of your life, committed to you by God, in such a spirit of faithfulness that, without remorse of conscience at all events, you could lay it down if He required you to do so?

(2) Again, let me remind you that our Lord *acquiesced in His Father's ordaining for Him a life of poverty.*

A carpentry-business in Nazareth cannot have been a lucrative concern. And whatever wages Jesus earned at His trade, they were required, we may be sure, for the upbringing of His younger brothers and sisters. When He left His home and His bench, He probably took no money at all with Him. We know for certain that during the three years of His ministry He was dependent on the charity of friends. And while kind hands were not

wanting to minister to His necessities, there were times when he had not " where to lay His head."

It is true that " East is East and West is West." Under the social conditions that exist in the East, the same degree of disrepute has never attached to poverty, as is fastened upon it in the West. " In India to this day the figure of the sage or saint is familiar, who has nothing but his cloth and his dish, and who yet takes rank in the reverence of the people with the great men of the land." And as we can readily exaggerate the humiliation of poverty in Oriental society, so we can also easily overstate the discomfort attendant on that condition in a kindlier climate than our own. Nevertheless there is no getting past the fact, that no matter in what country it is experienced, poverty involves many sore hardships. It was under this burden that Christ lived His life, and accomplished His work. He was poor: and He accepted that lot without complaint.

God does not appoint for every one the same outward circumstances. I am not going to raise the question as to the equity, or the reverse, of the present system of the distribution of wealth. That is a separate subject altogether. But as men differ from men in their talents and habits, so there

will always be some wealthier than others, on whatever basis society may happen to be organized. And let us beware of belittling the power of money (because we perhaps do not possess very much), and of underestimating the opportunities for doing good, which it affords to those who have more than they need. At the same time let us never be afraid or ashamed to be poor. "It is certain," says William James, "that the prevalent fear of poverty among the educated classes is the worst moral disease from which our civilization suffers." That is a strong statement, but there is abundance of evidence to prove that it is true. The deceitfulness of riches, possessed and coveted, is choking "the Word" in thousands of lives to-day.

Many of you are looking forward to careers in which the chances of making a fortune are almost nil. Considerations of that kind are indeed, I believe, of secondary, if they are of any importance, in determining your choice. You are prepared to be thankful, I daresay, if you get enough to keep you. Always remain impervious to the idea, that a condition, straitened as regards outward circumstances, is essentially a condition straitened as regards the possibilities of your living a great life of service to God and to your generation. You will be tempted to think otherwise many a time. But

wherever your lot is cast, be it in a crowded city, a country town, or a remote district of this or another land, hold before yourself a high ideal of the romance your life in fellowship with God may become, and strive to be found faithful to His Will. By the poverty of Jesus, be content with your estate, and suffer it not to betray you into despising the greatness of your opportunity for glorifying God.

(3) Finally, let me remind you in a few sentences that our Lord *acquiesced in His Father's ordaining for Him a life that was an apparent failure.*

I say " a life that was an apparent failure," for we know that He finished the work that was given Him to do, and that the manifold fruits and trophies of His obedience are still being gathered to His feet.

But while anything but a real failure, the life of Christ was undoubtedly an apparent failure as far as outward signs of success were concerned. The crowds, that had gathered to hear Him at the beginning of His ministry, gradually melted away. Galilee rejected Him, and the populace of Jerusalem took up stones to destroy Him. A brief interval of popularity occurred while He was preaching at Bethabara, and when He entered Jerusalem in royal Messianic state. But the shouts of

" Hosanna," that greeted Him then, were quickly changed into hoarse cries of " Crucify Him." The moment He was arrested His disciples forsook Him and fled. And when He was hanging on the tree, the only person who believed in Him was a man who had been a malefactor, and who was himself dying on an adjoining cross.

Our Lord passed under the power of death without having seen of the travail of His soul. In that respect your experience of life may to some extent resemble His. You may be appointed to know the fellowship of His sufferings in that ordeal. To be misunderstood, to be unappreciated, to be denied the joy of seeing the results of one's labours —that is, indeed, a sore trial. Are you prepared to drink of such a cup, and be baptized with such a baptism ? Neither you nor I dare invite God to subject our faith and courage to so severe a test. It may never indeed be our lot to have to face it. The lines may fall unto us in pleasant places, and we may have the happiness of being the reapers of our own sowing. But if we are put to the proof of having failure attributed to us, and testimonies of gratitude withheld from us, let us reach out towards God for the strength that will enable us to remain constant to His Will, and cherish the conviction that a life clean, and strenuous, and

dedicated to Christ, cannot fail in the end to accomplish great, if delayed, results.

Follow Me, Jesus said, and they uprose,
Peter and Andrew rose and followed Him,
Followed Him, even to Heaven, thro' death most grim
And thro' a long hard life without repose
Save in the grand ideal of its close.
Take up your cross and follow Me, He said,
And the world answers still thro' all its dead,
And still would answer had we faith like those.

XVIII

THE UNRECOGNIZED CHRIST

"Supposing Him to be the gardener."—JOHN XX. 15.

ONE of the most striking features in the gospel narratives of the resurrection is the reference that is repeatedly made to the fact, that those, to whom our Lord appeared, failed at first to recognize Him.

For example, in the exquisitely told story of the "Walk to Emmaus," we read that "it came to pass, while Cleopas and his companion communed and questioned together on the road, Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But," continues the evangelist, "their eyes were holden that they should not know Him."

Again, there is an incident of a similar kind recorded in the last chapter of St John's Gospel. The scene is laid in Galilee this time. At the suggestion of Simon Peter, a number of the disciples (including the sons of Zebedee, Thomas, Nathaniel of Cana, and two others whose names are not mentioned) had gone a-fishing. Trained though some of them, at least, were to the business,

and familiar from boyhood with the most productive areas of the lake, they had worked their nets hard all night, and had nothing but seaweed to show for their labour. Not a single fish flapped in the bottom of the boat. If Thomas and Nathaniel were laymen at the trade, the experience was a particularly unfortunate one for them, and their impressions with regard to the profitableness of the occupation cannot have been very favourable. Day was now breaking, and with the rising of the sun the last chance of a catch was gone. It was time for the unsuccessful toilers to be thinking of turning towards the land. So, with their nets stowed on board, they searched through the gray morning light for a point on the shore which they might make for, and where they could beach their boat. And as they did so, what was their surprise to see a solitary figure standing near the water's edge. It was Jesus Who stood there. "Howbeit," as the evangelist says, "the disciples knew not that it was Jesus."

Both of those stories are singularly beautiful, but the one from which our text is taken is more touching, I think, than either of them. It was the first Easter morning. By the empty tomb of Joseph's garden stood a woman weeping. Through the dark and silent streets of the city, Mary

Magdalene had stolen out to the sepulchre. To her amazement, the great stone that guarded its door was no longer in its place. Unable to endure alone the agony of dismay, which so startling a discovery awakened in her breast, she had fled to share it with Simon Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved; and had burst in upon them with the cry, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb."

In breathless haste the two men had gone forth to prove with their own eyes the truth of her words. Sleepers half roused from their slumbers had wondered for a moment to hear the sound of their running on the street, and had fallen over again satisfied that, whatever the reason for the hurrying footsteps might be, it did not concern them.

So the men had come to the garden, Simon Peter, less fleet of foot, following his nimbler companion. They had entered into the sepulchre, and had found it even as the woman had said. The napkin and the linen clothes were there, but the body of Jesus was not there. And having seen and believed, they had gone away again, staggered and speechless, to their own home.

How exceedingly characteristic of the conduct of men, the behaviour of those two was. They were satisfied about the facts. They had laid hold

of them with their minds. As best they could, they had now to face those facts, and wrestle with the significance of them. The outward circumstances that confirmed them no longer commanded their attention. Further contact with them promised to be in reality a source of intolerable embarrassment. The facts themselves claimed their thoughts ; and the men, with all the data that they needed in their own minds, obedient to the instincts of their sex, sought a place where they could be alone, and think over, and try to realize the meaning of what had happened.

But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping. Like a true woman, she lingered at the place which loudly proclaimed the frustration of her expectations. From the actual scene, the details of which kept repeating their cruel announcement, she could not tear herself away. Had she tried to do so, her heart would have cried out for another immediate, sensible proof, that the stone was rolled away and the tomb empty. And back she would have run to fill her eyes again with the woeful evidence. Unlike the men, she could not take the facts into her mind, and give herself up to grievous contemplation of them. Her womanly feelings craved a longer experience of relation by sight and touch to the outward signs, that testified to the dire thing

that had occurred. And so, whereas Simon Peter and the other disciple went away to their own home, "Mary," we read, "stood without at the sepulchre weeping."

"As she wept," the narrative proceeds, "she stooped down and looked into the tomb." Her hunger for confirmation of the bitter truth was insatiable. Straightway, through the mist of her tears, she beheld two angels in white, sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. The evangelist, writing, apparently, long after the event, forbears making any mention of the emotions, whether of fear or surprise, which the vision created in Mary's heart. All he tells us is, that to the angel's question, "Woman, why weepest thou?" she replied, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him."

Was it the sound of a footstep, or a sudden inexplicable conviction that some one was behind her, that made her turn half-round and see the figure of a man standing near her? Who the person was, she knew not; and even when the silence that ensued, while her mind accommodated itself to his presence, was broken by his asking, "Woman, why weepest thou, whom seekest thou?" she failed to recognize the speaker. No one but

the gardener was likely to be abroad at such an early hour; and, in the words addressed to her, there was just a trace of authority—a suggestion that the man, who spoke them, was privileged to put such a question to a person found in that place. So she concluded that he was the gardener, and leapt to the thought that his presence there and then might have something to do with the tomb's being empty. Fear or shame on account of the charge laid upon him had, perhaps, induced him to remove the body to some secret resting-place. If so, Mary was willing to relieve him of all responsibility for the care of it. Ah! there was one person, at least, in the world, a lonely woman who had been a sinner and an outcast, who was ready, nay, eager, to bear all the reproach and incur all the dangers attendant on such a custodianship. Does not her imploring cry send a thrill of wonder and gratitude through us:—"Sir, if thou hast borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away." Jesus saith unto her, "Mary." She turneth herself, and saith unto him, "Rabboni."

The particular idea, which I wish to emphasize at present, is suggested by the incident that has just been described. Mary, like Cleopas and his friend, like Simon Peter and his unsuccessful colleagues in that memorable fishing expedition,

failed to recognize Jesus. Whom the others supposed Him to be, we are not told; but she, we know, mistook Him for Joseph of Arimathea's gardener.

Now it is impossible that any of us should make such a mistake to-day. We have no occasion or opportunity to do so. Jesus Christ is no longer visible to men's bodily eyes, in Palestine or in Scotland, in Jerusalem or in Stirling. He has withdrawn Himself from that condition of existence in which His presence can be recognized by sense-perception. We are not liable to meet Him walking in some graveyard, on the road, or by the seashore. There is no possibility of our ever having to own that we confused His gracious appearance with that of some one else. But in another sphere, in another mode of His manifestation of Himself, it is far from unlikely that some of us may for long have been unaware, that He, and none other, had drawn near to us, and was speaking to us.

To what sphere, to what mode of manifestation, do I refer? I refer to the sphere of our inner experience, and to Christ's mode of manifesting Himself there after a spiritual fashion. With the conception of the exaltation of Christ, we are all doubtless familiar. One of the answers in the Shorter Catechism, some of us will remember,

explains "wherein it consists." That answer is based on language which the apostle Paul uses in his Epistle to the Ephesians, where he speaks of "Christ's being raised from the dead and made to sit at God's right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world but in that which is to come." The great idea conveyed by those glowing words is one to be cherished and rejoiced in. But it is a profound misfortune if, through want of reflection, we persist in thinking of Jesus Christ as reigning somewhere in space at an immense distance from us. Not so ought we to conceive of His exaltation. Our constant endeavour should be to get behind every figure of a spatial kind. His exaltation, as far as we can understand it and feel the significance of it, consists in a moral and spiritual pre-eminence. He has the "Name that is above every name," inasmuch as He possesses supreme authority over the consciences and wills of men, and is invested with power to save them. The seat of His Kingdom is not located far off in stellar space. His Kingdom is within men's lives. All things in that realm are not yet put under His feet, but He comes to His throne and secures His royal prerogatives, when He becomes your Lord and mine. So then,

when we think of Jesus Christ as exalted, He is not to be relegated by our imaginations to some inaccessible celestial fastness. "Say not in thy heart," writes the apostle Paul, "Who shall ascend into Heaven? (that is to bring Christ down). For He is nigh us, in our hearts."

> "Speak to Him thou for He hears, and spirit with spirit can meet,
> Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet."

In connection with a certain experience, John Bunyan makes Hopeful say to Christian in the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' "I was ignorant that this was the work of God in me." And a similar ignorance, I feel sure, characterizes the minds of many young men and women with regard to what goes on in their inner life. They hear others using time-honoured expressions descriptive of religious experiences, and they are at a loss to know what they mean. They conclude that there is something mysterious and supernatural about the feelings and convictions referred to, and they are unable to detect any corresponding phenomena in themselves. They are conscious of nothing abnormal occurring in the region of their emotions and thoughts, and they are somehow persuaded that the chief feature about religious experiences is their abnormality.

They imagine that if Jesus Christ were to speak to them, He would do so in some miraculous and altogether unprecedented way. Now I am here to tell those of you, who labour under such ideas, that you are entirely mistaken. Just as He addressed Mary Magdalene in tones so human and natural as made it possible for her to " suppose that He was the gardener," so does He address us in the secrecy of our hearts. The voice with which Jesus Christ speaks to men and women is a still small voice, with which you are all well acquainted. Only, perhaps, you have not hitherto recognized Him. He has spoken to you in sharp rebukes of conscience, and in your secret loathings of the sins you have committed. The noble and generous emotions, and the tender and gracious memories, by which you have, from time to time, been thrilled, were of His evoking. The appreciations of goodness, and the aspirations after purity and holiness, which swept through your soul, were called forth by Him. The longings and ambitions, by which you have once and again been urged, to have your life made great and serviceable in behalf of righteousness and the welfare of your fellows, were kindled by His words. The solemn and overwhelming thoughts of God, which loomed up in your mind and marked an epoch in your history, were communicated to

you by His presence. He has been addressing you since the days of your infancy and childhood. He is seeking to be recognized by you. He calls you by name. He entreats you to come into conscious and deliberate relationship with Himself. He waits for you to turn yourself towards Him like Mary, and say to Him, "Rabboni"—My Master. Your future life will be a different thing altogether from your past; it will be illumined with a rare glory and pervaded by a deep gladness, if the footing on which you stand to Jesus Christ is one of intimate, personal, avowed acknowledgment of Him as your Lord and Master. "She turneth herself and saith unto Him—'Rabboni.'"

XIX

IF CHRIST HAD NOT COME!

"If I had not come, and spoken unto them, they had not had sin."—JOHN xv. 22.

"If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin."—JOHN xv. 24.

THE little community, which had been in existence for about three years, was rapidly approaching a crisis in its history. The Master was to be crucified within the space of a few hours, and the task of promoting and developing the purposes, for which the society had been founded, was to be entrusted to the disciples alone. They were met together for the last time under the conditions that had characterized their fellowship since the day when they had become associated with one another. To the disciples, from whom He was on the eve of being separated as far as His continuous bodily presence with them was concerned, the Master could hold out no other prospect than that of a life of hardship and danger. He Himself, as He reminded them, had been hated by the world. They would experience the same treatment. They were His

servants, and He had been persecuted. They must be prepared, therefore, to undergo a similar ordeal. A future full of hazard and affliction lay before them. It behoved them to recognize that fact, and count the cost entailed in His service. For the sufferings, to which they would be subjected, would befall them in consequence of their relationship to Him. They would be regarded with hatred, and pursued with violence, for His Name's sake. It might fare otherwise with them if they abandoned their discipleship. But so long as they were identified with Him and His Cause, they knew what to expect. That generation of the Jewish people had heard His words and seen His works, and they had "despised and rejected" Him. The welfare of the eleven, in so far as it could be determined by outward circumstances, was thus at the mercy of men who had committed themselves to an attitude of relentless hostility. By their repudiation and oppression of Him, the leaders of the Jews had declared on what side they stood, and had incurred a heavy burden of guilt. The disciples, therefore, in the days to come, would have to deal with persons, who were in the position of having had a great opportunity and refused it. "If He had not come, and spoken unto them, they had not had sin. If He had not done among them

the works which none other man did, they had not had sin. But now had they both seen and hated both Him and His Father."

The candour which our Lord exhibited towards His disciples on this, as on other occasions, cannot fail to arrest our attention. He showed Himself ready to trust these men, whom He had called from their various occupations to be His companions and colleagues. He reckoned on their facing the future with undaunted hearts. He believed in their loyalty. His attitude towards them, and the position which it secured for Him in their lives, might be described in the words of the prophet Isaiah concerning God's method of dealing with Israel :—" Surely," saith the Lord, " they are my people, children that will not deal falsely : so He was their Saviour."

But the subject, round which our thoughts are to collect at present, is that which is proposed in a negative fashion by verses 22 and 24, viz., the significance for you and me of the coming of Jesus Christ into the world.

Some time ago there appeared in a daily newspaper a short article entitled, " Had it not been for that." The writer pointed out in a graphic way how the " Ifs " of history had been the theme of many an interesting digression on the part of historians.

He quoted as an instance the declaration of Froude, that if the Spanish Armada had taken the Isle of Wight and effected a landing in that neighbourhood, as it might easily have done, instead of Protestant England, we should have had Catholic England. Another example of the exercise of the speculative faculty on the part of a historian, referred to by the anonymous journalist, was the statement of Lecky to the effect, that if George I. had known English, the King would have continued to preside over the Cabinet, and thus the whole course of constitutional development would have been different.

The study of history, if it be taken up in a scientific spirit, proceeds along the lines of endeavouring to relate previous events and movements to subsequent ones. The historian has to perform two journeys. Beginning at a definite period of time, he must trace back, as accurately as he can, the incidents that mark that period to those of an earlier date which contributed, by one means or another, to their occurrence. At whatever era he chooses to stop—and every historian must pause in his intellectual excursion into the past somewhere—he cannot regard his labours as finished. He has still the return journey to face. And it is the story of this latter journey

that he gives to the world as his contribution to the subject. History is always written in the form of a narrative description of events in the order in which they happened. The historian ascends from the present into the past in the course of his investigations, but he descends from the past into the present in his historical publications. In other words, he writes history forwards and not backwards. And it is with successive facts, verified as such with the utmost care, that he has to deal. His route is fixed for him. He has to find in one set of facts an explanation that will account for another set later on in time. It is not his province to inquire what would have happened, if such and such an event had not taken place. He has to record that it did take place, and then he must attempt to show how it determined and gave rise to subsequent events.

Place yourself in imagination at any great epoch of history—the Battle of Waterloo, the Reformation, the Invention of Printing, the Discovery of America, the Norman Invasion, the Downfall of the Roman Empire, the Destruction of Jerusalem. At once you will realize the impossibility of conceiving what the history of the world would have been, had those momentous events not taken place. But your sense of bewilderment and your con-

sciousness of speculative impotency will be increased immeasurably, if you try to imagine what course the history of the race would have taken, had the most stupendous event that ever happened not occurred, viz. the Advent of Jesus Christ. One's mind cannot get under way at all with such a problem. For He has been the supreme factor in the history of the Christian era. We date the passage of the years by the year of His birth, dividing time into "before" and "after" at that point. And we owe everything that is elevating in our civilization, and fraught with the promise of future well-being, directly or indirectly to Him.

But, while we are utterly unable to represent to ourselves the course which the history of the world would have followed had Christ not come, the verses we are considering emphasize the moral and spiritual significance of His Advent for us as individuals. "If I had not come and spoken unto them, if I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin."

(1) Consider, in the first place, *the responsibility created by the fact of Christ's presence in the world.*

When our Lord entered on His public ministry, He at once drew to Himself the attention of high and low. He invited men to take up a definite attitude towards Himself. People instinctively

and inevitably ranged themselves on the side that was for Him, or on the side that was against Him. They could not help passing a verdict on One Who advanced the claims that He did, and Who repealed and supplemented their traditional law with an authority that no scribe ever assumed. Every person who came in contact with Him was tested by Him, and a feeling of attraction or repulsion was awakened in their hearts. In this cleavage of the populace into opposite parties there was fulfilled the prophecy of Simeon, which he spake to Mary concerning her infant:—"This child is set for the falling and rising up of many in Israel."

Every great boon conferred on mankind, whether it takes the form of the appearance in their midst of a commanding personality or the acquisition of a new political or social privilege, assumes the character of an opportunity. Advantage may be taken of the opportunity: or it may be neglected and abused. On no other terms, save those which admit of the possibility of these contrary relations to it, can any benefit be bestowed by God on human beings. It cannot come otherwise than in the form of an opportunity, fraught with blessing to those who embrace it, but fraught with the opposite to those who despise it. If it had not been put

within their reach, the former would not have attained to the higher and richer experience which it secured to them, while the latter would not have incurred the guilt of rejecting it, and confirmed themselves in a condition of insensibility to all such appeals.

God's unspeakable Gift to the race comes under this universal law. The presence of Jesus Christ in the world constitutes a supreme opportunity. With it we must deal. With Him we must deal either in the way of acceptance and obedience, or the reverse. It is not within our power to divest ourselves of this grave responsibility. He has come, and spoken unto men words which none other spoke, and done works which none other did. As the eyes of a portrait painted by a master follow us all round the gallery in which it is hung, so do the eyes of Christ arrest us and challenge us. Whither can we go from His Spirit, and whither can we flee from His presence? It is not a theory of His Person that He requires us to give in the first instance. We might well declare our insufficiency for such a task. He demands from us a reply to the question as to what we are making of our life, and as to the place we are giving to Him in our hearts. No answer to the inquiry, "What think ye of Christ?"

can possibly be worthy of the subject at issue, unless it is provided by personal experience of faith in Him and obedience to Him. "If He had not come!"—but He has come, and He presents a great and solemn opportunity to you and me.

(2) Notice, in the second place, that *the consciousness of sin bespeaks the presence of Christ in a man's life.*

That is a thought which our text does not directly suggest to us, but it can hardly fail to occur to one who ponders over the words of our Lord. I do not say (God forbid!) that sin bespeaks the presence of Christ in a man's life. What I affirm is, that "the consciousness of sin bespeaks His presence." "Were we," writes Origen, "to draw from the axiom, that 'disease is diagnosed by means of medical knowledge,' the inference that 'medical knowledge is the cause of disease,' we should be making a preposterous statement." And similarly we should be making a "preposterous statement," if we deduced from the fact, that "the consciousness of sin is due to the presence of Christ," the inference that "the presence of Christ is the cause of sin."

The presence of Christ when He was on this earth had the effect, you will remember, of revealing to men and women their sinfulness. The sight of Him on one occasion made Simon Peter

exclaim, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." A compassionate glance of the eyes of Christ, or a tender word from His lips, melted the heart of a woman who was a sinner, and discovered her condition to her. The spectacle of Christ entering his door caused Zacchæus to take a swift survey of his past life, and announce great reparations. The challenge of Christ awoke the slumbering consciences of certain Scribes and Pharisees who had brought to Him one that had been taken in sin. "They went out," we read, "one by one, beginning from the eldest even unto the last."

And so when there rises up before you and me the dark vision of what we have been and are, when shame spreads its mantle over our feelings and we are filled with self-reproach and self-disgust, let us seek to believe that these experiences are ours because Christ is near at hand. "If once sensibility to sin be lost," says Marcus Aurelius, "what object is there in still living on?" It is "the beginning of man's doom." But sensibility to sin, while it is a fundamental condition of amendment and contains the promise of a new life, is hard to arouse. How common a circumstance it is for good advice, tendered with the best intentions, to have the effect only of offending a brother's pride, and establishing him in a sullen attachment

to his habitual ways. Some disturbance of the complacency, into which a man's moral interest is always liable to settle down, may be brought about by the faithful rebukes of a friend, or the silent influence of a life of self-sacrifice. But to accomplish a radical upheaval, to awaken that deep dissatisfaction and alarm which characterize genuine repentance towards God, He must come into our life Who is able to speak words, and effect a work of conviction, for which none other is sufficient.

(3) Finally, let the imperfect words of the preacher once again announce the Gospel message, which is old and ever new, that *Jesus Christ manifests Himself not to condemn, but to save.*

" God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world : but that the world through Him might be saved." Those words of the evangelist are true in their widest application, and they are true when their application is narrowed down to your experience and mine. He, but for Whose presence in our hearts we had not had the consciousness of sin, comes not into the little world of our life to condemn us, but to save us. The service, which He is able to render to us, is not the disappointing and melancholy one of a physician, whose skill enables him to diagnose our condition, but who is forced to confess that he can no nothing to cure us.

He " shows us all the sin," in order that He may " teach us all the mercy." And " the mercy " which He " teaches " us includes forgiveness and something else. That something else is the gift of His Spirit. We are not left to struggle upwards, as best we can, towards moral well-being from the zero represented by the level at which we have experienced forgiveness. The revelation to us by Christ of what we are not, qualifies us to receive and appreciate forgiveness. It also, it always, sets before us what we can become " through Him that strengtheneth us."

XX

A MUCH MISQUOTED SCRIPTURE

"And it shall come to pass in that day, that the prophets shall be ashamed every one of his vision, when he hath prophesied; neither shall they wear a rough garment to deceive: but he shall say, 'I am no prophet, I am an husbandman; for man taught me to keep cattle from my youth.' And one shall say unto him, 'What are these wounds in thine hands?' Then he shall answer, 'Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.'" —ZECHARIAH xiii. 4-6.

THERE are certain subjects of scriptural study, which have engaged the attention of many good people to very little purpose. One of these consists of the mysterious figures and symbolic numbers, mentioned in the Books of Daniel and Revelation. Some of the explanations, that have been offered of the details of these books, are bewildering in their ingenuity and fantastic, beyond all words, in their character. Again and again the most confident predictions with regard to the end of the world, or the Second Advent of Christ, have been announced on the strength of a special baptism of illumination; and just as often, of course, the

momentous date has passed and nothing has happened.

Another subject, on which a great deal of devout but unprofitable labour has been expended, is the allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament. In particular, the utmost pains have been taken to discover a reference to our Lord in every verse that could conceivably be expounded in that way. We are all aware that there are numerous passages scattered throughout the Old Testament, which foreshadow the coming of Christ and the sufferings He was destined to undergo. The evangelists and the apostolic writers of the New Testament quote many of them in connection with incidents which they record, or arguments which they develop. On the way to Emmaus, our Lord Himself, we are told, " began from Moses and from all the prophets and interpreted to Cleopas and his friend, in all the Scriptures, the things concerning Himself." But the fact that the Old Testament is rich in such Messianic forecasts does not justify us in straining the sense of every possible passage, until it can be made to yield a reference to the Person or work of Christ. I need not detain you by giving instances of the lengths to which this method of exposition has frequently been carried. The verses, which form our text, provide us with

a case in point. The mere circumstance of a mention of "wounds in the hands" has led many readers to conclude, that the words contain a direct prophetic allusion to the Passion of our Lord. We shall see, as we go along, how erroneous such a view is, and how justly it merits the severe criticism of the commentator who remarks, that "if it were propounded by an adversary of the faith, one would suppose it to be profanity."

"It shall come to pass in that day," says the prophet. The day, to which he refers, is a day of national repentance and religious awakening. He anticipates a turning on the part of the people, from their idolatrous customs and sinful habits, to the living and true God. How real and deep he expects the contrition of his fellow-countrymen to be, is shown by the fact that he describes "the land as mourning, every family apart." In other words, the penitence of Israel was not to be of that outward and ceremonial kind, which an official decree was capable of calling forth. It was not to be a mourning appointed by the temple or the palace, and celebrated by public demonstrations of a formal nature. Households were to be affected with genuine human sorrow. Men and women, fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters were to be smitten in their consciences. Startled out of their

insensibility by the Spirit of conviction and self-condemned, they were to realize their need of Divine forgiveness, and to experience the mercy of God towards them. "That day" was to be a day of revival. The grace of God was to be manifested in the most striking fashion. In the abundance and spontaneousness of its outpouring, it would be like "the opening of a fountain to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness."

I do not intend to discuss the question as to whether this prophecy has ever been fulfilled. What it seems to point to is an event of tremendous significance which has not yet occurred, viz., a national repentance on the part of Israel. Only that nation which crucified their long expected King could exhibit a grief of the character and intensity described in the previous chapter. "And nothing," as Dr Marcus Dods well says, "would go further towards the conversion of the world than were the Jews to complete their marvellous history by once again combining, and this time to acknowledge Him, whom they pierced, as the Christ, their and the world's King. The agony of remorse would be terrible. But what event could be so exemplary to the world? Who could be such missionaries as those from whom the apostles sprang, and who

are now found in every nation and speaking every language of the world ? " The apostle Paul evidently looked forward to this epoch, and anticipated from its occurrence consequences of the most momentous kind. " If," he says in his letter to the Romans :—" If the casting away of the Jews be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead ?

The particular portion of Zechariah's prophecy, which I should like to bring under your notice, is that which is included in verses 4 to 6. He is under no delusion with regard to the extent to which the new spirit will prevail, and pervade the nation, in " that day." Without rendering himself open to the charge of taking a pessimistic view of human nature, he shows that he is well acquainted with the shiftiness and shallowness of the heart of man. He reckons on there being some who will not be affected with a genuine spirit of contrition. The movement will not touch the false prophets, those whose interest lay in the maintenance of the old idolatrous customs, and whose trade will be menaced by the reforming zeal of the time. Such persons, feeling no salutary pangs of repentance and having no personal experience of the forgiving and cleansing grace of God, will be driven to sore straits in their efforts to escape the wrath of their friends, and

their fellow-countrymen. How they will behave in those circumstances is the subject which Zechariah deals with in the verses, which form our text.

(1) "They shall be ashamed every one of his vision, when he hath prophesied; neither shall they wear a rough (or hairy) mantle to deceive."

The movement would certainly not touch the false prophets—the men who encouraged in evil the rank and file of the people—in the sense, that it would alter their sympathies, and make them eager to assist in promoting the ideals which inspired it. But the change in the social and religious atmosphere would have some effect on these persons. It would make them ashamed and afraid of their ways. They would be obliged for their own sakes to abstain from letting their voices be heard in public. Only in secret and with individuals, to whose reticence they were sure they could trust, would they dare to have any communications. None of them would venture to wear the "hairy mantle" which was the traditional badge of their profession. They would clothe themselves like ordinary people, and try to encourage the impression that they were anything but traitors in the camp.

A religious movement, quickening, as it is bound to do, the public conscience, invariably has an

effect of this kind. It cannot convert men. The influence which proceeds from other people's lives is not able to produce a radical change of heart in the case of any individual. The Spirit of God can alone accomplish that result. But a manifest awakening on the part of a community as a whole to the demands of righteousness, justice, and purity can and does make those who traffic in sin uncomfortable. The shelter of darkness is sought by them, and they skulk in the shadows instead of parading their iniquity in the light. They feel obliged to paint their faces with hypocritical expressions, and try even to conceal from their left hand what their right is doing. Society, roused and in earnest over the question of its moral welfare, is able to bring about that condition of things. It can shame and frighten the votaries of wickedness.

(2) " But he shall say, ' I am no prophet, I am an husbandman ; for man taught me to keep cattle (or, for I have been a bondman) from my youth.' "

If challenged regarding his vocation the false prophet, Zechariah tells us, will take refuge in a lie. He will claim to belong to that class of society which was least likely to afford opportunities to its members to qualify themselves in the accomplishments, which were essential for the successful

discharge of the prophetic office. He will protest that he is a boor, a bucolic individual, a rude and unlettered yokel. Even if he had wanted to become a so-called prophet, he will declare, he could never have had the chance of setting up as such. From his youth, he will go on to explain, he has not been able to call himself his own master. He has always been in the service of others as a bondman.

A lie is still regarded by many people as the most convenient device for extricating themselves from a disagreeable situation. One of the most lamentable features of a good deal of recent fiction, as distinguished from the great novels of last century, is the facility in lying which is attributed by authors to their characters. Without experiencing apparently the slightest qualms of conscience, men and women are represented as successfully avoiding the consequences of their deeds, or disentangling themselves from perplexing circumstances, by the simple expedient of a falsehood. The difficulty out of which they get, as far as their relations with other characters in the story are concerned, is elaborately described. The difficulty into which they get with God and their own sense of the authority of the moral law is passed over. Books of that type (and they are only too numerous),

and such plays as proceed on the same lines, do incalculable harm. The cleverer they are, the more pernicious are they. They are treasonable to human nature. For the recognition of the distinction between right and wrong, between truth and falsehood, is fundamental to the consciousness of man, and gives him the capacity for experiences that distinguish him from the brute creation. The greatest novelists and dramatists have realized that fact, and their delineations of character, as well as their descriptions of the development of events, have been based on the validity and significance of it. When it is ignored, another world than that in which we live, and other beings than those that we are, are staged by the author for the presentation of the realities of human life.

(3) "And one shall say unto him, 'What are these wounds in thine hands?' Then he shall answer, "Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.'"

The questioner, who has just elicited the reply from the disguised false prophet that he is a tiller of the ground, is represented by Zechariah as not being satisfied. He asks to be allowed to look at the hands of the would-be rustic. On them he notices suspicious scars of the kind that people

were in the habit of inflicting on themselves in the performance of idolatrous rites. Pointing to these compromising marks of self-mutilation, he puts the straight question to the man:—"What are these wounds in thine hands?" But the false prophet is not to be caught. Rather than acknowledge himself in his true character, he is prepared to surrender all his sense of dignity and humiliate himself to the uttermost. "These wounds," he answers with a leer, "are the wounds with which I was wounded in the house of my friends." In other words, he finds it necessary to tell a second lie in order to support the first. And this time he does not hesitate to sacrifice the last shreds of his reputation. "I have been brawling," he virtually says; "I have been indulging in debauchery lately, and these bruises are the traces it has left on me."

How one lie leads to another, and how the second may be fouler, in many respects, than the first, is graphically set forth by this dialogue of Zechariah's. It is a powerful illustration of the fatal sequence of falsehoods. The application of any of the language to the circumstances of our Lord's Passion is a shocking abuse of Scripture. Ignorance of the original context does not completely exculpate an offender; for no preacher or writer is justified

in using unexamined references and phrases in connection with such a sacred subject.

The conclusion of the incident represents the false prophet as having escaped detection. He got off: he saved his life. But such a saving of one's life is really a losing of it. To his sin as a false prophet, he added that of being a liar. The wounds on his hands were likely to disappear in course of time, but the scars on his character were festering sores, which the falsehood he uttered only rendered more corrupt and malignant. Detection, so far from being the undoing of guilty persons, may be and often is the occasion of their salvation. Nothing is accomplished by lying except the deterioration of character, and the acceleration of the process of moral degeneration. "Success," said an English judge recently, when passing sentence on a criminal, "might have covered the fraud and prevented discovery, but success cannot turn fraud into honesty; and the disgrace of fraud lies in its commission, and not in its discovery." The true disgrace of all sin lies in its commission, and not in its discovery by our fellow-men. A person may manage to make amends to those whom he has deceived or injured, and keep himself right with them by repairing the losses he has inflicted on them. This he may even contrive

to do without suffering the humiliation of exposure as a dishonest person. In most cases, alas! as, for instance, where innocence has been betrayed, no amount of reparation avails to redress the wrong done. But whether found out or not, whether able to undo the consequences of his conduct or not, a man comes under the judgment of God by his transgressions. The amplest restitutions cannot efface his guilt. A sincere penitent will labour to render them and be filled with shame and sorrow till the end of his days, but he will cast himself for forgiveness upon the mercy of Him Who alone can speak peace to the conscience of man, and cover his sins.

XXI

CHILDREN OF GOD

"As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His Name."—JOHN i. 12 (A.V.).

"As many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on His Name."—JOHN i. 12 (R.V.).

THESE words, so familiar to us all, might well be taken out of the context in which they occur, and placed at the beginning of the New Testament. They furnish us with a key to the contents of the Gospels and the Epistles alike. They enable us to grasp the general idea, the commanding purpose, of the life of Jesus Christ. There is a saying to the effect that we are sometimes unable to see the wood for trees. We get involved amongst details, and fail to understand and appreciate the principle which they express and illustrate. In the variety of incidents recorded by the evangelists, in the emphasis that is laid by the apostles now on one aspect of Christian doctrine and practice, now on another, we are apt to lose sight of the single and

all-explaining motive which governed our Lord's life on earth.

In this verse it is set forth in the plainest terms. He came not simply to live amongst men a life of exemplary sinlessness and moral beauty. He came to do something; and that something was not just the performance of miscellaneous acts of benevolence, and the inculcation of profound truths, as opportunities occurred. He had a settled object in view, and to the furtherance of that object the energies of His Will were undividedly directed. He came to affect the lives of men and women in the deepest of all conceivable ways—to give them power "to become children of God."

"To become children of God." Notice the significance of the verb:—"to become." Man is the child of God by nature. Our text does not oblige us to deny that fact. Various passages of Scripture can be cited in support of it. Take our Lord's Parable of the Prodigal, for example. The point of the story is not that the prodigal was a stranger who became a son on his return, but that he was always a son, though a wilful and unworthy son. Take the speech of the apostle Paul at Athens. Addressing a pagan audience, he frankly adopted the pagan poet's words:—"We are also God's offspring." Again, the writer of the Epistle

to the Hebrews uses language to this effect :— "Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, He also Himself in like manner partook of the same."

The Bible justifies us in asserting that "man is the child of God by nature." Yet, alongside of that teaching, it tells us that the great purpose of Christ's presence in the world was that we might "become" children of God. How are we to reconcile these two positions ? In view of ancient controversies, which have been waged over this subject, it may seem a daring thing to say that the explanation of the difficulty is a simple one. But the circumstances of many a family circle render the apparent contradiction intelligible. We are children of God by nature, but we are unnatural children. That we might become children of God in reality, was the motive of Christ's life and work.

The childhood in relation to God the Father, which belongs to us all in virtue of our existence, is a capacity, a promise unfulfilled. The tragedy of human life, that which makes sin such a dreadful thing, is owing to the abuse of this capacity. Sin is a selling of one's birthright, a prostitution of the ideal promise of man's nature.

But the "childhood in relation to God the

Father," which it was the purpose of Christ's life to secure to us, is a realized experience. It is something actual. It is essentially a condition of love to God, of obedience to His Will, of assurance in the midst of time's perplexing ordeals. That, you must admit, is a state in which we do not find ourselves by nature. It represents thoughts which we do not think, feelings which we do not entertain, purposes which we do not cherish and achieve, consolations and guarantees of which we are ignorant, by nature. You are a child of God all the time you are repudiating His Fatherhood of you, rejecting His claims upon your trust and love, betraying His Will, seeking the gratification of your own selfish and self-indulgent desires. It is because you are a child of God, that your life is not simply a fiasco, a meanly played part on the world's stage, but a tragedy of infinite sadness and solemnity.

To become a child of God in truth and in fact, to have the relationship of childhood made a conscious, living, glad experience—mind and heart and will in loyal exercise towards the Father—that is our true destiny. And that we might be able to fulfil it, Jesus Christ came into the midst of humanity.

If you seriously consider what "childhood in

relation to God the Father " means—as a realized experience, as an actual exercise by you and me daily of love and obedience and trust—then you will acknowledge that it is something we have to become from being what we are by nature, a life of particular interests into which we have to be born by a second birth. Something that we have to become other than we have been and are—new creatures, not in any utterly unintelligible sense, but new creatures as regards our conscious attitude towards God, our view of life, the desires and hopes and ambitions which determine our conduct—how is the change to be effected in us ? Here is proposed a tremendous task calling for tremendous capabilities. " To them gave He power to become children of God."

The Authorised Version says, He gave " power " ; the Revised Version says, He gave the " right." Which is the correct reading ? The word in the original includes both renderings, and if you reflect over the matter carefully you will see, that the necessities of the case require the use of such a word—a word meaning " right " as well as " power," and " power " as well as " right."

We need to have the " right " to become the children of God secured to us. If you take a low view of what " childhood in relation to the Divine

Fatherhood" means, if you think of it as realized in what a person with no distinctive moral and religious experience is, then you will attach no significance to this idea of a right. But if you take a high view of it, if you think of it as a condition of amazing privilege, involving communion with God and expressing itself in a hearty conformity to God's Will, then the question of your right to become a child of God will be a living one to you. Your conscience will make it a living question for you. For it will say, "You, a child of God! You who stand self-condemned, who have sinned against God, and broken His law knowingly—by what right do you dare to aspire to such an experience of restored fellowship with God?" That is how your conscience will regard the matter. It will be outspoken, and will hunt you off such privileged ground. But you will not be without an answer wherewith to meet conscience, and every voice which insists upon your weakness and worthlessness and insignificance—every voice which awakens doubt in your heart concerning your title. By the life and death of Jesus Christ our right is established for evermore.

We need to have the "power" to become children of God—to maintain ourselves in this privileged condition, ever to be progressing in love

to God, in obedience, and in trust. It is not in us, amidst the manifold temptations, cares, monotonies, and perplexing circumstances of life, to charge this relationship with fresh vitality every day, and make it the ruling relationship of our being, so that our thoughts and our plans, our words and our deeds shall be governed by it—so that we shall think as children of God, and accept every joy and every sorrow as children of God. No, it is not in us to do that. It is not in us even to grow old amid uneventful circumstances in that spirit. A right is a great prerogative. But if a right is unaccompanied by the power to exercise it, wherein does its worth consist ? The more august the right the more barren the dignity in such a case. He who gives us the right to become what we should be, what it is the glory of our manhood and womanhood to be—children of God—gives us also the power. He does not withhold from us that which is as essential as the right itself. He communicates His spirit to those that turn to Him, and seek His presence. To them He gives power, a secret inspiring energy, to become children of God.

"To as many as received Him," says the evangelist, "even to them that believe on His Name."

There were those who did not receive Christ,

and who did not believe on His Name. A large majority of His contemporaries belonged to this class. And by not receiving Him, by not believing on His Name, they forfeited the priceless gift which He was willing and eager to bestow on them—the right and the power to become children of God. But in the experience of the few in Galilee and Judea who answered the call of His words and His looks, and gave their trust and their love to Him, He wrought a great work of grace. He brought God into their lives: He revealed the Father to them as their Father. He kindled hopes and awakened interests in their hearts, that were unknown to them before. He claimed their wills for tasks that had issues, not simply in relation to schemes involving their own pleasure or temporal prosperity, but in relation to the Kingdom of God. And when they applied themselves enthusiastically to this new service, they found themselves able to do and to endure with a strength, which they knew came from Him.

What the evangelist emphasizes, as we can all see, is the attitude adopted towards Jesus Christ. Everything turns on that. Whether the "right," to which he refers, is secured, and whether the "power" is appropriated, depends on a man's attitude to Christ. But you will notice that he defines the true attitude by a couple of phrases,

one at the beginning and the other at the end of the verse :—" As many as received Him," and " to them that believe on His Name."

At first sight there would seem to be a certain awkwardness in the language employed by the evangelist. In the former clause he uses the past tense :—" as many as received Him " : in the latter he uses the present :—" them that believe on His Name." It is not just a pedantic interest that is served, when attention is drawn to that point. The change from past to present is intentional, and corresponds to facts of experience. The awkwardness is explained and disappears, when we apprehend what the Evangelist is referring to. He is describing a process—the process whereby men and women become children of God. It is a process, a long process of instruction and discipline, in the case of everyone.

Now it is self-evident that a process depends for its reality on two conditions. In the first place, it needs a *beginning*. A commencement has to take place. And in the second place, it needs a *continuance* ; for otherwise it is not a process at all.

In the process of becoming children of God, the *beginning* is made when we receive Jesus Christ. That seems to be a simple matter. And so in a sense it is ; it is a simple matter when it is actually

done. But our hearts are apt to be so occupied as to have no room for Him. The hospitality they are disposed to offer is stinted and cold — too uninviting for so glorious a guest. We must look into His face, and let Him look into ours. He brings great gifts where He comes—for them that receive Him.

And in the process of becoming children of God, *continuance* is secured by believing on His Name. That means believing on His sufficiency for our every need. All the assurance of right, and all the sense of power, that are necessary to enable us to contend with the fears and doubts, the temptations and problems of the recurring days, are not imparted to us when we receive Christ. From that past experience we cannot fetch by memory the grace, which we require now. It is by fresh acts of believing on Him, by exercises of faith in His Name relevant to our present necessities, that we obtain the strength to maintain ourselves, and make progress as children of God.

I ventured to say at the outset that the words of our text furnish us with a key to the contents of the New Testament. Jesus Christ came to affect the lives of human beings in the deepest of all conceivable ways. His mission is sometimes interpreted otherwise. Emphasis is laid on particular

truths which He enunciated. The sanction of His Name is claimed in behalf of social reform and other causes. Undoubtedly His teaching bears directly on such subjects, and ought to be authoritative for His followers. But the presentation of our Lord in the character of a reformer of private and public morals merely is totally inadequate. He came to establish and sustain men and women in a living relationship to God. The kernel and essence of the Gospel, that which distinguishes it from all other religious systems, and justifies as well as demands its world-wide proclamation, is set forth by the experience recorded in the words of the evangelist :—" To as many as received Him, to them He gave the right and the power to become children of God, even to them that believe on His Name."

XXII

MATTHIAS

"And the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles."—Acts i. 26.

In the address reported in this chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, Simon Peter discharged three offices. He began by preaching the funeral sermon of Judas Iscariot, "who was guide to them that took Jesus." What he said, the Evangelist Luke, who wrote this history, could never find out exactly. There were words of tenderness and rebuke spoken, that none would repeat. The dead man had been numbered among them, and had received his portion in their ministry. We can well imagine with what hesitation and searchings of conscience, with what breakings in his voice and streams of tears, he, who had himself cursed and sworn in the High-priest's courtyard at the suggestion of his being a disciple, made mention of one who had been their brother and their Master's betrayer. Little wonder, surely, that the physician-historian

had only sparse notes of that sad occasion to send to his friend, Theophilus.

After a pause, Peter went on to deliver the edict for the election of another apostle. Finding his warrant in the 109th Psalm, he read it aloud :— " His office let another take."

Thereupon he invited the assembled company to select one, who, along with the eleven, should be a witness to the world of the Resurrection. This condition only did he lay down for their guidance in making the appointment, viz., that the person chosen should belong to the group which had been associated together " all the time the Lord Jesus went in and went out amongst them, beginning from the baptism of John unto the day He was received up."

Two names were put forward—two out of the seventy, very likely, whom Jesus had called and sent out to preach the good news of the kingdom. Both men seem to have enjoyed the confidence of their fellows, and, though different, doubtless, in their respective temperaments, to have manifested such devotion to Christ and such zeal for His cause, that either gave promise of proving himself a worthy apostle. Their general qualifications for the office, the tone of their characters, that is to say, and the integrity of their conduct, had led to

their being selected as a leet. It was a magnificent testimony for an hundred and twenty people to record about two of their number. The choice, you may be certain, was spontaneous. It was not the result of canvassing and wire-pulling. The electors felt that their interests would be well represented by these men. During a period of three years, the spirit that was in them had been quietly impressing itself upon their companions. And, moreover, we may be sure that, as the assembly rose from their knees to select the candidates, it was not so much their own credit that they felt to be safe in the keeping of Barsabbas and Matthias; but the deeper conviction possessed them, that the honour and glory of their Lord would be maintained by either of the two.

But which was to receive the appointment? Suppose that the one had a remarkable aptitude for public speaking, while the other was distinguished for sobriety of judgment and sagacity in counsel. Which type of man did the eleven stand in most need of at this juncture? Whose parts, those of Barsabbas or those of Matthias, would bring the efficiency of the apostolic college to its greatest height? That, or something like that, was perhaps the problem that perplexed the electors. And they solved it by waiving their own

views. "They prayed," Luke tells us, "and said, 'Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew of these two the one whom Thou hast chosen, to take the place in this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas fell away, that he might go to his own place.' And they gave lots for them; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles."

There are two questions here which we might prefer to avoid, but which we ought to face.

The first concerns the method adopted by the early Church in this election. The use of lots was an Old Testament expedient, and was in vogue amongst the nations of antiquity generally. It was governed by the presupposition that Divine influence controlled the operation, and that the result coincided infallibly with the Divine Will. After this occasion, we never hear of its being resorted to again in New Testament times. We should frankly recognize, and not hesitate to assert, that the method was far from satisfactory, and represented a stage in the development of ethical ideas. The fact that the process was accompanied with prayer proves the good faith of those who carried it out. But beyond that it need not affect our estimate of it. We know that many matters, the moral character of which the enlightened con-

science of mankind has since perceived to be wrong, have been made the subject of earnest prayer in the past. Nor can we claim to be exempt in our own day from such contradictory experiences, as devising unworthy schemes and asking God's blessing on them. There are people in whom the habit of seeking the Divine benediction on their actions seems to be more highly developed than the habit of searching their own hearts and consciences. That is true, indeed, more or less in the case of all of us. But to return to the question of casting lots, let me quote what the late Dr Joseph Parker says about it in this very context. "If," he says, "you were to write all the creeds of Christendom, and put them into an urn, and to shake the urn after prayer, asking God that the right creed might come out, I should not wonder that some creed should fall out of the urn, that would shock the sense of nine-tenths of Christendom. There is no such way," he concludes, "of discovering God's thought." In a perplexing situation we must depend on the interpretation which circumstances conspire to yield, on the advice of wise friends, and ultimately on our own judgment, purified and instructed by communion with God. Of course, it is obvious that in matters of no importance, as, for example, in games, the casting

of lots or the tossing of a coin is a convenient and legitimate method for enabling parties to come to a decision. But it is out of place, morally obsolete, if you prefer that expression, in connection with interests of grave moment. The adoption of it involves a divestment of responsibility for the exercise of careful and, it may be, anxious thought, which we have no right, as rational beings, to accept.

The second question raised by this passage of Scripture refers, not to the worthiness of the method of election, but to the propriety of an election having been made at all. There are many devout students of the Bible who regard it as having been premature and unwarranted, the outcome of Simon Peter's impetuosity. The apostles, they maintain, ought to have waited, as they were told to do, for the promise of the Holy Spirit. The great preacher, whom I quoted a little ago, describes the situation in this characteristic way. "In those days," he says, "Peter stood up. It was a pity he did so, for he had been distinctly told to sit down. . . . But Peter was not the kind of man who could wait. Goaded by impatience, he stood up, and addressed his brethren. . . . He was determined to complete the broken circle, and reorganize the apostolate." It need

hardly be said that those, who hold such a view of what took place as that, are entitled to their opinions. It is quite in accordance with the profoundest reverence for Scripture. Because, while believing in the doctrine of the Divine inspiration of the Bible, we are not obliged on that account to defend all the actions of the apostles. At the same time, most people, I daresay, will agree with the writer who observes that " the step taken in setting about the election of a twelfth apostle was a legitimate exercise of human wisdom in dependence upon Divine guidance. Luke, the beloved friend of St Paul, appears to endorse the election, for, after speaking of the eleven apostles in the first chapter, he later on in the Book refers to the twelve."

There is no necessity for us to linger over these two questions, and discuss them at further length. The fact remains that Matthias was chosen as an apostle. We know for certain nothing more about him than is recorded in this passage by Luke. One tradition says that he laboured amongst a cannibal tribe in Africa, and came near to losing his life at their hands. Another makes Jerusalem the scene of his ministry, and the place of his burial. His career is wrapped up in obscurity. Our only authentic glimpse of the man is on the day of his

appointment in the upper room in Jerusalem. In what kind of a position did he find himself on that occasion? We have material enough, I think, to give a fairly complete answer.

(1) In the first place, Matthias found himself *the successful candidate.*

His election meant, as elections generally mean, the rejection of another man. Barsabbas is only mentioned in Scripture in connection with a defeated candidature. And yet the fact that he was "put forward" for the apostleship by his brethren is a great testimony to the worth of his character. How did he take his rejection, when the lot fell upon his companion? Did the fact that another was preferred before him make him sour and jealous for life, or was he content to go on working for his Master in a humble and obscure way? Did he ever afterwards speak appreciatively of his rival, or did he allow himself to deteriorate to the level of a cynical detractor? An experience like that which befell Barsabbas has been the marring of many a man's happiness and usefulness, while, on the other hand, it has been a source of discipline and enrichment to the characters of those who have been able to accept it as the Will of God.

And how did Matthias take his success? He

can hardly have been human, if he was not tempted to cherish a feeling of elation over his companion. Did he resist the impulse, and bear himself meekly ? Thomas Boston tells us that the night before his ordination at Simprin he remembered how Satan was sure to lie in wait for him in a special manner on the eve of such a great occasion. Next morning he records that Satan got advantage of him indeed. " But," he goes on, " that word was given me for support, ' The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.' I came to Simprin leaning on the foresaid word." And shall we not believe that as was the day of Matthias, so also was his strength ?

(2) In the second place, Matthias found himself *the successor of Judas Iscariot.*

The vacancy had arisen in a tragic way. The mantle that descended on the shoulders of Matthias had been worn by the betrayer. Do not tell me that the heart of the newly elected apostle was not swept by an emotion of fear and trembling. He knew that it would never befall him amid the olives trees beyond the Kidron to kiss the Saviour into the hands of His enemies. His hand would never be able to close over thirty pieces of silver as a sufficient price for bringing the Master to shame and the Cross. The days of humiliation

were past. Jesus Christ had been exalted to the right hand of the throne of God. But Matthias knew, as we know, that it was still possible for a man, yes, even for an apostle, to betray the Son of God in thought and in word, and to crucify Him afresh by behaviour that grieved His Spirit.

"Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." That was the message that was delivered to the Christians in Philadelphia. It was not so much a motive that was appealed to, as a certain spirit that was bespoken. Not because someone else was waiting to take possession of their crown, should they forfeit it by unfaithfulness; not because there was a rival candidate, whose claims came next in order to theirs, were they required "to hold fast that which they had." No one, as a matter of fact, could possibly have been benefited in the event of their having proved unworthy. By their remaining steadfast, they were cutting no one out of an interest devised to take effect, failing them. But the zeal they were exhorted to manifest, the temper they were urged to exhibit, was to be distinguished by that degree of resoluteness, which naturally characterized the man who was tenacious of his rights, and jealous lest another should by any chance fall heir to them. As if someone else were at hand to snatch up what

they despised and cast from them; not because someone else actually was at hand, it behoved the Philadelphians "to hold fast that which they had."

And similarly, not because the position we occupy and the profession we make have been betrayed by a Judas, but conscious that they may be betrayed, remembering that they constitute an opportunity which may be magnified or utterly destroyed, you and I ought to take heed lest we fall. Our hope of standing fast must be based on the assurance of the apostle Paul:—"Thy grace, O Christ, is sufficient for me, and Thy strength is made perfect in my weakness."

(3) In the third place, Matthias found himself *an apostle of Jesus Christ.*

It was an office of great honour and privilege. His name was destined to come down to posterity in a goodly fellowship. Utterly unjust, surely, would be any account of the emotions which worked within him, if, besides the tempting whisperings of self-congratulation, and the salutary feeling of self-distrust, we failed to record the deep-seated solemn joy that he was no longer Matthias, but Matthias an apostle of Jesus Christ. The throne of Cæsar did not carry greater responsibilities: but neither did it cover its occupant with greater glory than the ministry to which Matthias

was ordained. For the mighty empire of Rome was destined to flourish for a season and then decay ; but the Kingdom of Christ, in the establishment of which Matthias was called to bear a pioneer's part, was to expand throughout the whole earth and endure for ever and ever. It is no trivial invitation that the Gospel holds out to us, needing to be sustained and gilded by persuasive argument. State it simply, and you state it adequately. We are called to be witnesses of Christ to our generation. Who amongst us needs to be urged to embrace such a high privilege, and to undertake such a glorious office ?

XXIII

COMING TO ONE'S SELF

"When he came to himself."—Luke xv. 17.

The parable of the Prodigal Son has been called the "crown and pearl" of all the parables of Scripture. There is perhaps no passage in the Bible which secures for itself so immediately and completely the attention of every reader and hearer. The story is intensely human from beginning to end. It never grows old, for the sad facts on which it is based are only too familiar to successive generations. The anguish of the father's heart, the folly and repentance of the younger son, the self-righteousness and censoriousness of the elder brother—these or similar experiences represent the tragic secrets of many a family circle at the present day.

The central figure, as in Shakespeare's "King Lear" and Balzac's "Père Goriot," is the patient, suffering father. But instead of expounding the parable as a whole, and discussing the question of its original application, I propose to confine your

attention to the striking phrase which our Lord used to describe the crisis in the prodigal's career :— "He came to himself."

The same form of words is to be found in a chapter of the "Acts of the Apostles." It occurs in the narrative which recounts the circumstances of Peter's deliverance from prison. The apostle, we read, was wakened by an angel of the Lord as he lay bound between two soldiers, and, after being told to gird himself and bind on his sandals and cast his garment about his shoulders, was led forth through the iron gate of the jail into the city. Having conducted him along one street, the angel departed from him; and when he was thus left alone, "Peter," remarks the writer, "came to himself." He had been in a dazed condition, that is to say, up to this point. But no sooner did he realize that his guide had vanished, than he began to understand where he was and what had happened.

We use, as you are aware, exactly the same form of words to describe the return to consciousness of any one who has been for a time insensible. At the first sign or glimmer of intelligence displayed by a person who had been under the influence of an anæsthetic, or in a faint, or submerged in water, we say "he is coming round," or "coming to," or

"coming to himself." The arrest that has been laid on his faculties is observed to be passing off. The mind that has been enveloped in a dense mist is seen to be extricating itself, and slowly resuming relationships of perception with its surroundings. What is going on is apparently being taken in, to some extent, by the hitherto unresponsive subject; and when the process of recognition has reached the stage of completeness, we declare that "he has come to himself again."

Now, the experience of recovery, represented by this usage of the phrase, has no moral quality whatever belonging to it. It is simply a re-awakening of the mental powers, and a re-exercising on a human being's part of the intelligent functions, that were in action before the state of stupor supervened. In the case of a combatant, for example, who has been struck senseless by an opponent, a gleam of hatred against his foe appearing in the fallen man's eyes might be hailed by his comrades as a sign that he was "coming to himself." Or, to take another instance, the fact that a half-drowned man had got the length of being able to swear, might, in certain circumstances, be accepted by those who were acquainted with his habits as convincing evidence that he was out of danger, and "had come to himself." Both manifestations

of intelligence—the look of hatred and the utterance of oaths—would, of course, be morally wrong; yet that would not affect their value in the slightest as proofs of returning consciousness.

But the phrase in question is descriptive of another kind of experience, besides that of restoration to a normal physical and intellectual condition. It signifies a complete change in a person's attitude towards life. We have all heard, or overheard, people explaining how, as the result of things which they said or did, they succeeded " in bringing a certain individual to his senses." The man, they were referring to, had perhaps been behaving foolishly, or selfishly, or brutally before they ventured to interfere. But when at last they felt obliged to do so, the effect of their intervention seemed to them to be satisfactory. " They brought him, the offender came, to his senses." What occurred was not that a mind emerged from a state of inactivity and insensibility, but that a conscience was awakened as out of a deep sleep. In other words, an experience essentially moral in its nature happened in the life of a particular person. And it is to such an experience that the statement made in our text points. The prodigal in the parable " came to his senses," or, as it is otherwise and more suggestively put, " came to himself."

When the prodigal got his patrimony into his hands and started out for the far country, his idea was that he was going to see life and be a man. Impatient of his father's supervision and control, he was determined to be his own master. A condition of existence, that promised him freedom and pleasure, emancipation from the irksome restraints of the parental roof and a right to do what he liked, invited him to come and prove its joys. The vision cast its spell attractively over him, and after it he went with impetuous haste. Persuaded that the self, with its capacity for sensual indulgences, represented what was most distinctive of manhood, he plunged headlong into a career of sin. Fortunately his substance was not unlimited. In course of time he found that he had wasted it all, for riotous living has never been anything else than a costly business. Fortunately, too, he fell in with no foolish, if well-intentioned, philanthropist, who might have shielded him from the consequences of his wrong-doing, and encouraged him to believe that he had sinned less, than he had been sinned against. The only person, according to the story, with whom he had any dealings, was a citizen who sent him into his fields to feed swine. There and then he "came to himself." Hunger, and the disgusting habits of the creatures that he was told

off to herd, opened his eyes. He realized how despicable was the self to whose interests he had been a slave. The road he had followed had led him through the foulest slush, but at length he had found, he had been brought to, "his true self."

There was no mistaking his true self when he came to it. Forlorn though it was, he knew it at once. The meeting had been long delayed, but the recognition was immediate. The period of delusion was at an end. The darkness, in which shadows assumed the shapes of substances, had passed. Light had broken, and enabled him to "see, and know, and consider, and understand." In every human being there is a potentiality of goodness and purity, a capacity of serving the highest. In the development of that ideal self, in the realization of that potentiality and the fulfilment of that capacity, our real personality finds expression. Never believe that the self, which betrays all that is most sacred in your memories of the past and all that is noblest in your dreams of the future, is your true self. Stand over it, and with shame and indignation repudiate it. Claim to be identified with the self that you ought to be, and fight the good fight to become such.

There are certain facts in connection with the

prodigal's experience, which we ought not to overlook. Emphasis is given to them in the story.

Notice, for example, that when he came to himself, he was *profoundly dissatisfied with his lot.* "How many hired servants of my father's," he said, "have bread enough and to spare, and I perish here with hunger."

You may be inclined to remark, that speech of that kind does not betoken a very contrite frame of mind. The fact that the wanderer would be certain to get plenty to eat at home could not be called a lofty motive for his returning. Things happen that way, however, in real life. Prodigals are often brought back to their father's house by hunger and poverty. But it should be borne in mind that the story is a parable. The prodigal's comparison of his actual condition of starvation with the comfortable lot enjoyed by his father's servants is intended to represent a conscience awakened to the knowledge of what is, and of what might be. The disproportion is perceived. The revelation to a man of what he is, is always accompanied by the revelation of what he might be, and is not. The Gospel of Christ aims at producing this schism in experience, with its attendant distress of mind. But it also comes to us with the assurance that what we

are we need not remain, and that what we might be we can more than become, through Him that loved us.

Again we are told that when he came to himself, he *acknowledged his guilt.* "I will say," he vowed, "I have sinned."

We can imagine his having assumed a different attitude. He might conceivably have tried to shift the blame of his wild career on to other shoulders. "If his father," he might have argued, "had not been so strict with him in the old days, or if he had put his foot down and refused point-blank to listen to the proposal that he should hand over to him, as the younger son, his share of the family property, events might have taken a different course. If his older brother, too, had not been so self-satisfied and cold and unapproachable, if he had been franker and more affectionate in manner, there would have been no temptation for him to leave home." But, though we would have had no difficulty in recognizing the character of such excuses as these, had he given utterance to them, he did not use them. Nor did he break out into invectives against the citizen whose swine he was herding, and violently attack the economic system of the country in which he was suffering dreadful hardships. Reproaches of that kind might have

been legitimate enough in the mouths of others. But they were denied to him. He could not take them upon his lips. Why? Because "he had come to himself." And his having done so included the consciousness, as it always does in such cases, that he was guilty. Divest himself of responsibility he dared not. It would not have been his "true self," that he had "come to," if he had begun forthwith to attribute the blame of his condition to others. It would have been as "false" a self, as that which had made his lusts his master. "I have sinned":—the man who is not brave enough to say that, who shirks responsibility for what he has done, may not be a prodigal in the usual acceptation of that term, but his moral nature is none the less corrupt. He is in grave danger of never being able "to come to himself," for he virtually renounces and disowns what is essential to his being a "self" at all.

Finally, when the prodigal came to himself, he *went to his father.* "I will arise," he said, "and go to my father." And forthwith he proceeded to act on the resolve he had made.

Let me remind you again that the narrative is a parable. At the same time, there is a didactic significance in the details as they are given, apart from the spiritual interpretation which the story

as a whole bears. The account of a wayward son's desire and determination to become reconciled to his wronged father emphasizes what must be regarded as a primary obligation to be fulfilled by an awakened soul. The genuineness of a conversion is to be suspected, if not utterly distrusted, which does not urge the subject of it to take immediate steps to remove family misunderstandings, and put an end to estrangements amongst relatives.

But the words are not only to be interpreted in this literal way. They carry another meaning also. They re-state the old truth that we are incomplete without the fellowship of God. When we "come to our true selves," we discover that fact. A need and a longing are awakened in us. "Our hearts are restless, till they find rest in God." And the parable announces the Divine attitude of mercy and love towards us. To "come to our true selves" it is not necessary for us to wander into the far country of sin and shame, and to "go to the Father" we need not take the squalid road round by the swine-trough. But wherever we may have turned our prodigal steps, and even when we are yet a great way off—urged forward by no very insistent impulse, held back by many a doubt and the consciousness of our unworthiness—He sees

us, and comes out to welcome us. For, to His returning children,

> The heart of the Eternal
> Is most wonderfully kind.

Then in communion with Him, and in the service of His Will, we enter upon that life, which gives expression and satisfaction to all that is deepest and best in our natures, and which contains in itself the promise of immortality.

XXIV

THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTIANITY

"God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, of love, and of a sound mind."—2 Tim. i. 7 (A.V.).

"God gave us not a spirit of fearfulness; but of power, and love, and discipline."—2 Tim. i. 7 (R.V.).

The question which is settled for us by these words of Scripture is a very important one, and a very practical one. With every function which a human being is called upon to fulfil in this world, whether that function be assigned to him by the direct act of Divine Providence or assumed by him through the exercise of his own free-will, we are accustomed to associate the idea of what we call a certain "spirit."

For example, here is a man who is the head of a family. God has bestowed on him the joy, and entrusted to him the responsibility, of possessing and training children. What kind of a father is he proving himself to be? Is he faithful or unfaithful to the "spirit" of fatherhood?

Again, here is a person who is a teacher. He has chosen that honourable profession; he is

" devoting " his life to the education of the young. Can it truly be said that he is " devoting " or " solemnly dedicating " his life to this magnificent work ? Is he seeking to take full advantage of the unique opportunities afforded to him, and striving habitually to adapt his practice to the " spirit " of a teacher ?

Once more, take the case of one who is a minister or an office-bearer in the church. He has been set apart for service of a special kind. A charge has been laid upon him : a call has been accepted by him. Is he taking his duties seriously ? Measured by the " spirit " of his office, are his zeal and fidelity in the discharge of it anything like worthy ?

Clearly, then, what is meant by the " spirit " of a function or vocation is the true conception, the ideal fulfilment of it. We enter into the " spirit " of any enterprise, as the saying is, when, having formed a good idea of the object in view, we endeavour to realize it to the best of our abilities, and as the circumstances require. Sympathy with the purpose of an undertaking, and enthusiasm for its promotion, are demanded from those who would embrace it in the right " spirit."

Now, the Christian life is a vocation. It has a

character all its own, which distinguishes it from other ways of living. It consists of certain wonderful privileges, and involves certain definite obligations. Hence there pertains to it a "spirit," in relation to which, as to a standard, every Christian life, as it is lived, takes rank in the scale of worthiness. Conformity or want of conformity to the true conception of that life, the degree in which we are faithful to the perfect idea of what we should be, determines the quality of your Christianity and mine. And what the apostle does in this sentence of his letter to Timothy, is to describe the "spirit" of our vocation as Christians. He is thinking, no doubt, primarily of the office of the ministry. But what he says has a more general application as well. The character or temper, he declares, in keeping with our high calling and profession as Christian men and women, the "spirit" consonant with our experience of the work of God in our lives, is not the spirit of "fear," but of "power, and love, and a sound mind." That spirit, which manifests itself in these three ways, he bids us "stir up," or "fan into a flame." For along with the privileges of forgiveness, and fellowship with Himself, and anchorage within the veil through a sure and steadfast hope, God has also given us the capacity

to live a life characterized by " power, and love, and a sound mind."

Before we develop our subject further, let us stop for a moment and take our bearings exactly. Mathematicians tell us that two measurements are sufficient to determine the position of a point on any given surface. And, similarly, if we allow ourselves to be guided by the consideration of two facts, we shall find out precisely where we are.

In the *first* place, the Christian life, as we are all very well aware, has two sides—an inner and an outward. Viewed on its inner side, it consists of a conscious, personal relationship to God through Jesus Christ. Elsewhere the apostle has much to say with regard to that aspect of Christian experience. And, in the 8th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, he goes into the subject of the " spirit " that ought to characterize our relationship to God. " Ye received not the spirit of bondage," he writes, " again unto fear, but ye received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, ' Abba, Father.' " The footing on which we now stand towards God, that is to say, the true conception of our relationship to Him, is that of children to a Father.

But, in this letter to Timothy, Paul has in view

the Christian life not on its inward but on its outward side. He is surveying the Christian as he stands face to face with the world: he is describing the "spirit" that ought to pertain to him in relation to human society.

At the same time, we should be careful to observe in the *second* place, that it is not with the general subject of the qualities which ought to be manifested in a Christian's outward life, that the apostle is here concerned. In other words, he does not set himself in this epistle to give an exhaustive account of the Christian graces and virtues. He simply describes the true "spirit" of the Christian life in contrast with a particular false "spirit"—the spirit of "fear," or "fearfulness." His description is therefore necessarily limited by the temper which he wishes to repudiate. In contrast with another false "spirit," say the "spirit" of selfishness or joylessness, he would have named other qualities than those of "power, and love, and soundness of mind." Why he selects "fearfulness," and chooses to define the true Christian character in opposition thereto, is easily explained. Timothy, "his dearly beloved son," as he calls him, was evidently prone to "fearfulness." In proof of this statement we have not only the language of the present letter to go on, but the interesting fact also,

that when there were troublesome matters to be settled in the Church at Corinth, Paul did not dispatch Timothy to deal with them, but sent Titus, you will remember, as the stronger man. There was no question about Timothy's faith: it was "unfeigned," as the apostle warmly testifies. But there was a timidity, a strain of "fearfulness" amounting almost to cowardice, in his character, which distressed Paul, and was quite out of keeping with the true Christian temper. Hence the earnest reminder:—"God hath not given us the spirit of fearfulness, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

We have taken our bearings; we have joined one another at the rendezvous appointed by our text; we are in a position now to proceed to the next stage of our subject.

I am sure we are all sensible that there is much in our conduct that is inconsistent with our vocation as Christian men and women. We betray our calling in many ways every day. And one of the most fertile sources of specific and conspicuous acts of disloyalty is just our susceptibility to "fearfulness." "Fear and Gain," says William Penn, "are great perverters of mankind." We are afraid to put our foot down: we hide our colours as if they were rags to be ashamed of. Cowardice constrains

us to wink at things said and done in our presence. Our silence is taken for approval, and we become compromised before we know what has happened. We are not brave enough, perhaps, to spoil a laugh, or to resist an appeal to our self-interest, or to risk the displeasure of someone who is able to do us an ill-turn. And so while we flatter ourselves that we are broad-minded and tolerant, as a matter of fact we are pusillanimous and cravens at heart.

The "spirit" of Christianity is a "*spirit of power.*" However strong and however seductive the influences may be, to which we are exposed, we have resources in God able to overcome them. It is sometimes said that the greatest need of the age is for men and women with some distinction of personality about them. There are plenty of people whose intentions are good, and whose lives are gangrened with no flagrant faults. But the impression conveyed by too many is that their principles are perpetually in a fluid condition, and that the drawing of the line is a moral exercise which they are unaccustomed to perform. So they lack power; they are not to be counted on; their characters run to flabbiness. They have no firmness and decisiveness of personality. To enable him to acquire a pronounced

personality, a man is not beholden to his social position. Riches cannot purchase it: nor can the humbleness of one's occupation prevent it from being recognised and appreciated. Village Hampdens are always respected for their worth. Such a bracing and clear-cut individuality ought to be inseparable from the profession of Christianity. With the pledges he enjoys of God's interest in him and concern for his salvation, the Christian ought consciously to possess, and courageously to manifest in his daily life, the "spirit of power."

As opposed, then, to the "spirit of fearfulness" or "moral timidity," the "spirit" appropriate to the Christian life is the "spirit of power." But the apostle has something to say about the nature of this power. When we speak of a person as powerful, if we are not alluding to the fact that he is well-built and physically strong, we generally mean that he is capable of imposing his will on others. A powerful man, in that sense, is not necessarily a good man. He is simply one who is not easily put down, but who is in the habit of getting his own way. The power, which ought to inspire the character and conduct of a Christian, is not an authoritativeness of this brow-beating, self-assertive kind. It is a

power springing out of *love,* and seeking the ends of *love.*

Another type of person, who has an air of strength about him, is the man who has evidently succeeded, after a long course of practice, in reducing his appetites to a state of entire subjection. Assured of his immunity from the ordinary temptations that assail human beings, he feels justified in regarding his weaker brethren with disdain. But, impressive though that self-complacent and contemptuous attitude sometimes is, the consciousness of superiority on which it is based, and the assumption of self-righteousness by which it is characterized, are utterly unlike the inward source and governing principle of the power exerted by the Christian. For in his case it is the love of God and of righteousness that invests him with strength; and it is a passionate desire for the true well-being of his fellows that urges him to brave misunderstanding and obloquy and injury in seeking their good. No—neither arrogance nor censoriousness is to be identified with the " spirit " of Christian power.

But the apostle does not leave the matter there. Lest there should be any danger of this spirit of consideration for others becoming a vapid emotion, he condenses it, as it were, into a more indissolvable form. The term in the original, which the Author-

ized Version translates by the phrase "*a sound mind,*" really means "*correction,*" or "*discipline.*" The idea is the same as that which is implied in the words, which our Lord addressed to His disciples when He said, "Ye are the salt of the earth." "Fearfulness" is to give place in the Christian's heart to a consciousness of "power." That sense of "power," derived from God's love to us and our love to God, is to be manifested in "love." But love for our fellows is not to run to seed in mere feelings of pity, and throbs of distress on their account. Things are to be said and things are to be done by way of rebuke, and to counteract the influence of evil. In the name of love, Christian men and women are to take up arms against unrighteousness. Their hearts are not simply to melt within them for sorrow; they are explicitly to condemn evil, and to be propagandists of goodness. Love is not to seal their lips, but to open them. As sores react painfully to the cleansing and curative virtues of salt, so the influence of Christian men and women ought to be asserted lovingly but withal potently, that it may be felt distinctly by the consciences of those with whom they are thrown together. It is possible to concede and to concede in the interests of good comradeship, till the very distinctions, in vindication of which

Christ died, have been betrayed. The pass may be sold by a false geniality and a spurious charity of temper. We can say of a conversationalist, "how cleverly he talks," and of an author, "how brilliantly he writes," and be afraid to denounce the blasphemy and immorality of the sentiments expressed. Let us dare to be called puritanical. The case for the Kingdom of God and His righteousness is surely not to be allowed to go by default owing to our poltroonery. Let us have courage to affirm that if certain views of life are accepted as authoritative, then the Gospel of Jesus Christ is sheer and intolerable twaddle. There are serious questions of intellectual and ethical significance, from which we have no right to run away. They have to be investigated with patience, and answered with arguments. But when the very foundations of morality are assailed, when the most sacred instincts of conscience are flouted, then the situation created is really a simple one. The point at issue can be settled at once. For it resolves itself into a question as to who is to be believed. On such great matters as goodness and God and human destiny, do we acknowledge the authority of those "clever conversationalists" and "brilliant writers," or the authority of Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

Whoso hath felt the Spirit of the Highest
Cannot confound nor doubt Him nor deny :
Yea, with one voice, O world, tho' thou deniest,
Stand thou on that side, for on this am I.

"God hath not given us a spirit of fearfulness; but of power and love and discipline." Wherefore I put you, as I put myself, in remembrance to stir up the gift of God which is in you.

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