



*The* FOLLY  
OF UNBELIEF  
J · H · JOWETT





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The folly of unbelief





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# The Folly of Unbelief

and Other Meditations  
for Quiet Moments

BY

J. H. JOWETT,

Author of "The Passions for Souls," "Yet Another Day," etc.



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## Preface

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THE following expositions, which appeared originally in *The Sunday at Home*, are now published in this collected form in the hope that they may offer suggestions for helpful meditation in the quieter moments of our busy and hurrying day.



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I

## The Folly of Unbelief

‘The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.’

Psalm xiv. 1.

‘**T**HERE is no God.’ That is what the fool said. Ah, but it was the way in which he said it that revealed him to be a fool. There are souls which just whisper to themselves: ‘There is no God,’ and the secret utterance fills their hearts with cold, benumbing fear. They have stepped from one calamity into another. The floods are out. All their ways are beaten up. The lines of their life are filled with perversity and confusion; and as they move amid the encircling desolations, a fear steals across their minds and hearts with the chilling touch of a cold night-wind. ‘There is no God.’ They stretch out their poor ‘lame hand of faith,’ like blind, halt men feeling for some tangible support, and they seem to touch nothing. Are these the fools of the text?

Nay, these are seekers, and eventually all seekers shall be finders, and shall come into the satisfying presence of the unveiled glory.

Who, then, is the fool of the text? Let us read it again, and read between the lines. 'The fool hath said——' Now you must insert a shout of hilarious laughter. We miss the meaning of the words if we leave out the laugh. How much the laugh reveals! 'The fool hath said in his heart: There is no God,' and he said it with a laugh, a flippant laugh, a laugh which betokened a glad and welcome relief. Now the Scriptures affirm that the man who can say: 'There is no God,' and say it with a laugh, is a 'fool,' and by 'fool' is meant something infinitely more than senseless or unwise. The word 'fool,' as used in the Old Testament, is not an intellectual term, denoting want of wisdom; it is a moral term, denoting lack of virtue. Here, then, is the full force of the psalmist's words. The man who can say: 'There is no God,' and can say it with a light and jubilant laugh, is a fool; at his heart there is moral rottenness; there is badness at the very core of his being.

Why does 'the fool' say: 'There is no God'? Because that is what the fool wishes

to believe. The wish is the father to the thought. Our wishes exercise a far more tyrannical dominion in our lives than we commonly suppose. Our wishes play round about our minds, and shape and colour our judgements. There are no 'idle wishes.' All wishes enshrine a certain influence, and tend to determine the lines and issues of life. We have evidence of their power on the commonest planes of life. For instance, I wish that a certain thing may happen. That wish will not travel alone. Its influence inevitably works to drag the judgement after it. Let the wish be persisted in, and I shall come to believe that the certain thing will happen. Let the wish be still further deepened and intensified, and I may come to believe that the certain thing has happened. There are multitudes of instances in which men have believed that certain events have occurred, when in reality the entire transaction has been confined to the realm of desire. The judgement has been lured into practical deception by the sheer power of an intense desire. The wish was the father to the thought.

But where do wishes come from? They arise out of our character as naturally and as inevitably as fragrance exhales from a rose, or a noisome stench from a cesspool. If my

heart be like a garden, abounding in beautiful flowers and fruits, the wishes that exhale from it will be full of sweet and pleasant influence. But if my heart abound in uncleanness, the wishes that arise from it will be noisome and impure. As I am, I wish. As I wish, I come to think. As I think, I judge. 'As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.'

Here, then, is the man of the text with the badness in his heart. He is a fool, morally degenerate. Out of his pollution corresponding wishes arise. He wishes there were no God. Then his wishing determines his thinking. He comes to think there may be no God. And at last, with impious hilarity, and with a note of most unholy triumph, 'the fool says in his heart—There is no God.' He begins by defying God: he ends by denying God.

What is the lesson of it all? It is just this—that all sin works towards unbelief. All godlessness creates a desire that there were no God, and tends to snare the judgement into a practical atheism. Let us pray for clean hearts. It is in these that safety lies. Let us pray the Lord to rid us of all defilement. And if perchance there be lurking within our hearts some hidden sin, which like a secret tumour is sickening the entire life, let us go



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before the Lord with the psalmist's prayer upon our lips: 'Cleanse Thou me from secret faults.' 'Create within me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.'

## II

### Feeding His Flock

‘I will feed My flock.’—Ezekiel xxxiv. 15.

**W**E need to be fed. Even when we are born again we are only babes in Christ. We have got quality of life ; we lack quantity, the forceful, irresistible, abundant life which filled to the full the channels of the Christ. How are we going to gain the abundance? It is largely a matter of diet. ‘I will feed My flock.’ We are to be fed into maturity by the bread of life. But how various are the forms of bread which the gracious Providence employs! He suits the bread to the precise condition of our needs. ‘Thou givest them their meat in due season.’ Yes, ‘in due season;’ at the right time the right kind of bread. The Lord’s feeding of His children is tenderly discriminating, and to bring us to maturity He uses very varied breads. Let

us glance at two or three of the breads which are mentioned in the Sacred Word.

1. 'I will feed thee in a good pasture,' saith the Lord. Yes, sometimes that is the seasonable feeding-place for the soul. 'He maketh me to lie down in green pastures,' and there we should always like to remain. There are sweet and beautiful seasons, when life ceases to be a noisy tumultuous river, when it settles down into 'still waters,' and we are blessed with quiet visions which come as Heaven's bread. The good Lord permits us at times to just lie down and dream. 'Your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.' Beautiful are these seasons of holy communion, when life becomes a river of stillness, and we contemplate the things which are divine. The Lord is feeding us in a 'fat pasture,' giving us meat in due season.

2. 'I will feed thee with the bread of tears.' That is another of the means by which I am to pass out of babyhood into manhood, out of initial straits into 'the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.' Tears as bread: I do not think it means the tears that we shed because of our own griefs, but tears shed because of the grief of others. These tears constitute bread, and enlarge our souls. Sympathy

is feeding. It has sometimes happened that a whole family has been fed by the presence of an invalid child. Tender tones have stolen into the voice; a strange gentleness has come into the hand; the loud, thoughtless tramp has gone out of the footfall; jangling has given place to a subdued harmony which has been 'like snatches from the songs above.' The affections have been made more and more sensitive, responsive and vibrant to another's grief. 'When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled.' Our Saviour was being fed with 'the bread of tears!'

3. I will feed thee with 'the bread of adversity'; not only with sympathy for the griefs of others, but with personal grief of thine own. The bread of hardness! Do we not all know the experience in common life? How often we say to one another, in describing some personal experience: 'Yes, I felt it very hard.' We were eating the bread of hardness. We were expecting soft and toothsome food, and lo, it became in our mouths as gravel. 'Tomorrow,' we said, 'we will sit down to a feast;' and when the morrow came, our table was spread with the bread of adversity. 'We have toiled all night, and taken

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nothing!' The bread of hardness! 'Endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ'; endure hardness, and so become still better soldiers of Jesus Christ.

'I will feed My flock.' The good Lord has many breads. 'Give us this day our daily bread.'

### III

#### The Spirit of Power and Love

‘God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.’—2 Tim. i. 7.

‘**G**OD hath not given us the spirit of fear,’ of fearfulness, of timidity. The Holy Ghost does not create neutralities, character without force, colourless and impotent. A spirit of fearfulness would have no ‘go,’ no impressiveness, no decision. Its strength would be drained away by its own timidities. That is not the character of a man filled with the Holy Ghost. What then is he like? What like is the spirit of man when filled with the fullness of God!

1. It is a spirit of Power. Power is the first characteristic of the man who is full of the Holy Ghost. What is this, but to say that the Holy Ghost creates force of character? In every life there is an executive government which may be either vigorous or limp. That executive government is the will. If the will

be like a weak galvanic battery, then all my conduct will be wanting in brightness and decision. But if my will be like a battery well charged with power, then all my conduct will be characterized by intensity and precision. Force of character is proportioned to strength of will. The life of Jesus thrills with positive power. There is nothing pliable about it. It is strong, decided and bold, moving along with irresistible force, turned neither to the right hand nor to the left, neither frightened by the stones of the world, nor allured by its crowns. It was 'a spirit of power.'

That is one of the gifts offered to men by the grace of God. We can have our wills recharged from the super-abundant energy of the strong Son of God. The Holy Ghost will 'take of the things of Christ' and give them unto us. The Holy Ghost, working in man, works both 'to will and to do,' changing weak, wavering wills into steadfast ones, and the spirit of fear into the spirit of power.

2. But that would not be enough. Bad men have often great force of character. There is nothing more perilous than blind power. The spirit of power must be allied with something else, or we may drive into a terrible ditch. So the spirit of power must be allied with the spirit of love. The spirit

of love is the organ of vision. The finest knowledge is gained by the finest feeling. Sympathy is the great interpreter of secrets. Love is sight. It is only the loveless who are blind. The loveless do not see the beauties of Nature. It is only when love is enthroned that there is 'a new heaven and a new earth,' and that 'all things become new.' The loveless do not see the truth of humanity. It is Love who sees the wickedness of the city, and weeps over it. It is Love who sees the lingering beauty in a Magdalene, and yearns over it. The capacity of love is the capacity to judge. If we are to know the truth of things, we need the spirit of love. And my text tells me that this again is the gift of the spirit of love. He who gives the will to do the truth, will also give the love to know it. He strengthens the will, and gives men force of character. He enriches the heart, and gives men power to see and know the truth.

3. 'A sound mind.' That is the third characteristic endowment of a man filled with the Holy Ghost. Now a sound mind is a healthy mind, a mind which delights in the things which are pure, which passionately enjoys them, and which turns away from the impure with strong revulsion and disgust.



The 'sound mind' abhors 'that which is evil'; it relishes that which is good. So that a sound mind is just a healthy moral palate, a taste for the things of God. This, again, is the gift of the Holy Ghost, creating in man a moral sanity which enables him to sing, 'How sweet are Thy words unto my taste!' Now, sum it all up. The man filled with the Holy Ghost has a 'spirit of power'—capacity to do the truth; a 'spirit of love'—capacity to know the truth; and 'a sound mind'—capacity to love the truth.

## IV

### Spiritual Beauty

‘Moses wist not that . . . his face shone.’

Exodus xxxiv. 29.

**S**PIRITUAL beauty is loveliest when it is unconsciously possessed. Self-conscious virtue is lean and uncrowned. Moses has been closeted with God. The glory of the Lord has been poured upon him, bathing him in unearthly brightness, so that when he returns to the mountain-base his countenance shines like the light. The same transformation is effected every day, and by the same means. Spiritual communion alters the fashion of the countenance. The supreme beauty of a face is its light, and spirituality makes ‘a face illumined.’ The power of a beautiful spirit makes many a plain face lovely. The face of Moses was transfigured by the glory of the Eternal.

But 'Moses wist not that his face shone.' That is the supreme height of spiritual loveliness; to be lovely, and not to know it. Surely this is a lesson we all need to learn. Virtue is so apt to become self-conscious, and so to lose its glow. Take the grace of humility. Humility is very beautiful when we see it unimpaired. It is exquisite with the loveliness of Christ. But there is a self-conscious humility which is only a very subtle species of pride. It is possible to boast of our humility. There are men and women whose only source of pride appears to be their modesty. How often we meet with men who, when requested to do some service, immediately hoist the flag of their humility, and declare that they are of the humble sort, and prefer to keep in the shade! Yes, but humility takes the lowest place, and does not know that her face shines. Pride can take the lowest place, and find her delight in the thought of her presumably shining face. Self-consciousness always tends to sour humility, and pervert it into pride. 'Moses wist not that his face shone.'

Take another example, the grace of philanthropy, or charity, as it is commonly called. Charity is a lovely adornment of the Christian eye, but if charity be self-conscious it loses all

its charm. The Master says that true charity does not let the left hand know what the right hand doeth. Observe, the counsel is not merely—do not sound a trumpet before thee! It is not merely—do not talk about thy giving to thy fellows! Charity is a far more exquisite grace. The counsel is this—do not talk about thy giving to thyself. Do not let it be done in a boastful self-consciousness, or its beauty is at once impaired.

It is even so with the whole shining multitude of virtues and graces. No virtue has its full strength and beauty until its possession is unnoticed by its owner. When we wear a virtue consciously, it argues that the virtue is unfamiliar to us, just as we walk self-consciously in a new and unaccustomed dress. Virtue must become so customary as to be unconsciously worn. We must speak the truth as unconsciously as we breathe. We must wear the garment of humility as unconsciously as we breathe. Our faces must shine, and we must be unconscious of the glory!

And so it is that the problem shapes itself thus—we must become so absorbed in God as to forget ourselves. We cannot gaze much upon God's face and remain very conscious of ourselves. 'We all, beholding

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as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory.' Contemplation brings transformation. 'He will beautify the meek with salvation.' Let us lose ourselves in God.

## V

### Self-Containedness

‘A good man shall be satisfied from himself.’

Proverbs xiv. 14.

‘A GOOD man shall be satisfied from himself.’ Then there can be a noble kind of self-satisfaction. There is a self-satisfaction which is repellent, an offensive form of conceit. This species of self-satisfaction must be altogether removed from our minds when we seek the interpretation of our text. ‘A good man shall be satisfied from himself.’ How else could the good man be satisfied, if not from himself? He could seek satisfaction in the applause which his goodness secures, in the honour of his kindred, in the admiration of a people. But sometimes the honour is not given, the expected gratitude is not forthcoming, the only crown secured is a crown of thorns. Then the good man is driven to seek satisfaction where he should have looked for it before, not in the external rewards of

goodness, but in the goodness itself. He must search for crowns and riches where God would have him find them, in rectitude, in calm conscientiousness, in courageous discharge of duty, and not in any form of public recognition or reward. 'A good man shall be satisfied from himself.'

1. It is a very natural expectation that kindness should meet with the return of gratitude. We say there is some satisfaction in doing kindnesses if they are received by grateful hearts. But oftentimes the gratitude is withheld, and we are profoundly dissatisfied. The absence of any warm-hearted response chills the very spirit of kindliness and freezes all the genial currents of the soul. Let us take the counsel of the text, and when gratitude is lacking, let us retire into our own hearts, and find satisfaction in the kindness itself. I keep a flower garden, and my neighbour over the way keeps bees. Every day his bees visit my flowers, drinking up their finest nectar, and retreating, heavily laden, to increase my neighbour's wealth. My neighbour sends me no supply of honey in return for what his bees obtain from me. The only return I get is an occasional sting! Well, shall I give up the flower garden? Surely, even if I receive no honey, there are

stores of delight in the flowers themselves. Let us seek our satisfaction in the flowers we grow. An act is more and finer than its consequences. God 'is kind to the unthankful.'

2. It seems to be a most fitting thing that duty should culminate in comfort. But we are confronted with the fact that comfort is not always the crown of duty. There are many people who are scrupulous and conscientious, but their sky is overcast. Their way abounds in thorns. They wonder how it is that duty is not rewarded, that the angels have not charge concerning them, that the moral forces of the world do not league together to procure their material success. What is the meaning of it all? Is it not intended to throw us back upon the true wealth, to urge us to seek our satisfaction not in the comfort that duty may bring, but in the duty itself? That is a very elevated word of the psalmist—'I delight to do Thy will.' It is a word which indicates great range and wealth of devotion. He found his delight in the obedience itself. He had little or no external comfort or peace. He was compassed about by innumerable ills. External reward for duty done there was little or none, but he gets away back into his own soul, and in the great reality of obedience he found his delight.



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‘A good man shall be satisfied from himself.’

3. The great principle has other applications. Let this one suffice. If there be any of my readers who are workers for the Lord, and who are cast down and disquieted because of apparently fruitless toil, let me give them this counsel—get back into the consciousness of honest work honestly done, and you shall find the brightness there. ‘Light is sown for the righteous.’ ‘A good man shall be satisfied from himself.’

## VI

### *Filled with the Spirit*

‘Be not drunk with wine, . . . but be filled with the Spirit.’—Ephesians v. 18 (R.V.).

**T**HAT is an extraordinary antithesis. The contrast would appear to be almost irrelevant. We are accustomed to oppose excessive drinking by the claims of abstinence; but here the alternative counsel is the reception of the Holy Ghost. ‘Be not drunken with wine, but be filled with the Spirit.’ Do not try to accomplish by one way what can only be attained by another. Do not seek the stimulus of life primarily through the senses, but through the heart. The fundamental need of life is not a sensation, but an inspiration. Man has a body; he is a soul. It is folly to seek to spur the essential powers of life by a stimulus of the flesh. The stimulus must be more inward, and must be given by the Holy Ghost in the soul. If a man wants buoyancy, power to contend with a ‘sea of troubles,’ and

keep his head above the water; if he would be light-hearted, and have power to resist the awful, pressing weight of urgent care; if he would be optimistic, with reason that can pierce the near and frowning horizon, and realize the golden morrow beyond, the secret must be sought, not in the highways of the body, but in the deep recesses of the soul. And so the subject of the contrast expressed in the apostle's words is this—the real stimulus of life; what is it? What is it that reaches and quickens the innermost man? And the answer given is this—the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. Wine may excite a nerve; the Holy Ghost inspires and stimulates the life. 'Be not drunken with wine, but be filled with the Spirit.'

But how are we to become filled with the Spirit? Along what lines may we receive stimulus and inspiration? The apostle supplies an answer which, to the worldly-wise man, may savour of foolishness, and appear as a message for babes. 'Speak one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.' That is to say, one of the great means of revival and stimulus is to be found in the channels of fellowship. I am to take psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, the rich, inspired, Spirit-filled utterances of my brethren,

and I am to use them for my own inspiration. Along the way of life they made discoveries, and I am permitted to share in the fruits of their painful toil. They trod the winepress, and I may drink the juice. They put their experiences into 'psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,' in order that what to them had been a doubtful experiment may be to me an unwavering assurance. I am afraid that in our day this means of spiritual stimulus is very largely ignored, and its loss is partly responsible for the flatness and low vitality of much of our Christian discipleship. We cannot afford to drop the hymn and the psalm out of our daily religious life. They offer us the vehicles of the Spirit for the carrying away of fear and despondencies, and for the bringing in of a buoyant faith and peace. Goethe's mother used to say that whenever her son had a grief he turned it into a poem, and so got rid of it. We may not be able to turn our griefs into our own poems, but we may turn them into other people's poems, and so be rid of them. Stimulus is sometimes gained by mere expression. Souls are often heavy because of pent-up feeling. A mode of expression would be a means of relief. Utterance would be revival. The means of utterance can be

found in 'psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.' In these we may find our stimulus. We may gain our inspiration from that which is inspired.

How else may life receive stimulus and inspiration? The apostle gives a second answer, as startlingly simple as the first. Stimulus, may be found, not by drinking wine, but by cultivating gratitude—'giving thanks always for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.' Is not that profoundly true? An ungrateful heart can never be exuberant. Where there is no gratitude, the spiritual nerve is dormant or dead. But how is it where gratitude abounds? The whole life is quick, alert, exhilarant, expressionable. We say that a man's face 'beams' with gratitude. That is the right word. There is exhilaration within, and it reveals itself in a countenance illuminated without. Gratitude confers the quality of 'aliveness,' and acts as a stimulus to all the complex faculties of the soul.

There is still another method of inspiring the life, mentioned by the apostle in this great passage—the method of self-subjection; 'Subjecting yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ.' Self-subjection is a powerful stimulant. It makes life buoyant and exuberant. At the heart of the self-seeking man,

God has ordained that flatness and deadness shall reign. He may appear bright and energetic, but his exuberance is forced ; at his heart there is heaviness, weariness, death. If you want to revive your life, go and lose it in another. When a man subjects himself to the service and welfare of another, he enters into the joy of his Lord. Seek your stimulus, not in wine, but in fellowship, in thanksgiving, and in self-subjection.

## VII

### Conversion

‘Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.’—Matthew xviii. 3.

‘**A**S little children.’ How frequently the Lord took a little child for His text! How often He rebuked the hustling, selfish behaviour of feverish, ambitious men by putting into their midst a little child! ‘Except ye become as little children.’ What is there about little children which must also be found in those of a ripe age who would be citizens of the Kingdom of God? What are the great characteristics of the child-nature in which all healthy maturity must share?

I. I think the first great feature of childhood is pure affection. In childhood, affection is spring-water. It just bubbles up most naturally, and is pure and delicious. In manhood, affection is too often tap-water. It has flowed through pipes of expediency, prudence,

and calculation, and it has lost its sparkle and limpidity. 'Master, who shall be greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?' There you have affection which is losing its purity, affection with a selfish aim, affection yoked to personal ambition. Now that is the perilous tendency when our lives emerge out of childhood. Affection is prone to pass into long-sighted calculation. 'We have left all and followed Thee ; what shall we have therefore?' Love sets a price upon itself, and demands payment. That is not the way of little children. Little children loved Jesus for the pure luxury of loving Him. Their love was its own reward. They loved the lovable, and were happy. But are not older people prone to think that devotion to Jesus ought to be returned in the shape of temporal prosperity? Do we not half expect material payment for spiritual service? The Lord wants us to have the pure, uncalculating love of little children. He wants us to live so much with Him that to love Him shall be our highest bliss.

'My God, I love Thee, not because  
I hope for heaven thereby,  
Nor because they who love Thee not,  
Are lost eternally ;  
\* \* \* \* \*  
But as Thyself hast loved me,  
O ever-loving Lord.'



2. The second great characteristic of the child-nature is its fine sensitiveness. A child's spirit is like a photographer's sensitive plate, exceedingly impressionable, responding to the daintiest touch of the softest light. The joys and sorrows of the world find in children a most ready and sympathetic response. Now this fine sensitiveness is apt to be lost as childhood is left behind. Our impressionableness is prone to lose its delicacy. The grief and happiness of the world do not move us with the same facility as of old. Our character is inclined to harden in one of two directions—towards a gloomy pessimism or towards a glaring worldliness. The child-disposition may be symbolized by the month of April. April weather easily breaks into sunshine, and quite as easily melts into rain. Before the shower is over the sun is shining again. Childhood easily breaks into smiles. It quite as easily melts into tears, and before the tears are dry the smiles are there again. But, away from childhood, we are prone to lose the April characteristics. We pass either into the dull, heavy, pessimistic gloom of November, and it is difficult to move us into smiles, or into the hard, worldly glare of June, when it is difficult to melt us into tears. These are the two great tendencies of all life

which is not vigilantly watched ; to a gloomy pessimism which loses its sympathy with joy, or to a hard, prosperous worldliness which loses its sympathy with grief ; and both dispositions are opposed to the child-nature, one of whose great characteristics is a ready responsiveness, a fine sensitiveness for the whole emotional round of common life. ' Become as little children.'

3. A third great characteristic of childhood is its open-mindedness. Childhood is an age of eager questionings, and not of dogmatic conclusions. It is a season of keen receptiveness, of intense love of the sweet light. Now that open-mindedness is apt to be lost with the growth of our years. Revelation is regarded as closed ; the volume as ended ; all light as given ; so that our knowledge can now be arranged in final forms. That was certainly the condition of the people among whom Christ's earthly ministry was passed. Their minds were closed, shut up tight against the reception of any new revelation from God. And so the Lord spoke of them as having their eyes closed, and their ears stopped, and their hearts hardened. They had lost their open-mindedness. Their windows were no longer open towards the dawn, for the reception of the truth of God. There were

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two forces actively at work closing their minds, and they are quite as active to-day, the forces of pride and prejudice. When these abound in a life, every door and window is closed, and the 'Light of the World' will seek admission in vain. If we are healthy, and have the nature of little children, we shall have a hungry open-mindedness for the truth. 'As new-born babes, long for the milk of the Word.'

## VIII

### Seeking the Lost

‘What man of you, having a hundred sheep, and having lost one of them, doth not . . . go after that which is lost?’—Luke xv. 4.

**I** THOUGHT perhaps he would not have troubled about *one*. If he had had only two sheep, and had lost one, I could have understood his concern, but to lose one out of a hundred would seem to be an almost insignificant loss. That is the line of reasoning which we sometimes introduce into our affairs. We reason as if the loss of one is lessened in its painfulness by the many that remain. We hear of some parents who have lost a little child, a fountain of joy and cheer. We compassionately inquire: ‘Have they any children left?’ ‘Yes, they have four left.’ ‘Ah, well, it isn’t as great a loss as if they had only one.’ That indicates a common principle of reasoning—the greater the family, the less the value of the individual soul. We carry the reasoning

forward into the religious sphere, and it becomes the parent of depression and doubt. It creates the most terrible of all orphanhoods, the fear that there are so many of us that the individual does not count. God overlooks us, *looks over us*, and we cry, 'My way is hid from the Lord.'

Now this parable is intended to be an antidote to all such feelings of self-disparagement and doubt. The size of God's family does not affect the preciousness of the individual soul. The one sheep is not lost in the flock. 'He calleth His sheep by name.' 'He loved *me*, and gave Himself for me.' Let us hold fast to this inspiring truth—the infinite worth of the one in the esteem of the infinite God.

'If a man have a hundred sheep, and lose one.' I think it exceedingly tender and beautiful that the Master compares His family to a flock, and that He pictures His lost children under the figure of a lost sheep. A sheep does not intentionally go astray. It nibbles itself astray. It puts its head down to the grass, and begins to eat and eat and eat, and follows on and on, and at last, looking up, finds it has wandered far from the flock, and is lost. It was so absorbed in feeding that it paid no heed to its whereabouts. I do not think that men go

off into ruin by premeditation, by set and well-defined intention. They become thoughtlessly absorbed in something, and they never call halt to look around, to ascertain in what direction they are tending. Men get their heads down to the making of money. It absorbs all their energies and all their thoughts, and almost unconsciously they wander far from the Shepherd into moral and spiritual perdition. Minor fascinations ensnare, until we forget or ignore the fascinations of our Lord. This is true of every kind of temporal pursuit and enjoyment. The sheep of God's pasture stray away in thoughtless absorption, and become lost in the region of wild beasts and night.

'He goeth after that which is lost.' We are not left to our own deserts. 'The Lord is mindful of His own.' 'The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.' How does He seek us? He makes us 'disquieted within us.' He makes us restless. He makes us depressed. He makes the grass of the distant pasturage dis-satisfying. Have we not heard men say of their sinful enjoyments, 'I am sick of it'? But they used to like it? Yes; but 'their drink is turned sour.' Who has brought the distaste? The Great Seeker, that He might turn us home

again. 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul?' That is a most blessed depression, if it lead to a return to the good Lord. 'And when He hath found it.' In what condition does He find the sheep? Shepherds have told me that they sometimes find their lost sheep very exhausted, very weary, quite tired out. That is how the Good Shepherd finds His wandering sheep. The devil has undermined their life, and sapped away their strength. Their power of will is emasculated, their power of resistance gone. Sin is an awful exhauster. 'My strength fails because of my iniquity.' Hear now the sweet Gospel. 'When He hath found it, He layeth it on His shoulders.' He takes us in our moral impotence, and carries us. Men who have no powers of resistance or persistence are made 'more than conquerors' in Christ. How long will He carry us? Will He ever leave us to the terrors of the wild beasts? 'Even to hoary hairs will I carry you.'

'He is sure to aid you,  
He will carry you through.'

## IX

### Those whom Jesus Loved

‘Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.’—John xi. 5.

THEN He loved three souls of very different temperaments. To love all three is to love natures which are greatly contrasted in their constitution. That is the characteristic of true love. It is comprehensive and inclusive. There is a species of love which makes a fastidious choice of its objects. It picks out a few of a particular mental colour, or of a certain moral temperament, and with rigid exclusiveness it confines its communion to these. But here is the love of the Master lavishing itself upon these very different souls, and in each of these finding joy and satisfaction. Jesus does not want all His loved ones to be of one mould and colour. He does not seek uniformity—He loves us for our own individuality. He will not remove our indi-



viduality. He only seeks to glorify it. He loves 'Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.'

'Jesus loved Martha.' Martha is our Biblical example of a practical woman. 'Martha served.' In that phrase is enshrined her character. Martha was ever eager for practical deeds, and her interpretation of 'practical' was a ready ministering to the needs of the flesh. If she had been a worker among our modern slums, she would have persistently advocated the giving of suppers and teas. Martha was no expert in abstract discussions. But she was great when anybody was sick and in want of immediate help, great at lifting an invalid without increasing the pain, great at sitting up through a long night without ever looking tired, great at shedding her blood for another, without letting the spent treasure be named! Martha is typical of a vast multitude of women whom we describe as 'handy women,' women who are at home in a crisis, who are calm in some terrible emergency, who are strong and self-controlled at a death bed. It is to Martha's gentle, practical hands that we must all come at last, and I am glad that she stands enrolled among the loved ones, as the chosen companions of the Lord. 'Jesus loved Martha.'

'And her sister.' Mary was contemplative,

spending long hours in deep communion with the unseen. Her mind was roomy, full of visions. Her heart was equally capacious, full of feeling. Sometimes her feeling was aroused into high ecstasies, and then it found expression in some costly gift. But more usually Mary was quiet, reserved, unobtrusive, full of thought. The practical person is apt to be impatient with Mary. 'Bid her that she help.' That impatience arises from a narrow and impoverished conception of service. We do not think that all land is wasted that has not built upon it a shop or an eating-house. Land which is used as a garden, on which the green grass grows and the flowers bloom, is never regarded as waste. We want the park as well as the kitchen, the green grass as well as the warehouse. It is the same in human life. We do not want life to become a huge kitchen, full of severely practical ministry. We need the Marys as well as the Marthas, the deep contemplative souls whose spirits shed a fragrant restfulness over the hard and busy streets. The severely practical Peter could never quite understand the dreamy John. 'Lord, what wilt Thou have this man to do?' He wanted him to be doing, doing; and yet it was from the dreamy John that there came the sweet and comforting

revelations of the city where there is 'no more pain,' and where the light shines unceasingly. We need the souls who sit at Jesus' feet and listen to His word, and then interpret the sweet gospels to a tired and weary world. Upon these also the Lord has set the seal of His benediction, and has claimed them as His own companions. 'Jesus loved Martha, and her sister.'

'And Lazarus.' What do we know about him? Nothing. Most birds have one striking characteristic. The eagle is famous for its powers of flight, the nightingale for its song, the robin for its beautiful breast, but what fame has the sparrow of the common street? And how many sparrows there are in the human race! Such Lazarus appears to have been, undistinguished and commonplace. Yet Jesus loved him. What a huge multitude come under the category of 'nobodies'! Their names are on the register of births, and on the register of deaths, and the space between is a great obscurity. There are crowds of people who are massed together under some such description as Paul gives in one of his Epistles,—'Other my fellow-labourers whose names are written in the book of life.' Thank God for the commonplace people! They turn our houses into homes, and make life

restful and sweet. We could spare the roses rather than the blades of grass. We can do without genius better than we can do without homeliness. Jesus loves the commonplace. Here then is a great, comforting truth. We are all loved, the brilliant and the commonplace, the dreamy and the practical. 'Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.'

## X

### Separation from Sinners

‘Separate from sinners.’—Hebrews vii. 26.

‘**S**EPARATE from sinners.’ But I thought this same High Priest ‘went to be guest with a man’ who was a sinner? Yes: ‘separate,’ and yet a ‘guest.’ Isolation is not sanctification. Separation can only be effected by elevation of life. There are no gulfs so deep and infinite as those which yawn between souls. Spiritual differences make distances immeasurable. Bring out your measuring-rod, and tell me the distance between the speakers of the following words:—‘When this thy son is come, who hath devoured thy living with harlots’ . . . ‘This thy brother was dead, and is alive again.’ What is the width of the abysmal gulf? The distance is infinite; it is a separation in spirit.

We say ‘blood is thicker than water’: but what about the spirit? There are some children whose names the angels never men-

tion alongside the names of their parents. There is no relationship between them, such as is recognized in the unseen. Our connexions are often only skin connexions, while beneath the skin there are gulfs as immeasurable as the appalling chasm which yawns between heaven and hell.

This is the kind of separation referred to in the text. Jesus Christ was 'separate from sinners.' There was a difference in spirit which made the distance between them infinite. What our Lord was, all men are called to be. We are to be 'separate from sinners'; so unlike them in spirit as to be removed from them by an immeasurable gulf. But what is the spirit of sinners from which we are called to be separate? What is spirit? Who can define it? The spiritual is ever the indefinable. Who can define a wish? What its origin and composition? Who can define an impulse? What is it? How came it? Where dwells it? The spiritual defies definition. This much, however, we can say. The most spiritual essence we know is thought. Spirit is thought. It is more, unutterably more, but it is pre-eminently thought. Let us begin there. We are to be 'separate from sinners' in spirit, and therefore separate from sinners

in thought. We are to be dissimilar in thought, unlike them in the general furnishings and outlooks of the mind.

Now, what is a sinner's thought like? Suppose it were possible for us to have the insight of God, and we could look into a sinner's mind just as we look into a glass hive, and see all the purposings, the plannings, the rememberings, the swayings, what would be the general characteristic? The Bible supplies the answer. 'God is not in all his thoughts.' In all that restless multitude of thoughts there is no God. Where, then, is God? Outside the mind, a sorrowful on-looker where He yearns to be co-labourer and guide. God's light is spurned—His warmth is exiled. Thought becomes narrow and cold, small and chilling. The mind becomes a nest of petty purposes, when it was intended to be the glorious tabernacle of the eternal God. Be ye 'separate from sinners,' separate in thought, for in their self-centred mind there is no God.

A mind without God is a mind in which there is no hope. 'Having no hope.' I do not use the word hope with any dwarfed and trifling application, as being merely synonymous with buoyancy and good spirits. A man of hope is one who sees stretching out

before him a large, bounteous, holy possibility; and he is a man of large ideals, who lives in the assurance that the idealities will become realities, that the castle in the air will prove itself a very substantial dwelling, a 'house of God not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.'

Now the man without God has no such glorious hope. He looks ahead: he sees himself repeated, not transformed; and life whose outlook is only a series of repetitions is hastening unto death. No vast vision, and therefore no true perspective? From this I am to separate. I am to be separate by having a different type of mind. I am to have a mind that welcomes the divine, that lets in the sun's rays, that rejoices at the incoming of the Eternal. I am to have a mind with large outlooks, gazing upon big possibilities, and by the largeness of its gaze setting things in their true perspective, and so delivering life from the small bondage of the passing day.

How are we to become separate? (1) By an act of deliberation. Sit down and calmly think. The problem is this: you have opposing you 'the world, the flesh, and the devil,' and you wish to become separate. Can you do it? Think. Can it be done?



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Not in your own strength. How then? You must seek reinforcements. (2) By an act of consecration. Enter into a solemn league and covenant with the Lord Christ, who is the source of all the mighty powers and ministries of grace. In His strength you can be separated from the world. We become separated from sinners by becoming separated into Christ. Instead of having a mind without God, you will have the Lord God as a continual guest; and instead of a mind without outlook, you will have the allurements of an immortal hope.

## XI

### The Multitude of the Redeemed

‘I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.’—Revelation vii. 9.

**T**HERE are multitudinous national elements fused into a living brotherhood. Here are racial differences losing themselves in a vital union, as ten thousand separate streams lose themselves in the communion of the great deep. ‘All nations and kindreds and peoples’ stand together in sympathetic and heart-locked unity. How is the wondrous fellowship achieved? I think the words of the fisherman-seer point out the spiritual solvents by which all racial and national elements are to be transmuted into international love. What are they? What seem to be the elements which constitute this family life? Mark this:—these diverse ‘nations and kindreds and peoples’ were all alike in

this, they were all 'clothed in white robes'; in this too they were all akin, they all had 'palms in their hands'; in yet a third characteristic do we find agreement, they united in a common song, 'Salvation unto our God.' In these three common characteristics there is suggested the explanation of the family life above, and in this is indicated the line along which the strife-riven and jealous and revengeful nations of our day are to be brought into a fruitful and fundamental brotherhood.

1. The first essential to national brotherhood is the 'white robe.' That necessity is fundamental. If the 'white robe' be missing, brotherhood will always be counterfeit and a phantom. 'White robes' are holy habits.

The cleansed heart is the primary necessity to a true union of hearts. Impurities can never be brought into permanent union. We fight against the law of God when we seek to establish cohesion between the unclean. This is true in the life of the home as well as in the life of the nation. True family union can only be realized when every member of the family wears the white robe. Alliances between the unclean nations constitute only a 'covenant of death.' The brotherhood of man and the union of nations will not be accomplished by any diplomatic

shrewdness, by any alliance based on the identity of material interests, by any concert established for purpose of mutual defence. These may produce neighbourly contact; but as for brotherhood—the sweet angel will remain afar off, waiting for men to put on the ‘white robe,’ and not until the nations have been purged from their moral and spiritual filth shall we see the fellowship which makes the family life above, and which draws into a loving and vital union ‘a multitude whom no man can number, of all nations and kindreds and peoples and tongues.’

2. All the members of the great company carried ‘palms in their hands.’ The palm was a favourite symbol of the Hebrew people. Perhaps its gracefulness, its queenliness, its faithful endurance throughout the changing seasons, had made the people regard it as a beautiful and persistent friend. It was used as a symbol of conquest and sovereignty, and as such it has come down to our own day. We speak of a man as ‘taking the palm,’ by which we indicate that, after making a comparison, we decide that among many men this man is the victor, the best. So the palm is the emblem of conquest. This multitude ‘whom no man could number,’ comprising every nation and every tongue, bear palms in

their hands. What have they conquered? Self. Each has dethroned himself that he may crown his brother. By love they serve one another. Family life is impossible when each member is self-assertive, and constitutes a force of personal aggression. Family life is possible and beautiful when every member carries a palm, a symbol that self is merged and lost in the welfare of the whole. The greatest of all possessions is self-possession, as the greatest of all conquests is self-conquest. Before the kindreds can form a brotherhood the peoples must carry the palm, the palm which indicates a suppressed and surrendered self. Happily, they who have washed their robes in the cleansing energies of the Christ, appropriate the Master's Spirit, and in the constraining power of His crucifixion are willing and ready to crucify themselves. They who wash in His blood acquire the spirit of sacrifice, and sacrifice self. They who wear the white robes also bear the palm.

3. There is yet a third characteristic. The multitude whom no man can number have their family life consolidated by a common praise. They unite in the glorious song: 'Salvation unto our God who sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.' There is no unifying influence like worship and praise.

The family and the church will find a wondrous unifying medium in the atmosphere of devotion. Men find their kinship best when they are upon their knees. When men leave the platform of controversy and take to singing and prayer, they enter the domain of fellowship.

Here then are the three great characteristics of the family life in glory, and they suggest the ways to a divine brotherhood on earth: 'white robes,' the washing from uncleanness in the blood of the Lamb: 'the palm,' the entire suppression of selfishness: the song of praise, the participation in a common worship.

## XII

### Girt with Truth

‘Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth.’—Ephesians vi. 14.

**A** ROMAN soldier’s girdle was a strong belt which he wrapped around his loins, binding the armour tight to his body, and preventing it from interfering with the freedom of his action. The girdle braced him up, gave him a sense of firmness and a consciousness of compact and concentrated force. There was the civilian’s girdle, as well as the soldier’s, and this too accomplished a similar purpose. Its purpose was to lay hold of the flowing Oriental garments, which would otherwise flap loosely and catch the winds, and become a serious impediment to progress, and to bind them about the loins, and give to the wearer a sense of physical firmness, resource and control. Such is the apostle’s figure. Now see the application. ‘Have your loins girt about with truth.’ Take the truth, and wrap it

round about your life. Wear it like a belt, to give you strength. Let it gather up the whole of your life, and bind it into compactness. Do not let your life be loose, indefinite, limp and inconclusive. Let it be firm, assured, decisive. 'Stand, having your loins girt about with truth.'

Now, if any man wore the girdle of truth, that man was the Apostle Paul. He took 'the truth as it is in Jesus,' and he wrapped it about his life; and while he was wearing it nothing could intimidate or dismay the grand old warrior. The belt gave him a wonderful sense of power. As he felt its bracing support, he cried in the joyful consciousness of might: 'I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me.' So long as he wore the girdle, no enemy could overpower him. Suffering, temptation, loss, death—let them come; 'I can do all things.' How rarely we hear that note of absolute confidence in the religious life of to-day! We are more conscious of weakness than of strength. We feel limp and loose, with scarcely any spiritual strength. How is it? It is because we are not wearing the girdle. We are trying to live the Christian life without the Christian revelations, without the sustaining power of the mighty truths which



Christ made known. Revealed truth is the dynamic of the spiritual life. Let us put on the girdle, and wear it night and day. The girdle gave Paul a sense of power, it gave him self-possession, it also gave him decision. What it did for him it will do for all men. It will fill them with a calm consciousness of encompassing power, which will be to them the proof that they are partakers of the strength of God.

And now let me try to put a girdle round about some of my readers who may need bracing up into spiritual confidence and strength. There are some who are care-worn, anxious about to-morrow, wondering if the meal in the barrel will hold out, and if the cruse of oil will fail. Here is a great truth, which I would ask you to put on and wear as a girdle, and wear it always, 'Cast all your care upon Him, for He careth for you.'

And some are just beginning to live the Christian life, and they are experiencing all the joys of its most delightful spring; but they are a little fearful as to how they will fare on the morrow, when the skies darken and temptations come thick and strong. Here is a great truth, which I ask you to buckle on and wear like a belt: 'Having loved His own, He loved them unto the end.'

And there are some who know themselves to be so embedded in evil habit as to be almost hopeless of escape. They are coming to regard themselves as almost past redemption. Let me ask all such to take this truth, and fasten it round about their lives: 'He loved me and gave Himself for me.' 'We are justified by faith.' 'He is able to save even unto the uttermost.' Take this truth and wear it, and paralyzing despair shall yield to a bright and vigorous hope.

### XIII

#### *The Better and the Best*

‘The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls.’—Matthew xiii. 45.

‘THE kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man’ travelling hither and thither in search of good pearls. Already he has gathered together many pearls of great value; but his eyes are watchful for more. One day he discovers a pearl of exceeding preciousness, far surpassing in its beauty and rarity any that he then possessed. What shall he do? Buy it. But it is of great price! Let him then sell some of the pearls he has, and so acquire this one of superlative splendour. True, the pearls he has are valuable, and not to be despised; but they must be sacrificed to gain this pearl of pre-eminent excellence. The good must be sacrificed for the sake of the better.

Now see the Master’s application. The sacrifice of that which is good for the sake

of that which is better is one of the dominant notes of the Christian religion, as it is one of the characteristic features of the human life. If I belong to the Kingdom of Heaven, I am in search of moral and spiritual pearls, and my conduct will be based upon the principle that I am willing to sacrifice a pearl of comparative worth for another of superlative worth. This is an aspect of the Christian life which is sometimes overlooked. We are commonly inclined to think that because a thing is good we are entitled to keep it. No ; we are called upon to sacrifice pearls. Whenever we see a moral or spiritual pearl, a heavenly grace or accomplishment, surpassing anything that we possess, it is our duty to buy it, even though it be at the cost of sacrificing something which we have valued and loved.

There is one pearl which most people value, and which I suppose is treasured by every one of my readers—the pearl of personal liberty. Liberty is a precious possession ; we regard it as of great and significant value. But suppose I discover another pearl of greater value, which cannot be gained without the sacrifice of personal liberty, what is my duty in the sight of God ? The duty of sacrifice ; to sell what I have and buy it ; to let go the

one pearl for the sake of getting the other. But what can be more precious than personal liberty? Social Redemption. Personal liberty is good, social redemption is better. By social redemption I mean a saved commonwealth; the integrity and purity and sound moral health of social life. The moral welfare of a city is of greater value than the personal liberty of any individual citizen. Paul counselled Onesimus, the fugitive slave, to enter into servitude again. Why? Because, although personal liberty was an exceedingly precious thing—a pearl of great price—there was something more precious still—a pearl of greater price—the welfare of all the other slaves. A runaway slave, instigated in his flight by the Christian faith, might not only have jeopardized the interests of the struggling infant Church, but would have plunged into greater hardships all the slaves throughout the empire. So Onesimus voluntarily went back into bondage, sacrificing his personal liberty for the common good, the good pearl for the sake of the better, and in so doing proved himself a worthy member of the Kingdom of God.

If ever there was a man who loved liberty, it was the Apostle Paul. He was a man of clear head and determined will, and so could

use his liberty safely. He was a man of sound, healthy conscience, and so could use his liberty widely, walking with bold and confident step. Yes, liberty was a pearl which the apostle cherished and prized. Was there a pearl of greater price? Yes. What was it? The integrity and conscientiousness of others. Some of his fellow Christians had consciences which were easily offended. Their consciences were like newly-opened eyes, exceedingly sensitive, and they looked with pain upon the brilliantly glorious liberty reflected from the lives of some of their fellows. And regarding these Paul said: 'We must not ignore our weaker brethren. Our liberty is a great joy, but we must not exercise it at the cost of their pain. We must restrain ourselves for their sakes.' And so he would not eat meat which had been offered to idols, lest the liberty should give moral offence and pain. He took his personal liberty and sacrificed it for the sake of the integrity of others, a good pearl for the sake of a better, and so exemplified the teaching of our Lord.

This is another pearl which is greatly valued among men—the pearl of popularity. Yes, popularity is a pearl, and not to be despised. The esteem of men is not to be regarded as a thing of no worth. The Scriptures do not

counsel us to despise it. We are urged to watch against a false emphasis, and not seek the praise of men more than the praise of God. But if popularity be a pearl, there is a pearl of far greater price, and to gain it we must be prepared, if necessary, to sacrifice the pearl of smaller worth. We must be ready to let go the pearl of popularity for the pearl of truth. The esteem of men must be appraised as of infinitely inferior value to the preciousness of the good-will of the holy God. Let us all be wise merchantmen, eager traders, ever ready to sell all that we have, when we discover pearls of transcendent worth.

## XIV

### The Holy Spirit

‘As a . . . wind.’—Acts ii. 2.

WHAT is the Holy Ghost? How does He come? What is the nature of His influence upon the life of man? No one can put into speech an immediate interpretation of the Spirit’s work. We can search for parable and symbol. We can call in the aid of the natural to dimly shadow forth the supernatural. How does the Holy Spirit come to me? Like wind. How does the Holy Spirit influence the spirit of man? Like wind.

‘Like a wind.’ Then He creates an atmosphere and a temperature for the soul. How susceptible we are to the influences of the wind! The north wind blows, and we are chilled with the diffused presence of ice and snow. The south wind blows, balmy, gentle, wooing, and its touch is like a soft caress. Yes, we are sensitive to the presence of the wind. It creates an atmosphere in which



breathing becomes a luxury or an agony. The Holy Spirit comes like the wind. How does the atmosphere He creates affect and influence the life? In two ways.

1. 'It is the Spirit that quickeneth.' Then the influence He creates is like the warm, alluring, out-calling breath of the spring. How appallingly poor even a rich garden appears in the early days of March! The riches are there, but they are buried and dormant. The garden is just a graveyard, full of buried seeds and roots, waiting for the touch of some magician's wand to people it with life and beauty. It abounds in sleeping possibilities, which will not be roused into wakeful realities until some warm breath has thawed their frozen life, and urged it in healthy and aspiring circulation. At last there comes the spring, breathing resurrection warmth into the graveyard, sending a vitalizing call into the deepest tomb, and the buried powers feel the quickening touch, and clothe themselves in the beautiful garments of light.

'It is the Spirit that quickeneth.' Why, then, is man a graveyard? Yes, many of us are just tombs in which are lying possibilities buried and unsprung. I believe that God has planted seeds of possible

power within us which only a few have realized. Spiritual organs remain undeveloped and dormant. For instance, there is the power of spiritual apprehension—the power to lay hold of God. How rarely we find it thoroughly awake and mighty! There is the power of spiritual imagination. How rarely we find it with clear eye, and strong, soaring wing! There is the power of loving the outcast, the power of detecting the lovely wherever it is hidden, and of exulting in the discovery. Are not these powers, in the majority of men, lying in the tomb, waiting the spring breath, the wind of resurrection?

2. But here is another word which suggests another influence of this wind of the Spirit: 'The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it.' The Lord breathes, and some things are withered. The wind of the Spirit creates an atmosphere in which some things are destroyed. That is a note of the gospel in which I rejoice. I rejoice in the withering power of the wind. I am glad that the breath that quickens also consumes. I look into my heart, the heart that I have consecrated to the King, and there is still so much there that can only be described as chaff. What shall I do with it? This is my hope: 'He shall burn

up the chaff with unquenchable fire.' The fire of the love that saved me will burn away my chaff. That is a promise, and not a threat, to the Christian man. And so with this word about the withering winds. The word that quickens the spiritual, withers that which is carnal. It makes an atmosphere in which only the angels can live, and which the devil is unable to breathe. The coming of the Spirit means the torture of the devil. 'Art Thou come hither to destroy us?' Yes, always and ever. The wind that quickens also consumes. When the soul-desert has been turned into a garden, no lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast, but it shall all be beautiful with the presence of redeemed and fully sanctified life.

## XV

### Just Recompense

‘With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.’—Matthew vii. 2.

THESE words are usually interpreted in their application to the relationship which we sustain to others. If we are severe in our judgements, the same measure of severity shall be visited upon us. If our judgements are large in long-suffering and forbearance, the same measure of long-suffering and forbearance shall be meted to us. If our criticism of others be directed to the exposure of their faults, the same measure of searching light shall be applied to the exposure of our faults. If we are only strictly just, strict justice shall be measured out to us. If we are merciful, mercy shall flow out towards us. ‘With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.’

Such is the common interpretation, an interpretation strictly in accordance with

the whole tenor and teaching of our Master's life. But the words enshrine a principle to which our Lord gave other and varied applications; and some of these applications are perhaps too commonly ignored. Let us glance at one or two.

1. 'Unto you that hear shall more be given.' The measure of your hearing shall be the measure of your listening. The more you listen the more you shall hear. The measure of your attention shall determine the measure of the revelation. 'With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.' That is a very vital and momentous application of this great principle. If you want to hear the voice of God, listen! The voice will grow clearer and clearer as your hearing becomes more earnest and intense. Listen to God's voice in conscience, and more and more pronounced and definite shall be its guidance. Do not listen much to conscience, and conscience will say less and less to you, until perhaps some day the hall where it ought to thunder shall be as silent as the tomb. A man ought to have a clearer and more vigorous conscience at fifty than he had at twenty, or it is an unanswerable witness that he has not been listening as he ought. This is a great law: 'Unto

you that hear shall more be given,' and 'From him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he hath.'

It is not otherwise with the voice that speaks from the book we call the Word of God. 'Unto you that hear shall more be given.' A person can read the Bible, and not listen, and to him there comes no eternal speech. The revelation is not given to the reader, but to the listener. I may read discourse after discourse which was spoken by our Lord, but if the ear of my spirit be closed, I shall never hear the Master's voice. His voice is spiritually discerned, and only as I listen with my spirit will revelations be made to me. 'In the hidden part Thou shalt make me to know wisdom.' If we turn to the Word with the spirit awake and alert, we shall be led from revelation to revelation, and from glory to glory. 'Unto you that hear shall more be given'; measure for measure: 'with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.'

2. 'According to thy faith be it done unto thee.' Measure for measure! The measure of our faith is the measure of the power we receive from our Lord. Little faith—little power, little daring, little enterprise! Great faith—great power, great daring, great en-

terprise! Faith is power; and the measure of the one is the measure of the other. Faith is buoyancy: lose your faith, you begin to sink. What is faith? 'Faith is the assurance of things hoped for.' Faith acts on the assurance that the thing hoped for is. You hope that there is a hereafter, where your broken family circle may be again complete. Act on the assurance that the thing hoped for is. Arrange your life and affairs on the assurance that you are to live again. That is faith. Take the matter of forgiveness. You have penitently sought the Lord's mercy-seat, and humbly appealed for forgiveness. You hope that the gracious Father will forgive you. That is the thing hoped for. Now act on the assurance that the thing hoped for is, that you are forgiven. 'Believe that you have received them, and ye shall have them.' That is faith. Such faith is power; and the more our faith increases the greater will be our power to pursue a quiet, faithful, and confident life. 'According to your faith be it unto you.' 'With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.'

## XVI

### *All Things New*

‘The former things are passed away.’—Rev. xxi. 4.

JOHN is gazing into the perfected city of God. He is filled with intense surprise. It is not so much what he sees, as what he does not see, which holds him in fascinated wonder. It is the things that are missing which open his eyes in a wide surprise, the ‘former things’ that ‘have passed away.’ He discovers that many things, which he had regarded as essential and permanent portions of the structure, were only rough scaffolding, temporary expedients, which have no office in the perfected kingdom. In chapter after chapter we find him missing familiar things; scaffolding after scaffolding he finds removed, until at last, when, with one comprehensive vision, he contemplates ‘the holy city, the new Jerusalem,’ ‘prepared as a bride adorned for her husband,’ he puts his wondering sense of missing familiarities into this one pregnant



phrase, 'the former things are passed away.' Let us glance at two or three of the things that are missing in the perfected life.

'I saw no temple therein.' The temple is a temporary structure erected to serve the ends of the invisible Church. If I unduly exalt the scaffolding, if I regard it as an end, and not as a means, I throw my entire life into a false perspective, and I get astray from the pregnant truth. What remains in the life to come is the character the temple has helped to produce—the character of holiness, of fellowship, of praise; the character that apprehends the divine and loves it. Upon this I must place the emphasis, the spiritual internality, and not upon the temple externality, which will assuredly pass away. Observe, then, the rightful place of symbolism. All symbols are used rightly when they are used as scaffolding—means for the rearing and exaltation of something else, unseen and eternal. But when symbolism is everything, when the scaffolding becomes the perfected structure, and the temple becomes the Church, then no warning judgement can be too emphatic or too intense; for in the great day of test, when 'the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is,' all temporary scaffolding shall be consumed, and the poor symbolist shall be left without part

or lot in the inheritance of the saints in light, for 'the former things are passed away.'

'There shall be no night there.' Then there will be no stars, and, as the Word says, they will 'need no candle.' These are the things that will be missing, the imperfect lights. The bits of light, the fragmentary revelations, will be supplanted by the perfect glory of the immediate presence of God. We know, in the physical world, how partial and imperfect are the lights of the night. The dominion of the darkness is so immediate and urgent, that we are able to push back the encroachments by only a very little way. Here is a street lamp. Just round about the lamp, where the little flame is burning, there is partial light; but before I reach the next lamp the darkness thickens again, and I feel the intrusion of the night. Our night-lights are not continuous. They are bits of light, patches of light, 'broken lights,' broken here and there by an obtrusive darkness which they do not dispel. 'There shall be no night there.' There shall be no more small night-lights, no candle-light, no bits of light about God, no partial revelation, but the fullness of the unveiled grace of the eternal God Himself. We are no longer to be dependent upon the light of conscience, the light of Nature, the

light of the Bible. 'Now I know in part'—in bits of light—'then shall I know even as also I am known.' 'There shall be no night there.'

'Neither shall there be any more pain.' Has God no further use for it? No, not in the eternal city. Pain is a minister in early stages, but now its mission is perfected. The dwellers in glory do not know the meaning of the word 'pain.' It has dropped out of the vocabulary, an obsolete term. 'Sorrow and sighing shall flee away.' They are all preparatory ministries, and they pass away when their ministry is accomplished. They are part of the Lord's scaffolding, used in the erection of 'temples of the Holy Ghost,' and when the temples receive their top story, all the scaffolding will be removed. 'The former things are passed away.'

## XVII

### The Heavenly City

‘He looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God.’—Heb. xi. 10 (R.V.).

A MAN can be in the land of promise, and yet not feel at home. ‘He sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country.’ But why these feelings of the vagrant? Why this sense of homelessness in the promised land? In the verse which precedes the text we are told that in the land of promise Abraham dwelt in tents; and the shifting tenure made the country appear perpetually strange. Tent-life gave him the consciousness of a changing and uncertain possession. He pitched his tent here to-day, and for a few short hours he tasted the delights of possession. But on the morrow the tents had to be moved again, and there rushed back into the patriarch’s soul all the restless uncertainties of a vagrant. His inheritance was shifting, movable, and transient. He was possessor

only by spasms. There was no rich, unbroken, continuous life, to create in his soul the settledness of home.

And yet, what was the voice which Abraham had heard? 'To thee will I give the land.' That was the promise, and Abraham knew that the promises of the Lord God are not honeycombed with uncertainties. He knew that the promised lands and possessions of the Lord God are not to be held on precarious tenure. If tent-life gave him only a shifting possession, then he knew that the promise was not yet fully matured, and 'he looked for a city,' a city 'which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God.'

We must emphasize the contrast between the city and the tent. The patriarch lived in the tent: he looked for the city. The tent has no foundations. Its holdfasts are only for transient usage. They are made to be easily changed. The city has foundations. It is stable, fixed, and permanent. The tent is the symbol of vagrancy: the city is the symbol of home. The tent is associated with the evanescent and changing: the city is associated with the continuous and the abiding. Abraham dwelt in the land of promise in tents, but 'he looked for a city.' He longed for settledness. He yearned for the abiding.

Now we are all the children of promise. A kingdom has been promised to us; not a material kingdom, traversed by lines of latitude and longitude, but a spiritual kingdom, the inheritance of the saints in light. This kingdom abounds in 'things that are freely given to us of God'—moral forces, spiritual graces, strengths and beauties from the sanctuary of the Eternal. Some of us have crossed the borders of the land. We are in the kingdom of promise. But how? Some are in the kingdom in shifting tents. Others are in the kingdom in settled cities. Some people's religious life is full of a restless change; others have a life full of a deep and fruitful homeliness, of rich and assured peace. How many of us only enjoy the kingdom by spasms! We have short seasons of possession. We are dwellers in tents, and have no fixed and settled abode. It is the gracious purpose of our Lord that our religious life should be a certain and continuous possession. He wants it to be a ceaseless 'abiding,' and not a few detached and uncertain seasons.

Here is part of the promised inheritance: 'I will give you rest.' Have we got a fixed house in that land, a settled home? Do we abide in His rest, or have we only got a tent possession? Do we only have infrequent

seasons of rest—rest for a day, and then on the morrow are we troubled, foot-sore wanderers again? In this land of rest have we only a tent? Let us look for a city.

Here is another element in the promised lot: 'My joy I give unto you.' 'My joy'—spiritual cheeriness, the light of the Father's countenance, a radiant hopefulness, a religious gladness. Such is the land. Have we settled homes in it, or only shifting tents? Do we 'rejoice evermore,' or is our joy irregular and uncertain? Let us look for the city.

Our peril is that we become contented with the tent-life. We become satisfied with religious fragments. We have no strong, violent hunger for a religious life of heroic and unbroken consistency. We become contented with religious seasons, and all the while our Master is pleading with us to 'abide in Him,' to 'rest in Him,' to make Him our fixed 'dwelling-place,' and our 'eternal home.' Let us eagerly listen to Him, and, leaving the vagrant tent-life, seek 'the city which hath foundations,' and 'dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.'

## XVIII

### The Worship of the Redeemed

‘They fell down and worshipped God that sitteth on the throne, saying, Amen; Hallelujah.’—Rev. xix. 4 (R.V.).

‘**A**MEN; hallelujah.’ These are not the empty words of an idle song. They are the expressions of dispositions, not of the transient day, but of the endless life. In those two days, if only we look at them aright, we may see the two great features of the heavenly life, the life that is lived in the immediate presence of God. ‘Amen,’ a note of resignation and submission, not sung with reluctance, but with a glad and eager consent. To all the revelations of God’s will the angels send the response, ‘Amen’; ‘Hallelujah,’ the note of praise. The angels obey, but not sullenly: they submit, but cheerily. They love and praise; they serve and sing. God’s love shines upon them as the sunlight falls upon our busy birds in spring, and like the birds



they cannot help but sing. They bow to the Lord's will in 'Amen.' They sing to the Lord's praise in 'Hallelujah.' The two together make the unbroken harmony of the eternal song.

Now, need we wait for the great unveiling before we learn the song? This heavenly harmony may be in our lives even while we walk the ways of earth. To the cry of 'Amen,' 'So be it,' 'Thy will be done,' the angels kneel and lay their crowns at the King's feet. They kneel there, not as monarchs, but as subjects, listening for the King's will, in order that, as deputy kings, they may hasten away to perform it. May we not, even now, adopt the angels' posture and the angels' speech? We are too prone to stand in stiff rebelliousness when we ought to bow in resignation and submission. We keep our crowns upon our brows, as kings and queens whose rights and dignities we jealously guard against infringement, when our truest nobility would be gained in laying our crowns at the feet of our God. What crowns have we? We have the crown of thought and the crown of will, the power to think and the power to rule; but these powers only attain their highest efficiency and glory when they are constrained into obedience to the all-loving King by whom

they were created. We must 'bring every thought into captivity to Christ.' Our thought must be 'Amen' to the Master's. 'We have the mind of Christ.' Our will must be 'Amen' to the Master's. 'Not my will, but Thine, be done.' How is it with us? Are we in mutiny? When the angels look upon us, do they tremblingly whisper, 'A child of rebellion,' or do they gratefully proclaim, 'A child of obedience'? Is our life a 'will not,' or does there rise from it a strain 'like the sound of a great "Amen" '?

But to 'Amen,' the note of submission, the angels join 'Hallelujah,' the note of gratitude and praise. It is a beautiful companionship. One would be very incomplete without the other. Praise is very comely; it is a most gracious thing. The prophet Isaiah speaks of it as 'the garment of praise,' a lovely and exquisite robe which both warms and adorns the soul. Many of the loveliest psalms begin with a trumpet-blast like the clarion call of a herald, 'Praise ye the Lord!' And now this Book of Revelation assures us that praise constitutes one of the great notes of the heavenly life that is lived in the radiant presence of our God.

Why do they sing 'Hallelujah' in glory?  
Why do they wear the 'garment of praise' in

the city of God? Here is the reason, given to us by the apostle-seer, 'Hallelujah, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.' That is the faith that calls forth the jubilant 'Hallelujah.' 'The Lord God omnipotent reigneth.' Cannot we let that faith shape the strains of our pilgrimage through time? I sometimes hear men of little faith and wavering hearts moan, in their despondency, 'I don't know what things are coming to.' They have temporarily lost the vision of their Lord. 'I don't know what things are coming to.' The angels do; and why? Because they keep their eyes fixed upon the King who wields the sceptre, and, gazing there, they have the assurance which enables them to sing with confident lips, 'Hallelujah, or the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.' There is much round about us that is stormy and bodeful. There is much in our nation to dishearten and perplex. 'The whole creation travaileth and groaneth in pain.' Society is tossed in fevers and convulsion. Homes are smitten with sorrow and death. But that is not all. If that were all, the note of hallelujah would be smothered and choked in the sobs of despair. Lift up your eyes to the hills! 'The Lord reigneth.' No force in the universe is chaotic

or erratic, moving without purpose and aim. Social convulsion is not an accident. Sorrow is not an accident. Pain is not an accident. Death is not an accident. The sceptre is in the hand of the Almighty, and these fearful ministries are working out His bidding. 'The Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Hallelujah!' It is out of that faith that songs are born; aye, even 'songs in the night.'

## XIX

### Choked with Thorns

‘And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it.’—Luke viii. 7.

‘**S**OME fell among thorns,’ and the soil was unable to sustain both. That is the principle. The capacity and resources of life are limited. We recognize the principle in the department of the mind. Here is a general medical practitioner. He has studied with equal attention every organ and function of the body, and in no particular direction has his study brought forth fruit unto perfection. His mental resources have been distributed over too many subjects to make it possible for him to be distinguished in relation to any. But take a specialist, who has limited his study to one particular organ—say the eye or the ear. By the concentration of his resources his knowledge comes to maturity. The mind-stuff is not thinned out in the creation of a large number of mental weaklings: it is husbanded

for the sustenance of one strong and influential product. The specialist grows one plant in his mind soil: the general practitioner grows many.

Our Saviour declares that the same principle is operative in the human heart. The heart resources are limited. If we distribute them over many things, we shall 'bring forth no fruit unto perfection.' Every additional thing we plant reduces the general strength. He wants us to be specialists, and to grow wheat only. But we are very prone to attempt to grow wheat and thorns, and the result is a religious life at once weak, languid and sickly. The wheat is enfeebled and robbed of its sustenance by the introduction of thorns. We cannot grow good wheat, if we also grow thorns. What kind of thorns do we grow? The Master names three.

I. 'The cares of this world.' There is a small but very fatal species of this thorn called Fretfulness. Once fretfulness establishes itself in the heart, the task of uprooting it is analogous to the task of uprooting chickweed from your garden. It is small, but most prolific, and makes a terrible drain upon our resources. We are very prone to forget the devastating power of little frets. Two hundred and forty pennies

will run away with a pound quite as effectually as eight half-crowns; and there are people, who have not eight big anxieties in the life draining away their strength, but who have two hundred and forty little frets; and these accomplish the same impoverishment. There is an immense amount of moral energy and force extracted from the heart by sheer fretfulness. Many a man who gives way to the devil may trace his collapse to the exhausting influence of fretfulness. There is a word of the psalmist, which indicates startling moral insight, and reveals a profound moral truth. 'Fret not thyself . . . to do evil.' That is what fretting leads to—evil doing! We can so reduce our moral force by fretfulness, so strain and weaken our spiritual garrison, that the citadel of our heart becomes a defenceless structure, and the tempter has easy entrance and possession, and leads us away captive at his will. Fretfulness diminishes spiritual force. It sucks away the thought and energy which ought to feed religious impulse and endeavour. To return to the Master's figure, it is a thorn among the wheat. It drains away the food-stuff from the higher nature, and disables us from bringing forth any good impulse to perfection.

2. 'The deceitfulness of riches.' Here

is another thorn. Fretfulness cheats the heart of the thought which ought to feed the spiritual life. Riches, in most subtle deceitfulness, cheat the soul of the same bread. How do riches deceive men? Men are deceived as to when a normal and healthy desire for wealth passes into avarice. Their thought becomes so absorbed in the pursuit of wealth that they have none left to determine their moral whereabouts. While they are increasing in one kind of wealth, they are being secretly despoiled of another. The tempter puts gold into their hands, and while they are riveted in contemplation he strips the gold from their hearts. He deals with men much in the same way as we sometimes deal with little children. There is your little one, who has somehow or other got hold of your gold watch, and is playing with it on the hearthrug. The problem is, how to get it away. You do not make a violent grab at the treasure. You take something else of most trifling value, and seek to engage the child's attention by that; and while the attention is diverted, the greater treasure is quietly taken away. That is how we are treated by the devil. He diverts us with a toy, and then despoils the heart. 'While men slept, the enemy came.' Riches



seduce our thought, and we lose our souls. The Master calls this 'deceitfulness of riches' a thorn which sucks up the thought, the attention, the aspiration, the resolution; and so good impulse does not grow and come to maturity: it dies down and passes away.

3. 'The pleasures of this life.' This is another of the impoverishing thorns—voluptuousness of living, sensational living, a living in sensation, a living in the external senses, in the outside of the life. The pleasures of the senses are not to be despised, but we are not to abide in them. The passages in your house may be very beautiful, but you do not live in them. The passage leads into the living rooms, and there you abide. We are tempted to abide in the passages of life, in the body, to have our thought absorbed by the flesh, and to have no thought and prayer in the secret place. 'She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.' She has strayed so long in the passage that the fire has gone out in the living room. She has dwelt so long in the senses that the fire has gone out in the heart. That is our snare—to give so much thought to the 'pleasures of this life' that we have none for 'the pleasures at God's right hand.' That is the thorn which chokes the wheat.

## XX

### *Spiritual Transformation*

‘They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks.’—Isaiah ii. 4.

THIS is what always takes place when the Kingdom of God has dominion among men. Wherever Jesus reigns, this is one of the fruits of His sovereignty. The sword is converted into a ploughshare, and the spear into a pruning-hook. The sword is not destroyed. It is transformed. The power of the sword is not annihilated: the power remains, but converted. A destructive energy is changed into a beneficent energy. A weapon which has been used for purposes of mutilation, is now used in the ministry of cultivation. It is thus that the law of the conservation of forces prevails in the realm of the spirit.

We may then lay down an axiom in the science of the spiritual life. Jesus Christ never destroys a force; He converts it. He

came 'not to destroy,' but to redeem. Wherever He finds an implement of destruction, He does not annihilate it; He transforms it into an implement of spiritual culture. He retains all the energy of the sword, only it is converted into the energy of the ploughshare. The ploughshare is just the sword transformed, with no particle of its original energy wasted or destroyed.

This is the method of Jesus. When I enter the Kingdom of God, and become a member of the pledged and aspiring host, I pass under the active and liberal influence of grace. I bring with me all the powers which I have been exercising in the ways of the world. I bring with me this or that faculty, possessed of so much power. I bring with me my passion, possessed of so much power. I bring with me my humour, possessed of so much power. How does the work of grace operate upon me? Does the great King denude me of my powers, and do I remain in the world emasculated, with the compass of my being diminished, and the totality of my energies decreased? Jesus Christ our Lord never diminishes our power. Whatever powers I bring to Him I retain, only I retain them converted and glorified. The 'new man' has all the powers of the

'old man,' but they have been transformed. He takes my swords, and He hands them back to me as ploughshares. He takes my spears, and returns them as pruning-hooks.

How does the good Lord find us? He finds us with plenty of force in our beings, but it is force perverted, and, therefore, destructive force. That is how the Lord found Zacchæus. Zacchæus was not a weakling. His force of character was abundant. He was shrewd, cute, enterprising, firm, decisive. He had force enough, but it was the force of a sword, and was being used in self-destruction. That is how the Lord found Hugh Latimer. In his unredeemed days Hugh Latimer was not a milksop, a poor insipid, nerveless semblance of a man. Latimer had force, exuberant force, but it was the force of a destructive sword piercing with poisoned tip into the very marrow of his moral life. The Lord finds us in the possession of force, but it is force perverted; and the method of His redemption is to take the perverted force and convert it, changing it from a sword into a ploughshare, from a spear into a pruning-hook. When the Lord laid hold of Zacchæus, He did not destroy his shrewdness and despoil him of his foresight and enterprise. The re-

redeemed Zacchæus was just as shrewd as the unredeemed Zacchæus, but the shrewdness had been transformed. It was no longer a poisoned sword; it had become a ploughshare used in the general welfare of the race. When the Lord laid hold of Hugh Latimer, did He draw away the power of his wit? Nay, the redeemed Hugh Latimer was just as witty, just as humorous as Hugh Latimer unredeemed, only the wit had been transformed. It was no longer a sword, but a ploughshare; no longer turning with destructive energy upon his own soul, but used in the ministry of purity, and as the happy servant of righteousness and truth.

Let us rid our minds of all small and impoverishing conceptions of redemption. To many people the word redemption is equivalent to annihilation, and to many others it is synonymous with mutilation. Redemption does not mean power maimed or power abolished. Redemption means conversion, transformation. Converted force is force with the destructive element extracted, the sword changed into a ploughshare, and the spear into a pruning-hook.

## XXI

### The Joy of thy Lord

‘Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.’

Matthew xxv. 21.

WHOSE joy? ‘The joy of thy Lord.’ But I thought He was ‘a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.’ I thought His face was ‘marred more than any man’s,’ worn and furrowed by pain. ‘Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.’ And yet here is the word, ‘Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.’ He was the Lamb of Calvary, and yet within twenty-four hours of the crucifixion, with His face steadfastly set towards death, and His feet already treading the grim and darkening way, He spoke of ‘My joy.’ ‘These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy may be in you.’ A Man of sorrows—‘My joy?’ Are they contradictory? Nay, they are supplementary. Each interprets the other. The sorrow

explains the joy. Unless we share in the sorrow, we cannot partake of the joy.

What is the joy of our Lord? In one of His most beautiful parables, the Lord gives us a glimpse of one of His joys. A shepherd has lost a sheep. It has wandered on to the wilds, and has missed the flock. The good shepherd goes in search of it. He roams over the storm-swept, rain-beaten moors. He peers into precipitous ravines. He descends into valleys of shadow, where the wild beast has its lair. He trudges high and low, far and wide, gazing with strained vision, and at last he finds his sheep, maybe entangled in the prickly brushwood, or bruised and broken by the rocky boulders of some treacherous ravine. 'And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulder, rejoicing.' That is one of the joys of the Lord—the finding of the lost! 'Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.' Can we do it? Stay a moment. Let us follow the shepherd home. 'And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.' Could they do it? I know that they could come to his house, and sit down to the feast, and enjoy the good things provided, and fill the house with music and

song. But could they really enter into his joy? Suppose that among his neighbours there were some who had been with him upon the wilds, who had dared the dangers of the heights and the terrors of the beasts, who had trudged with tired feet far into the chilly night—would not these be just the neighbours who would be able to enter into the shepherd's joy? To enter into the joy of finding, we must have entered into the pain of seeking. To enter into the joy of my Lord, I too must become 'a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.'

How clearly the Master unfolds the principle in the parable of the prodigal son! Day by day the father expectantly awaits the prodigal's return. He stops every traveller by the wayside, and inquires if in distant parts they have seen his son. He is up with the dawn, and watches till the sundown, if perchance he may catch a glimpse of his home-sick child. Every day he retires, to toss and plan, and cry, and dream. And one day his eyes discovered a shadowy figure which love at once interpreted as the returning child. 'When he was yet a long way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him.' . . . That is one of the joys of the Lord. . . . 'Bring hither the



fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and be merry.' 'Now the elder son was in the field,' and he had never mourned, and he had never prayed, and he had never sought a vantage-ground from which he could command wide visions, in the hope of seeing the returning brother. 'Thy brother is come—rejoice with me.' 'He was angry, and would not go in.' He could not enter into his father's joy, because he had never entered into his father's pains. He had no delight in the finding, because he had not shared the agony of the seeking. And so it is in the entire circuit of our relationship to the Lord. We are qualified to share His joys as we have shared in His sorrows. 'If we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him.' 'Ye are they which have continued with Me in My temptations, and I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me.'

## XXII

### *The Renewed Life*

‘Let your manner of life be worthy of the Gospel of Christ.’—Philippians i. 27 (R.V.).

**LET** your citizenship be worthy of the Gospel of Christ.’ That is the true relationship of Church and State. The Church is to bring into the State an ideal citizenship. The Church is to control the State by the all-pervasive influence of a lofty and distinctive character. Her dominance is to be the dominance of a compact, irresistible, superior life. Ye Christians of Philippi, living there at the crowded meeting-place of nations, surrounded by the pomp of a proud empire, experiencing the breathless rush of material ambition, exposed to all the corruptions which fasten upon a severe militarism and a bloated commercialism; let your influence pervade the huge sickly mass like currents of uncontaminated air; bring into it a life mighty

because of its separateness : 'let your citizenship be as becometh the Gospel of Christ.'

'As becometh the Gospel of Christ.' There is a central pith in the Gospel of Christ which is also the central pith of an ideal citizenship. The heart of the one is the heart of the other. The proposition is this, that if we take the Gospel of Christ, and dig away to its core, and if we take an ideal citizenship, and dig away to its core, we shall arrive at corresponding treasure, at the same essential and eternal wealth.

Now what is the heart of the Gospel of Christ? If we can grip that, we shall have discovered what ought to be the secret energy of all Christian citizenship. Take the life that stretches between Bethlehem and Olivet: what is its consistent and all-inclusive revelation? Mass together the gloomy desolations of Gethsemane, and the appalling abandonments of Calvary; what is the great pulsing purpose that beats within the gloom? It is this—a Saviour seeking the justification of His brethren by the offering of Himself. That is the heart of the Gospel,—the life and righteousness of all men sought through the unspeakable sacrifice of One. The Saviour 'put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.' That was the purpose that throbbed in

Gethsemane and on the slopes of Calvary, and that pervaded all the years which stretched from the cradle to the grave. He found life for others by the shedding of His own blood. 'He washed their robes white' in the cleansing ministry of a personal sacrifice. He sought and found others by the losing of Himself. That is the core of the Gospel.

Let the same core be in your citizenship. 'Let your citizenship be as becometh the Gospel of Christ.' Let the same spirit of sacrifice possess it, and impel it to seek the welfare of the race. In all ideal citizenship there is the shedding of blood. The ideal citizen, the apostolic citizen, pursues the ends of sound redemption by the sacrifice of himself. He seeks 'white robes,' pure habits, for his fellows, by washing them in his own blood. He loses himself that they may be found. He gives himself for the race.

Let us bring that home. In the heart of citizenship there must be the spirit of Calvary. What is there of Calvary in the share that we are taking in the life of our fellows? Is there anybody to-day in my city wearing a white robe because I have shed my blood? How often have I been physically tired in the service of others? I know I have often been tired by absorption in the pleasures of

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a passing day. How often have I trudged home tired by walking the streets of the city on 'my Father's business'? How often have my knees ached while I prayed for others? How many times have I 'sweat, as it were, drops of blood'? Has my citizenship been one of continued getting, getting, getting, and has there been in it no altar of sacrifice, no cross, no Calvary? Then, whatever be the name I bear, when the Master looks into the heart of my citizenship, and sees no cross, these will be His words, 'I never knew you.' 'If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.' The spirit of ideal citizenship is personal sacrifice. 'Let your citizenship be worthy of the Gospel of Christ.'

## XXIII

### *The Supremacy of Duty*

‘At even my wife died; and I did in the morning as I was commanded.’—Ezekiel xxiv. 18.

THESE words in themselves constitute a powerful sermon. The text carries its interpretation upon the surface. It is full of practical and pathetic suggestions. ‘At even my wife died.’ The light of the home went out. Darkness brooded over the face of every familiar thing. The trusted companion, who had shared all the changes of the ever-changing way, was taken from my side. The light of our fellowship was suddenly extinguished, as by some mysterious hand stretched forth from the unseen. I lost ‘the desire of mine eyes.’ I was alone. ‘At even my wife died, . . . and in the morning——’ Aye, what about the next morning, when the light broke almost obtrusively upon a world which had changed into a cemetery containing only one grave? ‘In the morning I did as

I was commanded.' And what was the command? Perhaps it was something peculiarly appropriate and soothing, something that would not jar upon the most sensitive grief. What was the command? It was a command to go out and awake a morally torpid and filthy city. The prophet had to bestir himself, and proclaim divine indignation and judgement against a city whose life, both civic and personal, was like foul and poisonous scum. 'Woe to the bloody city . . . in thy filthiness is lewdness . . . according to thy doings shalt thou be judged, saith the Lord God.'

That was the prophet's message. The command had been laid upon him in the days before his bereavement. When his home-life was a source of inspiring fellowship, he had laboured to discharge the burdensome task. In the evening-time he had turned to his home, just as weary, dust-choked pilgrims turn to a bath; and, immersed in the sweet sanctities of wedded life, he had found such restoration of soul as fitted him for the renewed labour of the morrow. But 'at even my wife died.' The home was no longer a refreshing bath, but part of the dusty road; no longer an oasis, but a repetition of the wilderness.

How now shall it be concerning the

prophet's command? 'At even my wife died, and in the morning' the commandment? How does the old duty appear in the gloom of the prophet's bereavement? Duty still, clamant and clamorous now in the shadows as it was loud and importunate in the light. What shall the prophet do? Take up the old burden, and faithfully trudge the old road. Go out in his loneliness, and go on with the old tasks. But why? You will find the secret of it all in the last clause of the chapter:— 'Thou shalt be a sign unto them, and they shall know that I am the Lord.' A broken-hearted prophet patiently and persistently pursuing an old duty, and by his manner of doing it, compelling people to believe in the Lord! That is the secret motive of the heavy discipline.

The great God wants our conspicuous crises to be occasions of conspicuous testimony. He wants our seasons of darkness to be opportunities for the unveiling of the Divine. He wants duty to shine more resplendently because of the environing shadows. He wants tribulation only to furbish and burnish our signs. He wants us to manifest the sweet grace of continuance amid all the sudden and saddening upheavals of our intensely varied life. This was the prophet's



triumph. He made his calamity witness to the Eternal. He made his very loneliness minister to his God. He made his very bereavement intensify his calling. He took up the old task, and in taking up he glorified it. 'In the even my wife died, and in the morning I did as I was commanded.'

The evening sorrow will come to all of us: what shall we be found doing 'in the morning'? We shall have to dig graves, and have burials; how shall it be with us when the funeral is over?

## XXIV

### Self-Conquest

‘This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.’

Matthew xvii. 21.

‘**W**HY could not we cast him out?’ ‘Because of your unbelief.’ The energy that was wanting was the energy of faith. Faith is the expulsive force; and if that be wanting, the powers of darkness will enjoy a secure and increasing dominion. We have no other power with which to confront the empire of devilry. We have minor forces which may co-operate with faith, but without faith they are almost as inefficient as a pair of bellows without a fire.

What is faith? I am not attempting an exhaustive definition, but one which may be sufficiently definite for our immediate purpose. Faith is a restful realization of the gracious and almighty presence of the eternal God. The very pith and marrow of faith is the realization of God. It perceives God as real.

To realize God is to turn a name into a presence, a doctrine into a friend. God is no longer conceived as remote and unusable. He is very nigh, an inseparable companion in all the steps of the common way.

But faith is more than a realization of God. It is a *restful* realization of the gracious presence of God. Faith is not timid, not fearful lest the gracious presence should depart. It does not glance round with nervous trembling, wondering if the Divine Companion is still near. Faith 'feels His presence every passing hour.' In faith there is no strain. It 'rests in the Lord.' It knits the life together in restful realization of God; and in that quiet and fruitful assurance we become so identified with God as to be mighty to cast out devils. How is this faith to be acquired? What are the means to its culture? Our Lord provides the answer in the words of the text. The means to the culture of faith are prayer and fasting—prayer, the discipline of the spirit; fasting, the discipline of the flesh.

I. 'By prayer.'—Prayer is 'the practice of the presence of God.' The act of prayer is a sublime assumption. It is an experiment with the supposed presence of God. What is the testimony of those who have made the

experiment? It is this, that the timid experiment leads to an assured experience. Prayer, which begins in a faltering assumption, results in a glorious certainty. Prayer becomes the means of mutual communication between me and God. I communicate to Him an aspiration; He communicates to me an inspiration. Prayer finds its symbol in the mystic ladder of the patriarch's dream. On the line of communication there are angels ascending and descending. The ascending angels are the aspirations of the suppliant; the descending angels are the inspirations of our God. And so we find the Master saying, 'Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.' In the life of the Spirit we begin to expire the moment we cease to aspire. Spiritual aspiration makes spiritual expiration impossible. 'Men ought always to pray,' and they would never faint.

Now if prayer, beginning as a large assumption, elicits the fruit of a spiritual communication from God, surely prayer is a means to the realization of the gracious presence of God. Prayer multiplies the witnesses which bear testimony to the loving nearness of God. Every communication I receive from the Infinite tends to make God more real. Prayer is thus a means to the

restful realization of the Eternal, and so is a means to the culture of faith.

2. 'By fasting.'—It is by my spirit that I am to realize the presence of God. Has the flesh any relation to the spirit? Yes, 'the flesh lusteth against the spirit.' I cannot give the reins to the flesh, and preserve the health and sanity of the spirit. The flesh can burden and enslave the spirit. In Tennyson's *Vision of Sin*, the soul is compared to a finely-organized steed

'that would have flown,  
But that his heavy rider kept him down.

The flesh can be a heavy rider restraining the soul from its flights. To live coarsely in the body is to vulgarize the soul. A man's eating has direct relation to the quality of his spiritual organism, and to be negligent about the one is to seriously impair and imperil the other. I do not wish to be drawn into any minor issues as to whether our Lord countenanced or enjoined any systematic abstinence. I prefer to declare this broad and fundamental teaching, that we should have more spiritual refinement, more sensitiveness to perceive and realize God, if we gave more wise and restraining care to the heavy rider which so frequently burdens and vulgarizes the soul. The discipline of

the flesh and the discipline of the spirit are assured means for the culture of that faith which enjoys a restful realization of the gracious and almighty presence of the eternal God.

## Treasure in Earthen Vessels

‘We have this treasure in earthen vessels.’

2 Cor. iv. 7.

**W**HAT treasure? The ‘light of the glory of God.’ But why put such a resplendent treasure into commonplace earthen vessels? In order that we may not think more of the vessel than we do of the treasure it contains. It is possible for a man to think more about the binding of a book than of the truth which the book reveals; and so God often enshrines His truth in books of very poor and unattractive binding. God likes to show His loveliest flowers in very plain and commonplace pots. He likes to put a handful of His jewels into an almost forbidding casket. He likes to kindle the light of His glory on very unglamorous lamps. And why? That the treasure

may not be eclipsed by the fascinations of the vessel which holds it ; that the truth may not be obscured by the personal or social grandeur of the man who proclaims it ; that the divine may not be lost in the boastful protrusion of the human ; ‘ that the exceeding greatness may be of God, and not from ourselves.’ Let us look for examples of this method of Providence in the broad field of human life.

1. God puts His treasure into earthen vessels *when He kindles the prophetic fire in the heart of a nobody*. How innumerable have been the instances where God has chosen a nobody to be the prophet of his time ! Look back. Away yonder, far back in the history of Israel, the nation is riotous and full of sin, abounding in cruelty and injustice and superstition. Into this people must be brought the consuming fire of the divine word. Who shall be the vessel to bear it ? On the hills of Tekoa there wanders a lonely herdsman following his flock. He is unknown to the grandees of the metropolis, and when he shall stand in their spacious squares his appearance will betray him as a greenhorn from the country. Yet this rough and unkempt herdsman, made of very common clay, was chosen



to be the bearer of the treasure of the Lord.

Take the Book of Revelation, through which you get glimpses into the very heart and home of God. In what kind of magnificent casket were these magnificent visions reposed? In the heart of a fisherman named John, who had one day been found by the Lord, 'with James his brother,' as they were in the ship 'mending their nets.' He was chosen to be the bearer of revelations whose deep and far-reaching splendours have even yet not been all disclosed. The treasure was put into an earthen vessel.

In the last century, and especially in its early years, our own nation was deeply sunk in moral apathy and spiritual death. Yonder, at the Bell Inn, Gloucester, standing behind the bar as a common drawer, is a young fellow named George Whitefield, and he is the chosen vessel to bear the treasure of prophetic truth. Truly a very earthen vessel, of very common clay; but in him was kindled the fire of the Holy Ghost, by whose burning the iniquity was consumed in innumerable hearts.

2. The Lord puts His treasure into earthen vessels *when He puts the power of the Holy Ghost into so-called foolish and contemptible*

*speech.* It is possible to have a golden casket of eloquence, and yet for that golden casket to contain no treasure, no power of the Holy Ghost. Eloquence may be a wind-bag. Stammering lips may be burdened with the very fullness of God. I do not wish to disparage the great ministry of eloquent speech; I believe that God often puts His apples of gold into pictures of silver, and His beautiful revelations into beautiful speech. But I wish to emphasize the peril that the golden vessel may draw attention to itself, and fix the admiration there. Eloquence may point to itself, while 'contemptible speech' may point to God. Some of our Easter cards have pictures of the cross all wreathed in exquisite flowers. You think more of the flowers than you do of the cross. And a speaker may bury his Lord in flowery language, so that we pay compliments to the speaker when we should be worshipping his Lord. Thus the Lord chooses the plain, unlettered man, who cannot paint flowers and speak them, the rough, uncultured man who can just put out his finger and point to the King.

3. The Lord puts His treasure into earthen vessels *when He puts His strength and beauty into bodies of decrepitude and weakness.*

Paul was satirized as having a 'bodily presence' which was 'weak.' It was a characteristic criticism from a nation of athletes. God sent to the Greeks a diminutive-looking Jew, small and insignificant. The treasure was put into a most frail and ungainly vessel. How often it happens that 'the light of the glory of God' shows most splendidly through the invalid of the family! What an amazingly beautiful treasure was put into the frail vessel of Frances Ridley Havergal!

The Lord loves to use 'the weak things,' and 'things that are despised.' He loves to put the treasure of His grace into the feeble, that the world may be compelled to ask, 'Whence hath this man this power?'

## XXVI

### *Perpetual Spring-time*

‘His leaf also shall not wither.’—Psalm i. 3.

THE leaf is the thing of the spring-time.

It is the first thing that comes. How soon it loses its delightful freshness! How soon the sweet greenness passes into the darker shades of summer, and becomes sere and yellow in the older days of autumn! But my text speaks of a religious life whose leaf shall retain its freshness through all the changing days. The spring glory shall not wither as the years roll away. The beauties of the spring-time shall continue through all the seventy years. The characteristic charms of childhood shall never be destroyed. Life shall grow. It shall increase in knowledge. It shall broaden in experience. It shall open out large capacities and powers. But amid all the many and varied developments the beauties of childhood shall remain. ‘His leaf shall not wither.’

What are the leaves which make childhood so beautiful? They are these—hope and sympathy. These are the fresh green adornments of the spring-time of life. How many of us lose them as life passes forward into its prime! There is so much that is hostile to them in the very atmosphere of the world we have to breathe. There is the terrible chill of sorrow and care. There is the repeated experience of failure. There is the growing sense of personal sin. There is the increasing knowledge of the world's depravity. There is the ever-present might of the tempter. There is the cold mystery of death. All these pervade and possess us, and in their bitter blasts our spring leaves begin to wither. The 'tender leaves of hope' begin to lose their freshness; the delicate leaves of sympathy begin to fade away. As men and women leave their youth and childhood behind, they are apt to decline in one of two ways—to become pessimists or formalists. A pessimist is a soul from whose branches the green leaf of hope has withered away. A formalist is a soul from whose branches the green leaf of sympathy has withered away. When these leaves fade and droop, the world becomes unspeakably poor. That is a wonderful word in the Apocalypse,

wherein we are told that 'the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.' It is full of beautiful suggestiveness. 'The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.' If ever the wounds and sorrows of the world are to be healed, it will have to be by the leaves of the tree of life, the green leaves of the spring-time, the leaves of hope and sympathy. It is the child-like disposition which is to heal the world's broken heart.

And yet in what multitudes of lives the leaves have withered away! What crowds of men and women there are who have lost their hope and sympathy! How is it? This psalm affirms that it is all a matter of rootage. If some of my readers are not as hopeful as they used to be, not as sympathetic as they were wont to be, let them regard their decline as occasioned by bad or imperfect rootage. Here stands the word, proclaimed with unfaltering confidence, declaring that he who 'delights in the law of his Lord,' who lives in the mind of God, who meditates therein continually, shall be 'like a tree planted by rivers of water: his leaf shall not wither.' His leaves shall be as green in old age as in earliest youth. Circumstances shall not vanquish him. 'He shall not fear when heat cometh.' Amid all the fierce blasts which

beat upon men in their prime, amid all the feverish haste and worry of these perspiring times, 'his leaf shall be green.' The drought of ingratitude shall not destroy the green leaf of his sympathy. The hot menaces of wickedness shall not corrupt the green leaf of his hope. 'The trees of the Lord are full of sap.' Rooted in the mind of God, our souls are 'planted by rivers of water,' and have resources at hand which can never be dried away.

Does this accord with common experience? Who are the men and women who keep the green leaf, who retain all the hope and sympathy of their early days? Where are the hope and sympathy of the world to be found? They are to be found on the tree of life, on souls that are rooted in Christ. It is there we find the spring green through all the changing years. It is there we find the enduring hope which is the source and impulse of all labours of reform—a hope that some day lust shall be unknown in the land, that drunkenness shall be no longer seen in our streets, and that all the owls and bats and dark night-birds of the human heart shall give place to the birds of the morning, the sweet singers of the brighter day. That is a great and inspiring hope. On some souls it has withered away, but it grows

green and fresh upon the souls of those who are rooted in their God. They carry the charms of their childhood on to the farthest day. 'He shall be like a tree planted by rivers of water. His leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.'



## XXVII

### *Spiritual Insight*

‘In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord.’

Isaiah vi. 1.

**H**ERE is Isaiah. Before his call and consecration he had lived on the political plane of life. His thought was ever moving among the forces of diplomacy and statecraft. The national problem was to Isaiah a political problem. The ultimate foundation of national prosperity was strong and stable government. The wise handling of political forces was the one essential for the continuity and grandeur of the nation's life. That was the plane of thought and life on which Isaiah moved, and on that plane he must find his heroes. He found the hero in Uzziah. Uzziah was the embodiment of political smartness—a sagacious administrator, a man of vision and brilliant diplomacy. So he became Isaiah's hero. What then? He had won Isaiah's admiration. What next? Next he won his

confidence, next his love, next his devotion; *then Uzziah became Isaiah's god!* Uzziah filled the whole of Isaiah's vision. How now did Isaiah's reasoning run? Thus: 'What will become of the world when Uzziah dies? When the master of statecraft is gone, in whose hands will the rulership rest? When the political nave is removed, will not all the spokes of the national wheel fall into the direst confusion?'

Such was Isaiah's fear, begotten by his hero-worship. Well, Uzziah died. What then? Let us read the record. 'In the year that king Uzziah died'—what? 'All my worst fears were abundantly realized?' No, no. 'All the world's affairs were plunged into chaos and discord?' No, no. 'In the year that king Uzziah died I had my eyes opened. I saw there was a greater kingdom with a greater king—I saw the Lord.' When king Uzziah was removed from his vision, Isaiah saw that king Uzziah was not the ultimate power, but that behind him, high and lifted up, was the Lord God Almighty. The revelation gave to Isaiah an enlarged conception of all things. It gave him a new centre for his thoughts and life. It taught him that the ultimate security of all national greatness rests not in thrones and

crowns, but in God. It taught him that big armies, and walled cities, and subtle diplomacy are not the fundamental forces on which the welfare of mankind rests. The originating centre of all true and enduring life is not diplomacy, but holiness—not Uzziah, but the Lord.


Surely that is a lesson for to-day—that national foundations must not be laid by Uzziah, but by the Lord; that material forces must be kept secondary, because they are transient; and that the spiritual must be exalted, as being primary and eternal. To-day men are labouring with both hands to mightily strengthen king Uzziah, as the representative of political strategy and material force. We are ‘digging wells.’ We are adorning cities. We are increasing our armies and navies. We are buttressing about our treasures with ramparts which appear invulnerable. All around us is going on constitution building. The clamour of the builders is incessant. Are we building another Tower of Babel, or are we building the City of God? Is it true of us, as of the builders of old, that we are using ‘bricks for stone, and slime for mortar?’ Behold, ‘the Lord will come down to inspect the tower which the children of

men build,' and then shall it become manifest that the solidarity and stability of the structure depend not upon clever policies, but upon holy character; and that if the government of things is to be eternally efficient, the government must rest upon the shoulders of the Lord.

**THE END**



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