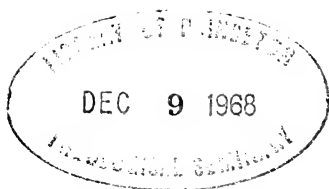
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Jesus and
the Sinner
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Gospel Records of Conversion

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ADOLPH SAPHIR, D.D.

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THE FIRST FIVE DISCIPLES.

JOHN I. 35—51.

WHAT heavenly peace, calmness, confidence, innocence, breathes in the picture which the beloved evangelist has given us of the first gathering of disciples round the Divine Saviour! After thirty years of quiet, unobtrusive obedience to His Father in heaven and to His earthly parents, He had been solemnly set apart to His Prophetic and Messianic office. John the Baptist, who, as a living embodiment, summed up the teaching of the law, in its awful severity and inflexible justice, and the hope-inspiring predictions of the prophets, had acknowledged and introduced Him before and to Israel; the Father had declared His infinite delight in His person, and His infinite approbation of His work; and the Spirit of the Lord, who had been upon Him even from His infancy, now anointed Him

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to go forth and preach the glad tidings of salvation to the poor and broken-hearted. Called through the voice of law and prophets, and set apart for His great work by the Father Himself, who gave unto Him the Spirit without measure, He was led into the wilderness, and there, as the second Adam, the Lord from heaven, the Covenant-head of His people, He resisted temptation and triumphed over Satan, who had concentrated all the energies of his malice and cunning in order to defeat the Holy One of Israel ; and, after having achieved this victory for Himself and His people, the angels of God came down to minister unto Him, thus acknowledging Him as the Lord of hosts, the beloved Son of the eternal Father, and the appointed Heir of all things.

Now the time is fulfilled. Having become perfectly acquainted with Satan's strength and subtilty, with man's frailty and vulnerability, with the intense agony of the struggle, with the warfare of faith, even the wielding of the sword of the Spirit—He now possessed sympathy with His brethren, and was fully prepared to begin His Messianic career.

Again we behold Him walking beside Jordan, in quiet, silent dignity waiting for the guidance of His heavenly Father ; for this had been the precious jewel of which Satan had endeavoured to rob Him, which He now was guarding with all His strength and soul—viz., that He was the Son, who would do nothing of Himself, but whatsoever He seeth the

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Father do, He doeth likewise. No pride, no haughtiness, no self-confidence, no flush of triumph can be discerned in His countenance; Satan's defeat and the homage of angelic hosts cannot disturb the tranquillity of His soul—cannot alter His true humility and meekness, His filial reverence and obedience. When John the Baptist sees Him, he exclaims, "Behold the Lamb of God!" When He was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and opened not His mouth, even as a sheep before her shearers is dumb—when He returned the mockery and cruelty of His ungrateful and bitter enemies by lifting up His voice in supplication for their forgiveness—when, in sorrow and agony, He exclaimed, "I thirst!"—then, truly, we see in Him the Lamb of God, the gentle, meek, lowly, patient Redeemer, who, in perfect heart-obedience to His Father, and in wondrous love to His Church, emptied the cup, endured the cross, and despised the shame. But though it is on Golgotha that we see it most clearly and brightly written that He is the Lamb of God, the same perfect obedience to God, love to His people, meekness, and lowliness characterised Him while He was on earth in His infancy, childhood, youth; and all the words and acts and steps of the three years of His ministry. And throughout the centuries which preceded His advent in the flesh, He revealed Himself to Israel as the same loving, obedient, self-denying, and self-sacrificing Servant of Jehovah, and Saviour of His people—

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His voice was heard, "Lo, I come to do thy will : in the volume of the book it is written of me ;" for doth not Scripture teach us that this was His character in the eternal counsel of redemption even before the foundations of the world were laid ? " We are redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot : who verily was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world, but was made manifest in these last times for you," (1 Pet. i. 19, 20.)

What more fitting, speaking, obvious emblem of His meekness, gentleness, and obedience, than the lamb ? All that is good, and strong, and bright, and loving in God's creation is but a feeble shadow and picture of the glory of Christ. And when we remember that all things were made by Him, and that He is the centre of creation, as well as its aim, head, and glory, we do not wonder that wherever we look we see parables declaring to us His beauty, goodness, and truth. The rock—the vine—the rose—the lion—the morning star—the sun—the friend—the brother—the husband—whatever gives shelter and rest, whatever diffuses light, and joy, and fragrance, whatever breathes faithfulness, affection, and tenderness, declares and manifests Him, in whom it pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell—by whom, and for whom all things were created, and all things consist. Nature leads to nature's God—that is, in the strictest sense of the word, Christ, the Word, or Son of God,

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“without whom was not anything made that was made.”

Every child understands at once the symbolism of the lamb. Instinctively, the childlike, humble, confiding, docile soul feels itself drawn to the lamb; fearlessly the child will put its tiny arm round the lamb's neck, and think that it has found a companion—one like himself. There may be patience in suffering, while all the time an incongruity is felt between the character and the affliction—it may be borne as a burden, with energy, fortitude, and unswerving, unremitting concentration of power; but there is a suffering of a willing heart which cannot be better described than by calling it lamb-like! The lamb feels, as it were, that in suffering it fulfils its destiny, its nature, that no strange thing has befallen it. But, besides the childlike character, and the peculiar willingness to suffer, and meekness in the endurance of suffering, a lamb conveys to every one the idea of purity and spotlessness, and lastly, of attractiveness, which renders it difficult to pass it by unnoticed and uncaressed, a striking contrast to the repulsive, hostile, combative, and vindictive beings with which, since the entrance of sin, the world abounds.

This symbolism of nature,—still further explained by the Divinely-appointed type of the passover lamb, and the descriptions given in the prophets (especially Isaiah) of the Servant of God, who, by His obedience, suffering, and death, was

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to glorify the Father, and save His people,—finds its perfect fulfilment in the Lord Jesus Christ. He was God's holy child, He had no will of His own; it was his delight, His strength and life, to obey and follow His Father; not for a single moment did a thought of self-assertion gain ground in His mind. He bore reproach, hardship, persecution, ingratitude, unspeakable pain and agony, and no murmur of impatience escaped His lips, no thought of bitterness entered His soul. He lived in a sinful and polluted world, and He was holy, undefiled, harmless, separate from sinners. Though all around Him used weapons of self-defence and attack—worldly power, the strength of the arm of flesh, public opinion and enthusiasm—He remained like a lamb; no other defence was His, no other power than His purity and love. And, lastly, so merciful and beneficent was He to all who needed His help, so gentle and meek to His enemies, so tender and overflowing with love and joy to the souls who sought His friendship, so forgiving and compassionate to the trembling penitent, that even the most timid could draw near, and approach Him boldly. “Behold the Lamb!” The words are invested with peculiar force and beauty, as coming from John the Baptist. When the prophet Jonah, brought, after severe discipline and painful experience, to deliver the Divine message to the inhabitants of Nineveh, lifted up his voice and cried, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be over-

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thrown ;” although he had a presentiment of the approaching act of amnesty with which a gracious and compassionate God was to smile on a repentant people, yet he did not rejoice when, after the trumpet-blast, so terrible and awful, there succeeded the gentle voice of forgiving love and mercy. But after John the Baptist had risen like a mighty lion in the wilderness, and with majestic indignation had expressed the guilt and degradation of his people, and announced the approaching wrath and judgment, denouncing the sin, the hypocrisy, and the corruption of the nation, so that even the secure and self-confident Pharisees and Sadducees trembled—how wonderful is the brightness and sweetness of that word of love and pardon, when he exclaims, “Behold the Lamb of God !” To His guilty and apostate Israel, the Father sends not judgment and destruction, but the meek and lowly Jesus—the Lamb.

The disciples of the Baptist heard it, and they who had listened most attentively to the preaching of the law, who had felt most powerfully its awful purity and grandeur, who had entered most deeply into the spirit of that heaven-descended commandment, which discovers to the sinner his guilt and his weakness, were the most eager to obey the direction now given them by their revered master—willingly they allow the law to lead them to the gospel ; as they had obeyed Moses in the wilderness, so they are resolved to follow now Joshua into the

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promised land. And the two disciples, Andrew and John, heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. This is the test of preaching. If the aim of the preacher, like that of John, is to lead his disciples away from himself, and to direct them to the Saviour—if he is willing to confess, not merely with his lips, but to manifest it in his life as the real, prevailing, and moving feeling of his soul, that he is to be only the voice of one testifying in the wilderness, and magnifying Christ—if he finds it his joy to stand aside, and to look on with delight and gratitude at the joy which souls feel in their knowledge and love of the heavenly Bridegroom—then his aim is right, his tone is heavenly, his heart is loyal. Again, when the hearers are constantly led away from man to God, from man's opinions to the Word of God, from the instrument to the Divine Master; when, with all due gratitude and docility towards the servant, souls become daily more exclusively dependent on God for guidance, instruction, consolation—then are they hearing aright and unto life. Notice, lastly, how simple the means, how grand the result! John simply declared, "Behold the Lamb of God!" Here is no vehement appeal, no angry rebuke, no feverish, would-be impressive urging; it is a simple, earnest declaration of God's truth. What else have Christ's servants to do but to set forth the truth, the gospel, the will of God, as revealed in the person and work of Christ? How much more important to give all

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our energy and strength to this, than to the attempt of enforcing and applying, threatening and inviting, urging and pressing, in perorations thundering or melting. The truth itself thunders and melts, rouses and whispers, bruises and comforts ; entering into the soul, it brings with it light and power. How calm and objective do Christ's sermons and those of the apostles appear ! how powerful by the consciousness which pervades them : this is the truth of God, light from heaven, power from above. "Behold the Lamb of God !" This is demonstration, showing and setting forth the salvation of God. (Comp. 1 Cor. ii. 4 with Gal. iii. 1.)

They followed Him. Oh, to have seen the grand countenance of John the Baptist as he followed with his eye the dear, beloved disciples, who had never been more truly his followers than at this moment when they were leaving him ! Then Jesus turned ; for He had heard their footsteps, He had felt their approach in his inmost soul—His heart was expecting them, His love waiting to receive them from the hand of His heavenly Father. He asked them, "*What seek ye ?*" What a comprehensive question ! how sublime, when we remember that the question is asked of poor, needy, lonely, sin-burdened, yet heaven-aspiring men, by One who, while He enters with exquisite sympathy into the feelings of the wounded heart of the restless and home-sick inquirer, speaks with the consciousness that He is rich, and great, and glorious—able to

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give what they seek, to satisfy their longings and desires—to lead them to a haven of rest. *What seek ye*, O children of men, ye banished sons of Eve, ye heavy-laden, tempest-tossed, afflicted, fearful, broken-hearted sinners, whose immortal souls thirst after God? Tell me; I will sympathize with you, I can help you. Disciples of John the Baptist, who have trembled at the foot of Mount Sinai, who have beheld the unapproachable, yet mysteriously attractive height of holiness and purity, what seek ye? A greater is here than Moses; of greater power, of deeper love.

The disciples felt the comprehensiveness of the question. They were overwhelmed by it, yet out of the abundance of the heart they gave the true, the best answer: “Rabbi, where dwellest thou?” We seek *Thee*. Many things, indeed, we are seeking; we feel many wants, many questions, many difficulties, trials, desires; nay, what we seek Thou knowest much better than we. Where dwellest Thou? that we also may dwell there, abide with Thee, enjoy Thy teaching and guidance; then shall we find what we are seeking. Thus the soul replies to the Saviour when asked, “What seekest thou?” Lord, thou only knowest the depths of my poverty, my wounds, my weakness; I cannot tell Thee, I will not attempt to enumerate my wants, for I cannot remember and estimate them aright. But Thou art the Searcher of hearts, therefore, where dwellest Thou? If I am with Thee, I have

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found all ; for Thou wilt show me my wants, to satisfy them out of Thy fulness.

Jesus, recognising in them true children of Abraham, waiting for the consolation of Israel, prepared by the heavenly Father, and now drawn by His Spirit, received them at once into His fellowship, saying, "Come and see!"* Yes, not an isolated interview, not a transitory conversation, not a passing hour, during which they listen to His voice, is what the Saviour offers to those who seek *Him*, and in *Him* all they need ; but to know, to see, and to live with *Him* is His gracious invitation. "Come and see" He saith to His disciples at every stage, from the very commencement of the new life, till at last we have reached the summit, where He asks the astonished and adoring saint, "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" If "coming" involves any effort, struggle, self-denial, what encouragement and promise are held out in the word, "See." Great was the glory which Moses beheld when he ascended Mount Sinai ; greater glory appeared unto Andrew and John when they accompanied Jesus and entered His dwelling.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon, and they remained that day with the Saviour, but, ere night, friendship and brotherly love caused them to leave for a while His blessed abode. Finding Andrew's brother, Simon, they announced to him

* Comp. Psalm lxvi. 5 ; Psalm xlvi. 9.

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the wonderful discovery—"We have found the Messiah!" Even up to this day, though Israel has fallen so low, and forsaken so lamentably the truth of God, that word Messiah has, to Jewish ears, a sound full of mysterious attractiveness and sweet solemnity. *Messiah!*—it reminds us of a lost paradise, beautiful garden of Eden, with its glorious trees and lovely flowers, and life so full of innocent, joyous, holy music, and fills our soul with a deep, pensive melancholy, as when we are thinking of a dear, beloved parent in the grave, and of the last act of ingratitude and disobedience with which we have grieved him. *Messiah!*—it reminds us of the majesty of that night, when God appeared unto our father Abraham, and showed him the sky with its innumerable stars, and gave him the promise of a great and blessed nation. *Messiah!*—it reminds us of all the past merciful and glorious manifestations of Jehovah, when He brought His people out of Egypt, when Judah was His sanctuary, and Israel His dominion; it reminds us of David and of Solomon—the days of summer joy and beauty; and, though the present cries out, "Ichabod, the glory is departed," it arouses the hope of God's future favour to His covenant people, and renewal of His own Zion. They were waiting for the Messiah, longing for Him with all their heart; though Scribes and Pharisees were cold and dead formalists, yet God had left in the midst of the rich and self-satisfied a poor and afflicted people—such as Zacharias, and

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Elizabeth, and Mary, aged Simeon, and Anna, and many who are well-known in heaven, who looked for redemption, that is, for the appearing of the promised Redeemer, the Angel of the Covenant, the Son of David. Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another; the desire of their hearts, the object of their life, could not but form the frequent subject of their communings: a hallowed companionship was here, a sacred friendship: then were two or three gathered together in Messiah's name, and, according to the promise, He came to them. "We have found the Messiah!" these were the words with which Andrew announced to Simon the great event of his life. And he brought him to Jesus. The Lord beholding him claims him as His own, and knowing the place which the Father had assigned to this new disciple in His kingdom, and the peculiar gifts with which He had endowed him, changed his name, Simon, into Cephas, or Rock. Our Saviour assigns to every one his place, his service in His house; and it is He Himself who must train and qualify us, even by taking from us our confidence in our natural gifts and adaptation, and giving unto us new spiritual strength out of His fulness. Simon is weak, though impetuous, bold, strong in his own might. Simon denies Jesus; Simon, son of Jonas, has to be asked three times by the Saviour, "Lovest thou me?" Simon attempts to walk on the waves of the sea, and sinks. But Peter, that is, Simon, distrusting

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himself and looking to the Lord for strength, is strong and gains the victory. Simon's natural courage and strength are not only no advantage in the spiritual kingdom, but the very reverse, an incumbrance, obstacle, and snare. Saul thinks that David would be assisted by the royal armour, and a helmet of brass upon his head, and a coat of mail, but David said unto Saul, "I cannot go with these." For man's strength is weakness before God, and the hero of God glories in his infirmity.

The next morning, Jesus being about to leave the Jordan to go to Galilee,* He met Philip of Bethsaida, a countryman and friend of Andrew and Peter; and the Saviour, seeing in him also an Israelite waiting for redemption, said unto him, "Follow me!" Word of power and of love! how cheerfully and gladly followed by the living; how unwillingly and reluctantly heard by the dead intent on burying their dead. "Follow me!" Word of gracious condescension! when the soul hears it, there flows into it a tide of unspeakable joy and overwhelming humility; and surprise, gratitude, and peace,—the trembling joy of a loving, timid bride—take hold of thee. "Follow me!" The stone is rolled away from the tomb, the past is brought to peace and reconciliation, a glorious prospect of never-ending life and joy opens before us. Jesus called, Philip followed.

* Jesus *would* go forth: with the purpose of gathering in disciples. (Psalm xlv. 3-5.)

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How rapidly is the circle of first disciples formed, and how quietly and calmly. Here are no discussions and debates, no signs and wonders, few words; it is all confidence, love, personal attraction, influence of heart on heart.* It is like a quiet, still, peaceful morning—like the lovely, gentle spring. Four disciples had now found Him whom they had been led by God, through His holy Word, to seek, and Jesus had found them; for, as the Father seeketh souls to worship Him in spirit and in truth, the Son was seeking hearts, which were waiting for His redemption. They were the men whom the Father had given Him out of the world; the trees of righteousness, which, in the midst of a wilderness, the Father had planted to be a garden to welcome the second Adam. It was meet that, before the heat and toil of the day, before the angry clouds and darkness which awaited Him, there should be this season of joy—that the Beloved should come into His garden and eat His pleasant fruits.

And now a fifth was to be added to the number of His followers. Philip found Nathanael, and partly because he could not but testify of what he had seen and heard, because he could not but communicate his most important and precious experience, partly because he knew Nathanael's earnestness, and was convinced of his sympathy, he said, "We have found Him, of whom Moses

* Nitzsch.

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in the law, and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." It is not without the purpose of instruction that the different expressions used by the disciples in this narrative are recorded with, doubtless, exact truthfulness by the inspired evangelist. In words we read the thoughts which proceed out of the heart. Philip does not merely say, "We have found the Messiah," but he seems to be struck with the apparent contrast between the real character and greatness of Him whom he had found, and the outward position and circumstances in which He appeared. The great Object of all predictions and promises of the prophets, the great Centre of all preceding dispensations—the Messiah, whose coming was prepared for centuries by Moses and the prophets, behold we have found Him—Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph. It is the same evangelist who notices subsequently Philip's peculiar appreciation of the outward, visible element—of the disproportion between the actual and the ideal—"Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little," was his remark, when Jesus, knowing his peculiarity, and intending to prove him, asked him, "Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" (John vi. 5-7.) Jesus had lifted up His eyes and seen the multitude; Philip lifted up his eyes—and they were quick and correct; but Jesus saw not merely the actual, and what in a lower sense is called real,

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He perceived in faith God's reality. Thus again, Philip said, "Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us;" for he could not see clearly in Christ's humility and weakness, Divine power and glory. Notice, it is this very same Philip who saith here, "Jesus of Nazareth, Joseph's Son." Nathanael asked, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" See how true and deep is the remark made by the evangelist Matthew on the circumstance that Joseph came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth. He beholds in this providence the fulfilment of what was spoken by the prophets, "He shall be called a Nazarene," not referring to any isolated passage of the Old Testament predictions, but to the general tenor of prophecy, which announced that the Messiah was to come in outward lowliness and humility, as a root out of a dry ground. Galilee itself was despised; Nazareth especially had become proverbial for its obscurity and spiritual deadness. The humiliation of Christ consists in this, that His outward appearance is a stumbling block even to the light-seeking, truth-loving souls; not merely is He divested of all that is attractive to the lovers of the world and its glory, but He so humbled Himself, that even a Nathanael and John the Baptist can be offended at Him. But Nathanael, with the same candour with which he had expressed his doubt and scruple, acknowledges the claim which Philip's friendship and enthusiastic conviction ought to exert upon him. His scruple

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is not an obstinate prejudice ; his doubt is not a perverse clinging to preconceived opinions. It would be strange if any good thing, if the best of all gifts, were to come out of Nazareth ; but he knows that God's ways and thoughts are often different from our ways and thoughts, and that the Lord is a God whose thoughts are wonderful and past searching out. Philip had said to him, "Come and see." In this invitation there was the tone of firm, undoubting conviction, joyous satisfaction, and earnest happy anticipation of the result, namely, Nathanael's faith. And thus the two Israelites approach.

When Jesus beheld Nathanael, He described his inmost character to those that stood around him, and exclaimed, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile." We are astonished to hear the true and faithful Witness, the Searcher of hearts, give such a description of one to whom the Saviour was as yet a stranger, unknown and unloved. "In whom there is no guile ;" we know that true sincerity and uprightness of heart cannot be found among Adam's children, except where the Spirit has been exerting His renewing influence. We speak of sincere, honest, transparent men, and to a certain extent we are justified in attributing this beautiful character to our fellow-men ; but we feel that the description, "in whom is no guile," refers to the deepest centre of the character in its relation to God ; it denotes undivided love to Him who has

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commanded us to forsake all idolatry, and give Him the affection of our soul ; it includes undivided trust and confidence in Him who is willing to be our *only* rock and salvation, but not willing to be our defence and help when we trust also in the arm of flesh ; it embraces undivided obedience to Him who demands of us to fear only one thing—His displeasure and the hiding of His countenance. “ In whom there is no guile,” is the same state which Christ, in another passage, describes by the words, “ If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be light ;” and David truly represents it as the *result* of pardon received, and of Divine mercy accepted : “ Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.” (Comp. 1 John i. 8, 9.)

It is evident, then, that Christ does not mean a natural virtue, and that He refers to something essentially different from that sincerity, uprightness, truthfulness, and transparency which adorn, in a pleasing and beautiful manner, the character of many human beings. Jesus declares, that Nathanael’s heart was right with God—that he had received the good Spirit from above.

And again the question arises : How is it that Nathanael had reached this high state ? The Saviour himself replies, by saying, “ An Israelite indeed !” His guilelessness is referred not to humanity, for humanity is corrupt, it is nature ; but it is referred

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to his being an Israelite—that is, to the kingdom of grace, the work of the Spirit, the planting of the Lord. He was an Israelite, and he was not merely a nominal, but a real Israelite. In every nation it is considered a high encomium when an individual is spoken of as a good representative and specimen of the people—a real Englishman, a true German, &c.—that is, a man who possesses the honesty, thought, faithfulness, liveliness, or whatever characteristic it may be which distinguishes his nation. Hence, when Nathanael is designated as a genuine Israelite, the question arises, What is Israel's characteristic? It is not outward power or glory, it is not wisdom or art, it is not courage or enterprise, it is not righteousness or self-trust; Israel has only one thing. While other nations look to the past, Israel, even in its lowest degradation, was always commanded to look to the future. While other nations are always reminded of the virtue and noble achievements of their ancestors, while their encouragement to the battle is always the memory of their past conquests and the consciousness of their strength, Israel is reminded of its sin, weakness, and helplessness. Israel has nothing in itself, but it possesses the promise. Sin, guilt, weakness, sorrow, are thine—as they belong to no other nation; but Jesus is thine, “Salvation is of the Jews.” He is called the Consolation, the Redemption of Israel. This is the *idea* of which Israel is an embodiment: human sin, weakness, sorrow

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longing after Divine righteousness, strength, joy. And he was the true Israelite who despaired of himself, and in true self-abasement and contrition looked for redemption from the Saviour and Restorer. In this sense Nathanael also was waiting and hoping, believing and rejoicing, a true Israelite ! And therefore it was true of him "in whom is no guile."

"The Lord knoweth his own." Outwardly nearly all Israelites professed the same truths and the same hopes. They all adhered to the declarations of Scripture, spoke, reasoned, preached very frequently, ably, enthusiastically about the Messiah—knew and felt themselves a chosen people, separated from all other nations. But the Lord knew where there was a genuine Israelite. He is not a Jew who is a Jew outwardly. To be an Israelite is not the gift of nature ; he is not born of the flesh or of the will of man, he is born of God, by the Spirit, through the law, the types, the promises, the psalms, the history, prepared by God to manifest His salvation unto His people. "An Israelite indeed." That means, in Christ's lips, a flower planted by my heavenly Father for me—a lamb brought into the fold for my care, love, and guidance, one of the children whom God has given me.

He had uttered it—was it because in His joy, delight, and love, out of the abundance of His adoring, thankful, tender heart, the words flowed forth irresistibly ?—He had uttered it to His new

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disciples, not addressing Himself to Nathanael, but yet speaking so that he heard it. Nathanael, understanding the full import of Christ's words, is not disturbed in his calmness by the praise bestowed upon him, but he feels that no superficial acquaintance, no outward report, no testimony of friends or neighbours, could justify Christ's description of his character. To say of any man what Jesus had said of him, and to say it in truth, it is necessary to *know him*, to be intimately and spiritually related to him. Nathanael therefore asked Him—thus showing the truest modesty and humility—"Whence knowest thou me?" And now Jesus answered in a word, which entered into the very depths of Nathanael's soul, "Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee." It was not merely, because these words might have shown, that Jesus was a prophet, that He beheld and witnessed things which distance would have rendered impossible for ordinary mortals to see, that they produced such an effect upon Nathanael. Rather are we to conclude, that Jesus referred here to a moment in Nathanael's life, when, in solemn solitude, he thought of God's salvation, and longed for its coming. "When thou wast under the fig-tree"—when no eye beheld thee but the Father's—when, alone with Him who seeth and heareth in secret, thou didst pour out thy heart, and remind the Lord of the gracious promises which He had given to His people, and in which He has caused

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them to hope—when thou didst sigh and weep before Him, “Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down!”—“even then I saw thee.” I know thy heart, “thou art an Israelite indeed!”

When Jesus had thus revealed Himself, Nathanael exclaimed, “Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.” He beheld in Him the Son of God; for to Him he could apply the words of David, “O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me, thou knowest my downsitteing and mine uprising, thou understandest my thoughts afar off, thou compassesest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether.” The Saviour had revealed Himself as the Searcher of hearts to the woman of Samaria, by telling her all the evil she had done; to Nathanael, by telling him all the good God had worked in him. And the Israelite has found now Israel’s King—the true David, who knows His people, sympathises with them, and gains not merely outward obedience, but submission, confidence, loyalty, surrender, love of the heart. How quickly they recognised each other! Christ apprehended Nathanael, Nathanael took hold of Christ (Phil. iii. 12). He beheld Jesus coming, not out of Nazareth merely, but of heaven, the Son of God, the Lord of glory, and he beheld His glory, full of grace and truth.

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Nathanael *believed* now ; not on account of superficial congeniality, liking, predisposition—the word of praise would have blinded and influenced many into a hasty resolution of discipleship. “This Rabbi seems to understand and appreciate my character ; our views will likely harmonise.” In this manner many fanciful, vain, dreamy, and self-satisfied souls glide into sentimental faith, intuitions, feelings ! Not so Nathanael, not so the child of God. He digs deep—he seeks a rock to build upon. The depth of his feeling is the very source of his calmness ; beneath, a rock, above, the clear light—thus do the tempest-tossed thoughts and doubts possess a lighthouse, guiding and directing them in the darkness of night. God does not call this calmness coldness or indifference, He beholds in it the fruit of His Spirit,—He sees in it true earnestness and zeal, and freedom from self-trust and self-complacency. Jesus is always willing to answer such questions as, “Whence knowest thou me ?” Whereas professions not based on true, conscientious knowledge—as “Good Master,” in the mouth of one who knows not Christ’s divinity—He always refuses to accept. The honour which cometh from man He is not willing to receive : but the very feeblest stammering and lisping of infant lips, taught by the Spirit to call Him Lord, are welcome to His heart. And more convincing and satisfying than signs and wonders is the evidence which the manifestation of a heart-searching and heart-con-

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soling Saviour gives to the earnest soul ; evidence, which results not merely in intellectual conviction, but in the adoration and homage of conscience and heart.

Jesus promises Nathanael, and all like him, that they are to witness greater, clearer, more glorious manifestations : “ to him that hath shall be given.” “ Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.” Nathanael had called Jesus, Son of God—the Saviour loves to call Himself, Son of Man. He is the Mediator between God and Man—in Him is realized the vision beheld by the patriarch Jacob. The wall of separation is removed through His coming. The Son of Man, even while on earth, is in heaven ; the delight of the Father rests upon Him, and through Him on the children, whose nature He had taken upon Him ; the angels of God are ascending and descending, watching with adoring interest His progress, and ministering to Him, who, though for a season made lower than they, is appointed, even as Son of Man, to be the King of the world to come. The separation existing between heaven and earth is henceforth no longer a real and essential one, it is only temporary, and as more in harmony with the character of this dispensation—till the time comes when God’s will is done on earth as it is in heaven. But the disciples behold heaven open ; in Jesus the darkness, sin, and misery,

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which, since the Fall, conceal heaven from our view, have vanished ; and in His person, His work, and the life He imparts, we behold the heavenly places and live in them. As Christ's sacrifice and intercession ascend to the Father, His blessings, through the Holy Ghost, descend into our hearts. In the Son of Man we behold and have God as our Father ; in the Son of Man God beholds and possesses us as His children. First we believe, then we know and see ; we know by living experience, by deepening and growing enjoyment : we know in proportion as we exercise faith, not looking at the things which are seen,—Nazareth and Joseph the carpenter,—but lifting up our eyes to the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. “Come and see,” were the simple words of Jesus to the first two disciples who sought Him ; but now, in the circle of disciples—exercising more faith, and ripened, though within so short a time, into deep and solemn adoration—Jesus gives the full promise of the glory which in Him hath appeared unto sinful men, translating them into His kingdom of life and light.

Jesus has thus found five disciples—John and Andrew, Simon, Philip, and Nathanael. It was the dawn of the new covenant—a quiet, still, fragrant hour. In deep sleep lay nearly all the inhabitants of Judea ; the true Israelites, who had heard the voice of the harbinger of morning, who were waiting for redemption, they beheld the Sun

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of Righteousness arise with healing in His wings. The Bridegroom came, He beheld the Bride and knew her; the Bride saw Him, and with trusting love and joy responded to His voice. Meek and lowly appeared the King of peace, His royalty concealed, His dignity veiled; but the people given to Him by the Father were drawn to Him by an irresistible attraction. Prepared by God, through His Word and ordinances and messengers, prepared above all by the inward, silent, deep influences of His grace, they found in Jesus the fulfilment of all prophecy—the prophecy written in the Word, the prophecy of expectation and earnest longing written by the Spirit on their heart.

Reader, has the Lord planted thee also in a garden, even the congregation of believers, where His gospel is known, preached, believed, enjoyed?—has He spoken to thy conscience by prosperity and adversity?—has He roused within thee terrors of the law, and expectations of salvation, peace, life?—has He instructed thee, line upon line, precept upon precept—led thee to seek, to think, to pray?—has He allowed thee, in the preaching of His Word, in the faith of a mother, or wife, or friend, to see, as it were darkly, a Divine, gracious, and powerful Redeemer?—and has it stirred within thee a desire after like faith and love and communion? Then, hear again the message of John the Baptist, “Behold the Lamb of God!” and

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remain no longer in the school of the Baptist, in the outer court, but follow the invitation of Jesus, "Come and see!" Enter into His fellowship, be His disciple, believe, and behold the heavens open. Be not afraid of the question, "What seekest thou?" but answer, "When thou saidst to me, Seek my face, my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek."

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JOHN III.

THERE are few portions of Holy Scripture which contain so many vital, central truths, and exhibit so comprehensive a view of the great doctrines of salvation, as the account given in the Gospel of John of the interview between the Lord Jesus Christ and Nicodemus. Here we behold the kingdom of God, which is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost—heights so sublime and lofty as to be inaccessible to fallen and sinful man. For here are likewise shown unto us depths of ruin and helplessness, a horrible pit, whither no cheering ray of sunlight can penetrate, and whence the poor captive can in no way by his own exertion obtain deliverance. Between this height—the kingdom of God—and this depth—“what is born of the flesh is flesh”—we behold a ladder, such as

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appeared to Jacob in his dream ; for Jesus speaks of Himself as the Son of man, who is in heaven, and came down from heaven, so that the hope is raised within us, that here is a true and powerful Mediator—a messenger bringing help, reconciliation, and liberty.

Here we behold, likewise, two mysterious fountains—the fountain which opened even in Paradise itself, whence sin, bringing misery and death, has flowed unto all the children of Adam ; and the fountain of renewing and cleansing water, even the Spirit, by whom we are restored to fellowship with God, and to the blessedness of dear and accepted children.

Still greater and more wonderful contrasts are disclosed to us.—A world hating God, and God loving the world ; a serpent healing the wound caused by a serpent ; Christ, who knew no sin, made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him ; eternal life, God's favour, presence, and Spirit—and death, condemnation, and the wrath of God ; and, finally, whereas it is most clearly asserted that man cannot save himself, that he must be born again from above of the Spirit, the unbeliever is condemned, and the love of sin is pointed out as the reason why men hate the light and remain in darkness.

Here are indeed stern and awful words, revealing fully the extent of our disease and danger, and cutting off every glimpse of hope which is

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based on our past attainments and merit, or on our future exertions and endeavours; and while listening to the declarations of Him who is called the Amen, the true and faithful Witness, as He speaks of God's kingdom and of our sin, guilt, and helplessness, we feel as if dark and ominous clouds were gathering above us, and our hearts are filled with terror and dismay; and we hear a voice of thunder proclaiming, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself;" and we behold a flaming sword, turning every way, and keeping the way of the tree of life; and the question stirs within our troubled soul, Who then can be saved? But, behold! the Sun of Righteousness arises with healing in His wings, and shines forth so brightly and gloriously, and freely, and powerfully, and invites us to come, and to be healed, and to rejoice. Christ speaks of the love of the Father, and the grace of the Saviour, and the influence and work of the Holy Spirit; and we hear the words of infinite strength and infinite sweetness, "In me is thy help;" and no longer have we to speak of a Paradise lost, and the flaming sword forbidding our entrance, but we sit down under the shadow of the tree of life with great delight, and His fruit is sweet to our taste.

It was spoken in an obscure and quiet chamber in Jerusalem on that night during the Passover feast. Probably the Saviour and His nocturnal visitor were alone, but Christ's words abode in the

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heart of Nicodemus, and proved themselves to be spirit and life; and they were written by the evangelist, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, that we also might believe and be saved.

I.

It is the passover feast. Jesus is at Jerusalem. Eighteen years ago He had, as a child, accompanied His parents as they went up to the feast, and on that occasion he had uttered the memorable words, "How is it that ye have sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" But now we do not find Him among the doctors, listening to them, and asking them questions; He now appears as the Prophet, the Angel of the Covenant, who has come to His temple to execute judgment and righteousness. Zealous for the glory of God, as a true Israelite and a true Prophet, He drove out of the temple those who turned His Father's house into a house for merchandise. Again He uttered the word "my Father,"—that word which afterwards formed the stumbling-block and rock of offence; and He prophesied of His resurrection in words which even His disciples were not able to comprehend, but from which it is manifest that He saw from the beginning that great passover feast, when the true Lamb was to be offered as a sacrifice for sin.

But not only did He testify of God's righteousness and Israel's sin, of His own Divinity and His

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sufferings and glory, He also confirmed His testimony by many signs and miracles. Then many believed on Him ; but Jesus, who knew what was in man—namely, an evil heart of unbelief—did not commit Himself unto them. An earthly teacher is easily flattered and deceived ; men who are willing to acknowledge his wisdom and authority often appear to him trustworthy, just because they honour him with their approbation and confidence ; but Jesus, seeking only God's glory, walked in the light—He, the perfect, sinless Man, was also the Searcher of hearts—He knew what was in man. One of the *men*, whom Jesus knew, (John ii. 25), came unto Him by night.

He was a Pharisee, and ruler of the Jews. What are we to think of the Pharisees? It is clear that many of them lived in guilt and hypocrisy ; but, doubtless, many of them were sincere, unto whom Paul bore record, that they had a zeal for God. "I was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day." They possessed the form of godliness, but they were without its power. They had the Scriptures, thanked God for His revelation, read and studied it with diligence and care, yet when Jesus, of whom all prophets testified, stood in the midst of them, they not merely did not recognize the full and complete harmony between the written and living Word, but accused the Lord of breaking and contradicting the Scriptures. They had the temple and the law ; diligently and perseveringly they

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endeavoured to honour and observe the commandments, yet the very first object which the law was to serve—viz., to convince man of sin and of his utter helplessness—was not attained in their case; they were self-satisfied and self-righteous. They prayed, and their prayer, instead of being a transparent medium through which they saw God, became an opaque obstruction—a form in which they trusted and rested. As for their doctrine, Christ Himself did not charge them with unsoundness. What are we to think of the Pharisees? They were religious, but not godly; orthodox, but not spiritual; they knew the *words*—God, prayer, kingdom of God, Messiah—but they had not come to look on the *realities*, of which these words are the outward designation. Had they possessed New Testament expressions, they would have used them also; and, therefore, men who speak now-a-days of heaven, and Christ's blood, and faith, but who have not received the Spirit of God, and so do not prefer heavenly and spiritual things to temporal and present enjoyments, and do not understand the power of Christ's suffering and resurrection, and do not live a spiritual life, Jesus dwelling in their heart by faith—although they are far from hypocrisy and a desire to deceive others—yet occupy the same place as the Pharisees of old, nominally believing in the Messiah, virtually denying and rejecting Him. Such men are generally the most inaccessible to the influence of gospel truth; the most rousing and

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powerful words have become to them meaningless ; while they imagine that they possess a reality they are only clinging to a form and outward sign. Yet the Lord is able to save to the uttermost. The voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness, and the heart of the self-righteous begins to long after reality, and to be troubled with a sense of its emptiness and darkness.

Nicodemus, a Pharisee, but, above all things, a man, came to Jesus by night. Instead of blaming him severely for his want of courage and his fear of man, which made him seek the cover of darkness for what was a work of light, let us rather notice the fact of his coming to Jesus. If anything, be it the preaching of John the Baptist or the appearance of Jesus and of His mighty works, has roused the hitherto satisfied and peaceful heart, and the soul has become restless and perplexed, go to Jesus and speak to Him. Perhaps, like Nicodemus, what you have to say to Him will be full of confusion ; for the words of Nicodemus can only be described as *chaos*. "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God." Remember what in Israel was understood by the expression, "Come from God." The eternal Word had thus announced Himself and His great work of atoning obedience, "Lo, I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me ;" in the very Psalm which was sung at the passover, Israel exclaimed, "Blessed is He that *cometh* in the name of the Lord." Malachi, the last

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of the prophets, had predicted the great event in the same words—"The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly *come* to his temple;" and four hundred years after, John the Baptist asked the question, "Art thou he that is to come?" "Come from God," therefore, in the mouth of an Israelite, meant definitely the great Messenger of the covenant, the Redeemer and King of Israel, the Lord of glory. "We know," said Nicodemus, (we Pharisees, who know the law, who can discern spirits, whose duty it is to take cognisance of what is going on in the kingdom of God), "that thou art come from God"—but he adds, "a *teacher*." What a descent! Of teachers there were enough in Israel—rabbis, expositors of the law, and prophets—it is a fulfiller who is needed. Such is the knowledge of man, of religious man, of a whole corporation of religious men, confused, contradictory, false. We know that thou art a teacher, and why? "Because no man can do those miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." Is it a sound argument? It is to all whom the Spirit has convinced of the truth of the doctrine; but when the teaching has not proved its Divine power to our hearts, no outward signs can form a sure foundation to rest upon. Yet Nicodemus said, he knew, they knew. If so, why did he come by night? why did they not all acknowledge Him? Is this not a picture of the unrenewed man, who *knows* that eternity is more important than the interests of the present world,

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and that we ought to seek and serve God, and that faith in Christ is the only way of life— who knows that the only true blessedness is to be found in Christ, and who will yet ignore Christ all the day, and be ashamed of Him before his companions, and unwilling to confess Him before men, will live as if he knew not, even because he believes not ?

Nicodemus stood where, at this present day, Socinians stand theoretically, and most unbelievers stand practically. If Christ be only a prophet, He is not merely not bringing us any help and deliverance Himself ; but if Christ be only a prophet, then all the prophets who preceded Him had indeed and in truth nothing to predict, no consolation to give, no redemption to promise. If Christ be no more than a prophet, then the prophets, all of whom testified that He was to give remission of sins and a new life, have raised in us expectations and hopes which are bitterly disappointed. Another prophet ! and for what purpose ? To issue forth new currency, as it were, which is mere paper, and corresponds to no reality. Is Christ, as the Jews thought, a Jeremiah, a prophet full of earnestness and tender pity, or an Elijah, full of zeal for God's glory and truth, or a John the Baptist, preaching repentance ? Is He only a teacher ? Then we must wait for another, or give up waiting, and come to the conclusion that we ought never to have waited at all. And as Nicodemus, after his con-

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fused and chaotic statement, has no definite request to present or question to ask, thus is there a similar most awkward pause after the acknowledgment of Jesus as a mere teacher and prophet. Nicodemus has evidently no petition to offer. He does not know himself what Jesus is to give him or do for him. Indeed, according to his ideas, he has reached already the conclusion; as he has acknowledged Jesus to be a teacher, he expects Jesus to acknowledge him as a good and wise rabbi. And there all ends. This was the preaching of the Rationalists, who did not see in Christ the Son of God and the Saviour of sinners. It was a shallow laudation of Christ and of themselves. But even though intellectually we may acknowledge Christ as God and as a Redeemer, do we not virtually treat Him as a mere prophet who declares the truth of God and preaches the righteousness of God and the way of life, as long as we do not allow Him to minister unto us, to wash us in His blood, to save us by His love? Do we not virtually hold the position of proud, though approving, and even admiring listeners and critics, until we assume the attitude of repentant and believing sinners? Is there not unbelief, self-trust, icy self-containedness in that word, "We know that Christ is a Saviour," until we learn to say, "I believe?"—and though at first we have to add, "Help my unbelief," we afterwards can say, "I *know* in whom I have believed."

Jesus Christ heard not merely the words of

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Nicodemus ; He knew what was in him, and therefore His reply goes to the very root of the matter. Nicodemus had addressed Him as rabbi ; Jesus replies as the Amen, the true and faithful Witness, the perfect Revealer of God,—“ Verily, verily I say unto thee.” The ruler had spoken to Him in the name of a whole class ; Jesus directs himself to the individual,—“ Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” What is meant by the kingdom ? and what is meant by regeneration ? God has a kingdom in heaven, where His will is done, where His love is felt and returned, where His glory is adored ; and it was His good pleasure to have a kingdom upon earth ; therefore He created man in His image ; and Adam was the son of God, glorifying his Father, and walking in fellowship with Him. But, through sin, the kingdom disappeared from earth ; and when God looked down from heaven, His dwelling-place, He beheld none righteous, no, not one. Among the heathen nations reigned superstition and selfishness, vice and degradation ; and as for Jerusalem, she killed the prophets, and stoned them that were sent unto her ; nay, when the Lord of glory Himself came, they nailed Him to the cross with cruel hands. The children of Adam, *as such*, were without the kingdom ; nay, they hated and opposed it. Therefore God, from all eternity, chose another Adam, a Servant in whom He delighted, and upon whom was His Spirit, to be the beginning of a new creation,

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the Father of a new family, the Head of a new organism. Christ is the second Adam, the Man from heaven, the Parent and Origin of the Church, the Head and Source of the kingdom of God. Therefore doth Isaiah call Him "the everlasting Father," and prophesy of Him, "He shall see His seed;" therefore is He called the First-born among many brethren, the Head of the body, the Church, the First-born from the dead. As there would be no human race without Adam, so there would be no kingdom of God among men without Christ. As Adam is the parent of the children of men, so Christ is the Father of the Church. Thus is Christ the first among many brethren; and when He rose from the dead, He became the Source of life and glory to all the children whom from eternity God had given Him. Therefore Peter gives thanks unto God, who of His abundant mercy hath begotten us again to a lively hope, by the *resurrection* of Jesus Christ *from the dead*, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away; and Paul says that God hath quickened us together with Christ. At first there is only one Man in the kingdom of God, even Christ; all Adam's seed are banished from it; all who are Adam's children, born of the flesh, are flesh; they cannot enter—they cannot even see the kingdom of God. Christ is the beginning of a new creation; and therefore, just as through connexion with Adam we are dead in trespasses and sins, so, if we are to see the

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kingdom of God, we must be brought into living connexion with Christ. If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature ; he belongs to the new creation, the new organism, the Church of which Christ is the Head.

In like manner Christ speaks of the regeneration of the present world. As it is, it is no fit locality for the kingdom. There is a curse on the earth ; the creature is made subject to vanity, and the whole creation groaneth and travaileth together until now. But Jesus is to make all things new ; we look for a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness ; in the *regeneration* shall be made manifest the kingdom which is now hidden. As Christ's kingdom requires a renewed earth for its place, it requires renewed men for its citizens.

Christ came into the world not merely to teach, but to bring life, to be the second Adam ; therefore nothing can avail but a *new creature*. He came to give power to become the sons of God to men who are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God,—who are not merely descendants of Adam, but members of Christ.

Nicodemus understood Christ's meaning in part ; he felt that Jesus had taken him away from his old mode of viewing things into a new world ; he was conscious, moreover, that Christ's declaration implied that his past life, with its attainments in knowledge and virtue, cannot suffice ; that even he, old as he was, required a radical change. The Jewish

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ruler does not dispute the necessity of the new birth. Indeed, man's conscience bears witness that Christ's demand is just. We are impure and defiled, within and without. Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, which afterwards beget evil deeds; and man feels (or at least does not contradict it, when he is told) that, in order to be fit for heaven, he must receive a new, clean heart. But while the necessity of regeneration is not denied, the possibility of such a change is questioned; for man is unwilling to look unto Him with whom all things are possible. Jesus repeats the solemn declaration; but this time he reminds Nicodemus of Old Testament promises and practices, which may help him to comprehend the meaning of the mystery. Was not the baptism of Gentiles, when they were received into Israel, regarded as a new birth? Did they not die to their former life, and enter into a new life, even the life of faith in, and obedience to Jehovah? And were not Christ's words almost a verbal repetition of the ancient promise—"Then will I sprinkle clean *water* upon you, and ye shall be clean; a *new heart* also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God"? that is, ye shall see and enter into my kingdom. Thus must we be born again, even by dying unto our past life, in its God-estranged character, with its evil works, and comparatively good but dead works, with its self-trust and self-righteousness, and, by being created anew in Christ Jesus through

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the Spirit of God, who enables us to see Jesus as the Son of the living God, and who fills our heart with humility and submission, so that we call Him Lord—with repentance and faith, so that we look unto Him whom we have pierced, and are healed.

II.

Absolute as is the necessity of the new birth, even so absolute is man's helplessness in this matter. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." Free, sovereign, and powerful is the Spirit of God. As the becalmed vessel, perfect and complete though its structure, vigorous and expert though its crew, lies helpless and motionless, waiting until the Most High sends forth the wind out of His treasury, the soul of man lies dependent on Divine influence and power. Blessed is he who has come to this Divine despair! who can say, not with the coldness of a sin-loving heart, seeking shelter from God in excuses, which imply accusation of His justice and mercy, but with the sorrow which is itself God's gift: With man it is impossible; here—a creation, a Divine power is necessary. Create within me a new heart! Blessed is the man who, like David, confesses, not merely his actual sin and transgression, but has learned to mourn over that fountain of sin which is within him; and, instead of seeing, in his connexion with

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Adam, a palliation of his guilt, beholds in it the depth of his depravity and wretchedness. The man who feels that what is born of the flesh is flesh, and who acknowledges in his heart his guilt and helplessness, is blessed; he is poor in spirit, and therefore, behold, the kingdom of God *is his!* For unto such the gospel is preached, even glad tidings of salvation. Instead of filthy garments, behold here the best robe, even Christ's perfect righteousness; instead of Adam, bringing sin, guilt, death, behold the Lord from heaven, bringing pardon, holiness, life. Hear even now the voice of Christ, as He points to all who believe in His name, and presents them to the Father—"Lo, I and the children whom Thou hast given me,"—children and heirs, heirs of God, and fellow-heirs with Christ, the First-born among many brethren.

But how can these things be?

A young minister of the gospel, teacher in the great Orphan-house of Halle, in Saxony, that wonderful monument of the power of faith, felt once so irresistibly moved in his spirit to visit his aged parents, who lived on the confines of Russia, that he forthwith commenced his journey; but in the first garrison town through which he had to pass he was arrested, and, according to the custom prevailing at the time, forced to enter the service of the king. Here he had to associate with a youth who had neglected the opportunities of education previously offered to him, and who, by his own

carelessness and folly, had fallen into his present condition. The minister felt it his duty to instruct this ignorant companion.

So, one day, he wrote for him as a writing-copy, the words which Christ addressed to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." The soldier read it, and was struck. "What is this you have been writing here?" he asked his teacher. A simple statement of the occasion when the words were spoken, and a short description of the persons who held that memorable interview formed the answer. "But is it true, do you think—is it a fact—that we must be born again?" "Doubtless it is. Christ is the Son of God—His words are truth." "And this," was the excited reply, "you can tell me with such coolness! If so, I must become altogether a new being." And thus was this young prodigal led to inquire earnestly after the way of God. Attentively and eagerly he listened; soon he wept bitterly, and believed with a joyful heart. These two men, teacher and pupil, were so active and zealous in promoting the gospel among their fellow-soldiers, that the officers, in their hatred of Divine truth, soon dismissed them as disturbers of the peace, and they returned sooner than they had anticipated to their respective homes.

When we ask thus earnestly, and with direct reference to ourselves personally, How can I be born again? the reply is—Believe the love of God

in Christ. This is the way to be regenerated. Look at Christ, and in doing this thy heart will be changed. It is strange, yet not stranger than what happened to the Israelites in the wilderness, when *Moses lifted up the serpent*. God's stories are truly wonderful; they are emblems of eternal truths; and although God dealt really and truly with Israel in the wilderness, all things happened unto them for an ensample, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. And therefore it is only now that these old histories can be fully understood; for we find that God, in His wisdom, hath so ordered it, that Christ and His work should be set forth clearly and minutely in the things that happened: and now, in the time of fulfilment, we begin to understand aright the prophecy. The fiery serpents, which bit the people so that many died, evidently show the nature and power of sin, first producing pain, restlessness, and feverish fear, and ending in death, estrangement, and banishment from God. This symbol was not entirely new, for we read, even in Genesis, of a serpent through which man was tempted to commit that sin the wages of which is death. But the remedy proposed, or rather commanded by God, is not only different from anything human ingenuity and wisdom would have devised, but it is a stumbling-block and rock of offence. For it was a serpent—the very thing which brought pain and death,

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and to behold which caused fear and anguish—which was to be lifted up. Thus it is that the remedy which God commands us to receive is Christ made sin for us. The Son of God appeared in the likeness of sinful flesh, and He who knew no sin was made sin for us; nay, more, Christ was made a curse for us, and hath thereby redeemed us from the curse of the law. When was Christ thus made sin and a curse for us, and when became He, in the full and real sense, our substitute? Paul tells us distinctly it was on the cross, for it is written, “Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.” (Gal. iii.) Even, as it is stated here, the serpent was *lifted up*, an expression which Christ, according to the inspired remark of John, used to signify the manner of death which He was to suffer. How perfect is the type of the brazen serpent! And that which appears strange, and contradictory, and foolish to man, is the very wisdom and power of God—even the vicarious death of Jesus Christ, in which He bore the sins of His people and was made a curse for them. In our days especially there are many attempts made, which have the appearance of wisdom and mystic depth, to explain this central fact of the Bible, so as to modify the idea of substitution; but this point must be guarded with the greatest tenacity, for we are distinctly told by the apostle that the cross of Christ is a stumbling-block and foolishness to man, and that it is here where the

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enticing words of human wisdom are apt to make God's powerful truth of none effect. It is the experience of God's saints in all ages that, before God and eternity, they have no other hope and refuge than this,—“He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.”

If Christ's death corresponds so exactly to the lifting up of the brazen serpent, the sequel of the history in the wilderness must likewise find its parallel. God commanded the Israelites to look upon it, and every one that *looked lived*. This also is not according to reason; but it was God's way, and it was reality and life. And it is in the same manner that the call is addressed to us; “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.” To look to Christ as a Substitute and Atoner—this is what God commands, and this is the way to be healed. This is faith, when we receive the testimony of God that He has made Christ to be a Mediator between God and man, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness; and that He has laid upon Him the iniquity of us all. And as truly as the Israelites were healed simply on looking, so certain is it that we who believe shall not perish, but have life everlasting.

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“IS IT SAID TO ME?”

Yes, if thou belongest to the world—the mass of sinful and guilty human beings. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Nicodemus may, perhaps, have been astonished at the words, “God loved the world.” It would not have surprised him if Jesus had said: God loved the Israelites. God loved His own good, holy, praying people. But God loved the world, sinners, the ungodly, sunk and degraded in darkness, guilt, and misery. And how did He love the world? Even so, that He gave the Son, who loved Him, and whom He loved with infinite love and delight, the only-begotten Son, to whom none is or ever could be equal—that He spared Him not! The reference is evidently to Abraham and his son, his only son, whom he loved. Was it a sacrifice of unspeakable depth and intensity which the father of the faithful brought in spirit? Infinitely greater was the sacrifice which the heavenly Father brought in reality. He gave Him up to the infinite humiliation of becoming man, born of a woman and under the law, of taking upon Him the form of sinful flesh; He gave Him up to be a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, to be surrounded with sin and pollution, suffering and sickness, which He felt as a heavy and oppressive burden;

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to bear scorn, contempt, hatred, cruelty ; to endure in Gethsemane what it is impossible for us to comprehend ; and to die even on the cross, as the Sin-bearer, "made sin for us." God spared not His only-begotten Son, because He loved the world. Herein indeed is love which is its own reason and source. The world was sinful, the Son of God righteous ; the world hated God, He was the beloved and only-begotten of the Father ; the world was polluted and deformed in His sight, (Ezek. xvi.), He, the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person ; God loved the world and gave up Christ, and Christ took upon Him sin, and pain, and curse, and death, that He might give us His righteousness and peace, His life and joy, for ever.

And now, "*whosoever* believeth on Him shall not perish." Think not of waiting till thou seest in thyself reasons for believing that God has begun a work in thee, that thou art therefore one of the elect, one of the people for whom Christ died. If thou waitest for this, know that the Spirit will never help thee in thy work. The Spirit glorifies Christ and Christ's work, and not Himself and His work ; He testifies of Christ as a full Saviour for an empty sinner, but not of thee and thy progress and fitness. If the Spirit is teaching thee it will be this : "I belong to the *world*, the mass of sinners ; and have nothing to distinguish me from them, except it be that, with more of restraining mercy,

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and more abundant opportunities of serving God, I have been more guilty and am more inexcusable than they; and if God has not loved the world, and if the call is not to *whomsoever*, it is no gospel or glad tidings for me." We must go to Christ as *lost*, not as elect sinners.

THE LITTLE GOSPEL.

The *little Gospel*, some one has called this precious verse, which contains all that we require, and which has been blessed to the conversion of so many souls. God is love. The Father is love; the proof is the gift of His Son. Jesus is love; the proof is the gift of Himself. The Spirit is love; the proof is He brings Jesus into the heart of faith. A poor criminal, who shortly before his death was led to repentance and faith, said of this verse: "This is enough for me; when I hear, 'God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son,' my heart expands at the sight of God's wondrous gift of love; and when I hear further, 'that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life,' my heart closes, takes a firm hold of Him, and I know He is mine."*

God has *given* Christ to be our salvation and life. He never takes from us this His unspeakable gift—through all eternity Christ is ours. God has given Him to be not merely our Teacher and Guide, our

* Valerius Herberger, (born 1562). Sermon on John iii. 16.

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Friend and Deliverer, our King and Protector, but to be unto us the second Adam, a source of wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Of God are we *in Christ*; and by believing in Him, we become one with Him, we become members of His body, branches of the living Vine—we are born again of incorruptible seed to an incorruptible inheritance. We are no longer carnally minded, which is death, but spiritually minded, which is life. Therefore it is, that Christ's people, or believers, are described as "they who are His;" and the region where they have their home, their affections, and their treasure, where they are citizens, and in which they live and walk, is no longer earth, but heaven; and thus, as Christ is heavenly, so are they also called heavenly. "The first man is of the earth, earthy, the second man is the Lord from heaven; as is the earthy, so are they also that are earthy, (that is, Adamites); and as is the heavenly, so are they also that are heavenly," (Deutero-Adamites or Christians). We are thus brought by faith out of a state of condemnation, and death, and darkness, into a state of justification, and life, and light—out of Adam into Christ.

And as *faith* is the commencement of regeneration, so faith is the development of the new life. Jesus dwells in our heart by *faith*; and it is by looking unto the things not seen and eternal that, dying unto the present world, the children of God persevere, grow, and glorify their Father,

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(Heb. xi.) “Jesus and His Spirit are more intimately connected with our new life, and contribute more to sustain and nourish it, than the atmosphere is essential to our natural existence. The spiritual man does not rely on himself and his spirituality, but on fellowship with Jesus, who is his *life*. He does not know of the existence of a new creature except in looking to Christ; and he knows, that every moment he would be a lifeless phantasm, were it not for the life of Jesus flowing into him and penetrating him. Hence faith in Jesus and love to Him are the pulsations of the spiritual man; he possesses and enjoys the unction which proceeds from the Saviour; he feels life in his soul, when he remembers Christ loved him and gave Himself for him; Jesus Himself with all the blessings of His work becomes his nourishment and strength; He is formed within us, He lives in us, and never leaves His abode. Jesus Himself is present with all His members, and fills with Himself all whom He has begotten. This is indeed a mystery which cannot be fathomed; but this is the sum and substance of religion. Jesus dwells in the heart; this is the element in which we live, and when we have this, we possess all.”*

What a contrast is this new life to our former state! And entering into it, or believing, may well be compared to a new birth. But the same apostle, who frequently and emphatically assures us, that all

* Steinhöfer.

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who receive Christ by faith do thereby enter into this new mode of existence and have eternal life, the favour of God, fellowship with Christ, and the indwelling of the Spirit, likewise assures us, that it doth not yet appear what we shall be ; and it was given unto him to behold the glory and blessedness of the future and perfect state. We are even now the children of God, but our life, real and true as it is, is still hidden with Christ in God ; but Christ our life shall appear, and we shall appear with Him in glory. Then shall we fully understand what is meant by that eternal life which God has given us *in Christ*, which was ours the moment we believed and became Christ's.

Thus we see here everything is real and substantial. There is a real kingdom of heaven, in which God's will is done, and for which God will prepare new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. There is at first only one Son of man, who, being righteous and holy, belongs to that kingdom ; but He is the everlasting Father, the second Adam, and the First-born among many brethren. There is a real change, a true and real new birth ; when we believe in God's testimony, we are grafted into Christ, joined to Him, even as by our natural birth we were in Adam children of wrath and disobedience and heirs of death. We receive a reality—even life—at present hidden, weak, struggling, hereafter manifest, glorious and full of power. Here are no abstractions, but here

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is *substance*; thus let us think of it, as the most concrete, true, and real thing in the world.

And as here all is real, so all is full of love and liberty. "Whosoever" is the expression Christ uses, *to abase the proud and lift up the humble*. He excludes the rich, and strong, and righteous—He draws the poor, and weak, and sinful. And verily His sheep hear His voice.

ONE MORE DARK CLOUD.

Is Christ's message, then, nothing but love and life, forgiveness and renewal? When God sends His messengers sinful men are afraid, for they expect judgment and condemnation; therefore God says so often, "Fear not." What a change does this betoken! Has the fond mother who bends over her sleeping child to say, Fear not, when those bright eyes open after their calm slumber? Yet, what is even a mother's love and tenderness, compared to the love of God? And ought not man to trust, and love, and rejoice in God with all his heart? God sent His Son into the world, and man naturally expects that the purpose of His mission is judgment and condemnation: and when the glad tidings are proclaimed, the roused conscience and timid heart finds difficulty in believing that it is peace now and for ever; that the past is forgiven; and that in the future "goodness and mercy shall follow them all their life, and they shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." Therefore Christ

adds, "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God." And in another place the same true and faithful Witness saith, "Verily, verily I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life." This is a strong word, and strong is He who has uttered it, and faithful, who will also do it, for He came down from heaven to do the Father's will; and this is the Father's will, that of all which He hath given Him He should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. Knowest thou *whom* thou hast believed, in whom thou trustest, on whom thou reliest? Even Jesus Christ, the Son of God, of infinite power, truth, and love. Then, be persuaded that He is able to keep that which thou hast committed unto Him against that day. Even now He is thy advocate with the Father, because he is Jesus Christ the righteous. Therefore art thou accepted, and thou canst sing with that servant of God—

"Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
 My beauty are, my glorious dress;
 Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
 With joy shall I lift up my head."

And with the apostle, "Who shall lay anything to

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the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth."

When the soul first hears of Christ, His power and His love, and the blessings which He bestows so freely and bounteously, it is like unto the sons of Jacob, who in the midst of famine heard of corn in Egypt, and of a wise ruler and benefactor, who had foreseen the coming evil and provided for its wants. Driven by necessity, they undertake the journey. They appear before Joseph, their conscience is roused, and they remember the sin which years ago they had committed against their brother, and which had brought such sorrow to Jacob's heart. But when, finally, in secret, the Egyptians not being present, Joseph reveals himself as their brother whom they had sold into Egypt, who can describe the mingled feelings of sorrow and shame, of fear and hope, of bitter repentance and sweet affection?—who can describe the tumult of emotions and reminiscences which rose in their hearts? They were silent—astounded, paralysed. Thus is it when we see Jesus; and, lo, it is our sins which have pierced Him—it is we who have made Him serve with our transgressions, who have wearied Him with our iniquities. He who is now exalted a Prince and a Saviour to give repentance and remission of sins, who is now willing and able to save to the uttermost, whose voice of power and love has attracted us, and to whom we have come from the far country where our souls languished, is that same Jesus whom

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we have hated and crucified. Then it is that we feel repentance, grief, and sorrow, such as we had never known before—fear and trembling mingle with hope. But Joseph understands his brethren. He says, “Come near to me, I pray you.” He proclaims to them Divine pardon, and asks them not to be grieved; “and he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck, and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck. Moreover, he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them: and *after that* his brethren talked with him.”

When we say within our heart, “I, even I, nailed Him to the cross,” Jesus replies, “I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions, who loved thee and died for thee, who sought thee, and now have found thee.” And He embraces us and kisses us, and allows us to kiss Him, (Luke vii. 37.) Then it is that the last cloud disappears, and it is peace and joy. “Not to condemn, but to save.” “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine. Because of the savour of thy good ointments thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee. Draw me, we will run after thee: the king hath brought me into his chambers: we will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine: the upright love thee.”

And here, before inquiring what were the effects produced on the mind of Nicodemus by the teaching of Christ, let us endeavour again to seize the sum

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and substance of this wonderful chapter. May it not be expressed in one sentence thus?—

In order to enter into the kingdom of God, O fallen, guilty, and dead son of Adam! thou must be in Christ, and thus become a new creature. Let not this alarm you, for to believe in the freely-offered, crucified Saviour is to be born again. But let not this again give you false security; true faith is nothing less than regeneration, the gift of God, the work of the Holy Ghost.

God gives us a new heart when He enables us to accept Jesus, because He is a Saviour and we are sinners. When we believe in Him, (not as many imagine, when we believe that we are believers), we are new creatures by this simple act of trust; then do we become members of His body, and Jesus dwells in our hearts; and as He is our righteousness, so He is our life and strength. The doctrine of regeneration is expressed in Scripture by the renewal of the *heart*. In the scriptural use of that word it denotes the centre or fountain of our life: “God saw that every imagination of the thoughts of man’s heart was only evil continually,” (Gen. vi. 5.) “Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts,” (Matt. xv. 19.) It is the deepest, inmost centre of man: “The heart knoweth his own bitterness,” (Prov. xiv. 10.) It is, moreover, the mysterious centre, known only to God: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? *I the Lord search the heart.*” As the heart is the source

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and fountain whence thoughts, words, acts do proceed, so it is again to the heart whither thoughts, words, acts, all life-experiences return, leaving their impressions; for which reason it is compared to a storehouse or treasury: "A good man out of the good *treasure of his heart* bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh," (Luke vi. 45.) Hence, when the heart is renewed, man is renewed; and the heart it is that believes: "And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest," (Acts viii. 37.) "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness," (Rom. x. 10.) "Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?" (Luke xxiv. 32.) This faith in the heart is its renewal: "Purifying their hearts by faith," (Acts xv. 9.) "Blessed are the pure in heart," (Matt. v. 8.) By it the heart is enlarged: "I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart." It is made firm and peaceful: "With purpose of heart they cleave to the Lord," (Acts xi. 23.) "It is good that the heart be established," (Heb. xiii. 9.) And it receives the love of God: "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given us." Thus the promise, "A new heart will I give unto you," is a promise of radical and central renewal—a regeneration of man

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by the Spirit of the Lord, through faith in Christ Jesus.

From all this it is abundantly evident, that a mere intellectual and notional belief in the truths declared by God's Word, which so many possess, and with which so many are satisfied, is essentially and totally different from that living, powerful, and active principle of faith which is the gift of God, and which is accompanied by a radical change of heart—at first secret, and seen only by Him that is in secret, but afterwards manifesting itself by its fruits of holiness and love. The notional, or self-given faith is Adamic, or of the flesh, (religious flesh, granted,) and, therefore, it does not raise us above Adam. With such a faith we are still in Adam—in Adam's sin, guilt, death; without life or communion with God, without peace and joy, without the Spirit of Christ. Nature can never glide into spirit. But what is born of the Spirit is spirit,—that is, it lives, breathes; the second Adam is a quickening Spirit, and all who are joined to Him are one spirit with Him; they have His life, His glorious resurrection-life, in the power of holiness. The consciousness of life is joy: "The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the Lord that seek him: your *heart shall live for ever.*" When the heart lives, it rejoices; when we really believe the glad tidings, we rejoice. "God is our exceeding great joy." We delight ourselves in Him. No dead soul ever does; and therefore O

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Christian, going about in uncertainty and mourning because thou art not sure whether and when thou wast born again, is Jesus precious to thy soul? is thy meditation of Him sweet? is the world crucified to thee, and thou to the world? is a heavenly, spiritual inheritance thy desire? art thou becoming daily less satisfied and pleased with self, more filled with adoration, and wonder, and astonishment, and delight when thou thinkest of God and His ways? art thou seeing more of Christ's love and glory?—then, surely, whether thou knowest it or not, and whatever doubts may be connected with it, thou art His child: “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.”

Nicodemus had heard the word of life. The good seed was sown—did the fowls of the air devour it up? or did he receive the word with superficial enthusiasm and mere human strength? or did the fear and love of the world choke it? or did it abide in him, watched over by God's love, and was it quickened into life? and did it, finally, bring forth fruit to God's glory? It is told in a subsequent chapter that, in the council of the chief priests and Pharisees, there was a division about Jesus. “Nicodemus saith unto them, (he that came to Jesus by night, being one of them), Doth our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doeth?” (John vii. 45—53.) True, Nicodemus here does not express faith in Jesus, and he

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merely demands that no injustice should be shown to Him, but that the law should be fairly and honestly observed in His case. Yet, when we remember his naturally timid character, we cannot fail to perceive that he was influenced by a strong sense of Christ's authority, and a strong feeling of reverence. We must not only look at the words themselves; but, from the impression evidently made by them, we can picture to ourselves the earnestness and warmth of his manner. "They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee?" Was he even then a believer, and beginning not to be ashamed of the despised Nazarene?

Behold him afterwards again coming to Jesus. But now it was not to the living Saviour. He had been crucified. He was dead. And as Nicodemus saw Him, he would understand the meaning of the words which had appeared so mysterious and enigmatic: "The Son of man must be lifted up, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness. God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." And, behold, now he is no more ashamed of Jesus. As before, the evangelist here again reminds us he came to Jesus by night, but as he came drawn by the Father, he received strength to become a disciple of Jesus, whom men despised and rejected. He brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pounds weight. And he and Joseph of Arimathea, being also a disciple of Jesus, but

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secretly for fear of the Jews, took the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. They had been secret disciples, but they did not remain such. Their faith was weak, but real, genuine; they loved, adored, confessed, served.

It is a fact of great power, truth, and solemnity, that these two rich followers of Jesus, who, in fear and from worldly motives, had been hitherto secret disciples, are ripened into decided confessors by the death of Jesus. Christ's death was accompanied by an earthquake, which rent the rocks of worldliness and the fear of man; it brought them light and liberty, because it brought them true repentance and contrition of heart. He who sees a crucified Saviour can say, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA.

JOHN IV.

“**L**EAVING Jerusalem, and turning to the north towards Damascus, a day’s journey brings the wanderer to a valley between steep heights, at the entrance of which, amidst smiling orchards and beautiful trees, an ancient city meets his view. It was spring, and fields and gardens were clothed with green ; it was mid-day, and the earth was scorched by the burning sun ; when a little band of pilgrims, apparently poor and humble, came from the mountains of Judea, towards the gates of the inviting city. One of their number, however, choosing for himself a shady spot, where sycamores and tamarinds grew over the walls of a well, remained behind, while the others pursued their way to procure refreshment for their exhausted frames.”*

* Veith, Samaritin, chap. i. Wien, 1840.

THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA.

The occurrence in itself is one of a most ordinary character; but the place and the persons are possessed of a singular interest and importance. The country, with its vines and olive-gardens, is Samaria; the city, Sichem; the well, the well of Jacob; the travellers, the chosen apostles of the Lord of glory; and He who, being weary with the journey, remained behind, and sat resting and waiting, was the Divine Saviour and Redeemer, Immanuel, the Prince of Peace.

Like almost everything connected with Christ's earthly life, His journeys are like any other journeys, and have nothing to strike the outward observer as great and remarkable. They extend over a small territory—from the south of Palestine to the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. Yet how wonderful do they appear, when we consider the work which He accomplished in and through them. The period of time for work which the Father had given Him was only three years; but what labours do these three years comprise! There was no time lost here, no opportunity neglected, nothing undertaken out of season; and the reason of this marvellous continuity and condensation of usefulness, of this perfect redeeming (out-buying) of the time was, that Christ had only one desire—to finish the work which His Father had given Him to do; and that He followed only one plan—to enter day by day into the plan of God—to be led and guided by Him; and thus to walk in a path which unerr-

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ing wisdom and omnipotent Providence had made plain before Him. And thus the question naturally arises, as we see Jesus passing through Samaria, what were the circumstances which determined Him to leave Judea? The evangelist informs us, that Jesus knew that the Pharisees were aware of the great influence which He was exerting; and, doubtless, in order not to excite their hatred and opposition at so early a stage of His prophetic life, Jesus, of whom ancient prophecy had predicted, "He shall not cry, nor lift up His voice in the street," returned to Galilee, where many already believed on His name, and loved Him with a holy and fervent affection. He had to pass through Samaria. On another occasion He said, that He was not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel; and the direction which He gave to His disciples was, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not," (Matt. x. 5.) But it is perfectly plain, that while, in obedience to His Father's commandment and purpose, Jesus did not go forth among the Gentiles, it was not for him, who was filled with love to all men, and who thought with infinite love of the "other sheep, which He had, who were not of this fold," or of Israel, to reject those Gentiles, who in God's providence came in His way, seeking His help and favour, or to avoid, according to the manner of narrow-hearted Jewish bigots, the land of Samaria, when it lay in His direct route to Galilee.

THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA.

And thus it was that He came to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Thou hast been here before, dear Bible-reader. When Abram, in obedience to the Divine command, left his country and kindred, he passed through Canaan unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh; and there, amidst an idolatrous tribe, he erected an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him, (Gen. xii.) It was here that Jacob, after having served Laban fourteen years, bought a parcel of a field, where he had spread his tent and built an altar, and called it "God, the God of Israel," (Gen. xxxiii.) It was here, and in the field which Jacob had bought of the sons of Hamor, that the bones of Joseph were buried, which the children of Israel had brought out of Egypt, (Josh. xxiv.) Here, on the two heights of Gerizim and Ebal, stood Israel and their elders, and officers, and judges, and read the blessings and the curses, according to all that is written in the book of the law; and Joshua wrote upon stones a copy of the law of Moses. And it was here that, after Solomon's reign, the opposition to Judah and David's house found strong support; and that, as an inevitable consequence, heathenism subsequently obtained an entrance.

It was thus a locality rich in historical associations. The events of centuries,—the calm and peaceful morning of patriarchal innocence and faith, the heat and turmoil of struggles and wars, the

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dark night of backsliding and apostacy—lay as it were inscribed on the scene before the Saviour's eye. The evangelist, however, singles out one fact—viz., that Jacob gave this village to his son Joseph; and he mentions also that Jacob's well was there. It was after Jacob had wrestled with the angel that he pitched his tent here, and the altar which he erected was to commemorate that great event; and it was unto Joseph, the type of Him who, for the joy set before Him, endured the cross and despised the shame, and was taken from prison and judgment, that this land was given. And now here is He, who had appeared unto the fathers of old, the true "fountain of Jacob, who alone shall make Israel to dwell in safety," (Deut. xxxiii. 28.)

"Jesus, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well." How very natural and graphic is the little word "thus!" You see the picture. You feel the scene. You are reminded of sensations and scenes in your own life. The traveller, who is anxious to rest his wearied limbs, sits down on a stone or on a plot of grass; and if there is a beautiful landscape before him, he yields himself in pleasant passive mood to the influence of the scene. And when he afterwards refers to it, he will say, "I sat *thus*;" and we who listen, understand and feel the force of "thus."

So does the evangelist narrate with great pictorial simplicity; and we have a vivid description of the Saviour, who was made in the likeness of man and

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was found in fashion as a man. He, to whom all worlds belong, by whom all things were created, is now a stranger and pilgrim upon earth, a guest and a wayfarer; His disciples have gone into the city to buy bread, and He is now waiting for their return; in this quiet place, stretched on the grass, will He eat with disciples and give thanks to God, who openeth His hand and satisfieth the desire of every living thing. Weary He is; the Shepherd of Israel, who neither sleepeth nor slumbereth, who fainteth not, neither is weary—He has taken upon Him our infirmity.

Beholding Christ as He sat thus on the well, we are reminded of His humanity; but we are led also to think of His divinity. He was different from all other human beings; always active, collected, conscious of the hour, the place, the purpose of God, the duty before Him. Even while resting He had His loins girt and His lamp burning. This Jesus, who sits *thus* on the well, is the Lord from heaven, who knows that He came from the Father and is going to the Father; who is always about His Father's business; who must—it is a vital necessity—work the work of Him that sent Him while it is day; and with whom is the secret of the Lord, as light on all His ways. And, therefore, when He now found Himself near the spot where Joseph was buried, whose history was so soon to find its grand and awful fulfilment in His sufferings and exaltation,—when He was at the foot of the

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mount from which the blessing of God was pronounced on all who keep the law, that law to which He alone offered perfect obedience,—when He was on the confines of two separate and hostile camps, Jews and Gentiles, He himself being the true Peacemaker and about to abolish the enmity in His flesh,—when Jesus was near Sychar in Samaria, and sat thus on the well, doubtless the counsel of the Lord, in His life and work, stood clearly and solemnly before His soul, full of light and holiness. And this Divine element in the human is suggested to us by the expression of the evangelist, “He must needs go through Samaria.” Thus, like any other weary traveller, and yet different from all others, was He there; “needs”—as a natural necessity, and yet as a Divine appointment He had to pass through Samaria. For while He thus sat on the well, “there cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water.”

She came as was her custom—though the hour (noon) was unusual. Why came she? Surely a trivial, common-place, simple act like this requires no special motive or impelling cause. If you had asked her as she left Sichem’s gate, she would have answered, “I go to draw water;” if you had asked her afterwards, her answer would have been different. For results of eternity, both for herself and many inhabitants of Samaria, depended on her coming that day, that hour, and, to a large extent, that portion of the hour during which the disciples

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were not with their Master, and there was thus no interruption or constraint in His converse with her. When the results are of such overwhelming importance, even proud men begin to feel inclined to believe that there are decrees of God, even His eternal purpose according to the counsel of His will, whereby for His own glory He hath fore-ordained whatsoever cometh to pass. As for believers, they understand the meaning of the word "needs." It is their consolation and strength. "Many things," said Martin Luther, "I have undertaken, and taken into my own hands, and I have lost them all; as for my salvation, it was and is in God's hands, and is therefore sure," (Rom. viii. 29, 30.) "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me." Jesus knows them all, and seeks them all. As He came near to Jericho, He knew who was on the sycamore tree anxious to see Him; when He went forth to Capernaum, He knew Matthew at the receipt of custom, and that he was ready to obey His command, "Follow me." When He sat at meat in the house of Simon the leper, He was not surprised by the sudden entrance of the woman who was a sinner, and He understood her tears and kisses; and when He sat thus on the well, He knew that He had needs to go through Samaria, and He knew that He was to be found there by one who sought Him not.

It is likely that she was still young; not regarding the heat of the noon, she is industrious and

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active; nor would it be safe to infer from her homely occupation, that she belonged to the poorer and humbler classes of society, as we find even in the present day among the inhabitants of the Caucasus, and other tribes who have retained primitive customs, the daughters of princes watching the flocks and engaging in laborious employments.* Whoever and whatever she was, with the quick observation of woman, she noticed not merely the fact of a stranger's presence, but, from His dress and appearance, she saw at once that He was a Jew and rabbi. His Divine glory, the beauty of His holiness, of His pure, loving, and peaceful soul, were concealed from the eye of ordinary observers. There was no beauty or comeliness, no power or majesty, in the common sense of the words, to astonish the mere outward beholder. And thus seeing He was an Israelite, as a matter of course, as a thing which required not a moment's thought or consideration, but came quite naturally, she perfectly ignored Him; she offered Him not the usual salutation which in all ages and climes human beings address to strangers; and she would certainly have returned to Sichem without having received Christ's instruction and His Divine gift, had not the Saviour, as was His wont, begun to speak to her. He said, "Give me to drink." The request was simple and natural. "I am thirsty and a stranger; it is mid-day; you have drawn

* Veith.

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water, and I ask nothing of you that implies additional labour: give me to drink." Ignoring altogether her Samaritan prejudices, He appeals to her as unto a human being. The request was, however, an act of condescension and heavenly peacefulness on Christ's part, for He knew she would not accede to it. Being anxious to converse with her, He took the initiative; He asked a favour, trifling and natural, it is true, but of a person who He knew was not ready to grant it. Is not this always His gracious way?

How different from our Samaritan was that maiden who went down to the well and filled her pitcher and came up; and when Eliezer, the faithful servant of Abraham, requested her, "Let me, I pray thee, drink a little water of thy pitcher," she replied, "Drink, my lord," and offered to draw water for his camels also! While we behold in Rebekah the kindness and hospitality which are common among simple and unsophisticated people, the kindness and love, sympathy and helpfulness, which we notice in children, and all whose disposition is not peculiarly selfish and morose, we see in the case before us how the instincts of humanity, the natural promptings of the heart, are brought into conflict with artificial distinctions, with dissensions and discords, walls of separation between nation and nation, tribe and tribe, class and class.* "Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How

* Veith.

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is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria ?”

“For the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans,” the evangelist adds as an explanatory remark for his Gentile readers. Not merely were the Samaritans to a considerable extent a different race, and descendants of Assyrian colonists—and the Jews naturally did not like to see this beautiful portion of their inheritance in the hand of strangers—but the help offered by the Samaritans to the Jews after their return from exile was not accepted by Zerubbabel the prince and Joshua the priest, which so irritated and offended the people of Samaria, that they did their utmost to hinder the building of the temple. The difference pervaded their whole life, especially in its spiritual aspects. While the Samaritans acknowledged the five books of Moses, they obstinately refused to receive the other historical and prophetic writings of the Old Covenant; and, to distinguish themselves still further from the Jews, they worshipped, not in Jerusalem, but on Mount Gerizim. The Jews despised and hated them; and it was, therefore, with peculiar significance that the Lord Jesus, the great Peacemaker, the Searcher of hearts, who is no respecter of persons, and judgeth righteous judgment, told the story of the merciful Samaritan, who understood and practised the law of love better than the priests and Levites. Probably there was more intolerance, bitterness, and suspicion on the

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part of the Jews; and the question of the woman of Samaria, while it expresses the unnatural separation and estrangement which existed between her people and Israel, indicates also her surprise, heightened by the consciousness of the harsh and undeserved treatment which her people had received from their neighbours. Her attention, however, her curiosity is roused; the stranger appears a Jew, and yet different from the Jews; she cannot help regarding Him with wonder and amazement. Jesus said unto her, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." As if He said: "Not merely am I willing to speak to thee, and accept thy gift, but my true wish and desire is to give unto thee what is much better and higher than this water which I asked of thee. *It* is indeed a gift of God, which He mercifully gives to all who thirst; but He has another gift, of which this is a mere emblem. If thou knewest the gift of God, and if thou knewest who he is that saith unto thee, 'Give me to drink,' who is now sent to thee by God, willing to bless thee, thou wouldest ask Him, and He, more willing to give than men to ask, whose thirst is that thy soul should thirst after Him, would give thee living water!"

All this is in Christ's words. They set forth the blessing of eternal life, which of God is in

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Christ for poor and needy men ; they set forth the compassionate tenderness, the yearning love of the Saviour, whose delight it is to dispense the gift ; they show the sure and prevailing efficacy of prayer ; salvation of God in Christ freely given : the whole gospel is comprised in Christ's words. She understood Him not ; but Christ's words are words of light, and their entrance creates, from the very outset, light in the darkened mind. "The entrance of thy word giveth light ; it maketh wise the simple." She perceived, although very dimly, that Jesus spoke of a gift excelling all other gifts ; that He spoke of Himself as a great, mysterious, Divinely-commissioned person ; and above all, that He was willing not merely to speak to her, but to confer on her some important and precious boon. Christ knew how far she would understand Him, even as He knew how far Nicodemus would understand His word about the new birth. Our Saviour is in this respect more courageous than mere human teachers are apt to be ; trusting in the power of truth, He testifies ; and His testimony, though only partially understood, rouses the conscience, and causes the soul to think and ask.

"If thou knewest the gift of God." "Every good and perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights ;" and every blessing we enjoy is undeserved mercy. But there is one thing which so excels all others in importance, in value, in beauty, that Christ calls it *the* gift of

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God. When He gives this, He gives the best, the most precious—He gives all. Every blessing is undeserved and unattainable without God's merciful help; life, health, peace, friendship, whatever is good and valuable comes from Him. But of all things it is most true of this one gift, that God alone can bestow it; we cannot merit, earn, procure it; it comes down from heaven. And if you ask it—this is all that is required—"He would give it." Christ represents thy asking and His giving as inseparably connected.

The woman, evidently struck by His wonderful and majestic words, expresses the difficulties which they present to her mind with deference and docility. "Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water?" Still thinking chiefly of the natural gift, she is at a loss to understand how Christ was able to obtain water out of the deep well; and when the thought strikes her, that as a Jew He was perhaps inclined to depreciate the well of which Samaria boasted, and preferred another well in the neighbourhood, she added: "Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself and his children, and his cattle?" The last words are characteristic. They show how much she was cleaving to "this life;" and, more than she herself was aware, manifested that as yet she was thinking of the gifts of God, which cattle also

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require, and had not yet risen to feel the need of those higher gifts of God which are bestowed in the all-comprehensive, unspeakable gift. Our father Jacob, she said, not without pride and Samaritan consciousness, lived here, and this his well is, in God's providence, in our possession. When Jesus was asked in like manner by the Jews, "Art thou greater than Moses, who gave us manna from heaven? art thou greater than our father Abraham and the prophets?" His answer was clear and decided; referring to the testimony of the Father, He unfolded His glory and Divine majesty. But in this instance Christ, with the perfect wisdom of love, ignores in the meantime her second question, and speaks to her of the gift He is so willing to bestow. He answered: "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

Men who have forsaken God, the fountain of living water, having hewed themselves out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water, are driven about in the wilderness of this world by the thirst which is still in them. For, though they have forsaken the fountain of life, whence proceeds the river of true, satisfying, and enduring pleasures, they have not been able to change the nature of their immortal, God-created souls, which thirst after

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living water. This thirst drives them now upwards to knowledge, and virtue, and honour, now downwards to avarice, and lust, and the works of darkness. The best things to which they are thus brought, give only temporary satisfaction and a transitory peace: "he that drinketh of this water shall thirst again." But the worst things, instead of being water to quench their thirst, are rather fire to increase its torment. Thus do men go on thirsting and drinking of the water of this life, until death comes and puts an end to the fruitless iteration, and the soul has to pass into eternity, where there is neither probation nor experiment, but a judgment, which is final. There is One that testifieth, and His testimony is true: "And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazurus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame."

But the thirst of the soul is satisfied by God Himself. We behold ourselves, as Hagar beheld Ishmael her son, languishing under the burning sun, in the arid and lonely wilderness, helpless, exhausted, near unto death, and she sat over against him and lift up her voice and wept;—we are poor and needy, and seek water and there is none—truly there is none—and our tongue faileth for thirst. Then God saith concerning us, "I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not

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forsake them ; I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys ; they shall neither hunger nor thirst ; for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them ; even by the springs of water shall he guide them : nay, they themselves shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not," (Isaiah xliii. 19, xlix. 10, lviii. 11.) And what is this living water? The Lord Himself explains it: "I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed;" and again, "I will put my Spirit within you;" and again, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit;" and again, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. . . . This spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive." Yes, it is the same great truth which the Saviour declared unto Nicodemus: life eternal through the Spirit, in and by whom we are joined to Christ. Then do we stand in true and real fellowship with God, the fountain of life; we are abundantly satisfied with the fatness of His house, and He makes us drink of the river of His pleasures for evermore.

We are not astonished that the woman of Samaria did not comprehend the meaning of Christ's word. The natural, unenlightened man cannot receive and know the things of the Spirit. And—as the Jews did not understand Christ's word about the bread of life, and did not know the spiritual meaning of the petition which they offered, "Lord, evermore give us this bread"—so here also we have a request

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which cleaves merely to the external : "Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw." Thinking still, after all, of the water of this life, of which, if a man drink, he shall thirst again, her whole view and heart turned to what is seen and temporal. Jesus Christ, the Searcher of hearts, the Wisdom of God, the perfect Teacher, instead of explaining His meaning, appeals now to her conscience, penetrates into the very depths of her soul, and causes her thus to see the source of unhappiness, confusion, and unrest in her life. "Go, call thy husband, and come hither." Like lightning, which suddenly cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west, this word of Christ, so simple and natural, brought to her remembrance her whole past life in its true and inmost character ; and for a moment, infinitely quick though it was, she felt that no real peace or happiness could come until her sin be pardoned and healed. Yet, thinking that, as a stranger, Jesus could not know her history, and commanding the thoughts of shame and remorse to descend again into the depth, where they had long been allowed to slumber, she replies, in words which were literally true, but whose literal truth just revealed the full extent of her sin, "I have no husband." "Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband : for thou hast had five husbands ; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband." Jesus Christ thus reveals to her His perfect knowledge of

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her whole past life, and of the extent of her guilt; in His usual kind and merciful way, He utters the sharp and severe truth with gentleness and calmness, praising the only thing that could be commended—the remnant of truthfulness which her reply betokened. “Thou hast well said,” and again, “in that saidst thou truly.” And we cannot but think, that in His whole look and tone the blessed Saviour showed that His only purpose was to lead her to a knowledge of herself as a sinner, and of Himself as a Saviour. How difficult do we find it to address words of like import to a fellow-creature, even when we know that our object is a right one and our aim the aim of love! How much of pride and of the consciousness of superiority enter even unconsciously into our manner; how difficult to make the impression, that repentance and restoration are our only thought and desire. Jesus, the sinless One, had such perfect compassion and love, that His sharpest reproof, His keenest reproach, His severest rebuke, had healing balm in it; while it effects its purpose, while His arrows are sharp, His word as a two-edged sword, there is in all He says to the soul, though not expressed, yet hidden, “I will heal thy backsliding, and love thee freely.” He does not refer any more, as most of us would likely have done, to her sin; He waits now to see the effects of His word.

What must have been her feelings! While we read Christ’s words we are astonished. We saw her

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coming to the well so cheerful and peaceful ; apparently she was a good, conscientious, right-minded person—at least, one who need not be ashamed to appear among her neighbours—and now!—but, following the example of our Saviour, let us not further look into her sin, but rather notice the results of Christ's words. She does not think of denying her guilt ; she does not attempt to palliate it ; she does not leave the stranger in a rage. The first may have appeared impossible, but many in her situation would have adopted either the second or third course. She received Christ's rebuke with meekness, and replies, " Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet !" The view which she took of the nature of prophecy was not the narrow one, which limits it to future events : but she regarded Him as a prophet, because He saw that which was hidden ; because the past was before His eye as well as the present ; because His knowledge was different from that of ordinary human beings, and evidently from on high. There was more in this word than she was aware. This Stranger, against whom she was naturally prejudiced, has thus not only broken through the wall of separation which national sin had built up, and, in condescending love, opened a conversation with her, roused her attention, called forth in her an interest in a mysterious gift and blessing—so that, in a very brief period of time, she had begun to regard Him with respect, and kindness, and confidence ; but now, having told her the

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whole truth about her life, fully and exactly, yet not severely, bitterly, proudly ; but, on the contrary, with a gentleness and dignity which at once betokened the Divine source of His knowledge, and the affection and compassion of His nature—she regards Him with veneration and solemnity as a *Prophet*—a man sent from God. I imagine that it is psychologically quite impossible to look upon her subsequent question as a mere evasion—as an artful turn given to the conversation to get rid of a painful subject. Her conviction that Jesus is a prophet is too deep and solemn to allow of such levity. And from all that we read about her, she was far too quick and sensible not to know that all such attempts would have been futile. Nay, rather do I think that she felt to some extent what Jacob did when he exclaimed, “How dreadful is this place ! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” She felt that she was a sinner, that God knew her past life, remembered it, condemned it ; she was brought into close contact with God ; and, conscious of her guilt, with her thoughts directed to the God against whom she had sinned, she was anxious to hear from the Prophet how she could gain God’s favour and approbation. Certainty on a point of great moment, where human opinions differ, appears now to be within her reach ; and questions which formerly were possessed of no attraction and interest, assume now a vital and all-absorbing importance. “Our fathers

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worshipped in this mountain, and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." This is not, as it appears at first sight, a mere question of the intellect, but of the conscience, of the heart. She seeks God's pardon and favour. Feeling that Christ had spoken of her sin in order to lead her to God and to His worship, her question, implying confession and sorrow, asks for the way.

We must not expect the same form, the same intensity, the same directness in every case. It appears quite different when the men in Jerusalem, being pricked in their hearts, exclaimed, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" or when the jailer, trembling, asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" and yet the Samaritan woman is virtually asking the same question. Divine grace has convinced her of sin, has caused her to turn from forgetfulness of God to seek Him. The sinner, the worldling, asks about God's worship—asks about it solemnly, earnestly, as a personal thing. Thus the Saviour evidently looked upon her words when He replied, "Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship; for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father

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seeketh such to worship him. God is Spirit : and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." *

* A living God requires living sacrifices (Heb. ix. 14 ; Rom, xii. 1.) God is Spirit, and therefore only spiritual worship can be acceptable to Him ; but all human attempts (apart from God's instruction and revelation—salvation is of the Jews), even when they aim at spirituality, end in vague abstractions. Since Israel has lost faith in the mediating, redeeming, interceding Jehovah, their abstract monotheism has no life, strength, reality. For, as some one has said, man's most ethereal spiritualism is flesh ; but the Word was made flesh, and all who see and believe in the incarnate God, worship the Father in spirit and in truth. God is Father and God is Spirit are truths inseparably connected—in this manner, that only in the Spirit, who enables us to call God in Christ, Abba—are we able to worship spiritually.

“ The most practical, and at the same time, simplest, and deepest exposition of the words, God is Spirit, we may find in the Saviour's direction concerning prayer (Matt. vi.), where He lays down as the fundamental principle of true worship—the truth : *God seeth in secret.*” (Beck.) No outward place, no outward act, no outward word, but that which is secret, is the element in which God and the soul meet. He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. Finally, notice also that Christ refers here to the solid, substantial character of New Testament worship in contrast to the symbolic, shadowy character of the Old Testament. We have liberty to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus ; and hence our worship is not merely in spirit (which Israel's was also), but in truth, that is, in substantial reality and fulfilment. And from this it follows that only believers are worshippers.

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What sublime words ! uttered in the presence of a single person, and, as many would add, such a person !

Yet this is the Saviour's way. He came from above, out of the heaven of infinite wisdom and love, and His object is not His own honour, but to glorify the Father, and to seek and to save that which is lost. The honour, which man can give, and which men seek, is nothing in His estimation,—it has no existence in His affections and plans ; He condescends to men of low estate ; He visits and teaches publicans and fishermen, women and children ; human distinction or lowliness cannot disturb His calm vision and loving purpose. He seeks to change natural, sinful, worldly men into spiritual, godly, heavenly men ; therefore He beholds all, not merely in their difference of degrees in sin and death, but in their real and essential state—estranged from God and without life. And in this work He is faithful at all times, and in that which seems least in the sight of man. Differing from all reformers, this Renewer ignores all worldly methods and levers. He ignores the power of wealth, learning, influence. Silent before Herod—He turns with words of peace and consolation and fellowship to the dying thief ; avoiding an interview with Herod, who wished to see Him, He anticipates the desire of Zaccheus, the publican. And while He thus ignores the ways of the world, He loves and walks in the ways of God, which the

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world ignores. Prayer, that is, loving and obedient intercourse with God, is His strength; the repentance of a sinner is to Him a great event in which, with angels, He rejoices; faith He regards as the great lever which shall remove mountains. And therefore, while He escapes when the people wish to make Him king—while He sees in this no gain, no furtherance of His purpose—He spends His time and strength with the blind, the deaf, the lepers, and the poor in spirit.*

And while he thus spake to her of the Father, of His love and kingdom, of His spiritual and real worshippers; while He thus testified to this poor woman, sunk in the love of the world, and in degrading sin, of heavenly life and glory and reality, she remembered all that she had ever heard—was it in her childhood from a devout and godly parent?—of the Messiah, the great Prophet and Redeemer, through whom God would send light and peace to the nations. Christ had brought before her her life in its worst aspect; He had brought to light also the best reminiscences, hopes, and aspirations which lay buried in her soul. “I know,” she exclaims, as if enraptured by the sublime and beautiful prospect which Christ’s words opened, “I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things.” Evidently we have here a reference to the passage in Deuteronomy, where Christ is promised as the prophet like unto Moses;

* Beck, Reden iii., 106.

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and, as the Samaritans restricted themselves to the Pentateuch, it is possible that their chief expectation of the Messiah was based upon the predictions it contains, and that the prophetic character of the Messiah was kept by them prominently in view. Is it possible that she already thought that Jesus, who had told her so much both of herself and of God, was the promised Redeemer? However this may be, the Lord, who afterwards told His disciples not to declare publicly that He was the Messiah; who did not declare Himself the Messiah, though the Jews, in unbelief and impatience, urged Him to do so, utters here the words, "I that speak unto thee am He." He saw in her one who was truly waiting and longing for the Messiah; who was weary and heavy-laden; who was hungering and thirsting; and therefore, while He did not reveal Himself by the name of Messiah to those who neither expected nor felt their need of a Saviour, He cannot refrain from revealing Himself fully and clearly to this poor, guilt-laden woman. And now the woman cannot restrain herself: leaving her pitcher, she went her way into the city, and spoke of Jesus.

How much had happened in that short hour! When she came to the well of Jacob, she was ignorant of the gift of God, and of Him who spoke to her: now she knew and testified to others. How much had Christ taught her, and how beautiful and easy and natural is the way in which He gradually enlightened her mind and conscience!

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Here we have revealed Christ's *humanity*, not merely in that He was weary and thirsty, that He was compassed about with infirmity, and had taken upon Him the form of a man; but that He possesses perfectly, and in spotless purity, all the kindness and sympathy and love which ought to bind man to man. We see here Christ in His poverty, His meekness, His loveliness; gently He approaches the sinner, as if He required and needed our welcome and shelter, thus revealing to us that His love is yearning over us. Here Christ discloses His glory and power,—that the Father has made all fulness to dwell in Him, and that through and in Him we receive that water of life, “of which, if a man drink, he shall never thirst again;” and here Christ shows His pity and delight in mercy, that He is waiting to be gracious, when He tells us, “thou wouldest ask of him and he would give thee.” Here Christ shows unto us sin as misery and death, a thirst which nothing in this world is able to satisfy; while He gives, as a glimpse into the blessedness of His kingdom, which is joy in the Holy Ghost, rich and abundant supplies out of the fountain of life. And Christ not merely shows His knowledge of sin, but He reveals Himself as the Searcher of hearts; He knows the sinner, He speaks of the guilt of our personal sin; our secret sins He sets in the light of His countenance. And when, convinced of sin, we seek earnestly to return to God, He reveals Himself unto us as the true Prophet,

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sent by the Father and proceeding from the Father, the only true and living God, and finally Himself, as the promised Redeemer, Saviour, Bridegroom of the soul. Thus He leads us step by step; and, though the lessons be at first "hard sayings," dark and unintelligible, severe and painful, we are riveted by the attractiveness of His perfect humanity, by the mysterious dignity of His glorious divinity. He loves me, He knows me, He saves me. Such are the three thoughts which open gradually in our hearts while he speaks to us. "I am he." I that speak unto thee, the Man whom thou trustest, before whom thou art not afraid; who, knowing thy sin and guilt, did not address a single harsh word to thee, and only seeks thy welfare and life; behold! I am He,—the Messiah promised to the fathers, the Servant chosen from all eternity to accomplish the work of redemption. "Fear not, it is I;" believe, and live. To see that it is He is life eternal. And she believed that she had found the pure and holy, perfect Man who hated sin, and loved sinners—who was meek and lowly, humble and poor, and yet the Fountain of living water, the Giver of the best and most precious gift.

And see how truly she has received that water of life; for it is even now already evincing its living and life-spreading character. Believing, she must speak. Out of her flow, according to the Scriptures, rivers of living water. Filled with joy, she leaves her pitcher, and hastens into the city to

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speak of Jesus. That apparent *peace* which had been on her countenance before, which arose from her ignoring and forgetting her guilt, from her ignoring and forgetting the emptiness of her life, has now given way to an expression totally different, even to that tranquillity of a pardoned and God-loving soul, which is based on humility and contrition, cleaving to a merciful and holy God, (Isa. lvii. 15.) And now the sinner is an apostle; she who was far off is brought nigh; Jesus was found of her who sought Him not; He said, "Behold me, behold me," (Isa. lxxv. 1;) "I that speak unto thee am he;" and therefore she testifies in faith and love,—“Behold him who told me all things that ever I did; is not this the Christ?” Before, a Samaritan, a worldly and guilty woman; now, with a truer insight into the purpose and work of the Messiah, than many learned and privileged inhabitants of Jerusalem: hitherto a useless, nay, worse, an injurious member of society; now a member of the Church of Christ, a blessing in the wilderness, a lily among thorns.

What remarkable points of contrast and resemblance offer themselves to our mind when we consider this interview and the conversation between the Saviour and Nicodemus. There, in Jerusalem the chosen city, in the silent hours of night, we see Nicodemus, a ruler among the Jews, a master in Israel, a man of virtue and knowledge; here at Jacob's well, a Samaritan, a woman ignorant and

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guilty. Nicodemus came seeking light and truth ; she came seeking only water of this life. Yet to both Jesus declares the same message,—the necessity of a spiritual, heaven-born, God-given, new life. Both the learned Jew and the ignorant Samaritan are at first not able to understand His words, and apply to them a carnal meaning ; but, strange to say, while Nicodemus learns only slowly and gradually in the Divine school, and months and years pass before he confesses the Saviour, this woman, after a single interview with Christ, receives Him as the Searcher of hearts, the Messiah and Saviour ; out of the abundance of the heart she testifies, and her testimony is blessed to the conversion of souls. In both cases we see the love and zeal of Christ : willingly He is disturbed after His day's labour, and gives up His nightly rest ; and willingly He forgets His weariness and thirst, for His heart's delight is to show the way of salvation to perishing souls.

What holy, solemn joy fills now His soul ! His disciples have returned from the city—they notice Him absorbed in meditation. For a while they wait reverently ; but at last, knowing that His exhausted frame stood in need of restoration, they prayed Him, as His loving and faithful disciples, “Master, eat.” But Jesus said, “I have meat to eat that ye know not of.” He had been filled with strength and joy while they were in Sichem, and His soul was satisfied, for He had done His Father's

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work. But His disciples, not understanding His words, imagined that the woman with whom, to their astonishment, they had found Christ conversing, had brought Him aught to eat ; wherefore Jesus, for their and our instruction and example, said unto them : “ My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.” To obey God, to execute His purpose, to fulfil His will, appeared to Christ not a painful sacrifice or an exhausting exertion, but the very food and nourishment which sustained and refreshed His soul. He lived by the Father in holy fellowship of thought, will, and act ; as the true Man and Israelite, He lived not by bread only or chiefly, but by every word, be it promise or command, which proceedeth out of the mouth of God. As the sorrowful penitent said, “ My tears have been my meat day and night, while they daily say unto me, where is thy God,” so Christ’s life and strength was His obedience to His heavenly Father, and His finishing the great work which had been intrusted to Him. For in obedience He felt His oneness with the Father. “ The Father hath not left me alone, *for I do always those things that please Him ;*” and again, “ If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love ; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in His love.” Hence, obedience was to Christ a resting in the Father’s affection, an intense enjoyment of the Father’s presence and love. And

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when we think of the harmony between the Father and the Son, more especially in the work of redemption, and of the love with which Christ loves all whom the Father has given to Him, and the love with which the Father loves Christ, as obeying His commandments, and laying down His life for the sheep, we can well understand why the Saviour, forgetting at that moment the body's weakness and weariness, said, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work."

The beautiful fields on which His eyes rested, white already to harvest, brought before Christ's mind the joy which His disciples would soon experience when multitudes of Jews and Gentiles—prepared by God through His revelation in the Scriptures, His providence, and His merciful and earnest dealings with the conscience—were to be brought into the fold, and to receive the Spirit in His renewing and sanctifying influence. He beheld the whole world as a field; He saw in spirit the prophets and witnesses of all ages, Himself the greatest prophet, the true Amen, and faithful Witness; He thought of their labour, their tears, their patience; and He felt the near approach of the harvest of joy. The woman of Samaria appeared to Him as a type and earnest of a large multitude sitting in darkness, living in sin and worldliness, who, by the power of His word were to be changed into believers and evangelists. And though the

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true seedtime of tears was yet before Him, and He knew clearly that the corn of wheat must fall into the ground and die, if it is not to abide alone, but bring forth much fruit, yet in faith He rejoiced even then, and realized the joy set before Him—"He shall see of the travail of His soul, and be satisfied"—that joy which is fulfilled in the salvation of His people.

While the Saviour uttered these profound words before His disciples, the woman was calling her neighbours, and inviting them to come to Jesus. We admire her wisdom as well as her zeal. Addressing every one she met, and willing already to be charged with foolishness for Christ's sake, she testifies with great simplicity and humility. She does not say, "Listen to me and weigh my arguments, believe my testimony, and adopt my view," but simply, "Come and see." She does not say "Go,"—as some people are apt to say, with something of an imperious tone, separating between themselves and their hearers; but "Come"—for she intends to return to Christ, and merely wishes to show the way. "See the man." Herein also is great wisdom and humility, for she does not wish to assert her judgment; but, in order to show the dignity and greatness of the Stranger, she does not hesitate to abase herself and remind them of her guilt: "He hath told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?"*

* Veith, l. c. xii.

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And they went out of the city, and came unto Jesus. We are astonished at the immediate effect of the woman's words. However, three causes may have, in a secondary sense, been at work. Her honest, enthusiastic, solemn manner; the circumstance that she felt the matter so important as to humble herself by alluding publicly to her sinful life; and lastly, the desire which many of them felt for the coming of the great Deliverer. But what would these and such-like causes effect, were it not for the great and all-prevailing influence of the Father's drawing? "All whom the Father hath given me shall come to me." Yet the three circumstances are of general importance. Earnestness and humility are the two great requisites in an evangelist; and often where we least expect it God has prepared the way for the reception of His truth by creating in the soul a hunger and thirst after His righteousness. Think it therefore not useless or hopeless to speak to Samaritans about Israel's Messiah. Behold how they came out unto Jesus! And what was the result? "They besought him that he would tarry with them." They wished to have Him constantly dwelling in the midst of them. They received Him as an angel, a messenger of God. Blessed city, where Christ spent two days, full of peace and love, instructing them in the way of life. Many more believed on Him; and, as they themselves expressed it, not merely "because of the woman's saying, for we have heard Him ourselves,

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and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world." In Jerusalem we know many believed outwardly on Christ, astonished by His miracles; but the Searcher of hearts did not commit Himself unto them. Here, where He had performed no miracle, except the miracle of His Divine teaching and life-giving word, the people, who possessed less knowledge and fewer privileges revered Him, and sincerely believed in His person. Christ must have spoken to them of His world-wide purpose and kingdom; He must have removed all walls of separation, and shown to them how they, aliens and strangers to the commonwealth of Israel, were to be brought nigh by His work of redemption.

Two days He remained there; and the harvest came a few years after, when Philip the evangelist preached in the city of Samaria, "and the people with one accord gave heed unto the things which Philip spake, and there was great joy in that city." And the beginning of the great work—so wonderful are God's ways and so marvellous is His condescension—was not an apostle of the Lord, but a poor, sinful woman, herself a monument of redeeming love; one who before was a cumberer of the ground, and "injurious," but having received of Christ "the gift of God," and having drunk of the water of life, became herself "like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters fail not."

How perfect is God's forgiveness—that He uses us as His messengers and evangelists; and how

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real and great is the change produced by God's Spirit—that they who were before dead in trespasses and sins, become fruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ! They travail in birth until Christ be formed in the souls near and dear to them, and as workers together with God, they share His joy; as the beloved disciple said, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.”*

“Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

* As Rahab, the harlot, was not merely saved by faith, but, in the wonderful providence of a merciful and holy God, whose thoughts and ways are heaven-high above those of man, became one of the ancestors and mothers of the King of the Jews, the Saviour of the world; so did the Samaritan woman, receiving Christ's truth and love, become a mother in Israel, and many were brought to the knowledge of God's salvation through her testimony.

THE WOMAN WHO WAS A SINNER.

LUKE VII. 36—50.

OH for a heart of love, rather than the eloquence of men or angels, to speak of the wondrous love of Jesus to sinners, as it shines forth in this touching narrative! “Whenever I think of this story,” said Gregory the Great, “I feel more inclined to weep over it, than to preach on it.” And, indeed, the believer sheds tears of sympathy, tears of gratitude, and tears of joy, when he beholds the picture here presented to him of a bruised reed, and of the Anointed of the Lord revealing His Divine love, tenderness, and majesty, as the Healer of the broken-hearted, who appoints unto them that mourn in Zion, and gives unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. “Seest thou this woman?” was the question Jesus addressed to Simon; it is the question which He directs to us,

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that we may see in her the glory of His forgiving, renewing, peace-giving, restoring love—that we may be guided and encouraged by her example. Let us endeavour, then, to see, to realize the scene, and to live it over in spirit; truly, it is good for us to be where Jesus reveals Himself a refuge for the lost.

We behold Jesus in the house of Simon the Pharisee. Christ showed His condescension and love by going willingly whenever the humble and needy supplicated His help; and even when the proud and self-righteous ask Him, He refuses not to comply with their request. Simon had asked Jesus, not that the Saviour might confer on him the benefit of His heavenly instruction and of His Divine blessing, but rather thinking that he was conferring a favour on the poor and despised Rabbi of Nazareth; he invited Him, not feeling like the centurion that he was not worthy that the King of glory should come under his roof—that Christ's presence was the greatest honour which could ever distinguish his abode—but rather imagining that his invitation and hospitality was a distinction conferred upon One on whom none of the rulers believed, whose friends and companions were chiefly among the poor and unlearned. Yet Jesus went, and in this we find the greatest manifestation of condescending love.

Thus do the unrenewed often think of serving and honouring Christ, instead of beseeching Him to

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serve them and minister unto their wants. They are willing to do something for the cause of religion, to acknowledge, recognise, encourage it by their example ; they come to Christ's house, and Christ's Word, not as poor and needy, but as good, virtuous, enlightened men, self-satisfied, and having need of nothing. And how often does Jesus pardon the ignorance and pride of their hearts, send forth the arrows of His Word, convincing and subduing their souls, till in humility and faith they open the door, and the Saviour enters, bringing with Him the gifts of His love and life, and transforming their hearts, by His renewing and sanctifying power, into His dwelling-place and abode.

Jesus sat at meat with the Pharisee and his friends. How near were they to salvation and life, and they knew it not ! The blind were near the Fountain of light, who, as He once called light into existence, was now able to open their eyes, and reveal to them the kingdom of God. The captive and fettered were near Him who had come to proclaim and to bring deliverance and liberty to the bound. The sick and dying were now in the presence of the omniscient and omnipotent Physician, who came to heal, and to restore to new life and vigour. They were near Him, yet they knew it not. How near they appeared to the outward observer, to him who judgeth according to the flesh ! Was Jesus the promised Messiah, the sum and substance of Old Testament predictions ?—

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behold, here are men who have read and studied Moses and the prophets carefully, who take the liveliest interest in Scripture and its exposition. Was Jesus the pure, and holy, and righteous Israelite, who delighted Himself in God's law?— behold, here are men who are zealous in their observance of God's commandments, who keep themselves free from the pollutions of the world. If thought, and knowledge of Scripture, and obedience to the law, and acquaintance with the symbolic ordinances of the Levitical dispensation were preparations for the reception of Christ, who were nearer to Jesus than Simon and his friends? And yet how infinite is the distance which separates them from the Saviour! Infinite is the distance which separates the soul from God; no outward religious knowledge, piety, zeal, can bring us any nearer to Him, and all is outward, until He himself, who delighteth in truth in the inward parts, maketh us to know wisdom in the hidden man. By Him only can every valley be exalted, and every mountain and hill be made low, and the crooked straight, and the rough places plain, and a highway be made straight in the desert for our God; and then the glory of the Lord is revealed. There were many valleys and mountains, and crooked and rough places between Jesus and the woman that was a sinner; she lived, indeed, in a desert, and not, as the Pharisees, in the garden of religious privileges and ordinances; but the Lord

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had brought her nigh, and attracted her by His irresistible influence.

She was a sinner, even in the estimation of sinful men. Who knows how frequently she had been the object of a father's prayers and a mother's tears! Who knows but in her childhood and youth the smile of innocence was on her lips, and words of purity and piety in her mouth! What a fall was here! They had dragged her down into sin, darkness, vice, degradation. The temptations of the world, the vanity, pride, and waywardness of a deceitful heart, and the great deceiver and destroyer of souls—behold, these were the three great and mighty influences which allured, and deceived, and overpowered her, till at last they had gained the victory and triumphed over her. Verily, he is going about like a roaring lion, fierce, indefatigable, strong; he is like a serpent, full of malice and cunning; he is a prince, and innumerable are his accomplices and servants; he has established a kingdom on earth, and evil angels and evil men obey him and promote his purposes. Mysterious is his influence, appalling is his power; having blinded men, and filled them with godless thoughts and inspirations, he leads them captive at his will—his will of enmity, cruelty, and darkness.

“A woman who was a sinner!” It is a melancholy sight to see a city, once beautiful and flourishing, converted into a heap of ashes by the ravages of fire or war. But what is this compared to a

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human soul, ruined and lost? What a wreck is here! A body, created to be the temple of the Holy Ghost, destined to be a glorious, transfigured, beautiful dwelling for the soul and spirit in everlasting glory,—a soul and spirit created in God's image, to know, love, and enjoy the infinite Jehovah; and now body, soul, and spirit given over to sin, darkness, death, in time and in eternity. "A woman who was a sinner!"—that is, without God and hope in the world, lost and dead. Here indeed is a sorrow exceeding great, a woe of unutterable bitterness.

Imagine the state of this poor woman. Could she look back into the past,—its bright associations and reminiscences, the pictures of her childhood, her father's tenderness, her mother's love, her sister's merriment, her cheerful playmates, the dear Sabbath, the beautiful temple service, the sacred, joyous festivals? It was a paradise lost—she dare not think of it. Or the dark memories of the past—her disobedience and guilt, the struggle of her conscience, the warning of her parents, their grief and anguish, her obstinacy and self-will, that plunge into darkness and sin against the protest of the inner voice? It was a flaming accusation against her, filling her soul with unspeakable horror. The future was dark and threatening. She had found out that sin was a bitter thing. Conscience had often been silenced, but now its voice must be heard. Like the words which were written by a mysterious

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hand at Belshazzar's feast, the writing cannot be obliterated. To whom shall she go? Where can she find comfort? In the multitude of thoughts within us, we cannot remain alone. There is a solitude which is unbearable. When God leads us into the wilderness, we faint, we look for help, and there is none to help us. Poor sinful woman! to whom can she go? Her companions cannot understand her. They would only mock, and advise her to continue in that which was the very soul of her agony. The righteous and religious only despise and condemn her. . . . God? . . . As the thought enters her mind, she trembles in fear and awe; for she knows that God is holy, righteous, and just—that in all her sin and disobedience she had sinned against Him; and yet she feels, if anywhere, with Him, with Him alone, could she obtain help. For she thinks that if a holy Being could befriend her—if One who is pure and good could love her—if God, the righteous and holy Father, could forgive her, it would bring peace and life into her troubled soul.

Poor bruised reed! thou art not able to lift up thy head, to renew thy strength, to concentrate thy energy. Poor broken heart! no human effort can make thee sound and joyous again; thy strength is gone, thy life departed, thy joy and brightness vanished. Men may pity the bruised reed, and weep over the broken heart; angels may watch with tender compassion; but neither men nor angels can

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perform the miracle of infusing new life, new strength, new joy, into the broken-hearted, who mourn and tremble because they have sinned. But He can do it—the glorious Immanuel ; the Father hath given this work to Him ; He hath anointed Him with the Spirit to be the Healer, the Renewer of the lost. Pure He is, undefiled, harmless, separate from sinners, and yet He loves, pities, saves them. Holy, and yet their friend ; strong, yet gentle ; divine, yet compassionate ; righteous, yet forgiving. He touches the leper—He Himself remains spotless, and the leper is cleansed. He forgives sinners, and His word of pardon, His kiss of tenderness and mercy, changes them into saints, and imparts to them the love of holiness and truth. Jesus is His name : He never breaks the bruised reed, He never quenches the smoking flax ; His arm possesses infinite strength and infinite tenderness. God the Father is the source of all pity and compassion ; in His love originated the thought of salvation and help. But *God the Son is the source of all sympathy* ; it was He who resolved to take upon Him our nature, to enter into our trials, to be made acquainted with our sorrows,—nay, even to be tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin,—in order that He may be able to be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and to succour them that are tempted, to be afflicted in all our afflictions, and to comfort us with His perfect sympathy. Only a holy and righteous God can bring salvation to

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sinners ; only One who is like unto us, and identified with us, can give us that sympathy after which our heart longs. Jesus Christ, the God-man, not only brings pardon and help, but He brings it with a human hand and a human heart ; and His sympathy is the balm of Gilead which heals our wounds. Perfect sympathy can only be found in an omniscient, holy, and all-loving Being. Men cannot fully understand us ; Jesus knows our hearts, knows what is in man,—He understands and reads what is even hidden and confused to our eye. Selfishness excludes sympathy ; love is the only atmosphere in which it can breathe. Christ's love is infinite and immutable. But holiness seems to diminish rather than increase sympathy with the unholy and impure. Yet this only seems so on a very superficial view. Jesus cannot sympathise with the sinner in his love of sin, in the unhallowed desires and imaginations of the heart, in his worldliness, selfishness, unbelief, forgetfulness of God. But how contradictory is the very thought ! That would not be sympathy *with* the sinner, but rather sympathy with sin and Satan, *against* the sinner. In departing from God, we destroy ourselves ; in clinging to sin, we cling to our enemy, to our ruin. When, by God's grace, we repent, "we come to ourselves," we begin to feel sympathy with that poor wretched self which has been blinded, led astray, ruined, because torn and separated from its rightful centre, the fountain of life. They who sympathise with our love of sin are,

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in so far as they do so, our enemies ; if one could love us without loving in the least degree our faults and transgressions, his would be true love, real sympathy. The purer, the holier he is, the keener his perception of the evil of sin, of the misery and loneliness of a God-estranged life,—the livelier, the deeper, the stronger his sympathy with the sorrow and the anguish of a repenting, contrite heart. Besides, the greater purity, the more power and energy of love.

But how can such a Being know my difficulties, my struggles ? He is able to do so because he was tempted in all things like unto thee. He knows thy infirmity, for He likewise took on Him flesh and blood ; He knows Satan's malice and cunning ; He knows the powerful assault, the insinuating flattery, the dazzling, alluring brightness, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, for He was tempted by Satan through these three—not merely in the wilderness, but afterwards also in many ways. "But still He did not yield ; He did not allow a selfish thought to dwell in His mind, and therefore how can He sympathise with a sinful being like me ?" See, the very fact that His abhorrence of every sin was invincible, and that His love of unspotted righteousness and holiness never wavered, is the very foundation upon which His sympathy rests. He alone can value aright the great evil and misery of sin ; and, having Himself experienced temptations most terrible, severe, and

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sifting in their nature, and thus learned the full extent of human infirmity, He is both able and willing to assist us in our struggles, and to keep us even from the slightest transgression of the Divine law. His very hatred of sin is the pledge that He will not for a moment forget the interest of the sinner—that is, his holiness and victory over Satan. His very sinlessness and purity assure us that even the slightest defeat and loss sustained by us will fill Him with sorrow and grief, and that He will not pass unnoticed any wound or suffering with which the enemy has afflicted us.

But where argument and abstract thought fail to convince, facts speak with irresistible conclusiveness. That poor woman who had been taken in adultery, accused by men sinful and guilty themselves, was brought before Him who was of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. Sinners showed no sympathy. They had sympathy with the sin, if not in its grossest manifestation, yet in its more concealed and hidden, secret and refined development—in its essential nature. Jesus was perfectly pure and holy in His inmost soul, in the very depths of His heart. Did their sympathy with sin give or increase sympathy with the sinner? Did the hatred, the abhorrence, the loathing which a holy Jesus, the Child of God, felt against all impurity, take away or decrease His sympathy with the sinner? We know it—Jesus pardoned, and He pardoned with tenderness; and therefore let us hold it fast: *His perfect holiness*

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is the foundation upon which His perfect sympathy doth rest.

Sinners knew and felt that ; therefore they were attracted by Him. They had known saints, but they had shown them no sympathy ; they had known sympathy, but it was not that of saints. The saints had not been genuine, nor had the sympathy been true and powerful. But here is a perfect Saint, and yet perfect sympathy ; this is the Anointed of the Lord, God a Saviour.

She had heard of Him, the Holy One and the Friend of sinners, and her heart began to hope. Faith was the spark, yet it was Divine, and could henceforth be never extinguished. In His favour, she felt, there would be life for her ; in His forgiveness and acceptance, peace and rest. She believed, yet she trembled ; she felt delivered from her former anguish and despair, yet she was in uncertainty and doubt. She had entered on a new existence, distinct from that dark and starless night of loneliness and self-condemnation in which she found herself when first convinced of her sin ; but still it was not light : the dawn is mysterious, and not without anxious foreboding. David had received, through Nathan, a declaration of his guilt and punishment, and the promise of forgiveness ; yet he had no rest until he confessed his sin and humbled himself before God, and sought the favour and light of His countenance, (Pss. li., xxxii.) Thus had this poor woman received the hope of forgiveness, and begun

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to believe and to enter into peace ; but she had no rest until she came to Jesus, and saw Him face to face. It was repentance unto life, it was faith which brought her to Jesus. She knew that He was at meat in the Pharisee's house ; and though she could not expect anything but contempt and harshness in the house of Simon, so great is her desire, so intense her anxiety, that she forgets all difficulties and ignores all obstacles ; absorbed in one great object she loses sight of all other considerations,—all the world is dead to her ; only one Being exists for her soul. She is a sinner, and Jesus is the holy Friend of sinners. No temple, no altar, no priest can give her what she seeks ; her heart tells her the true and eternal High Priest, who can reconcile sinners to God, who can restore them to fellowship with the Father, and purify them from guilt and sin, is Jesus Christ, the good, faithful, loving Shepherd. She brought an alabaster box of ointment to express her veneration, her gratitude, her willingness to honour and serve Him. She intended, doubtless, to speak—to confess her sin, to adore the Holy One, to ask His favour and counsel ; but when she stood there, she found no words—her tongue failed her. Surely it was a great effort to arise and go into Simon's house ! it cost her a great struggle ; her whole soul was moved in its inmost depth ; and now she saw Him, the Saviour, who made her feel that she was a sinner, and yet was her only hope, her only light. She stood at His

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feet, and wept tears of bitter sorrow, of blessed hope, of holy love; and the fountain of sorrow was opened, and she remembered her guilt, and, in the light of Divine purity and love, she saw the darkness of that selfish, God-estranged life, in which she had spent so many years; and the very heavens seemed to open above her, and the bright sunshine of Divine love and blessedness to stream down on her guilty soul. Fast fell her tears; how eloquent they were!—Jesus heard in them this voice—“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin; for I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned.” She washed Christ’s feet with her tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment. And, behold, Jesus did not shrink from her; He allowed her to touch His feet, to kiss them; He did not refuse her sorrow, her affection, her surrender. Then she felt she was accepted. Christ understood the silent language of her tears and kisses; she understood the silent language of His acceptance. As the child feels assured of his mother’s love and forgiveness, when, after his having incurred her displeasure, she again permits him to kiss and caress her, so does this sinner now feel—

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“Jesus has pardoned me ; He allows me to honour Him, and to trust in His mercy.”

What a picture is here ! Jesus, the holy, spotless, perfect God-man—and a woman who was a sinner ! And yet the contrast constitutes the harmony. “He came to seek and to save that which is lost”—to heal the sick, to bind up the broken-hearted. It was a solemn, holy, and blessed meeting ; the angels in heaven rejoiced, and the Father was glorified, for the Saviour receiving sinners is the brightest manifestation of the love of God.

Here, O sinner ! thou canst not remain a neutral spectator. Thou must take thy place, and choose the side on which thou wilt stand—either with the woman at Christ’s feet, sympathising with her sorrow and joy, or with Simon and his guests, who murmured in their hearts. The Pharisee spake within himself, “This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him ; for she is a sinner.” He sees no repentance, no contrition, no love, no turning to light and righteousness ; he has no eyes to perceive it. “That toucheth him,” he says. If Jesus, he thought, was really a prophet, as people say, He would doubtless know that this woman was a sinner. In this he was certainly right. Christ, being a prophet, knew what was in man—He knew the sin of the woman, even the deep and hidden fountain of sin which is only revealed to the

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Searcher of hearts. But Simon's inference was radically false. Because she is a sinner, a prophet would not receive her, was his thought; but God's thought is the very opposite. Not merely though a sinner, but rather because she is a sinner, does Jesus accept her love. And in this He was like His Father. Simon the Pharisee ought to have known that the High and Holy One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, had expressed His gracious will and character in this wise: "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit;" he ought to have known that the Lord is more willing to visit with His glory and love a broken heart than even the outward sanctuaries and temples devoted to His worship; and that not merely a prophet and servant, but Jehovah Himself, cannot despise the broken and contrite heart—cannot refuse worm Jacob, seeking His face, the light and favour of His countenance. How often had Simon read the 32nd and 51st Psalms, and doubtless imagined that because he knew and repeated them he was a true son of David; but now, when the 51st Psalm stood before him in living embodiment, he could not recognise it. How often do men see, hear, read, repeat that word "mercy!" but to understand it is to understand all—the whole gospel of God. But the unrenewed man not merely does not understand God's truth, but when he meets it he is offended at it—his religious sense is shocked. Simon ought to

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have seen a harmony between the spirit of the Old Testament and the scene before him ; but it is the religious, orthodox Bible-man in him who is offended. It is with a catechism-syllogism, and a sabbatic sentence, that he condemns the conduct of the Saviour : so true it is that the flesh profiteth nothing ; it is the Spirit that giveth life—it is He who breathes in the Scriptures ; what are they, and what use do men make of them, without Him ? And yet, how often do we forget this when, in directing men to read the Bible, to keep the Sabbath, to attend God's house, we do not point out to them that, as the body is dead without the spirit, even so these precious gifts and channels are useless—as far as life in God is concerned—without the Holy Ghost.

Jesus knew his thoughts and in His wisdom and condescension, replies to Simon's objection, defends the woman, and at the same time preaches the word of repentance and faith to the poor self-satisfied Israelites around Him. He said to Simon : "Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee." What He had to say to the woman, He had said already. He has no words of rebuke or of chiding for her, no angry refusal, no cold and haughty denial to address to her : in His silence He had accepted her homage. But to Simon He had somewhat to say. And, encouraged by His host, He spoke unto him, as His manner was, a parable. We can judge others, though we are not able to judge ourselves. David was filled with righteous indignation when Nathan

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told him the story of the rich man and the poor man's favourite lamb. Clearly he saw the injustice and cruelty, keenly he felt the iniquity and heartlessness, distinctly he perceived the necessity of punishment and restitution. We have as it were two consciences—one for ourselves, the other for our neighbour. In our own case, self-love blinds us, self-interest bribes us; in the case of others, conscience has a clear perception of God's law, of transgression, of merited punishment. And therefore are we inexcusable, because in that we are able to judge others, and actually approve of the voice of conscience—in that we do judge others, we condemn ourselves. Jesus shows Simon his own heart by telling him a parable, and Simon's common sense cannot but see and judge rightly in the case presented to his view: "There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?" To such a simple question Simon could not hesitate to reply: "I suppose, that he to whom he forgave most. Jesus said, thou hast rightly judged." As much as to say, thou art able to think, and infer, and judge rightly, where sin and pride do not blind thee; if thou wert pure in heart, thou wouldest know and see also the kingdom of God. And now Jesus applies the parable: "Seest thou this woman?" Her sin, her tears, her

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kisses, and my receiving her—this is what is unintelligible to thee. Therefore look well at her. Examine the case thoroughly. I shall leave nothing out of consideration, pass over no circumstance. I see and know her—seest thou her? She loves me more than thou; this thou canst not help seeing “I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.” What a contrast is here! “I came into thine house,” and herein I showed condescension and love; but how little gratitude, deference, or affection, didst thou manifest! whereas this woman, driven hither by her reverence, her devotion, her love, hath not ceased to give me the most touching signs of her profound veneration, her heartfelt gratitude, her overwhelming sense of unworthiness, her overflowing love. Doubtless she loves more than thou. And why? “Wherefore I say unto thee, her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.” Her sins are many—she owed five hundred pence—but the merciful and compassionate Creditor has forgiven her. And having received great mercy, she feels great love. Her love is but the result of redeeming love; it is the

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expression of her gratitude ; her sins have not to be ignored and forgotten—they are no wall of separation between her and the Saviour ; it is because such and so many sins were forgiven her, that she loved, and her love is accepted.

Some have strangely misunderstood the expression of Christ—“ Her sins are forgiven, for she loved much”—as if her love to Christ was the reason why she received forgiveness. But they can scarcely have read the parable aright. The debtors are first forgiven—then, out of gratitude, they love ; they were forgiven because they had nothing to pay, and because the creditor was merciful. “ Tell me, which of these *will* love him most ? ” Future tense, not past. If He had asked in the past tense, it would have been, “ Which of them was most afraid of him ? which of them anticipated a heavier penalty ? ” But love and gratitude are the sequence, the result, the fruit of undeserved clemency and favour. And therefore, as we say the sun has risen, because it is clear daylight, so Christ is the sun, and when He rises, light enters the soul—the light of love and self-surrender. Why, then, was she forgiven ? Hath love saved her ? How eager are men, even good men, to insinuate human merit into a region where man has no merit whatever—to speak of human effort and strength where with man it is impossible. There is an element, they say, of love and longing, an incipient holiness, which accompanies faith—it is this beginning of

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conformity to God's will which in some way or other is joined with that trust in Christ which they admit is the essential ground of acceptance. But the question, "What is it that saves—faith or love?" is in no wise answered by the glorious fact, that when God gives us faith, He thereby renews our hearts and implants within us a new principle of obedience. It is true, that believing in the Lord Jesus we love Him; but it is of the utmost importance for us to see that the beginning of our salvation is our seeing Christ as the only hope and refuge, and coming with all our sin and unworthiness to Him, because God testifies of Him as a Saviour of the sinful and lost. Jesus Himself hath distinctly declared it in this case. For when the Pharisees were astonished at Jesus saying unto the woman, "Thy sins are forgiven," He explained and confirmed it by adding, "*Thy faith* hath saved thee," not thy love. For how can love proceed from a selfish, God-estranged, sinful heart? Thoughts of trust and confidence cannot come out of a heart which has sinned, and thinks God an austere and hard taskmaster, which dreads His justice and hates His commandments. It is only after we know that God has loved us, that we love Him. And how can we know that God loves us, except by *faith*? Reason cannot assure us of it; our conscience testifies that we have not deserved it; but when God declares it, then to accept it, rely on it, and embrace it as a truth, a fact, a reality, our shield,

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defence, refuge, life—this is faith, the gift of God, the work of His Spirit. Therefore think not of thy love to Christ, seek it not in an evil heart of unbelief, expect not that it will grow of itself on that ground which lies under the curse, and can bring forth only thorns and briers. Think of Christ's love to sinners. In this trust—to this look. Into this strong tower run and be safe. “*Only* believe!” is the word of life. With all thy weight, with all thy burden, of which this is the very heaviest part—that thou hast *no love*—cling to Jesus, the holy Friend of sinners, who is full of love and sympathy, and thy sins, which are many, shall be forgiven, and thou wilt love much—“because the love of Christ is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost.”

“Go in peace,” the Saviour adds. Perfect peace depends on our relation to the past, present, and future. Memory and conscience cannot dismiss the past. We must know that its sins and follies, its guilt and ingratitude, have been forgiven and pardoned. And although even a saint like David cannot refrain from offering up the petition, “Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions,” yet he could think of his past life and be at peace, for he knew the blessedness of him “whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered, unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity.” Though Paul remembered that he had been a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious, yet he was able to

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add: "But I obtained mercy." And not merely do we know that our sins are forgiven; but, believing in God's loving wisdom, we see that He has brought good out of evil, and that even our experiences in the far country, in the house of bondage, are now made unto us a blessing, and enable us to be useful in the kingdom of God, and thus glorify His name. And more than this; the Lord Himself commands us to think of our past sin—not in order to disturb our peace, but to deepen and strengthen it; for He wishes to lead us to a fuller, clearer, humbler trust in His mercy, and to make us hear again the gracious assurance, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and *will not remember thy sins,*" (Isa. xliii. 24; Jer. xxxi. 34.) Thus, with regard to the past, we have peace—peace which is consistent with the clearest, fullest light of memory and conscience, and peace based on the holy and righteous love of our adorable Saviour-God.

But the present also is full of peace. We cannot feel at peace unless in the present we have the thirst of our soul satisfied. We must have light to see an object worthy of our supreme affection and veneration, and have fellowship with Him in thought and life. Jesus brings us peace, because He and the Father come unto us, and make their abode with us. Our fellowship is with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, and we know that God is our sure portion, and our exceeding great reward.

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Our heart is satisfied, it is fixed and established in God, for it can say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." The Shepherd who loved us and laid down His life for us, hath not left us to ourselves; He is even now with us, feeding, guiding, restoring, healing, protecting us. He who entered our heart, came to dwell there, to sup with us and we with Him; therefore He hath anointed our head with oil, we are kings and priests unto God: the Spirit flows from the Head, Jesus, to His members, His believers; and thus it is His peace, the peace of the Covenant-head, the glorified King-Priest, which fills our souls; no wonder that the world cannot give that which has its source in Deity, that it cannot take away that which is hid with Christ in God.

But peace is ours, because the future also is ours. God commands us to be at peace, to believe we are saved, to accept and enjoy the assurance of His love and favour in time and eternity. "Thou wilt guide me with thy counsel," the believer is able to say, in sorrow and affliction, temptations and trials, darkness and death—in every valley of shadows and tears, the faithful and compassionate Shepherd is with us, and He is able to comfort, and sustain even to the end. And what a future is before us! A future bound up with Christ's future! Let a Christian take no lower view than this, which Scripture holds out to him—he is accepted in the

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Beloved, and one with Him ; the inheritance was purchased by Christ, and given by the Father to Christ and His Church. We are fellow-heirs with Christ ; we shall be blessed not merely through Him, but in Him, and with Him. What makes the heavenly places thrice blessed and glorious to us who love Jesus, is that He saith, "To him that overcometh will I grant *to sit with me in my throne*, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne ;" it is into the joy of our Lord that we shall then enter.

To sum up all, Christ—who loved us from all eternity, who died for us on Golgotha, who sought and found us—is our peace, when we think of the past ; Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith, revealing to us the Father, and enabling us to live unto God, is our peace in the present ; Christ—our glorified King-Priest, who is appointed heir of all things, the Bridegroom of the Church, our glory and life, ready to be revealed on that day—is our peace for the future. In Him we can say, "From everlasting to everlasting thou art God"—and therefore our home and shelter, our peaceful dwelling-place and immovable refuge.

"Go in peace," is the word of Christ. "Go," He can say to her now, because she had obeyed His first word, "Come." Moses saith, "Go and do God's will, and then come and claim His reward." Christ saith, "Come and claim my love, unworthy of it as thou art—believe, trust ; and then go and serve me

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and obey my holy will." But sinners foolishly imagine, that going away from Christ will somehow or other at last bring them to Him. He saith, "Come with thy sin and guilt, cease from thy own fruitless works, for they are dead, and come to Me, for I am the Sabbath of thy soul—the rest which God hath made for thee." And the soul answers: "I am coming, . . . seest thou not I am going to read, to feel, to improve, to do." . . . *Nobody is coming who is going.* Jesus saith, "Come, here is the robe of righteousness, the garment of salvation." Thou repliest, "I am coming;" but all the time, instead of coming, thou goest weaving, spinning, toiling, trying to clothe and adorn thyself with thy own frames and sentiments and goodness. Jesus saith, "Come, here is payment for thy debt, I give it freely—at once come and take it." Thou sayest, "Coming;" but all the time, instead of coming, thou goest gathering, collecting, saving, earning small coins and big coins, wherewith to offer some payment for thy heavy debt. But do not go! only come! And verily "blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out," (Deut. xxviii. 6.) "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"—this is the first step; but after we have come, Jesus saith to us, "Go." "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Jesus

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hath chosen us and ordained us, that we should *go* and bring forth fruit, and that our fruit should remain ; and *after the sheep have entered in* by the door and *are saved*, they shall *go in and out* and find pasture, (John x. 9) ; that is, they shall take out of Christ's fulness grace for grace ; always having all sufficiency in all things, they shall abound to every good work ; they shall be, first, like Mary, receiving ; and then, retaining Mary's humility and spirituality, like Martha, giving unto the Lord of His own, and offering unto Him willingly for the building of His temple, that His name be glorified, (1 Chron. xxix. 14.)

"Go in peace," the Saviour said to the woman who had found forgiveness and life. The peace He had bestowed was Divine, and therefore the mockery of sinners and the suspicions and coldness of the self-righteous cannot disturb or extinguish it. Firm and full, clear and distinct, had been the declaration of the Son of Man, "Thy sins are forgiven." He had attached no condition, no limitation—He spoke of it as a fact, perfect, accomplished, certain. And if He said it, it is her's to believe implicitly, and to rejoice with humble gratitude and praise. It is wonderful, doubtless, beyond all human thought and expectation, but therefore the more truly Divine, heavenly, real, valid for eternity. And such an assurance of pardon and salvation, based as it is exclusively on Christ's word, on Christ's truthfulness, on Christ's holy and righteous love, is accompanied

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by a peace which passeth all understanding. For it is not the peace of human understanding and reasoning, it is the peace of *faith*! “Thy sins are forgiven”—this is the word which gives peace. Christ speaks to Simon and his friends of the woman’s *love* as manifested in her acts—to herself of her *faith*. This is to show us that the world must see our love, our obedience, our devotedness, to the Saviour; they cannot see and recognise the hidden root and spring of our life. Live so that Christ may be able to say to an unbelieving world, “Seest thou this man, this woman? Look at them, how they *love* me!” Nay, even to Satan, “Seest thou this Job? He is my servant, perfect and upright.” But to the saved sinner, Christ speaks of *faith*! “Thy faith—and nothing else—hath saved thee. Because as a lost, guilty, and unworthy sinner thou didst trust in me, as I commanded thee.” And this Christ does because He wants us to go in peace, to rejoice in a perfect, full, free, eternal salvation; because the believer is to have peace by continuing to believe—that is, to acquaint himself with God, whose perfect name is revealed in Him whom all God’s children delight to call Jesus, Saviour!

* * *

Christendom is like the upper room in Simon’s house. They have invited Jesus—but not as a Saviour, a Redeemer, a Divine Being; rather as if they were to serve and confer honour upon Him. The true disciples are like the woman, emphatically

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sinners. They manifest love, tenderness, gratitude, rapture, humble, trembling delight in the fairest among the sons of men; and the very people who have invited Christ cannot understand it, and think it strange and exaggerated; they wonder at the worshippers, they doubt whether God really demands and is pleased with such devotion. Jesus, while He accepts the love and service of His people, because He has first washed them in His own blood, condemns the world by appealing to the fruits of the Spirit in His disciples, and by appealing to the admitted fact, that the world loves little, that they are strangers to such affection and gratitude. And how can they, who love little, enter into the joy of Christ and be His bride? Here we either do not love at all, or we love much; for the love of Christ—a love infinite, which manifested its Divine strength in that He died for His Church—is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost; we love Him as God, our exceeding joy.

She went in peace; so do all His disciples, though their afflictions and trials be many and great, until they appear with Christ in glory. Then Jesus will no longer be a guest and stranger, but the heavenly Bridegroom and Master of the feast; and His blood-bought bride, saved by faith, renewed by the Spirit, glorified and transfigured by His resurrection-power, will be united with Him in perfect, ineffable glory and blessedness!

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MATT. xv. 21—28.

THE people of God are called Israel in the Old Testament scriptures, because the Man, even the Angel of the Lord, with whom Jacob was left alone, and who wrestled with him until the breaking of the day, said unto him, “Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel ; for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.” The Church of Christ is likewise thus addressed by the apostle of the Gentiles : “For you know that in the races of the Stadium, though all may run, yet but one can gain the prize. So run, that you may win. And every one who strives in the matches trains himself by all manner of self-restraint. Yet they do it to win a crown of fading leaves ; we a crown that cannot fade.” “The wrestler does not win the crown unless he wrestles lawfully.” “Fight

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the good fight of faith!" (1 Cor. ix. ; 2 Tim. ii. ; 1 Tim. vi.)

Paul alludes to the games and contests so dear to the pride and patriotism of the Greeks. Thus wrestling was characteristic not merely of Israel, but also of the Gentiles ; and of the Gentile world the most perfect and elevated type is to be found in the Greek. What truth, beauty, and strength the natural man is able to produce out of his own resources, we see in Hellas ; and up to this day Greeks are our teachers ; and though Athens and Sparta have fallen, the genius of the nation is still the genius of unrenewed civilisation. But to the Greeks Israel is diametrically opposed. For out of Israel cometh salvation ; and the cross is foolishness to all who are wise, and strong, and beautiful. Hence the wrestling which is the glory of the Greeks must be entirely different from that which characterises God's people. Abraham, the father of the faithful, began his life by leaving behind him all that was dear and cherished, all that promised earthly comfort and prosperity. He continued his fight and contest by remaining a stranger and pilgrim, and abstaining from all conquest and self-aggrandisement. Still further was he led into this mysterious method by offering Isaac, because, though Isaac was the object and the reward of faith, he had begun to come between Abraham's heart and the naked promise and word. Jacob also had to struggle from the beginning. It was typified in his

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very birth, and through contest and struggle, hardship and danger, sorrow and tears, he had to gain that birthright which was so precious to him, for which his brother Esau had neither an enlightened understanding nor a renewed heart. But his great and decisive contest and victory were on that morning when he gained, in the fullest, truest spiritual sense, the birthright, the blessing of the God of Abraham,—when, notwithstanding his sin-clouded, sin-burdened soul—notwithstanding his weakness, fear, and trembling, his consciousness of guilt, his anguish and weeping of heart—he insisted, even in the midst of defeat, on the blessing of the Angel of the Lord, the Divine Mediator, who had wrestled with him. Abraham received back Isaac from the dead; Jacob obtains the victory out of defeat and agony. His weakness is his strength; tears and strong crying are his war-song. His infirmity—“and the hollow of Jacob’s thigh was out of joint when he wrestled with him”—is his glory.

Such wrestling was not known except in Judah. This is the great difference between Israel and the nations, between the Church and the world. “As unknown, yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things;” sent forth as sheep in the midst of wolves, yet defended, and conquering; without weapons, yet with invisible weapons mighty through God to the

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pulling down of strongholds; strong when we are weak—Israel, because worm Jacob! Such are God's people. But the world, though it may speak Israel's language, is not Israel; it cannot see any beauty or comeliness in the cross, any strength in infirmity, any safety in the weakness and defencelessness of sheep. They also fight; but it is not a good fight, for it is not of God—it is against faith and without faith. And therefore it is that all who wish to be crowned with the unfading crown which the Lord alone shall give, must fight lawfully—that is, like Israel.

In all the New Testament scriptures we do not meet a narrative, so strikingly and evidently the counterpart of Jacob's struggle and victory, as the story of the Syrophenician woman. And we may be justified in viewing her as a type of the Gentile Church, or as a representative and earnest of the multitude of Gentiles who subsequently became the spiritual children of Abraham, wrestlers with God, gaining the victory of faith.

The evangelists Matthew and Mark tell us the reason why Jesus departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. The religion of the scribes and Pharisees was offended at the disciples of Jesus Christ, who disregarded the tradition of the elders. Professing to honour God, and to watch zealously over His laws and commandments, the Jews were seeking their own honour, and following the imagination of their own hearts, resting satisfied with an outward

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purity of their own invention, while they sought not that inward truth and wisdom which alone can please God. The Saviour boldly and fearlessly exposed the very root of the matter; and after having shown clearly that their tradition made of none effect the Word of God, He called them hypocrites, because their zeal for God's honour, and the strict and pure observance of His law, proceeded from their very enmity to spirituality and heart-obedience; and He applied to them the description of the prophet Isaiah, "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." And unto the whole multitude He uttered His decided, powerful, and penetrating protest against the false religion of their leaders: "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man, but that which cometh out of the mouth defileth a man."* Clearly the Lord saw His rela-

* "Jesus did many things which caused Him to be regarded as one of the most irreligious men: He did not try to give Himself the appearance of great piety, and did not care about the praise or censure of men. Thus, He healed the sick on the Sabbath-day—did not wash His hands before meat—went among sinners and publicans, as He was led in Providence—ate and drank like other people—kept no special fasts Himself, and gave no directions about it to His disciples, to whom, likewise, He gave no special model of prayer till they requested Him; whereas, we pray often, for the sake of others, lest we give them offence—we give to the poor in the presence of others, particularly charitable people—we refrain on the Sabbath-day

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tion to the blind leaders of Israel,—clearly He foresaw the end of their inventions and institutions. He said unto His disciples, “Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up:” words powerful and sharper than a two-edged sword, separating even in the outward Church of Christ, within the enclosure of His garden, between the real and spurious, the Divine and human, rooting up many a plant and flower which have been regarded as useful and ornamental, fragrant and beautiful.

The soul of Jesus was deeply moved; He was filled with holy indignation when He contrasted the form of godliness and the utter absence of its

from many a thing in which we would feel at liberty if we were alone; liberty which we have before God, we conceal before men. Notice that Jesus would rather be regarded as an irreligious man than be in any way guilty of hypocrisy, for we are to put off all hypocrisy; and if the desire to be seen of men was not so deep-seated in human nature, and even in the disciples of Christ, the Saviour would not have spoken so emphatically about it, but have rather hoped that the evil would die out with the generation of Pharisees. But the evil is very subtle, and it is difficult to know whether we do good in secret before God, or for the sake of men. Only when the heart is constantly roused by God’s Word, and directed to look to Him at all times and to care sincerely for the welfare of our souls, can we attain it. Not to be influenced by man’s praise or censure,—to look straight before us, to see only the living God, and to be directed by His approbation and condemnation, this is the way to obtain a sure reward.”—*Hahn, Vermischte theol. Schriften*, 1780.

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power,—when He thought of the scrupulous care attached to outward observances, and the appalling carelessness in the keeping of the heart, which was evident from the polluted streams of thought and deed proceeding from it.

It was then, as both Matthew and Mark state, that Jesus went thence and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. This may be viewed as a prophetic, symbolic act, in which we can recognise the transition of God's truth from Israel to the Gentiles. The kingdom was about to be taken from the children and given to strangers. The word had been preached to the Jews; but they changed and perverted it by their pride and worldliness, resting with stubborn self-complacency in the possession of privileges abused, of ordinances misunderstood, of oracles divested of their Divine spirit and meaning. The word had lost its arresting, reproving, vivifying power in their case; and now the light was about to leave them, and nations, who as yet were sitting in darkness and the shadow of death, were to see it, and to find in it peace and joy. And as with Israel according to the flesh, so is it always with the professing Church. Means of grace, when not used spiritually, instead of being channels, become obstacles; instead of being helps, prove impediments; instead of leading to the Saviour, become His substitute. That word of God which, if used spiritually, fills us with humility, self-distrust, and love to God, which makes us

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heavenly-minded, and leads us to crucify the old man with his lusts and affections—if used only mechanically, will only confirm us in our pride, our self-complacency, our worldliness, our utter want of heavenly motives and desires. The word, when received in a good and prepared heart, is a seed, and bringeth forth fruit: first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear; with patience, by prayer and meditation, by self-examination and self-restraint, by renewed humiliation before God, and earnest supplication for the enlightening, purifying, and strengthening influences of His Spirit, we have the seed of the word abiding in us, and thus it becomes a life-principle, pervading our thinking, feeling, willing, acting; it brings forth fruit a hundred-fold, for it is seed, which the Divine Sower Himself did sow. Likewise is the Word a sword, that is, a dividing, separating, piercing energy, which penetrates into the very depths of man, and discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart; and even where man perceives only one element, and sees only what he thinks good and spiritual, that Word will search out, and discover, and judge, and condemn the carnal, and earthly, and sinful, mixed up with it. Now, with such a positive and such a negative power of the Word, is it not evident that many do not use it as a Divine Word, as it indeed is, seeing that it acts neither as a seed nor as a sword, but rather as a soporific? for the fact that they are in the habit of reading it is

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only added to the hundred other sources of their commonplace self-complacency and earthliness. Thus was it among the Jews of old, and so is it in Christendom to a large extent, wherever truth is recognised, but little felt. And how often do we perceive that Jesus goes thence "into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon."

Elijah also had once left Israel and gone unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. But Jesus remained within the Jewish frontiers; His intention was to retire at present for a while from the scene of conflict, to remain for a short time in quiet, retired privacy. It was a region of ignorance, superstition, and sin; and the Saviour had not gone there to preach and heal. But is it possible that He can remain anywhere unnoticed and unknown? Can the sun rise without being perceived? Friend of sinners, where can He go without being found of poor and needy hearts, who claim His friendship, and wait for His consolation? Physician of the sick, whither can He go without finding sufferers who appeal to His loving and compassionate soul? His fame had been noised abroad, His works of power and mercy were well known in all the region.

We are therefore not surprised to read of a suppliant coming to Jesus. "Behold, a woman of Canaan:" this is Matthew's description. "The woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation," is Mark's statement. All the particulars mentioned

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present her as totally estranged from Israel—not merely an alien, but belonging to a hostile race and district. Tyre and Sidon, though in remote antiquity on terms of alliance, had long become the persecutors of the chosen people. She was a Canaanite—a child of that accursed race in whose room Israel had of old been planted. She was a Syrophenician, that is, of Phenicia, not merely in its Canaanitish aspect, but also in its Syrian—“Of that Syria, which not only had so often in its limited acceptation been the foe of Israel, and thence bears in Isaiah the bitter burden of Damascus, but which, some three hundred years before Christ’s coming, had merged in itself—as one empire the old glories of Assyria, and which thus involves in its associations and connexions the whole body of the eastern enemies of the Jewish people.”*

Jesus had left the Pharisees ; He was now in the region representing enmity to Israel. And although in a certain sense the strangers and aliens were nearer than the apostate and hypocritical children, yet was this woman in herself unworthy, and far off ; the people to whom she belonged had no claim on Israel’s prophets. But difficulties, which under ordinary circumstances appear insuperable, vanish under the influence of great affliction or under the pressure of urgent necessity. This woman is evidently bowed down by sorrow. Look at her coun-

* Archer Butler: “The Canaanite Mother, a Type,” &c. Sermons, I.

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tenance, and you may read in it long and bitter suffering, and likewise hopelessness about to change and settle into despair; only a faint ray of light, only a trembling spark of hope seems to comfort and uphold her in her anguish and woe. Her daughter was grievously vexed with a devil, and the mother feels her daughter's pain and sorrow her own—the joy and sunshine of her life has vanished.

The sorrow which brings the sinner to seek help, and enables him to overcome all the difficulties and obstacles which separate him in his darkness, alienation, and guilt, from the King of saints, is one which for a long time existed without his knowledge, and subsequently was superficially healed and apparently alleviated by many expedients. Now, however, it is seen in its true nature and in its fearful extent. The heart, which formerly was fondly imagined to be a treasury of good desires and affections, noble aspirations and feelings, when the Spirit of God utters the command, Break through the wall, (Ezek. viii. 8,) is seen to be a chamber of abominations. We thought it was like the garden of Eden, full of lovely flowers of virtue and righteousness; alas! it is a wilderness full of thorns and briars. And instead of being a sanctuary dedicated to Jehovah's service, love of self is there enthroned and rules supreme.

Whither are we to go? The woman of Canaan shows us the way. She had heard of the great Prophet in Israel who went about doing good, a Man

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sent from God, and full of compassion and love, endued with power to heal the sick and them that were possessed of devils. And although she remembered that she was a Canaanite, and without claim on His notice and help, yet so urgent was her case, so grievous her affliction, so earnest and loud the voice of love, that she resolved to approach this only Healer and pour out before Him her desire and wretchedness.

This was the first victory gained; she came to Christ in spite of her utter want of claim on His consideration and favour. But her struggle was only to commence. Mark (who always abounds in pictorial detail) tells us that she fell at His feet. She felt the dignity of the great Physician, the magnitude of the benefit which she was seeking, and her own unworthiness. "Lord," she exclaims, "thou Son of David, have mercy on me!" "Lord!" a poor and troubled, weary and helpless soul can discover Divine glory and power in Jesus. "Son of David!" this is Israel's language; the poor Canaanite had listened attentively and eagerly to those wonderful stories of His love and miraculous help, and she had noticed, and treasured it up carefully in her memory, that the sick and suffering used to call him "Son of David." How differently do we read the gospel narratives, when we seek in them guidance and direction in our perplexity, comfort and peace in our trouble. With what intense interest do we study every case in which we

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recognise features resembling our own, how we ponder over every symptom, every stage, following it in imagination, sometimes as it were in prophetic anticipation. When we read the prayers of David, admiring their beauty, earnestness, sublimity, we see only as it were their body and soul, we do not know the animating spirit; but when we begin to pray ourselves and to appropriate them, then do they become life and spirit to us. Thus had the poor Syrophenician woman heard that Jesus was called "Son of David," and she remembered it now. "Have mercy on me!" a simple appeal to His compassionate, loving heart. Identifying herself altogether with her daughter, she supplicates mercy for herself. As she had no claim to bring forward, but simply to look to mercy, so faith must not allow merit and works to come between it and Divine love.

Jesus surely delighted in this humble and trusting soul. He who visited thousands with His help and blessing, even when they did not seek or supplicate His aid; who invited all that labour and are heavy laden to come unto Him, promising them rest; of whom we read, that when the even was come, they brought unto Him many that were possessed with devils, and He cast out the spirits with His word, and healed all that were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, Himself took our infirmities, and bore our sicknesses!—surely He cannot refuse a petition so earnest, so urgent, so vehement.

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But Jesus answered her not a word. "He who is the word of the Father is silent, and doth not speak. He who is the wisdom of God gives no counsel. He who is the Healer of the sick offers no help. He who is the fountain of all consolation sends forth not a single drop."* Believe it, this silence was painful to Him; for if thou pitiest the woman, thy pity is but as a drop to the ocean, when compared with the fulness of love which is in Christ's heart. But the Saviour did nothing of Himself; in everything He sought His Father's guidance and direction, and therefore He hesitated before He granted her request.

What bitter disappointment was here for the poor mother, who had hoped to be so near the fulfilment of her heart's wish. Is it indeed possible that the Man, whose compassion and kindness had been described to her in such glowing terms, would not even address to her a word of sympathy, or hold out a ray of hope? Even His disciples are filled with pity, and intercede for her; they came and besought Him, saying: "Send her away, for she crieth after us;" but He turns a deaf ear to the voice of her entreaty. How often does it appear to the soul, that Christ's ministers have more sympathy with them, and are more willing to help them, than the Master Himself! We imagine that men pity us more, and if they had power would send us relief more readily than the Saviour Himself.

* Heinrich Müller, died 1675.

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Yet how grievously do we err in this, and wrong His faithful love! When He is silent and answers not a word, the soul must inquire, and not rest till He has told us why He is contending with us.

Jesus at length opened His lips. Hope entered the mother's heart. He is going to yield to His disciples' intercession. But, instead of the expected word of mercy, He uttered a word of refusal,—“I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” As much as to say, Though her case excites my pity, though my power is sufficient to grant her request, yet, as I am only sent to Israel, it is impossible for me to exceed the commission given me by my heavenly Father. What she had heard of His compassion and power was true; His heart was kind, His power unlimited, the obstacle was not in Him—it lay in herself. It was a word, piercing like a sword.

And such a word it is when the anxious and troubled soul hears Christ speak of His own people—the Church, whom He loved, and for whom He died—the sheep, who hear His voice and follow Him—the poor in spirit, whose is the kingdom of heaven! He is only sent, the soul exclaims, to His own chosen people—they only hear, thirst, believe, and are saved. I doubt not His love, I question not His power, but I do not think I am Israel. You who try to give comfort suggest, “lost sheep” He came to seek; the troubled soul replies, “True, lost sheep, but *certain* lost sheep, of the house of

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Israel." The more such an earnest mind reads the Word, the more may this difficulty grow and increase in intensity, till indeed the soul is in a very strait place. Yet here also we have help and guidance given us. See the Syrophenician woman, though she had heard herself excluded, came again and worshipped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" Now she did not call Him Son of David, for she felt, as she was not an Israelite, she had no right to call Him so. Do thou likewise, if thou feelest thou art not able to apply to Him the titles which His believers give Him—seek for a name with which thou mayest approach Him. "Help me!" she exclaimed; whatever difficulty and obstacle is in the way, can it not be removed? Thou only art able to help—my misery is exceeding great! But what gave her courage thus to persevere? Was it not doubting Christ's word? Christ's word is understood by *faith*. He said, "No," but He looked, "Yes." She perceived that refusing was His strange work, that He delighted in mercy. She felt that He wished to be entreated and urged; nay, more, she felt that His very refusal had put strength into her; now more than ever she felt she could not leave Him until she had obtained His help.

See, O soul, who art not able to discover in thee the mark of God's election, the work of His blessed Spirit, Jesus is waiting to hear thy complaint. He has taken from thee all hope and strength, yet

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whither wilt thou go? The more He weakens thee in the way, the more art thou shut up to Him. The more thou seest thou art "Lo-ammi," the more wilt thou desire to become His own, His inheritance and delight. Therefore begin the struggle anew—"Lord, help me!"

But Jesus answered and said, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." The Saviour still insists on His first exclusive word. He fortifies, intensifies the objection. The Israelites are the children, the Gentiles are compared to dogs. Bread, which is precious for the children's use, ought not to be wasted on dogs. What a decided refusal! Clear and definite, cutting off all hope. When we read of spiritual difficulties and trials, they do not appear formidable; but when we are ourselves oppressed with them, and can obtain no relief, no light, no comfort, then indeed do we know that no sorrow is like unto this sorrow. Who does not feel here, as Martin Luther has had the boldness to express it, "If He had said this to me, I would have run away, and thought, It is in vain; whatever you try here, you can get nothing. For it is indeed an exceedingly hard word, that He not merely tells her she is no child, but calls her even a dog. It is as if He had said, Stand no longer here, but be off, for you have nothing to seek and hope with me. If Peter or Paul should speak to me in this manner, I would be frightened to death: but only think of it, it is Christ Himself who thus

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speaks to the woman! This is indeed a temptation!"*

But wonderful is the power of faith! Some would have replied in offended pride, in wounded vanity, and asserted that they did not deserve such an appellation. Others would have said nothing, and gone away in hopelessness and despair. Others again go away with a new, deep view of their sinfulness: they have gained a new "frame of mind," but no salvation—a deeper humility, as they think, but no Redeemer. But this woman takes Christ's word as she has heard it, and clings to it, and with all simplicity and childlike humility, she says: "Truth, Lord: I am a dog"—I do not deserve to be treated as a child; but only do treat me as a dog; only let me be near Thee, in Thy house—"yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table!" Christ has given her the position of a dog; she takes hold of His word, and asks only for the right which is extended to dogs. "See, she catches the Lord Jesus in His own words! *What will He do now, the dear Saviour? He cannot unsay it!*"†

"Truth, Lord: yet!" is the sum and substance of faith. If we have learned to combine these words, we have learned to believe. *Truth, Lord: "sin has abounded unto death;" yet "hath Thy grace much more abounded unto life."* *Truth,*

* Luther: Hauspostille, 1534.

† Luther.

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Lord: “cursed is every one that abideth not in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them ;” *yet*, “He who knew no sin was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” *Truth, Lord*, is the sea of our sin and guilt, and the righteous anger of God ; *yet*, is the rock of Christ’s redemption and love. *Truth, Lord*, is a view of self ; *yet*, is a view of Jesus.

Behold, she has conquered Him with His own weapons ; she has triumphed over Him with His own word ; she has prevailed through her very weakness and unworthiness. *Israel is now her name!* The Saviour sees now here a soul given to Him by the Father, and “him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.” “O woman,” He exclaimed, full of wonder and delight, “great is thy faith !” Great was her affection—the tenderness of her love towards her poor afflicted child ; great was her humility and lowliness, which enabled her to endure so patiently and meekly His silence and apparent harshness ; great was her wisdom—exquisitely delicate mother-wit—which turned His very refusal into a favourable reply ; in all these things she had been great. But Jesus sees the root, the source, the life of it all, and He sees it in her *faith!* She was a true daughter of Abraham, who hoped against hope ; a true daughter of Jacob, who overcame Him who was the source of his strength. “Be it unto thee even as thou wilt.” Oh, to what height does Jesus raise us, and with what rights and

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privileges does He invest us, when we seek Him earnestly, when, not satisfied with merely seeking, we strive to enter in at the strait gate. Faith can hear only glad tidings in every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God, and lives by it; the very words which appear "hard" to reason and the natural mind are the strong and golden links which bind us to His faithful and loving heart. The law only makes faith strike deeper roots in the gospel.

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LUKE XXIII. 39—43.

THE three crosses on Golgotha present to us a view of sinners in their relation to Jesus, the Holy One of Israel, the Saviour and Redeemer of the lost. According to the prophetic word, the Messiah was numbered among transgressors, and crucified between two malefactors. His innocence sheds clear light on their guilt. But though they were alike in sin and transgression, deserving equal punishment, grace visited one of them, and plucked him as a brand out of the fire. He is saved now by grace through faith ; and behold what an awful difference subsists now between the two companions ! The one an unbeliever—he doubts, he mocks, he perishes : the other a believer—he adores, he supplicates, he lives. Jesus remains silent to the one ; to the other He utters words of grace and life.

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Is not this a picture of the world of sinners? We are all guilty and under sentence of righteous judgment. Christ's innocence and holiness only show more clearly and distinctly our unworthiness and pollution. Only grace can save us. Grace saves through faith; it chooses not according to merit, (for is there such?) but according to the good pleasure of His will. It creates within us faith; and looking unto Jesus we are translated from darkness into light, out of death into life. We hear His voice, and are at peace. Unbelief can see no glory, beauty, or comeliness in the crucified One why it should desire Him; no prayer of true repentance ascends from its lips, no word of life enters its heart. Jesus the Saviour, while He opens the kingdom of heaven even to the chief of sinners, is also the Judge of all who die in their transgression.

The narrative leads us—

I. Into the heart of the sinner—it is revealed in his confession and prayer.

II. Into the heart of the Saviour—it is revealed in His word of peace and promise.

I. Jesus had just uttered the wonderful word of compassion, long-suffering, and mercy, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!" Would not such a word from such lips at such a time break even the hardest and most selfish hearts? Would it not prove to them the innocence and

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purity of Jesus—the ingratitude, cruelty, and injustice of their conduct? But the people stood beholding! They could look at the crucified Saviour with dry, tearless eyes—without mourning and lamentation, confession, and cries for mercy. The rulers also with them derided him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God.” They were anxious to deaden the voice of conscience—which testified that Jesus had saved others, and had performed miracles of grace and life among them—by inferring from His present state of suffering and helplessness, that He was not the true Redeemer and King of Israel. See how they blaspheme their whole past history—how they who built the sepulchres of the prophets, are crucifying them afresh! Was Abraham the chosen of God? and yet he lived a stranger and pilgrim in Canaan, and had no possession in the land except the cave of Machpelah, which he bought for Sarah’s burial. Was Joseph the chosen of God? and yet he languished in prison, after having been cruelly treated and betrayed by his own brothers. Was Israel the chosen of God? and yet were they four hundred years in Egypt, the house of bondage, the furnace of affliction. What say ye to Father David, your glory and pride, when he fled from before Saul, and was as a partridge among the mountains, and when he wept and passed over the brook Kidron, and when he said, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Have you forgotten

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the history of Isaiah, and Jeremiah, and of all the prophets? Do you not know that if ye speak thus, you offend against the generation of God's children? (Psalm lxxiii.) But not merely do ye blaspheme the children, you blaspheme the Father—"He hath trusted in God; let him deliver him." They cannot deny that He had trusted always and exclusively in the Lord; often they wished Him to avail Himself of ordinary means, public opinion, the expectation of the day, the enthusiasm of the nation, the complicated interests of political parties, the miraculous powers in His possession; but Jesus only availed Himself of one thing—the guidance of God; He had not where to lay His head, except on His Father's bosom; truth, faith, prayer, love, patience—behold, these were His whole armour and policy. "He trusted in God" as no one else even professed to do; let Him see now, they said, the result of His exaggerated sanctity, His contempt of worldly wisdom and power. Oh, how the heart of Christ was wounded when He saw His people Israel converting the precious jewel of their Messianic hope into worldly, heathen, carnal, God-blaspheming selfishness! He beheld their ingratitude, their hatred, their bitterness, but above all, their utter godlessness. "Corruption of the best is the worst." God's Messiah changed into man's Messiah is a fearful manifestation of what is in man.

It was an ocean where wave upon wave beat

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angrily against that calm Rock—firm and immovable, yet infinitely sensitive and tender. And even the malefactors on His right and left joined in the mockery. They at least, one would have thought, would have remained silent in shame and in fear,—only a few hours were before them, how was it possible to spend them in inflicting pain on a fellow-sufferer? had they not enough to think, to suffer, to dread in the fearful nearness of death? But while they were mocking, one of them was arrested—he felt the falsehood, the baseness, the wretchedness of his words—he was enlightened, and he beheld his sin.

Now it dawned on his mind—rapidly the events of the last days and hours passed before him. He had heard the testimony of Pilate, who declared that he had found no fault in Christ, and of that great company of people, and of women that bewailed and lamented Jesus; many had spoken of the Saviour's innocence, and of the works of love and kindness which He had done among them for three years. He had seen Christ's countenance, in which a pure, calm conscience was so unmistakeably visible; he had seen Him dignified, fearless, composed, yet meek, lowly, gentle; he had heard His words to the daughters of Jerusalem, so solemn, and yet so tender, so majestic and Divine, "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and your children;" he had heard His prayer, revealing a love, a holiness, a strength more than human: "Father forgive

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them!" And while he remembered all this—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, even while he was joining his sinful companion in words of mockery—he was arrested—it flashed across his mind—Jesus is holy, I am guilty. And now see the extent and the depth of his confession; for,

1st, It was confession of sin *before God*. He rebuked the other malefactor, and said, "Dost thou not fear God, seeing that thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds." Not merely did he acknowledge that the punishment which they were now suffering was a just reward of their deeds, of their transgression of the law, but he realized their relation to the supreme Lawgiver and Judge, and felt that it was not enough to fear him who can kill the body, but that there was another tribunal before which they had to appear, and another sentence which they had to await. "Dost thou not *fear God*?" Had he ever asked this question before? Had he not forgotten, ignored, buried it, in order to continue in sin and transgression? For to fear God is the fountain of all obedience and the source of light. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: "I am the Lord thy God," the foundation and root of all commandments. And as forgetfulness of God's existence and character is the source of all sin, so to realize God is the source of all knowledge of sin, it is the quickening principle of the conscience.

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Once this centre is gained all things take their true place : sin is seen as exceeding sinful, the commandment recognized as true and just, condemnation and punishment as righteous and deserved ; we feel it is a bitter thing to sin against God, for the wages of sin is death. See also,

2dly, His self-abasement and self-condemnation. Already, in God's estimation, he is infinitely different from the malefactor to whom he is now speaking, but he regards himself only in the light of his past life and wickedness, and, seeing no difference between himself and his companion in crime, describes his whole past conduct, the result and fruit of his whole earthly existence, as deserved shame, ignominy and destruction : "We receive the due reward of our deeds." Oh, what a summing up of life is here ! The end of the whole pilgrimage, the prize of the struggle, the harvest of the whole year, the reward of a life's toil, the goal reached after a life's exertion of mind, body, and soul—here it is : condemnation ! And that it is so is just. Clearly he sees it, emphatically he acknowledges it : "We indeed justly." It is one thing not to be able to deny it, it is quite another thing to be able to affirm and confess it. He might have buried the bitter thought within his soul ; but notice,

3rdly, His boldness and zeal for truth, and his compassion and love for his sinful companion. Though he is an outcast, yet he cannot but testify that Christ is innocent. The mockery, the unbelief,

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the rage of Pharisees and rulers, can neither intimidate nor blind him. They ought to judge righteous judgment, and to defend the good, and holy, and innocent—but as these are silent, the very stones cry out; even a crucified malefactor must raise up his voice and testify, “This man hath done nothing amiss!” It would perhaps do no good—they would despise and mock him likewise, and perhaps treat him with greater severity and cruelty, now that he had ventured to question their wisdom, and to condemn their conduct—but the sin-convinced soul loveth righteousness, seeks God’s glory, cannot but speak the truth, for it is born of the truth. And as for the malefactor, perhaps it may be a warning to him, opening his eyes to his fearful state of sin and danger, for the sin-convinced soul is no longer selfish, it has begun to love, to have compassion, to seek the good of others, for it is born of love. Such knowledge of sin, we notice,

4thly, Is the work of Divine grace; it is the result of a sight of Christ’s holiness and love. It was the purity, the unselfishness, the mercy of Jesus which had opened his eyes and melted his heart. It was when he saw Him, that he felt he was a sinner and undone. And while thus convinced of Christ’s holiness and glory, and of his own guilt and condemnation, the Spirit had turned him from darkness, and death, and self, to light, and life, and God. For in his confession of sin was faith—that faith which immediately afterwards expressed itself in

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the prayer, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." Wonderful words! He calls Him *Lord!* If it is true at all times that none can call Jesus, Lord, save by the Holy Ghost, it was most emphatically true at that moment, when Jesus was seen in His lowest humiliation and sorrow. It was the work of the Spirit that Simon was able to recognise in Jesus the Christ, the Son of the living God; but notice how the very mention of Christ's sufferings and death makes this rock tremble. (Matt. xvi.) And when the Shepherd was smitten, the sheep were scattered; they were in grief, mourning, doubt, and fear; and even on the third day the two disciples, on their way to Emmaus, described their timid, melancholy, lonely state of mind by saying, "He was condemned to death and crucified; but we trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel." What a narrative of grace have we here! When all is dark around Jesus—when He is crowned with a crown of thorns—when no power of glory and strength declares His Divine authority and dignity—when all the scribes, and Pharisees, and rulers deride and mock Him—when His very disciples are full of fear and unbelief, without light and strength—behold this thief! He is not offended in His cross, but through cross and death, ignominy and reproach, he beholds Christ as the Lord. He recognises Him as the King, he trusts in Him as the Divine Redeemer, he adores him as the Son of

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glory. He saw divinity in His marred visage, the crown of crowns on His bruised and wounded head, a throne of majesty and grace in the accursed tree. "Lord!" It sounded as folly in the ears of unbelieving Israel; but God and the angels, and the blessed Saviour himself heard in it heavenly music. "Lord!" Truly this is faith; for he looked at the things which are not seen—the Spirit testified to him, and, taught by Him, he called Jesus Lord with his lips and with his heart. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven," but verily he who in faith adores the crucified Saviour as his King, hath already entered, for he is taught of God.

"Lord, remember me!" Who am I to speak to Thee, Thou Holy One of Israel? I have no claim on Thy mercy, on Thy favour. My past life, Thou knowest it. Sinful and black it appears to me; what must it be in Thy sight, the spotless and pure Son of God? I have nothing to pay, Lord, Thou knowest. But a few hours, and payment shall be asked of me. And now what shall I say? Lord, remember me! Think of me, and then do what seemeth good in Thy sight. When Thou comest in Thy kingdom, when, after Thy agony and death, the Father will give unto Thee the kingdom, the throne of thy father David—when Thou shalt return a glorious King, and the inscription over the cross shall be the inscription over a throne of majesty and honour, then remember me!

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See in this petition his humility—simply appealing to Christ's mercy, to Christ's good pleasure. See in it his feeling of helplessness, his longing after a Mediator. He knows that he needs an Intercessor, a Reconciler, an Advocate and Daysman. He chooses Jesus as his Defender and Pleader. He commits his cause into His hands. To be remembered by this High Priest, who is undefiled, and separate from sinners, and about to enter into the holy of holies, this is all his desire and hope. And thus God has raised this poor outcast high above all his contemporaries—the last has become the first. His was not merely knowledge and faith, but clear knowledge and gigantic faith. Better than even the apostles he understood the two kingdoms of Christ—the relation between the cross and the crown, the sufferings and the glory. Stronger than even their faith was his confidence and adoring trust in the Saviour, even in His humiliation and shame. More loyal and faithful than even the chosen ambassadors and pillars of the Church, did he confess his heavenly Master, testify of His righteousness, and share His reproach. And more than all, on that cross of loneliest agony and bitterest suffering, our poor earth offered no consolation, no sympathy, no cordial to the Son of Man; but this poor thief, behold, he was a lily among thorns; the beauty and fragrance of this flower, planted by His heavenly Father, was the last joy of Jesus upon earth. Oh for a heart to praise God and to adore Him! How

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manifold is His wisdom! how unsearchable His ways! He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. The disciples are afraid and silenced, He openeth the mouth of a malefactor to show forth His praise.

Faith, in spite of sin and guilt, can rely on Jesus and Jesus alone, and run into His arms—trusting in His love, and risking all on the good pleasure of His will. This is not man's doing, but the Father's gift. A Judas may be three years with the Saviour, enjoying His instruction, witnessing His miracles, beholding His life of holiness, and yet betray Him, and end a thief and robber; but this thief in a few moments is changed into a believer, a saint, a confessor, and apostle. "Have we not Abraham for our father?" was the secret hope of Christ's enemies; but, behold, the criminal whom they despised was a true son of him who staggered not at the apparent and visible difficulties, but relied on the word and promise.

Time doth not exist for God: His Spirit can create in a moment what in others is effected only gradually and slowly. For who can reach a higher point than this sinner, who was so suddenly converted? To fear God, to acknowledge our sin, to submit to the justice of our condemnation, to turn to Christ, to call Him Lord, to surrender ourselves entirely to Him, to cry for His mercy and mediation, to believe, to love, to hope, to confess and suffer Christ's reproach—verily these are the fruits

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of the Spirit, against such there is no law. Thus, although no time was given him to go and bring forth fruit on earth, to verify his profession by his godly life, and to prove the genuineness of his conversion by a holy and pure walk, yet are we clearly taught in this case also that to believe is to be born again, that faith purifies the heart. No terrors of Sinai could effect what the love of Golgotha effected; and, in receiving Jesus, this transgressor of the law had been delivered not merely from its curse, but also from the spirit of hatred and opposition to God's commandment, and from his former inability to keep and cherish it. The other malefactor had desired to be delivered from pain and death, and, doubtless, if Christ or some one else had taken him from the cross, he would have returned to his former sins and pleasures. This man desired not life, but God's favour, not deliverance from pain, but from guilt; his heart was renewed and enlarged, and thus, in God's estimation, he honoured and loved the law.

The petition is uttered—what will be its result? Joseph had once said to his companion in tribulation, “Think on me, when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness I pray thee unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house,” but in the day of prosperity the poor sufferer was forgotten. But the Lord heard, and He remembered. The narrative leads us—

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II. Into the heart of the Saviour.

Wonderful was the prayer of the dying thief; but still more wonderful is the reply of Christ. Notice,

1st, The very fact that Jesus replied; and see in His wondrous love and tenderness to the bruised reed and smoking flax. He had remained silent when false witnesses rose up against Him; when Herod wished to see some miracle done by Him, and questioned with Him in many words, He answered him nothing; when Pilate asked, "What is truth?" Christ did not speak; when the soldiers mocked and reviled Him, He opened not His lips. But scarcely had this poor sinner asked His favour and intercession when He delivered him from all uncertainty and fear by His word of power and love. Jesus was suffering unspeakable agony, yet even then His heart was full of sympathy, compassion, and tenderness. Not for a moment can He forget the great work of salvation which His Father had given Him to do; and that love which glows in His soul for that Church which God had given Him for His inheritance is so strong that not even the floods of death can drown it—that not even the agony of the cross can make Him forget it. Seest thou not here, that He is the true High Priest, "ever living to make intercession for us," ever remembering us in our infirmity and helplessness, ever ready and able to "save even to the uttermost." "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have

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compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are *continually* before me," (Isa. xlix. 15, 16). He is indeed a Saviour. And if He listened to a sinner's supplication when, on the cross, His soul was burdened with the great and agonising work of atonement which was before Him, how much more will He incline His ear now, when He is "exalted a Prince and Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sin"—when He is in infinite glory and blessedness, rejoicing and satisfied to see of the travail of His soul? He listened to the sinner's prayer; and, oh, no voice of angel from heaven would have been so refreshing to His loving heart! For He heard in it the answer of His heavenly Father to His cry, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"—He beheld in it the beginning of the fulfilment of the word, "And I, if I be lifted up from earth, will draw all men unto me"—He enjoyed in it a foretaste of the joy set before Him, of that paradise where forgiven and renewed sinners see His glory, and rest in His love. What encouragement is here given us to approach Jesus! The very cross was changed into a throne of grace. He cannot be silent, for He is the Word of God—the declaration of love and life; therefore say, "Unto thee will I cry, Lord, my rock; be not silent to me: lest, if thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit."

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But we are struck,

2dly, With the fulness of Christ's answer. He is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think." He gives not according to our poor petitions and timid desires, "but according to the riches of His glory." It is said, "Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy;" but it is added, "and with him is plenteous redemption." The command is given, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord." The promise is held out, "and he will have mercy upon him;" but it is added, "and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon," (or, as in the original, multiply to pardon). The sinner had said, "Remember me!" Christ replied, "Not merely will I remember thee in mercy, in forgiving love, in prevailing intercession, but thou shalt be with me in paradise, enjoying my presence and resting in my blessing." The sinner had said, "Remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." Christ replied, "Not in a future far-distant—not merely in the kingdom, when the times appointed by the Father shall be fulfilled—but even this day, immediately, shalt thou enter into my rest." "Remember me;" this implied, consider my case and decide with clemency. But Christ's assurance, "in paradise," declared the forgiveness of sin—full and entire acceptance.

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When Christ gives, He gives all, for He gives Himself. As we cannot accept His pardon, His light, His peace, without accepting Himself, so He cannot rest satisfied with our safety and freedom from suffering. He must have and possess us, and bring us into fellowship with Himself and the enjoyment of His presence. He has redeemed us unto Himself, as it is written : “ Christ loved the Church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that he might *present it to himself* a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing ; but that it should be holy and without blemish ” (Eph. v. 25—27). And therefore it is, that while the sinner asks mercy, the Saviour brings an abundant pardon, plenteous redemption, even an everlasting love, and union full of blessedness and glory. A declaration so overwhelmingly great and joyous requires strong confirmation. Therefore we notice,

3dly, The majestic tone of certainty and authority in Christ’s answer.

The troubled conscience, the wounded heart, seeks certainty, truth—clear and authoritative, sure and reliable. As long as we are not in earnest we can rest satisfied with conjectures and probabilities ; we can build on human authority, venerable traditions, and the opinions of the majority. But wherever there is sincere and real anxiety, we long after a solid, immovable rock, on which we can stand safely and firmly. In Israel only God has revealed Him-

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self, in Judah He is well known ; whereas in the wilderness of heathen life, men have had beautiful dreams concerning Him, not without elements of truth, for they also felt after Him ; and among the people, who think that reason is light-creative, whereas it is only light-receptive, many have reared ingenious and elaborate edifices with great boldness and confidence ; but they have found that what they had built was built upon sand, and one philosopher became only the gravedigger of his predecessor. Light is in God,—truth comes from Him ; when we see God's light, when we hear God's truth, we are satisfied : we are conscious, that essentially it differs from all the substitutes with which man has endeavoured to console himself in his darkness and loneliness. “Therefore my people shall know my name : therefore they shall know in that day *that I am He that doth speak* ; behold, it is **1** !” (Isaiah lii. 6).

Hence His commands and His promises are possessed, and felt to be possessed, of infinite authority and certainty. “The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it,”—“Thus saith the Lord,” behold, this is a rock on which we can rest, it can never be moved. And as Jehovah spake thus in the old-covenant times—revealing in His immutability the very foundation of Israel's hope, salvation, and glory,—even so Jesus, the only-begotten of the Father, spake in like manner when He was on earth. “Verily, verily, I say unto thee,” is the expression

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the Saviour uses when He speaks of the laws of the heavenly kingdom, of the purpose of His Father, of the eternal destinies of the souls of men, of the nature of His work. He speaks of God, of Himself, of heaven, of eternal life, as the true and faithful Witness, as the mouth of the Lord, as One who came down from heaven, even from the bosom of the Father. His sheep, who hear His voice, are delighted with its tone of heavenly clearness and certainty; they have heard many other voices, but would not follow them; but when Jesus speaks, His "Verily, verily, I say unto thee," is music to their soul—they hear, believe, and follow.

But Jesus is not merely the truth because He is from God, and spake not of Himself, but He is the Amen of all God's promises, because only through and in Him they are fulfilled. He Himself is the promise. For His sake, and through His mediation—by the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and the new life of Christ breathed into us—do God's gracious promises become ours rightfully and really; and, therefore, when Jesus confirms the hope of eternal blessedness, it is not merely His lips which declare, "Verily, verily," but His life of obedience, His sufferings and death, His resurrection and glory.

See, now, how Jesus assured the dying thief of his acceptance: "Doubt not; for I, whom thou rightly recognisest as Lord, now in this solemn hour do give thee the whole assurance of my royal,

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my Divine word." He confirmed His declaration, though never guile was found in His mouth—though never promise which He had given remained unfulfilled; but because He sympathises with man's frail, timid heart, He offers this additional encouragement, comfort, and sealing assurance of His grace. There were many elements of doubt, but Christ dissipated them all. Was the dying man's repentance sincere? was it real sorrow for sin? did he turn to God with his heart? Jesus assured him of it by His reply. "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" was Christ's question to His disciple; but what can the poor, backsliding apostle say, but "Lord, *thou knowest* that I love thee." We have to ask the question of Christ when He puts it to us. The reality of our repentance can only be known by us in the merciful answer of forgiveness and love. When doubts oppress thee concerning thy sincerity, and the reality of thy prayer for redemption, think not that thou canst obtain any certainty except from the lips of Jesus saying, "Thy faith hath saved thee."

Doubt rested in the penitent's mind as to his forgiveness, as to the time of his acceptance, as to the extent of his pardon; but no words could express it more clearly, more emphatically, more fully, more unmistakeably, than the Saviour's reply; he was pardoned, nay, loved, nay, received, even that very moment, and for all eternity. There was no condition annexed; for we notice,

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4thly, That Christ's answer excludes not only all uncertainty, but also all boasting.

Boasting? What could a poor sinner like the thief have wherein to boast? nothing in the past, certainly, and also nothing in the future. There is no future before him in which he could obey the law,—observe the commandments and precepts of God. The thought of atoning for the past by future amendment could not enter his mind; the hope of obtaining God's favour through his future exertions and self-denial could not for a moment occupy his soul. In no way could self for a moment think of sharing the work of redemption and its glory with Jesus. And thus it ought to be with all sinners. For it is not by works of the law, but by faith *alone!* Quite irrespective of all thy doings, past and future, learn that thy only Saviour is a crucified Jesus. See the waters behind thee, before thee; think of nothing but thy sin and helplessness, and Christ's righteousness, mercy, and strength. And do not be frightened by the objections of Antinomianism, and dangerous extreme. Believe it, Moses has no greater joy than to see thee hemmed in between mount Sinai and mount Golgotha; believe it, John the Baptist, verily no Antinomian, has no greater joy than to behold thee, a poor, wretched, naked, leprous sinner, believing and going just as thou art to the Bridegroom, the Lamb of God, the Redeemer of Israel, (John iii. 29.) And the more we are delivered from the slavish

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spirit of distrust, unbelief, and selfish fear, the more we rely exclusively and joyfully on the righteousness of God, the more do we obey Him and serve Him with gladness and singleness of heart.

A salvation so full, so sure, so free, we notice,
5thly, Is the gift of a Saviour of infinite power.

“King of the Jews” was written over His cross, and the inscription is awaiting still its glorious fulfilment. But Jesus is also the King of saints, the Prince of peace, the Redeemer of His people. All power is given unto Him in heaven and on earth : no man cometh unto the Father but by Him : He alone, according to the eternal counsel, can open the gates of the heavenly kingdom. He spoke on the cross, first as the compassionate High Priest, then as the glorious and all-powerful King. His divinity shines forth on the cross, not to defend, comfort, or save Himself, but to bring peace and consolation to the sinner. When He said, “Thou shalt be with me in paradise,” He thereby declared that His power and authority are supreme there. We see from it, moreover, that it is only *through* Him that the sinner can be *with Him*. Because *in Christ* by a true and living faith, he must needs be with Christ. The Saviour receives into His paradise the very youngest believers, who have trusted in Him only a few hours or moments ; but we do not read that dead souls are quickened into life in another world: the second Adam is a quickening spirit unto all who are born again during their life on earth. We

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should not endeavour to be wise above what is written; we need not be dogmatic, or delight ourselves in harsh declarations, especially where there is neither a Divine message to be delivered nor a practical purpose to be gained; but surely no reader of Scripture can deny that the message of God to us is—Jesus has power *on earth* to forgive sin; and that if we are to be with Christ in paradise, we must first be in Christ even now, during the accepted time, the day of salvation.

Christ's power—forgiving sin and promising blessedness—was manifested in a glorious manner even while He was on the cross: how much more now, that He has suffered, died, risen, and ascended? He was the Lamb without spot or blemish, fore-ordained before the foundation of the world; through Him, from the very beginning, grace and life came to sinners; and while He was on earth, He declared pardon and acceptance on the ground of His approaching sufferings and death. But now He has entered the holy of holies as our High Priest, and we are able to say with Paul, "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us," (Rom. viii. 34.) By the resurrection from the dead Christ was declared to be the Son of God with power, (Rom. i. 4;) and by it we are begotten again to a lively hope—we also become the children of God in truth and reality. "When we were enemies,

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we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son;" but do not rest here—continue with Paul, "much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life," (Rom. v. 10.) His resurrection and ascension are not merely our justification and translation into heavenly places with Him, but His resurrection-life is ours; as it is written, "Because I live, ye shall live also," (John xiv. 19;) "The life of Jesus is made manifest in our body," (2 Cor. iv. 10, 11;) "And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places," (Eph. i. 19, 20.)

Therefore it is that the risen and glorified Saviour refers to His resurrection in the Revelation which God gave unto Him to shew unto the beloved disciple. He calls Himself the first-begotten from the dead, and He reveals His glory as a glory of grace and life to His people, by saying, "Fear not; I am the first and the last; I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death."

Let us turn now, in the last place, to the promise and prospect held out in the words, "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." It embraces three elements—1. Paradise; 2. Paradise with Christ; 3. The immediate entrance into this blessed state. By paradise is doubtless meant a state of peace and of blessedness. The garden of Eden was a type of a

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blissful and pure life, free from pain and sorrow, danger and toil, sin and temptation. However vague and dim Israel's knowledge may have been, there can be no doubt, both from Scripture and tradition, that paradise conveyed to them the idea of a blessed existence in the unseen world.

But the promise was heightened and brightened when the Saviour added, "Thou shalt be *with me* in paradise;" for doubtless this child of God had already begun to feel, "Whom have I in heaven but thee?" A state of repose, tranquillity, and safety, without the enjoyment of Christ, would certainly, to a believer, appear greatly inferior to a state of struggle, labour, danger, in conscious communion with the Lord. God's favour is better than life. Jesus therefore shows the true blessedness of paradise, by adding the precious words, "with Me." This is enough. Even while we are on the troubled, stormy sea, Jesus says, "It is I; be not afraid;" even in the fiery furnace, while He is with us we are safe; how much more may we rest satisfied, and look forward with calm, humble trust and expectation to that paradise where Jesus, according to the promise, is with all who rely on him as their only Saviour?

And this entrance into communion with Christ in paradise is to be immediate. The angels, Jesus Himself told us, carried the soul of Lazarus into Abraham's bosom—at once he was brought to rest and consolation. It is clear from Scripture that our

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full salvation, our complete redemption, is connected with the coming of our blessed Saviour, who shall change our vile bodies and fashion them like unto His glorious body, who shall be manifest as our life when we also shall appear with Him in glory. True, it is to this great promise, to this great day, that Christ's people are directed; but let us hold fast the consolation given to us in Scripture concerning the immediate period after our death, if it should please the Lord to allow us to die before Christ's coming. It is not a state of passive rest and unconsciousness. Paul would not have said of unconscious sleep, however peaceful and tranquil, that it is *far better* than living in the enjoyment of prayer and praise, of Christ's word and favour, and in the active service of God, and in promoting His glory. He might have rested satisfied with such a prospect of mere rest if it had been declared to him by the revelation of God, but he never surely would have called it "far better." He had a desire to depart and be with Christ. "We are confident," he said, in another passage, "and willing rather to be absent from the body and be present with him," (2 Cor. v. 8;) in both places showing clearly that after death he expected a nearer and more blessed fellowship with his beloved Saviour. And this hope is perfectly compatible with the other hope, so often expressed by the inspired apostle, "waiting for God's Son from heaven."

Such was Christ's word of power, love, peace,

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and consolation. What must he have felt to whom it was addressed! He was now suffering the death which had justly been awarded him as the fruit of his sin; he was now enjoying the life which a sin-forgiving, pardoning God had so mercifully bestowed. According to his merit, he was not even worthy to continue an inhabitant of this earth; according to grace, he was to enter the blessed region of paradise. Now he was surrounded by sinners who mocked and despised Jesus; but soon he was to be with Abraham and all the faithful who adore and love the Messiah! He had entered into a new and Divine life. The cross inflicted pangs and agonies; but was not Jesus near him, and had he not the prospect of a speedy deliverance and entrance into perfect liberty and rest? Strong was his faith when he beheld Christ's royal glory and power, at a time when even friends and disciples had become doubtful: had his faith to undergo a still more severe trial, when, in the midst of darkness, he heard the voice of the Saviour, his strength, crying out: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" But even through such a trial, than which none could ever have been greater, the infinite power and faithfulness of God kept him, and soon he beheld what Jesus had promised.

There were many signs and wonders which accompanied the greatest and most awful event ever witnessed on earth—the crucifixion of the Son of God. There was darkness over the land, the

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earth did quake, the rocks rent, the graves were opened ; but greater than all these was the faith of the dying thief, and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ which appeared to him ! And this sign has been seen by thousands, and it has taught them clearly the abounding mercy of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

It has often been remarked, that this is a solitary example in Scripture of a man being converted at the hour of death—there being one such instance that none may *despair*, and only one, that none may *presume*. This is very true, yet is it not still truer that the story is meant so to shut us up unto Christ as that the future with its possibilities is entirely excluded, and we behold nothing but our guilt and helplessness and the fulness of a gracious and Divine Saviour? Is not this the sum and substance—that to remain without Christ is presumption *in all*; the Pharisees and self-righteous Israelites were without peace and safety because they believed not : but to cling to Christ is presumption *in none*, for even the most sinful and guilty Christ will in no wise cast out ? And therefore, if the Spirit illumines this remarkable story to our souls, we—even the very youngest and most life-full—shall behold ourselves, like the dying malefactor, surrounded by waves and billows on every side, and only one Refuge nigh,—a crucified Saviour.

Yet, let it be remembered, that while here God has given encouragement to the most guilt-laden

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and timid soul, the boldest and most reckless may be deterred by the fatal end of the unconverted thief, who continued to despise and reject Jesus. The one was taken and the other left. Did Jesus reply to his words of unbelief, worldliness, mockery? Jesus was silent. And to die alone—without the word of the loving, sympathising, saving Lord, the resurrection and the life—without His assurance of peace, His voice of love, His promise of blessedness—to die with a silent Christ, or without Christ, is death indeed.

When Christ saith, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me : and I give unto them eternal life ; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand !” may it be ours to reply, “The Lord is my Shepherd ; I shall not want. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil : for thou art with me ; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”

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LUKE XIX. 1—10.

“ **W**HEN Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand : and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or our adversaries ? And he said, Nay ; but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant ? And the captain of the Lord’s host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot ; for the place whereon thou standest is holy.”

It was the same Captain of the host of the Lord who, many centuries after, entered and passed through Jericho ; but He came now as the Prince of peace to open the eyes of the blind, and to give deliverance and liberty to the captive.

After the miraculous destruction of the city, a fearful curse had been pronounced against the man

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that should attempt to rebuild it ; and we read that in the days of Ahab, Hiel the Bethelite built Jericho ; he laid the foundation thereof in his first-born, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son. But God afterwards blessed the city ; He blessed it with outward prosperity, with beauty and wealth ; He blessed it with higher gifts—the sons of the prophets abode within its walls.

In the days of Christ, Jericho was a city of priests ; thus, in the narrative of the merciful Samaritan, we read of a priest and a Levite going down from Jerusalem to the city of palm-trees. It was also a city of publicans, which is accounted for not merely by the various products of the neighbourhood, but because Jericho commanded the passage of the river Jordan. The population thus presented a striking and interesting contrast of contemplative religionists, and busy, active traders. But far more interesting and attractive than the aspect of its inhabitants, was its natural beauty and loveliness. The valley of the Jordan, fertilised here by the pure and healthful water of Elisha's spring, was a most favourable picture of the land flowing with milk and honey.* Palm-trees, balsam and rose

* “ As we drew in towards the hills of Judah, we found ourselves all of a sudden in the midst of corn-fields, and surrounded on all sides with an exuberant vegetation. How is this ? What can have produced, on the edge of such a desolate region, this green and smiling oasis ? How delightful to discover the source of all this fertility and beauty in the fountain of Elisha. How vividly did the

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trees flourished here, and, as the name itself indicates, it was a city of fragrance. "In our narrative, however, Jericho's beauty and glory is represented by the more humble sycamore-tree, which bore that day a wonderful fruit of the most precious kind." *

It is the publican Zaccheus to whom our attention is directed. We know in what estimation the publicans were held by the people; and as the Saviour has so frequently and so emphatically expressed His sympathy with this despised class, it may not be superfluous to be reminded of passages in which He confirms the justice of the opinion which was generally entertained of them: "If ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?" (Matt. v. 46.) "And if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican, (Matt. xviii. 17.) "Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the

fact recall the words, 'And the men of the city (of Jericho) said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth; but the water is naught, and the ground barren. And he said, Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein: and they brought it to him. And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land. So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha which he spake,' (2 Kings ii. 19—22.)—*Buchanan: Notes of a Clerical Furlough*, p. 291.

* Lange.

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harlots go into the kingdom of God before you,"* (Matt. xxi. 31.)

The publican's profession exposed him to temptation in many ways. He was a gatherer of the Roman public imposts. "Not, however, as now, when all is fixed, and the government pays the gatherer of the taxes. The Roman publican paid a certain sum to the government for the privilege of collecting them, and then indemnified himself and appropriated what overplus he could from the taxes which he gathered. There was, therefore, evidently a temptation to overcharge, and a temptation to oppress. To overcharge, because the only redress the payer of the taxes had was an appeal to law, in which his chance was small before a tribunal where the judge was a Roman, and the accused an official of the Roman government. A temptation to oppress, because the threat of the law was nearly certain to extort a bribe."†

But the chief temptation presented to the publicans was the general estimation in which they were held. Pharisees and priests passed them by with contempt and disdain—the people looked upon them as excluded from the religious life and communion of the nation, as dead to all religious duties and privileges, as immersed in worldliness and love of gain,

* With what humble gratitude must Matthew, once at the receipt of custom, now an apostle of the King of Israel, have written these sentences.

† Robertson (of Brighton)—Sermons, I., p. 51.

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without conscience, fear of God, and devotional aspirations. If such was the general opinion, it followed, almost inevitably, that the publicans acquiesced in it, that they looked upon it as a fixed necessity, as a fate, that in their position of life and calling they could not fear God and keep His commandments. And as no credit was given them for honesty and uprightness, the love of approbation and the principle of self-respect, which act as powerful incentives where no deeper and loftier motives exist, had no room in their case. Passing from morality to religion, can we wonder that this class was totally estranged from the temple service, the Pharisees and scribes, when, as a picture of the times, our Saviour brings before us a religious man praying thus:—“God, I thank thee that I am not like this publican.” And although it may not have frequently happened in this concrete form, that a poor, penitent, trembling publican, venturing into the assembly of the righteous, heard himself thus described as the dark background to set off the brightness of Phari-saïc virtue, was not the whole tone and atmosphere of religious society such as to deter most effectually “the publicans and sinners?” What a hardening influence was thus exerted it is difficult to conceive. When men, who were in possession of a great, an inestimable advantage and benefit, instead of showing sympathy and compassion, tenderness and love, to those who were destitute of it—willingness and anxiety to impart it to them, readiness to meet them

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half-way—showed nothing but pride and haughtiness, selfishness and contempt, the desire and longing which may have been roused in some hearts were likely to be chilled and converted into bitterness and anger. Having no character to support, how can we expect among them morality?—having no fellowship or encouragement to expect from the pious and devout, how can we look among them for religion?

And yet it is clear that their very difficulty was blessed to many, and raised them high above scribes and Pharisees. Suppose a publican was led by the Spirit to feel his sin, guilt, and unworthiness, and to long after peace with God, and a holy, godly, spiritual life; suppose the worldliness, avarice, cruelty, sensuality, forgetfulness of God and the interests of eternity, which characterise his companions, grieve and vex his soul daily; suppose that he feels within a thirst after the living God—without, an oppressive, crushing burden and weight,—and Pharisees, and priests, and Levites, and temple services all seem utterly inaccessible to him. Then, indeed, he might begin to think of a righteousness which is better and truer than that of the scribes and Pharisees, and wait for a love which, while it is purer and holier, is also more compassionate and sympathetic. Yet while brought to this elevation, where they waited for redemption and help, how sad was their condition! I can imagine a dull, gloomy hopelessness taking possession of such an earnest,

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conscientious, God-seeking publican. He is silent and reserved, for who understands him, who would even believe him ? His mental struggles, his bitter sorrows, his daily cross, he has to bear it all alone. The reproach of dishonesty, of irreligion, he must endure from men who do not know his scrupulous, anxious integrity, his constant, ceaseless prayer of heart. And, what is worst of all, his soul has no sure peace. It is as if he were under a curse, a ban. The atmosphere is heavy, he cannot breathe ; he is oppressed by the majority, the massive weight of historical associations and authority. Oh for sympathy, for fellowship, for light—for a strong man to bring deliverance and liberty to the captive, to bring his soul into a large, roomy place !

It is true, a publican, like all other people, required forgiveness of sin. And such a publican as we are speaking of felt it. But it was not so much forgiveness of sin that he needed, as a Forgiver, a living One—holy yet loving, pure yet sympathising—One to draw him into the communion of saints, into the fellowship of light.

Doubtless Matthew, and the other publicans whom he invited to meet Jesus, when he gave a feast after being called to the apostleship, were thus prepared for the Saviour. We cannot wonder that the Pharisees were both astonished and annoyed at what must have appeared to them inexplicable and incongruous—a Prophet and righteous One among the unholy and unclean.

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Such an honest, sincere, God-fearing man we conclude from the history before us, Zaccheus to have been. He was even then in the habit of practising self-restraint and scrupulous honesty, though, of course, as a publican, his riches were attributed to extortion and fraud. And just because the temptations to which he was exposed had, by God's grace, not overcome and hardened him, he was burdened with a sorrow which was only known to the Searcher of hearts. Jesus was coming to Jericho, and Zaccheus had doubtless heard of Him. He was anxious to see Him. This was not mere curiosity, but it was an ardent desire to behold the countenance of Him of whom he had heard that He had brought peace, and life, and strength of holiness to many a despised and outcast prisoner, who, like himself, was groaning in bondage.

The desire was strong and all-absorbing, therefore he overcame all difficulties. Jesus was followed by a large multitude ; and Zaccheus was small of stature. So may we be : intellectually, not able to see the force of arguments, to compare, combine, infer ; or of weak or irretentive memory, or of languid and dull imagination, or, as the manner of speaking is, "deficient in veneration ;" and in every way—mind, heart, conscience, affections—feel ourselves "small of stature," so that we cannot see Jesus as He is passing. But is there not everywhere some sycamore-tree to be found ? And, regardless of all appearance, and forgetful of the remarks of the people, to which he

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exposed himself, Zaccheus, bent on the attainment of his object, climbed up into the tree, awaiting there the approach of the Saviour.

Who can fully know or describe what Zaccheus felt now, while he was expecting Christ? Vaguely, perhaps, and indistinctly his past life, with its sins and sorrows, would pass before him—longings and hope, misgivings and trembling expectations filled his soul. Yet, perhaps, he should merely see Jesus, and then all would be still as before! Would his captivity ever end? Would his chains be ever taken from him? his burden ever removed?

In the crowd which now approached, none knew him save One, even that Jesus who is the Searcher of hearts, who beheld Nathanael under the fig-tree, and who, whenever and wherever a soul has even the faintest desire after His love and blessing, exclaims, "Somebody hath touched me!" "When Jesus came nigh to the place, he looked up." Zaccheus was anxious to see the Saviour, but more anxious was He who had come to seek and to save that which is lost, to see Zaccheus. *The seeker was sought*, and also found. "Zaccheus, make haste and come down, for this day I must abide at thy nouse."

Zaccheus! The call is personal. Fixing His eye upon him, and singling him out from the crowd, and calling him by name, the Saviour leaves it not doubtful both that He knows him and is acquainted with his ways and wants, and that He intends to

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Speak and to deal with him individually. Not until we hear ourselves called by name do we truly hear the voice of Jesus. While we listen to the truths of God's Word, the descriptions of sinners in their lost and helpless condition, the invitations addressed to the guilty and wretched, the weary and heavy-laden, the poor in spirit and thirsty, we hear many names; but when the Lord himself calls us, we hear our own name, as distinctly as Zaccheus heard his, pronounced by the lips of Jesus. At first we may be like Samuel in the temple. It was the Lord who had called him by name, but he imagined it was only Eli. Thus do we hear a voice—a voice powerful and full of majesty—which rouses us from our slumber, which causes us to go to the priest and inquire; but we think it was only man's earnestness and solemnity which impressed us. "It was an exact description of my heart, of my state!" True, because it was not Eli, but the Lord who had spoken. Therefore, return unto thy still, quiet, lonely chamber, and, in secret, say to Him, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

Have you and Jesus come to the same conclusion as to what your name is? Jesus knows you, and therefore He knows your real name. Because we do not know ourselves, we do not recognise our name when Jesus utters it. But when the Spirit brings us to be of the same mind with Jesus, we hear Him call us by a name which exactly describes what we are.

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Make haste, said the Saviour ; because Jesus does not wish to keep the sinner waiting in suspense and in danger. If thy name is Zaccheus, make haste ! No more preparation is required ; a sinner and a Saviour meet—behold, all is perfect, all things are ready. When the heavenly vision appears, then be immediately obedient, and confer not with flesh and blood. “*Make haste*,” is what Jesus says to all whom He has called by name ; delay would only show our unbelief and distrust—would only reveal our coldness and apathy. Why should we stay or linger when Divine love and goodness call and invite us ?

And come down ! The sinner and Christ must meet ; therefore, they who are above must come down, they who are below must come up. To the proud and self-reliant, the Saviour says, “*Come down ;*” to the timid and poor afflicted ones, the Saviour calls, “*Come up :*” as for Zaccheus, though literally he required to be commanded to descend—spiritually and really, Jesus had come to lift him out of the valley in which he was languishing, and to put him on a mountain height, to enjoy the light and beauty of God’s free favour and bounty.

“*For to-day I must abide in thy house.*” The Saviour is going to befriend the despised publican, to fulfil the desire and longing of this poor, burdened soul. In all Jericho, He knows of nothing more important for Him to do, and of no dwelling-place so fit an abode for Him as the house of Zaccheus

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“I must abide!” for His heart was constrained by Divine love. But more than the overflowing, yearning love of the Saviour is expressed by the word *must*; for it signifies the eternal purpose of God, the counsel of His will, the decree of mercy, free, sovereign, and sure, which was now about to be realized. As He had needs to pass through Samaria, He had now needs to pass through Jericho. Jesus calls the sinner by name; Jesus tells the sinner to rejoice, because his name is written in the book of life. First He calls us by the name which His Spirit has enabled us to appropriate, and on hearing *that* name, we draw near. If He called all whose names are written in the book of life to draw near, none of His sheep would come; the proud and self-righteous probably would. But because He cries out: “Lost world, perishing sinners, impure and defiled, naked and blind,” His sheep hear His voice. They come, and afterwards they receive a new name; they discover that their names are written in heaven; they believe the Shepherd in this also, and rejoice.

Zaccheus heard it, and as if Luke felt the joy and eagerness and elasticity with which he obeyed the Saviour’s command, he writes, “And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully.” No wonder! For here was given to him exceeding abundantly above all his hopes and expectations. Though Jesus knew him, yet He was willing to be his guest. Here, for the first time, was a ray of

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heavenly light, of Divine love. The winter is gone, the darkness is past, the prison doors are open, the fetters burst. He is free!—with what joy does he receive Him!

We are not told what happened during the few hours that Jesus abode in the house of Zaccheus. What confessions, what outpourings of heart, what expressions of gratitude, of adoration, of joy,—what words of counsel, instruction, guidance, consolation,—we know them not. Enough we know, Jesus and Zaccheus had met; the Saviour had found the sheep, the sheep had found its Shepherd. The Friend of sinners was rejoicing over a saved soul; Zaccheus believed, loved, and was filled with “joy unspeakable and full of glory.” Here was, indeed, a harvest of joy after a seedtime of tears. The Pharisees and scribes condemned, despised, ignored him. Jesus receives, loves, honours him. The temple is closed against him: behold his own abode is now more glorious than the temple, for Israel’s glory is now inhabiting it. He was an outcast, but now he is a friend of the King; he was without the ordinances in which Divine favour is announced and sealed, but now the Saviour, heaven-descended, has brought him pardon and reconciliation, and the pledge of eternal bliss. Lonely he had been, and without religious fellowship; but now he has become a citizen in the great kingdom of heaven, and a thousand companions and brothers are his.

While there was thus great joy in the house of

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Zaccheus—a joy in which the inhabitants of heaven sympathised—they who saw it, the whole multitude, with the exception of Christ's true disciples, murmured, saying that He was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. Jesus is never so much hated as when He reveals Himself as a Saviour. Not when He shows forth His power and majesty, not when He manifests the purity and holiness of His kingdom, but when He saith to the sick of the palsy, "Thy sins are forgiven thee," they said within their hearts that He was guilty of blasphemy; when He allowed the woman, who was a sinner, to weep before Him, and kiss His feet, they felt convinced that He was not a Divinely-commissioned prophet; when He sat down with Matthew and the publicans, they murmured and were displeased. One reason of their murmuring was because Christ took away from them all boasting, all their imaginary superiority and excellence. Jesus said unto all, to a man like Nicodemus as much as to the vilest and most despised outcast, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God;" the righteousness, the outwardly irreproachable life, the regular, scrupulous, religious observances of which they were so proud, and in which they trusted, were, in Christ's estimation, utterly worthless and unavailing, as far as the heavenly, Divine life is concerned; He had taught this distinctly in His doctrinal discourses, in His parables, in His replies to the scribes and Pharisees,

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and most distinctly and clearly in His acts, for He received publicans and taught them, and preached to them the kingdom of God.

But although self-righteousness was probably the deepest real reason of the murmurs of the people, what appeared on the surface was their righteous indignation at the sinful avarice, injustice, and cruelty of the rich tax-gatherer. Doubtless they were commenting on his ill-gotten wealth, on his unjust and offensive extortions and cruel treatment of the poor. His whole past life, or rather a life such as they imagined one in his position must necessarily lead, was described and discussed, and indignation, contempt, and condemnation expressed in no measured terms. Poor Zaccheus! He had just heard for the first time in his sad life the melody of heaven; the sunshine of love, trust, and sympathy had irradiated his dwelling; a song of gratitude and praise had filled his soul; when dark, heartless, and bitter suspicions mar the harmony and cloud the brightness which now visited him. Poor Zaccheus! He had just begun to breathe freely, being delivered from the oppressive burden which had weighed him to the ground; and now behold, a thousand hands are ready to fasten it again, and crush him under it. He had only tasted the blessedness of friendship, confidence, and love, when again a hundred tongues hiss into his ear, "Thou art an outcast!" "And Zaccheus stood;" he arose, he stood forth and spoke unto the Lord, not

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unto his accusers. Yes, he can stand—the judgment of man, which is according to outward appearance, transgressed not merely charity, but also truth—he is able to stand and defend himself. “Behold, Lord,” he said unto Jesus—for the opinion of the multitude, of the whole world, weighs less than the dust in the balance—“the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.” He had been for a long time endeavouring to be honest before God, to be faithful in the riches which were entrusted to his care, to be a conscientious steward in God’s house. Some people are charitable on impulse, by fits and starts, others are charitable from ostentation. But Zaccheus had made it his thought, his duty, and, aided by the law of Moses, he had fixed the amount of his charity—nay, far exceeded the limit which was prescribed by the letter of the law. Notice, moreover, he gave alms secretly, not to be seen and praised of men; so that, notwithstanding his great beneficence, public opinion had not changed about him—he was still suspected and despised. See how superior Zaccheus is to the Pharisees in honesty, both as regards its extent and nature. The scribes and Pharisees paid tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, but they devoured widows’ houses; they gave alms, but they sounded a trumpet before them, that all the world might know their kindness of heart and munificence. But because Zaccheus was a publican, from whom

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religious people kept aloof, and who was banished from the assemblies of the righteous, they doubted not his living in dishonesty and fraud. True, his temptations were great, there were often complicated cases which proved snares, and sometimes even the truly honest and sincere man does allow himself to be blinded and misled. But knowing and feeling the difficulty of his position, and the frailty of his nature, he observed the law of restitution as instituted by Moses.

But, it may be objected, Does it not seem as if Zaccheus was representing himself here as a righteous man that needeth no repentance? By no means. He knew his sin, he felt his unworthiness; but in the sense in which men thought him guilty and wicked, his conscience testified that he was clear. But, the question may be asked, What was the great significance of Christ's visit to his house? Is it not clear that all the endeavours of Zaccheus to lead an honest and upright life, all his integrity and charitable works, were not able to give him peace, and take off the burden which was oppressing him? Therefore it is that Jesus, in reply to his self-defence, said unto him, "This day is salvation come to this house!" Good works were not able to save him, but Christ had brought salvation, even His favour and love. And the reason why Jesus singled out Zaccheus was not because he had proved himself worthy, but, as the Saviour himself expresses it, "Forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham."

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Jesus was sent unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel ; here, indeed, was one who could say, “ I have gone astray like a lost sheep : seek thy servant, for I do not forget thy commandments ! ” Because God was preparing Zaccheus for the reception of His salvation, his conscience had become alive to the requirements of the Divine law. The more he endeavoured to observe it, the greater was his longing after communion with God, and righteousness before Him. And when many impediments and obstacles were in the way of his outwardly observing what was regarded by the guardians of the law and ordinances as helpful and advantageous to the spiritual and eternal interests of man, he was the more filled with misgiving and hopelessness, and the more driven to think of the inward, spiritual, real keeping of the law as before God. Thus the very disadvantage and isolation under which he groaned, made the law of effect to him, for it was not made void by the tradition of elders. Gladly did he receive the gospel, for he had learned to reverence, fear, and love the law. Whereas many, because of their professed love for the law, rejected Jesus, even as now-a-days many, because of their professed love for the gospel, disregard the law. But the true disciple of Moses embraced the gospel, and the true believer in Christ delights himself in the law. For the test of the profession under the law was,—Do you long for the Redeemer and the Spirit to deliver you from the curse of the law, to fill you with strength of obedi-

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ence, and to bring you into peaceful and living communion with the heavenly Father? Hence, David and Nathanael, and all true Israelites without guile, rejoiced in the salvation of God. Even as the true test of our discipleship is—Do we love the law? Is it written on our heart, according to the promise of the new covenant? Hence, Paul, and all who are justified by faith, delight themselves in the law; and the beloved disciple, representing Christ's bride, exclaims: "His commandments are not grievous."

Zaccheus in his self-defence had not declared himself righteous or sinless, he had not even denied the sins peculiar to his trying and difficult position in life; but he had asserted that, sinner as he was, he had been under the guiding, correcting, restraining hand of Moses, he had felt himself, he had lived as under law to God. Jesus had accepted him as one who had been taught by the Spirit that he was lost, and to whom the law had been a schoolmaster to bring him to Christ.

How clearly and distinctly would Christ's visit stand out ever after in the memory of Zaccheus as the great turning-point in his life, the crisis in his history. Jesus came to him—behold, this was his salvation! How different were now his good works! For now he acted not merely from reverence and awe, and a dim longing after the fatherly love of God; but, delivered from the spirit of bondage, and having entered into the glorious liberty of the children of God, he delighted himself in the ways of

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God, and found that in obeying God's precepts he was walking with Him in whose "presence is fulness of joy," at whose "right hand are pleasures for evermore."

Jesus Christ had said, "I must abide in thy house;" and though in a few hours He had to leave Jericho, yet did He abide in the house of Zaccheus. That house was now consecrated to the love, the honour, the service of Jesus: it was indeed a sanctuary, a temple filled with the presence of Jehovah, where children of God, saved by His mercy, presented themselves a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which was their reasonable service. No longer strangers and aliens, outcasts from the commonwealth of Israel, but the true children of Abraham, and heirs of the promise, their future life was a life of loyalty and love to the Son of David, the King of saints, the Lord of glory.

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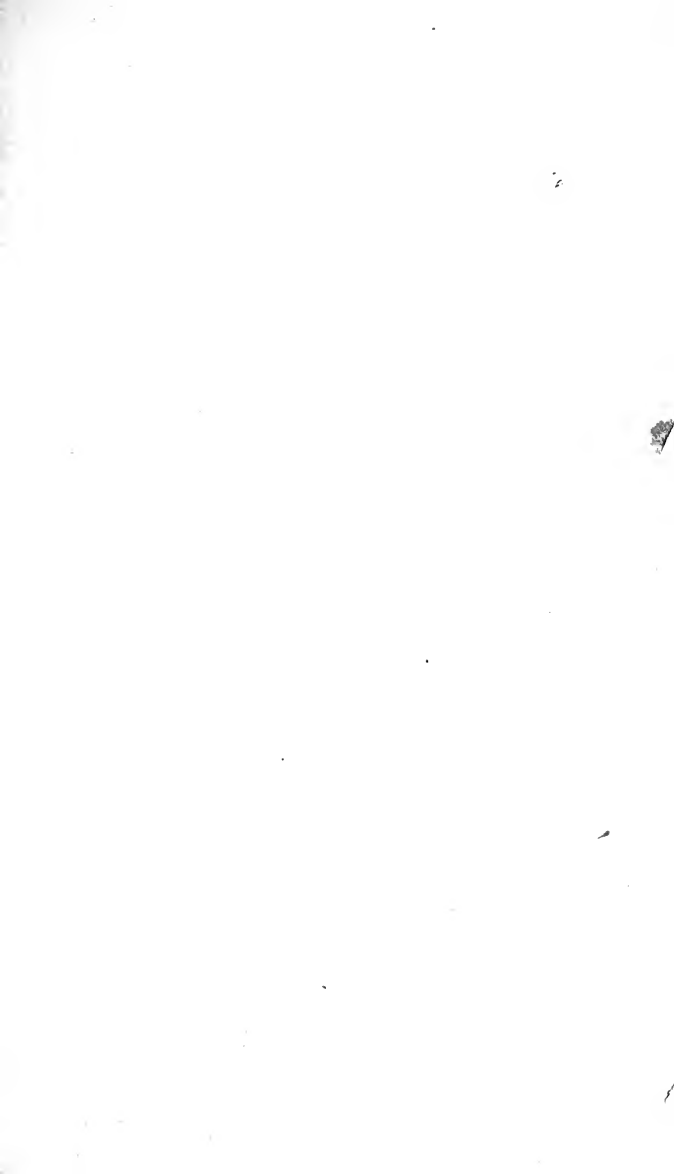
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