

# THE PEOPLE'S BIBLE:

*DISCOURSES UPON HOLY SCRIPTURE.*

✓ BY

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# CONTENTS.

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## THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN—

	PAGE
PRIMARY AND SECONDARY LIGHT . . . . .	2
THE RECORD OF JOHN . . . . .	6
THE PRIVATE MINISTRY OF THE GOSPEL . . . . .	16
NICODEMUS . . . . .	29
ON HUMAN REGENERATION . . . . .	36
SURPRISING PEOPLE . . . . .	46
THE MIRACLE AT CANA . . . . .	55
BETHESDA . . . . .	58
LONELINESS . . . . .	66
A SOLEMN WORD . . . . .	73
AN EXHORTATION AND AN ARGUMENT . . . . .	76
GREATER WITNESS THAN JOHN'S . . . . .	83
COMING TO CHRIST . . . . .	92
FRAGMENTS AND PORTIONS . . . . .	101
CHRIST NOT A KING BY FORCE . . . . .	110
BREAD AND WATER . . . . .	119
THE DIFFICULTIES OF DISBELIEF . . . . .	127
THE EVER-LIVING CHRIST . . . . .	138
JEWS MARVELLING AT JESUS . . . . .	146
THE CONVICTED WOMAN . . . . .	154
HISTORICALLY TRUE, MORALLY FALSE . . . . .	160
SONSHIP . . . . .	168
JESUS CHRIST'S CLAIM FOR HIMSELF . . . . .	175
PLAIN SPEAKING . . . . .	190
SINNER OR SAVIOUR . . . . .	199

	PAGE
<b>THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN</b> ( <i>continued</i> )—	
INDISPUTABLE CURES . . . . .	207
DIVISION OF OPINION . . . . .	217
LIFE WITHOUT MIRACLES . . . . .	225
CHRISTIANITY IN FAMILIES . . . . .	227
“IF” . . . . .	238
CHRIST’S COURAGE . . . . .	246
CERTAIN GREEKS . . . . .	249
WALKING IN THE LIGHT . . . . .	257
THE FALSE ESTIMATE . . . . .	266
CHRIST’S EXAMPLE . . . . .	274
WASHING DISCIPLES’ FEET . . . . .	283
JUDAS ISCARIOT: A STUDY OF CHARACTER . . . . .	292
NOT NOW, BUT AFTERWARDS . . . . .	311
THE REVELATION OF THE FATHER . . . . .	318
THE SELF-REVELATION OF CHRIST . . . . .	321
THE PREPARED PLACE . . . . .	329
ON CHRIST MANIFESTING HIMSELF . . . . .	336
BLESSINGS IN UNEXPECTED WAYS . . . . .	346
THE CONVICTION OF SIN . . . . .	356
THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CHRIST AND CHRISTIANS . . . . .	366
UNITY IN CHRIST . . . . .	375
THE TRUE KINGDOM . . . . .	384
SCOURGING JESUS . . . . .	397
NO FAULT FOUND . . . . .	406
WHAT SCRIPTURE SAITH . . . . .	409
MARY: NEEDLESS TROUBLE . . . . .	420
THE CONFESSION AND REMISSION OF SINS . . . . .	426
DOUBTING THOMAS . . . . .	440
A PATHETIC INTERVIEW . . . . .	449
<b>INDEX . . . . .</b>	<b>457</b>

THE  
GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN.

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[NOTE.—“John, the younger brother of James, who with him was called to the apostleship, was the son of Zebedee and of Salome. His father was a fisherman, living at Bethsaida in Galilee, on the borders of the lake of Gennesareth. The family appear to have been in easy circumstances; at least, we find that Zebedee employed hired servants (Mark i. 20); and that Salome was among the women who contributed to the maintenance of Jesus (Matt. xxvii. 56).

“Having been brought up in the knowledge and the love of the true God by a pious mother, he appears to have early become a disciple of our Lord’s forerunner, and to have been directed by him to Jesus, whom he followed; it being generally considered that he was one of the two disciples mentioned in chap. i. 37–41. He was soon admitted, with his brother James, and Peter, to particular intimacy with the Saviour, who selected them as witnesses of the most important and solemn events of his life (Mark v. 37; Matt. xvii. 1, xxvi. 37).

“It appears, that of all the apostles John was especially favoured with our Lord’s regard and confidence, so as to be called ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved.’ He was devotedly attached to his Master; and though he fled, like the other apostles, when Jesus was apprehended, he recovered his firmness, was present during the trial and crucifixion of our Saviour, and was intrusted by him with the care of his mother (xix. 26, 27).

“John is said to have remained at Jerusalem till the death of Mary, about the year A.D. 48. After Paul had left Asia Minor John went to labour there, residing chiefly at Ephesus, and founding several churches in that country. Shortly afterwards, during the persecution under Domitian (or, according to others, towards the end of the reign of Nero), he was banished to Patmos, an island in the Ægean Sea, where he received the visions of the Apocalypse. On the accession of Nerva he was liberated, and returned to Ephesus, where he continued to labour during the rest of his life. He died in the hundredth year of his age, about A.D. 100.”—ANGUS’S *Bible Handbook*.]

Chapter i. 6–13.

“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that

Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

### PRIMARY AND SECONDARY LIGHT.

THE John spoken of in the first verse of the text is John the Baptist. The evangelist says that John was sent from God. Ordinary biography begins at another point. In this case, parentage, birth, training, are omitted altogether, and the very beauty of God lights up the face of the man. Men have different ways of looking at themselves. In some cases they look downward towards "the mire and the clay," that they may keep in memory "the hole of the pit out of which they were digged"; in others, they view human life religiously, and claim the dignity and privilege of the sons of God. The influence of this view upon the uses of strength and upon surrounding life must be intense and salutary. We degrade life when we omit God from its plan. On the other hand, we descend upon our work with fulness of power when we realise that it is God that worketh in us to will and to do of his good pleasure. What is our view of life? Have we but a physical existence, or are we the messengers of the most High? When Moses went to his work he was enabled to say—"I AM hath sent me unto you." So when John undertook his mission he boldly claimed to be the appointed servant of God. Our greatest power is on the religious side of our nature: physically, we are crushed before the moth; religiously, we have omnipotence as the source of our strength.

"The same came for a witness,"—God reveals himself to us little by little as we may be able to bear the light. He has set forth a long and wonderful procession of witnesses, from Moses even until John, who was the last of the illustrious line. It is well when a man distinctly knows the limit of his vocation. We are strong within our own bounds. John, as a professed Saviour, would have been weak and contemptible; but as a witness he was a burning and a shining light. John the Baptist

was as the morning star. Or (changing the figure) he was a man standing on the highest mountain, who, catching a glimpse of the first solar ray, exclaims, "Behold, the day cometh!" And is not such an exclamation the only originality of which we are capable? There is no originality, except that which is relative, in any ministry or in any church.

"He was not that Light,"—he was but a temporary ray: the brightest light which the hand of man can enkindle is instantly paled when the sun shineth in his strength,—beautiful indeed is that secondary light when shining alone, and not beautiful only, but precious exceedingly to men who, without it, would be in darkness; yet could it speak, it would say,—“I am but a spark of another fire; your admiration of my splendour will cease when you see the sun.” Such is the speech of the most luminous men. Our light is lunar, not solar; or solar only because Christ is in us, and according to the measure of our capacity he sheds his glory through our life.

"That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." As the sun shines for every man, so Jesus Christ lives for every man. The lamp in the house belongs to the householder: the lamp in the street is a local convenience: but the sun pours its morning and its noontide into every valley, and into the humblest home; that is the true light: the freehold of every man,—the private property of none! And every man knows that the sun is the true light,—feels it to be such,—and without hesitation affirms it to be supreme. There is no debate as to whether the sun or the moon is the light of the world. Imagine a dark night, and an observer who has never seen the sun: a star suddenly shows itself, and the observer hails it with delight; presently the moon shines with all her gentle strength, and the observer says,—“This is the fulfilment of the promise; can ought be lovelier, can the sky possibly be brighter?” In due course the sun comes up; every cloud is filled with light; every mountain is crowned with a strange glory; every leaf in the forest is silvered; the sea becomes as burnished glass, and secrecy is chased from the face of the earth: under such a vision, the observer knows that this is the true light,—the sovereign

all-dominating flame. It is so in the revelation of Jesus Christ. When the eyes of men are opened to see him in all his grace and wisdom and sympathy,—in all the sufficiency of his sacrifice, and the comfort of his Spirit,—the heart is satisfied, and every rival light is lost in the infinite splendour of God the Son.

“He came unto his own, and his own received him not.”—He came unto his own things (*ἴδια*), and his own people (*ἰδιοὶ*) received him not. There was no room for his mother in the inn. He himself had not where to lay his head. He was as a householder coming to his own house, and being kept out by his own servants. What is the earth but one apartment in the great house of God! Its furniture,—(its hills and valleys and rivers, fruits and flowers and harvest fields),—is Jesus Christ's, for apart from him was not anything made that was made; yet when he came to his own house his ownership was denied by the servants who had been put into temporary possession by his own power and grace! “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.”

“But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God.”—Having believed on his name they entered upon a new relation to their Father in heaven. They had been living a life of mere creature-hood; the sense and the joy of sonship had been lost, and had become irrecoverable except by faith, which is the gift of God. Regeneration is as much the work of God as was creation. A man may unmake himself, but the power of restoration is not in his own hand. Nor is there either mystery or injustice in this. The same law holds good in the physical as in the spiritual world: a man can kill himself, but can he take back his life again? Or he can crush a flower, but can he heal it, and make it as perfect and beautiful as before? Or he may destroy his sight, but can he recover his vision? We can only destroy; we cannot create. “O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help.” Let us give personality to two flowers, and from their talk let us learn something on this matter: “I stand in this window from month to month, and I declare that every possible attention is paid to me;

as regularly as the morning comes my roots are watered, and not a day passes without the window being opened that I may be revived by the fresh living air : so if ever flower had reason for contentment and joy I am that flower." So far, so good. Now, the second flower, luxuriant and beautiful exceedingly, says, "Look at the difference between us ! I am of the same stock as yourself ; we are called by the same name ; we live on the same elements ; yet I am strong and blooming, and you are weak and colourless." How is this, then ? The one flower has been standing in a sunless window, the other has been living in the sun ! Preach the gospel of light to that flower, and if your gospel be received with faith, the light will give it "power" to become as strong and beautiful as any member of the same family. It is even so with mankind. We are trying to live without the light,—the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world,—and our trial gives us over more and more to the power of death. Without light no soul can live !

"Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."—This, again, is most emphatically in the style of John. Never can he lose sight of the perfect spirituality of Jesus Christ's work. John shows the very religiousness of religion. Christianity is to him more than a history, more than an argument, more than a theology,—it is a spiritual revelation to the spiritual nature of man. On the part of man it is to be not an attitude, but a life,—the very mystery of his spirit, too subtle for analysis, too strong for repression, too divine to be tolerant of corruption.



## Chapter i. 19, 20.

“And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ.”

### THE RECORD OF JOHN.

THE John spoken of in the text is John the Baptist. John who writes the text is John the Evangelist. It is a peculiarity of John's Gospel that throughout he deals almost exclusively, though there are special exceptions, with the spiritual ministry of Jesus Christ the Son of God. The other evangelists treat very prominently of the miracles and the more public ministry of the Saviour. But the evangelist John seems to know the heart of Jesus Christ. John was the spiritual evangelist; he had keen, spiritual eyes. True, indeed, he saw all the miracles of an outward and public kind that Jesus Christ did, but he seemed to make a special note of those spiritual miracles which deal more directly with the heart and the conscience, the inner life, and the secret motives of men. You will find somewhat of my meaning from the structure of the preface to his Gospel, which we have in this opening chapter. Matthew and Luke proceed to trace out the history of Jesus Christ from the human side; they show how he came into the world, through what genealogical line he found his way amongst the sons of men. But John takes another course altogether. Instead of writing a genealogical table, showing us the whole human ancestry of the Son of God, he says, with the abruptness of sublimity, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” The other evangelists seemed to bring Jesus Christ up from the earth; John opens heaven, and reveals his glory from on high. This is the key of the whole gospel; it is pre-eminently a spiritual revelation; it deals with the inner life

of things. He who is the master of the Gospel by John is a refined and learned scholar in the school of Christ. There is very little outwardness in the statements of John ; he does refer again and again to miracles, but more frequently he speaks from the interior life of the Saviour, and shows us the meaning of the truth and the grace that are in Christ Jesus. This we shall see more clearly as we pursue our way from the text which is now under consideration.

John the Baptist was preaching. A deputation was sent from Jerusalem to wait upon him, to put to him this question, "Who art thou?" He had been creating a great sensation ; all the people for miles round about had been crowding to his ministry ; he had excited very great interest and expectation, and people were looking out for some startling and marvellous event. John received the deputation, heard their inquiry, and when he listened to it he passed through the hour of his temptation. Is it a little thing to have a deputation waiting upon you from the capital in whose heart there is evidently a very special expectation ? Is it a little thing to hear the members of the deputation say, "Who art thou?" in a tone which seems to imply, "We shall not be surprised if thou dost reveal thyself as the very light we have been expecting!" A temptation was brought thus to bear upon John. The people would have returned to those who sent them, and would have said, "Yes, this is the man ; this is the realisation of all the ancient prophecies ; he has come at last ; his name is Messiah, Son of God, King of the Jews." How did John meet the temptation ? "He confessed, and denied not ; but confessed, I am not the Christ." The wonder of those who waited upon him was increased. Who was he, then ? That he was some great man could not be doubted, so they proceeded to say, "What, then, art thou Elias?" and he said, "I am not." "Art thou that prophet?" and he answered, "No." He did not at once reveal who he was, but allowed these people to pursue their inquiries for a time. He baffled them, and kept them at arm's length. It is in the same way we ourselves are treated in some such manner, now and again, even in our highest inquiries. We receive negatives, and not affirmatives, as answers. Instead of having a revelation made clear, distinct, and final, we are tempted to go

further, and to repeat our inquiries in various forms. Thus God puts us under a process of training by not answering at once the inquiries with which we besiege him. Blessed is the man who will pursue his inquiry until he reaches the truth, who finds in all the answers of God licenses to ask again, to put up some other prayer, to shape his heart's wish into some other form. For truly, God is thus training the man to have a wise and understanding heart.

John knew who he was. That is one of the main points every man ought to understand about himself. He ought to be able to say who he is, what he has been called to do, what he is qualified to perform. Because a man who may have great power within a given compass may have only to step beyond the line of his limit to be utterly weak and useless. Do we know ourselves? Do we know the measure of our strength? Do we work within the compass that God has assigned us; or are we wasting our strength in those foolish ambitions which tempt us away from proper limitations and mock us, throwing us back and back again into the dust, so that at the end of the day a man who might have done some solid and substantial work in life has done nothing but follow the vagaries of a useless and mortifying ambition, and will leave the world without having done it any good? The Church ought to know what it is; the Church ought to understand its limitations. Every minister ought to know who he is, and what he is called to do. The moment a man usurps anything that does not belong to him he loses power, and the moment the Church lays claim to anything that does not fairly come within its possession as determined by Christ, that Church goes down in its best influence. "Who art thou?" If he had said, "I am the Christ," he would have won a moment's victory, but he would have opened up to himself a most ignominious and humiliating destiny. Who art thou, O man? what canst thou do? what is the purpose of God as revealed in thy life? Art thou great? art thou little? art thou intended for public life? art thou meant for private ministry? What is thy place? what is thy calling in life? Let a man understand this clearly, and work according to a devout conviction, and his life cannot be spent in vain. But let this temptation

once seize a man, "I could be as great as Elias has been; I think I have within me the spirit of that prophet referred to so often in the Old Testament";—let a man extend himself ambitiously beyond his proper function and calling in life, and the result will be self-mortification, ignominy, and shame; and he who might have done something really good and useful, will go out of the world having misspent his little day.

What is true of individual men is true of the whole Church. When a man says, "I am Christ," he lies. When a man says, "I claim infallibility," he touches the highest point of blasphemy. When a man at Rome, or in London, or elsewhere, says, "I am as God upon the earth," he knows not himself; he has committed the most grievous sin, though there be upon his lips the holiest of names. I wish to be emphatic upon this; I wish every man amongst us to know himself, to understand what he is, and then, though he cannot say in reply to the inquiry, "Art thou some great one?" "Yes;" yet, if he can say that he is sent of God to do the humblest work in the world, he is great in his degree, and shall have promotion and rulership in the world that is to come. Look at John; see how the great men crowd around him; hear what temptation they suggest to him. It had never occurred to John himself, in all probability, that he was Elias, that he was "that prophet," that he was some great one. So the suggestion comes to him with all the force of a subtle temptation. What does he answer? He says, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord." That was his answer. What did he say of himself? "I am a voice." What did he say of his ministry? "I am sent to prepare the way of the Lord in the attention and the affections of the world." Thus, he who had offered to him by a very subtle temptation a brilliant crown and a high throne said, "No; I am but a voice; I am not the expected One; clearly understand my ministry and function in life; I am the herald, not the King: I blow the blast of the trumpet, and he himself will be here presently." That is just what every Christian has to do; to go before, to proclaim the Lord, to call men to preparedness, to awaken their attention, to tell them to be ready: for the Bridegroom cometh, and then to stand out of the way, as those who have indeed done a humble,

yet a most useful work, in the world. But I repeat, he who knows his strength as John knew it will be strong, as no man can be who imagines himself to have a power with which God never invested him. A stern, solemn, grand man was John. He would receive no compliments; he would take nothing that did not belong to him of right. He was asked why he performed the office of baptism if he was not the Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet. John answered and said, "I baptise with water; but mine is a merely introductory ceremony, I am only giving you types, and showing you hints of things; the real work has yet to be done, the inward spiritual change has yet to be wrought in the hearts of men. This poor water, this shallow river, I use as indicative of the great fact that man needs an inward change. As for this baptism, it does nothing towards the removal of your sins, but it offers an opportunity of saying, 'We are sinners; we would be saved; we would repent; we would be born again.'"

After this there came in his speech a beautiful sentence: "There standeth one among you, whom ye know not; he it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose." Where was the expected one? Standing amongst the people. They were looking far away for the blessing promised to the world, and behold, that blessing was standing in their very midst. It is in this way that we miss many of the great revelations and wonderful presences that God sends down to cheer us and soothe us by gentle ministries. We are looking beyond; we are looking afar off; we think that our great blessings should come from some great distance. God says, "My child, they are under thy very hand; they are close beside thy footprints; the best blessings I can give thee may be had at once. Seek, and thou shalt find; knock, and it shall be opened unto thee; ask and have." So throughout the whole of the revelations of God we are told that things precious to our best life are much nearer us than we imagine; that God is not a God afar off, but a God nigh at hand; that after all there is not some stupendous thing to be done on our behalf. We have but to open our eyes and we shall see the light; but to breathe our prayer, and all that is good for us will be done in our hearts.

We have no long pilgrimages to make ; no great penalties to undergo ; no long-suffering and self-infliction and self-reproach and self-crucifixion to perform, in any outward sense of those terms. Christ has done the work for us ; he is within reach of the prayer of our love ; he is amongst us ; he is nigh at hand. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."

I believe that in talking thus I am speaking to a difficulty that does keep many persons back from the realisation of the very highest blessings of God. "There standeth one among you." Blessings are nearer than you expect. There standeth one among you ; but the angel is veiled. There standeth one among you ; stretch not your necks as if looking beyond the hills ; open your eyes as if expecting to see God at your very side, and the light of his countenance shall make day in your hearts. Have not some of us been doing some great thing, and looking to some great distance for the incoming of God into the human race and into our own hearts ? There is nothing in the creation that is round about us that does not testify to the near presence of God.

Art thou looking for God coming far away from the east yonder, when the morning light shines ? Be assured that he is in that bread, if it be but a crust that is on thy morning table. Do you expect God to come in thunder and lightning, and whirlwind, and stormy tempest, making the clouds the dust of his feet, and coming with the trumpet of the thunder and the shouting of angels ? Behold, he is in that little spring of water at thy backdoor, he is round about thy bed ; he is numbering the hairs of thy head ; he is putting his hand upon the head of thy little child ; he is doing home work ; he is on thy table ; round about thy couch ; making steadfast thy feet in all thy paths, watching all thy going, observing thy down-sitting and thy uprising, thy going out and thy coming in. He hath beset thee behind and before, and he lays his hand upon thee. And yet thou art looking as though thou didst require some great telescope to see the distance of God, and even then thou dost expect but to see his hinder skirts. There standeth one among you whom ye know not ; God is within whisper reach : he can hear every throb

of the heart, he sees every tear that drops from the eye of penitence, and there is nothing that is hidden from the fire of his look. Believe this, and a great awe will descend upon thy life; believe this, and every mountain will be an altar, every star a door into heaven, every flower an autograph of God, and the whole scene of thy life shall be chastened and hallowed by a religious sense, and an assurance and consciousness that God is close at hand.

“The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” This expression on the part of John the Baptist proves what I have said about the spirituality of the writings of John the evangelist. John the evangelist alone marks down this exclamation,—he heard the spiritual words of the preacher. John the Baptist called the attention of the world to the great coming One. John the evangelist saw spiritual realities, whilst men of inferior mould were dealing with so-called facts and with the outwardness of things. It was John's fine sense of hearing that caught this expression: “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” If you will at your leisure compare the reports which are given of John the Baptist by the other evangelists, you will know what I mean by saying that John the evangelist caught the spiritual aspect of things, saw the inward, moral, spiritual intent of men who wrote and spoke, and who came as the special servants and ministers of God to the world. It will be easy for you to put together the conversations which would very likely take place regarding the preaching of John the Baptist. We have a record in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. There will be no difficulty in piecing these reports, so as to get a tolerably correct idea of the conversations that preceded regarding this remarkable personage. To him none could show hospitality. His meat was locusts and wild honey; he had a leathern girdle about his loins; his home was the wilderness. He wanted none of your wine and your luxury; he did not accept invitations to the banqueting boards of men; he realised what is meant by the independence of poverty. As long as there was a locust he had a meal; as long as he could put his finger out to the wild honey he had enough. The blandishments

and all the refinements and luxuries of the state that was near to him had no effect upon his ambition or upon his heart. He lived independently; you could take nothing from him, and he would not have anything added to him. Oh, it was a stern, solemn, terrible-looking life that; and his preaching was very like it, was it not? If we had only had the accounts of Matthew and Mark and Luke, we should have thought that the preaching was such as eminently befitted the preacher. Look at him there. Look at his long locks, at his leathern girdle, at his monastic face, at his rugged bearing, at his simple fare. He is standing there silently; when he speaks I wonder what such lips will say? Oh, they are terrible looking lips! When he shuts his mouth he seems to have made a resolution; when he closes those lips of his it seems as if he never would open them again but to curse the world! Listen! Have you heard this preacher named John—this grim, weird man that rejects our approaches, and keeps us so much at arm's length? Have you heard him? "Yes." Can you quote anything he says? "Yes; I never heard so terrible a speaker as he is; he seems to cleave the air when he speaks. I heard him say, 'His fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor!'" Have you heard him preach? "Yes; and never heard such a speaker before." Can you quote anything he says? "Yes; he says, 'The wheat he will gather into his garner; but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire!'" Have you heard him preach? "Yes." Can you quote anything that this wonderful man has said in his preaching? "Yes, I can." What did he say? "He said, 'The axe is laid to the root of the tree!'" And their report ends. Matthew, Mark, and Luke have each spoken to us, and there is an end of it. Was that preaching? Do such terrible sentences as these constitute preaching? "His fan is in his hand!" That is a threatening. "The axe is laid to the root of the tree!" That is a threatening. "The chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire!" That is a threatening. An awful preacher! I expected as much; I thought he never could speak a gentle word; his voice could never subside into a minor tone. I turn over a page, and the page brings to me the report of John the evangelist. I inquire, "John the evangelist, have you heard your namesake the Baptist?" "Yes." Can you quote anything from any one



of his sermons? "Yes." What? "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

Such are the different reports we may hear about a man's preaching! Some people never hear the finer tones; some persons never hear the tenderer expostulations and messages of the speaker. They remember what he said about the fan and the axe, and the unquenchable fire; but the gentle gospel, the sweet, persuasive tone, the indicated Lamb of God, they think nothing of,—they remember not; it seems to escape them altogether. This rugged preacher, with the voice of the whirlwind and a countenance grim to terribleness, was he who preached the most intensely evangelical, the most vital gospel sermon ever delivered by the lips of man or angel. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Remember, John said that; remember, that is the upgathering of the revelation of God; remember, that to recollect everything else and to forget this, is to remember the shell and to forget the kernel, to remember the body and to forget the heart, to know the outside of things, and nothing of that inner spiritual reality which is the very joy of life. How beautifully it is put: "The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." How it might have read! What a different expression it might have been! This would seem to have been more in harmony with the aspect of the speaker, and with all that was known about his way of livelihood. When he came out of the wilderness, having eaten the locusts and the wild honey, and girt his leathern girdle about him, and come forth amongst the people, I should have expected him to say this: "Behold the lions of the tribe of Judah that devoureth the sinners of the world!" I should have said, "Yes, that is a natural climax; that kind of expression seems to befit your mouth." Instead of that he says, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Not the sinners but the sin; not the offender but the offence. That is redemption. The other course would have been destruction. It is easy to destroy; it requires God to redeem. It is easy to strike: it requires infinite grace to heal. By one stroke of his lightning he could have taken away the sinners, but it required the blood of his heart to take away the sin. We are redeemed not with

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corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God !

Christ came to take away sin ; we cannot take it away ourselves. If it required the divine intervention to take away sin, why should we be going to Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, when there is a fountain opened in the house of David for sin and for uncleanness ? Why be wasting strength and mocking the heart when Jesus comes before us with the express purpose of taking away our sin ? “Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.” Here is the atonement, here is the sacrifice of the Son of God—complete, sufficient, final. The priest himself becomes the victim. Great is the mystery of godliness ! To have seen everything in life but the Lamb of God, is to have seen everything in life but the one thing worth seeing. To have beheld all sights of greatness and glory and beauty, and not to have seen the Lamb of God, is to have seen the light from the outside of the window, and not to have gone in and found rest and welcome and home !

## Chapter i. 45.

“Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

### THE PRIVATE MINISTRY OF THE GOSPEL.

**D**O you know how difficult it is to preach to one hearer? Some young people, who have a wish to be public speakers, wonder how a man can stand before a thousand of his fellow-creatures and speak to them boldly, with perfect self-possession and confidence. Believe me, there is a higher courage than that; namely, to speak to one man about Jesus, to direct your remarks to one heart, and to press your urgent appeal upon the individual conscience. Philip spoke to Nathanael, and in this fact I find an illustration of what may be called the Private Ministry of the Gospel—a ministry between one man and another—a ministry between friend and friend. To this higher courage we are all called—to this private and direct ministry we are impelled by our own thankfulness for a revelation of the Son of God; let us, therefore, endeavour to discover the basis and the method of this lofty and most blessed vocation.

The Christian minister has a distinct message to deliver to the world. Philip delivered such a message to Nathanael: “We have found him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” The Christian ministry takes its stand upon facts. We are not sent to conceive a theory to account for circumstances that are around us; we have not to strain our minds to work out a speculation or to elaborate an argument; we have nothing to do with dreaming or supposition; fancy is not our business; first of all, midst of all, and last of all, we have to deal with facts. The Christian

teacher takes his stand upon a historic rock, and only as he does so is he safe. Clearing the ground of everything, we point the inquirer in the first instance to facts: Jesus Christ was born, Jesus Christ lived, taught, died, rose again,—that is our historic outline, and we risk everything upon it; then we proceed to show that this historic outline has come out of a grand system of preparation, of prophecy, of holy service as ordained of God. Nothing else so completely, so graciously, and so gloriously meets all the points and designs of that initial system; so we do not hesitate to identify all the divine elements of human history with the person and work of Jesus Christ, and to claim for him the title of Saviour and the throne of the One true King.

Not only so. To have the facts is one thing, but something more is required. Philip did not say, Jesus Christ has been found; he said, We have found him. He himself sustained a personal relation to those facts, and this relation was the secret of his power. In a mighty ministry we find not only high intellectual, but also high emotional power; the heart gives fire to the thought. No man can preach with the truest success if he only knows the facts; he must feel them as well as know them, and then his tongue will not fail for words that find the hearts of others. Every preacher, private or public, must, so to speak, individualise the gospel; must himself represent the truths which he seeks to teach, and by so much his ministry will address itself to the deepest life of those who hear him. Know the gospel if you would formally teach it; but love the gospel if you would teach it with triumphant and blessed effect. Truly, no man knows the gospel, except as he loves it. To know about it is one thing; to have it reigning in the heart is another. It may be replied that it is not everything to know the mere facts of the gospel, and so it is undoubtedly, if you use the term "know" in its most insufficient acceptation; but as intended to be applied by me at this moment, the term includes, not only the assent of the mind, but the loving and undivided homage of the heart. We may know that a certain man has arrived in London, and the knowledge may fail to excite a single sensation in our nature; but to those who have been expecting and longing for him with most loving desire, his arrival is a blessing which fills

them with thankfulness and joy. So with Christ. We have been seeking him, waiting for him, crying to God for the coming of his blessed presence, and to-day the fact that we have found him causes us joy inexpressible and full of glory.

If the Church would be strong in her doctrines, she must be strong in her facts. When she gets away from facts, she gets into dangerous waters. I have no fear of speculation or of controversy so long as there is a clear and grateful recognition of facts. We may be trusted to speculate so long as we are sure of the foundations; but if we trifle with the rock, we shall be the sport of the wildest dreaming, intoxicated with our supposed independence, whilst the fetters of a cruel slavery are being bound upon our feet.

In delivering his message the Christian minister will encounter opposition. Nathanael said to Philip, Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? This is opposition. We shall encounter opposition of various kinds. The worldly-minded hearer will say, "I have enough to do in getting my daily bread. I have no time for spiritual concerns—away with your preaching and dreaming, and let me make the best of the present life." The speculative hearer will invite to controversy; he will urge objection after objection; it is not in his ethereal and sublime nature to trifle away his time in reading history and considering facts; he lives on wings, he soars through the courses of the light, and inquires in the upper circles of fancy. He says, "Away with your historic realities and your personal appearances! Answer the wonders of my imagination, and satisfy the demands of my curiosity. I care not for your dry and barren facts." All ministers have met with such opposition, and it has often been a hindrance to their ministry; but there is a deadlier opposition than this! It is possible to drag the worldly-minded man from the altar of his dust-god, and to persuade him to think of higher concerns; possible to break the awful dominion of Mammon, and to liberate a slave now and then at least; it is possible, also, to teach the speculator to be sober in his claims, to descend from his aerial car, and to look at events with the eye of temperate reason. But who can destroy the power of prejudice? Can you

define prejudice? You can give me a derivation, but can you give me a definition? What is prejudice, where does it begin, how does it work, where does it end? You may have felt it, but can you describe it—define it? Take a prejudice against a man, and he can never more do right in your eyes; you will see a colour upon his purest deed, you will see a twist in his straightest course, you will see a taint in his holiest motives. Take a prejudice against a minister, and though he gives his days to study and his nights to prayer; though every word be tried as men try fine gold, yet you will shudder at his presence, you will hear blasphemy in his prayers, you will see hypocrisy in his appeals. Prejudice! What is prejudice? A devil without figure, without address, without anything to lay hold upon,—ever active, never visible; always at hand, yet always in secret,—a damnable and cruel force, yet hidden under a guise of respectability. Give a prejudiced man an anonymous book, he may read it with delight, he may exclaim by reason of joyous appreciation—hear him. “What exquisite diction! What splendid painting! What gorgeous fancy! What ruthless logic,—a grand and precious book!” Ask him, “Do you know who wrote it?” He answers, No. Tell him that it was written by the man against whom he is so prejudiced, and see the change. “Oh!” says he, “I spoke under excitement,—I had no time to form a deliberate opinion,—I spoke off-handedly; now that I look at the thing quietly, there is really nothing in it; it is exaggerated, turbid, artificial; it is shallow in conception, and poor in execution.” Yes, he will say all that. Yes, he is willing to be called a fool rather than give credit to the man whom he dislikes. Such is prejudice,—yet what is prejudice? See it in the blinking of a wicked eye,—see it in the curl of a bitter sneer,—hear it in a subtly varied tone,—yet what is it? Define it, describe it, set it before us, that we may see its hideousness, and hate it with all our heart!

Let us beware of prejudice! Dislike a man, dislike his looks, dislike his works, dislike the very ground on which he walks—but do not give way to prejudice against Jesus Christ. Nathanael spoke of Nazareth, and could not believe that any good could come out of it. Prejudice may work in us also. Christianity

awakens all kinds of prejudice,—prejudice of birth, of position, of education, of earthly taste : the manger, the homelessness, the cross, all awaken prejudice ; and prejudice may lead to our damnation. Plain words,—yes, plain, because ruin should never be decorated ; hell should never be decked with tempting flowers.

The Christian minister has a most practical answer to all objections. The answer of Philip was, *Come and see*. When men are thoroughly in earnest they return these short, cutting replies to unexpected questions. Had Philip retired to consider the best possible answer to the objections urged by Nathanael, probably he might have written something that would have had the appearance of argument and conclusiveness ; instead of that, he spoke out of the holy excitement of his heart, and returned the best answer which could possibly be given to a suggestion such as Nathanael's. We do occasionally almost reach the point of inspiration when we are engaged in the blessed service of the Son of God ; questions that would puzzle us in our cooler moments seem to be easy of settlement when we are full of the spirit of our work. It is given unto us in the same hour what we shall say unto men, and oftentimes we ourselves are as much surprised at the answer as are those to whom it is directed. I wish to point out in this connection that Philip returned, not a speculative, but a practical answer, to the objection of Nathanael. "*Come and see*" is a better reply than "*Let us reason upon the subject.*" Philip might have invited Nathanael to a long contention about the unreasonableness of prejudice, and might have shown him by many instances that prejudice has often prevented men from reaching sound and satisfactory conclusions on many questions in common life. Instead of taking this roundabout course, he appealed to his interlocutor to come and see the Saviour for himself. Yes, let that be observed ; it was to the Saviour that Philip sought to draw Nathanael. Let us be careful how we employ this expression, "*Come and see*"; it is not come and see the Church. Alas ! it is possible for men to look at the Church, and to feel a sense of something like disgust in relation to the doctrines which that Church professedly embodies ; in the Church there are wars and dissensions, there are evil controversies which vex the heart and show themselves in

perverseness of life. In the Church one teacher contradicts another; one sect brandishes its chosen weapon in the face of another; and there is much that looks like contradiction in the outworking of ecclesiastical principles and relationships. A man must be a very good man indeed before he can quite understand the working of Church organisations. It is only after he has held long and sweet intercourse with Christ that he is enabled to look upon discrepancies, and to regard clamours in their true light.

Observe, too, that we are not at liberty to urge men to come and see our literature: if a man should be a very good man indeed before he can be trusted to look upon the Church as an institution, he ought to be almost an angel before he be invited to form an opinion about much of our literature. We who are already engaged in the production and circulation of that literature, may know how to estimate its excellences; we can make allowance because of our knowledge of the general character of those who are concerned in that literature; but for a young inquiring Christian to look upon it, the probability would be that by the brawling, the misinterpretation, the censoriousness of which he might discover traces, his heart might be turned away from those great principles in which alone he could find salvation. Nor are we at liberty to say to the Nathanaels of our own age, Come and see the preacher. No one preacher can preach the gospel in all its fulness and with all its sweetness. The true preacher of Jesus Christ is not one man, but the whole ministry of the gospel. Individual men excel in special departments—one is mighty in controversy, another is tender in appeal, a third is impressive in worship, a fourth is exact in criticism; but if we would know what the gospel is in its entirety (if that be possible on earth), we must hear all the servants of Jesus Christ, and regard their teaching as one grand exhibition of divine truth. We are not at liberty to set one preacher against another as the man who alone represents Jesus Christ and his truth. We must go beyond the servant, and show the inquirer the Lord himself. Philip invited Nathanael to see Jesus Christ—not to look at the disciples, but to look at the Master. This is, above all things, what we desire. Once get men thoroughly to study Jesus Christ



himself, and there can be little or no doubt of the result. We invite you to put aside everything that you may have heard about Christ. We encourage you in the meantime to set aside all early association and all preconceived opinion, and to go to the gospels in which the story of Jesus Christ is detailed, and to read solemnly and continuously what is said about him by the inspired writers. Nay, if possible, get beyond the reading into the spirit. And what will the consequence be? I say it with gratitude and joy, that never did I know a single case in which an inquirer deeply studied the life of Jesus Christ, without rising from its perusal with admiration, thankfulness and delight. But to know what Jesus Christ really is, we must go to him when we need him most. We may go to him in our speculative moods, and he may be to us silent; we may go to him merely for the sake of making of his principles a momentary convenience, and we may be driven to pronounce them insufficient; but when we go to him in sin and in penitence for our transgressions, and with an earnest loving heart beseech him to show himself unto us, we are never left in doubt of his omnipotence and graciousness. I would charge it upon myself, as upon you who preach the gospel, either privately or publicly, that we are bound to urge men to come and see the Saviour himself. This is our blessed ministry. We have a short message to the world. We have a decisive answer to objections—we have to hide ourselves in the glory of our Master.

When the practical answer of the Christian minister is received, the most blessed results are realised. We have just heard Nathanael say, Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? He has accepted the invitation of Philip to see the Saviour for himself, and now what does he say? Hear his wonderful exclamation: "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel." Look at the extreme points of this experience of Nathanael. At the beginning he puts the question of prejudice; he shows himself to be narrow-minded, exclusive, and childish—at the end he expands into a noble and magnanimous character. It is even so with all men who stand afar off from Jesus Christ, and trouble themselves about questions of absolutely no importance. So long as they look at places and at merely incidental

circumstances, they quibble and contend in unworthy strife of words ; but as soon as they go to the Saviour and see him as he really is, they forget, in their glowing delight, the prejudices of earlier inquiry. And how did Nathanael come to this decision concerning the Person of Jesus Christ? Whilst Nathanael was approaching, Jesus Christ said to those who were round about, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" He gave Nathanael at once to feel that he was fully abreast of his history, that he knew him altogether, and that he could instantly commence conversation on the profoundest themes. That is the great power which Jesus Christ has over all men. He asks us no questions concerning our antecedents. He is not dependent upon our answers for his knowledge of the state of our minds ; before we speak to him he reads our heart in its deepest experiences ; there is not a phase of our being on which he has not looked ; and I take you to witness that you have never gone to the New Testament without finding in it a spirit of judgment that instantly called up your whole life, and commented correctly upon its moral value. How intense must have been the joy of Philip as he stood aside and watched the progress of this interview !

We who are ministers of the Cross have had similar joy in the course of our ministry ; we have seen man after man give up his prejudices in exchange for loving homage and life-long consecration. We have felt the blessedness of being enabled to turn men away from ourselves, and to fix their attention upon Jesus Christ. If it had been required of us to answer all their questions, to remove all their prejudices, and to satisfy all their curiosity, we should undoubtedly have failed in our means ; but we have felt ourselves to be but called upon to point to the Lamb of God ; the question was not to rest with ourselves. We said to those who came to us with prejudices and with difficulties, All things are possible with God—take all these to him, lay them before him just as they affect your own heart, and see whether the light of his countenance cannot dispel the clouds which intervene between yourselves and the infinite beauty. I would press it upon all ministers of the gospel, upon all missionaries of the Cross, upon all who teach the truth as it is in Jesus Christ,

that in the long run we shall have a joy such as Philip had when he saw the prejudiced man become the enraptured worshipper. We have our difficulties, our discouragements now; often we feel as if the work were perishing in our hands; again and again it seems as if the prejudices of the world were too strong for us; yet there are times when we see those prejudices so manifestly dissipated, and objections so clearly confounded, as to leave no doubt upon our minds that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, and that he can do for all men what he did so graciously in the case of Nathanael. I am only afraid that in some of our cases we take too much upon ourselves in the way of answering objection. It is quite possible for controversy to become a temptation to the Christian teacher. He may imagine that by careful and urgent argument he may be able to counteract prejudice, and to put men in a right state of thinking. I am more and more convinced that our safety and our success in this work, to which our lives have been committed, depends entirely upon our distrust of all that is merely human. Insist upon men going to Jesus Christ and obtaining a personal interview with him. Risk the results of your ministry upon a thorough scrutiny of the life of Jesus Christ as presented in the four gospels. Protest against any man raising questions outside that life until he has at least made himself master of all its details as given in the New Testament. We are bound to see that no trespass is made. As soon as the inquirer has really exhausted the gospel narrative, and made himself acquainted with the spirit and scope of Jesus Christ's ministry, he may be permitted to go into abstract questions in theology; but first of all, and until he has completely succeeded, he must be shut up within the limits of Jesus Christ's personal life and ministry upon the earth. I do not know why I should hesitate to say that Jesus Christ's life becomes to me a new life every day. According to my increasing capacity does the revelation of his truth and beauty increase upon me. To the little child Jesus himself is still a babe, and to the most mature thinker Jesus Christ stands in the relation of an all-sufficient Teacher. Herein is the surpassing wonderfulness of this unique life. We can never exhaust it; it grows with our growth; the light increases with our power of vision, and we never find the end of the perfection of the Son of God. I think that these

personal testimonies ought to be considered as of some value. I do not ask you now to follow me in any course of abstract argument in proof of these things; I choose rather in the spirit of the text to put my own personal experience and conclusions before you, and to testify these things in my own name.

Does any man say that he feels himself in the position of Nathanael, simply waiting to be called to see Jesus Christ? From this moment your plea is gone! Never repeat that excuse. I call upon you to come and see for yourselves him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write. Let there be no misunderstanding upon this matter, because I intend to break up your self-excusing, and to leave you without ground of delay. To-day you hear the invitation: it is for you to reply; but whether you reply or not, the plea that you are simply waiting to be called is now and for ever removed. Perhaps, however, you are saying that you do not wait to be addressed simply as a member of a large congregation, but you wish to be privately spoken to, so that you may put before the speaker your personal difficulties, whatever they be. Let me remind you of a fact in connection with this story of Nathanael which ought to save you from the consequences of such pleading: "Before that Philip called thee when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee." You need not wait for the servant when the eye of the Master is already upon you. The very fact that he is looking at you should constitute the most potent appeal that can be addressed to your spiritual nature. It is our joy to preach that Jesus Christ is still with his disciples; that they never work alone; that he goes with them confirming their words, and in many ways displaying the effect of his presence. If any man who is in secret making inquiries regarding the Christian life, or who is feeling the pressure of any special temptation to turn away from religious pursuits, I would urge upon him the truth that Jesus Christ himself is looking into the very depths of his nature, and is waiting to meet all the hunger of his heart with all the sufficiency of grace. Remember that Jesus Christ is the minister of his own gospel, and that even though no servant of his may ever speak to us directly in his name, he himself is causing to operate upon us influences without number, which we may often mistake for the agencies of ordinary

life. The fact that Jesus Christ sees us as he saw Nathanael in solitude, and that he knows our heart-aching and deep desire, should draw us towards himself in reverent inquiry and tender love.

The reply which Jesus Christ made to Nathanael gives us a hint of the ever-expanding sufficiency and glory of Christian truth ;— with a tone that had in it somewhat of surprise, Jesus Christ said to Nathanael, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig-tree, believest thou? And then he added, “Thou shalt see greater things than these.” Jesus Christ seems ever to have acted upon a principle of increasing his revelations, and not of diminishing them. Because thou hast seen creation, believest thou—thou shalt see greater things than these, thou shalt see the Creator himself. The sun and the stars, the forest and the sea, the great mountain and the fertile vale, are but alphabetic, and he who looks upon them with a right design shall be called to higher revelations still—Because thou hast seen events thou hast believed; thou hast seen a power in society giving shape and tendency to events that appeared to be confused and without meaning; thou hast put things together, and out of their union hast come to a conclusion that there is a providence that shapes our ends; thou hast found in the busy streets that men were moving in order, that they only appeared to be struggling in confusion, and that the affairs of men, after all, were moving round a centre that was keeping them in their places, and working out in them some great design; thou hast seen these things, and thou, in so far, hast been a believer in God; thou shalt see greater things than these: it shall be thy joy to believe that not a sparrow falleth to the ground without thy Father, that the very hairs of thy head are all numbered, and that there is not one grain of dust in the universe which bears not the impress of God's ownership. Because thou hast seen the Bible, the written record,—the mere letter,—thou hast believed; true, indeed, thou hast been baffled by much that appeared discrepant and insufficient; many a time thou hast been puzzled and perplexed by things in the record which appeared to be beyond reconciliation, and of which no man can give thee a meaning that satisfieth thy heart. Thou shalt see greater things than these:

from the letter thou shalt pass to the spirit ; the book itself shall be forgotten in a still higher gift ; thou shalt lose inspiration in the Inspirer himself. This is the stimulating language in which Jesus Christ addresses all true inquirers. You never can find the end of divine revelation. The New Testament has no final page. We come to what we consider to be the end, and, lo ! the end is more suggestive than the beginning ; and where we expected to pause we find that it is only to pause on our feet that we may stretch the wings of a higher being, and soar in the loftier regions of divine manifestation and government. Jesus Christ said to Nathanael, Hereafter thou shalt see ;—yes, Christianity has not only a great past, it has a great future. Hereafter thou shalt see ! I venture to say that no man who is deeply learned in the Christian life is of opinion that he has reached the final line of divine revelation. He is evermore given to feel that God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that has yet been realised.

This is our encouragement as Christian students ; yet this brings us into a deep humility of spirit, because we are given to feel that, however vast may be our attainments, we are still but little children in the great school of the universe. To increase, therefore, in the knowledge of God is to increase in lowliness of mind ; yet whilst our humility deepens we are not driven into despair, for the glory of God is not the terror, but the inspiration, of humble souls. It is not uncommon for men who criticise Christianity adversely to talk of the Christian revelation as if it were complete, as if nothing more were to be shown to the Christian mind ; we venture to say that the Christian revelation itself is yet in its beginning, and that it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive how much light and truth there is yet to break out of God's holy Word, and how extensive and profound is the ministry of the Holy Ghost in the heart of man. I cannot preach the doctrine of finality in connection with the Cross. I believe we have yet but seen the dim outline of Jesus Christ's truth—that we are standing in the grey twilight, and that the time of the full shining of the sun has not as yet arrived. "What thou knowest not now, thou shalt know hereafter," is a doctrine which the most advanced student may rely upon as a

stimulus to further study. We know in part, and in part only; towards that which is perfect we are called upon to move with patience and with sure hope. Sinful man! Thou too hast a hereafter. Art thou prepared for the to-morrow that is before thee? Thou hast further revelation of the divine throne to receive; what if it come to thee in thunder and lightning, and great tempests of judgment? I would speak to thee tenderly about this hereafter; for it can be no joy to Christian hearts to foretell the ruin of human souls; but believe me, that whilst Christian inquirers are joyfully anticipating the bright hereafter which Jesus Christ has promised to them, those who are not in Christ ought solemnly to consider how far they are prepared for the hereafter which will surely transpire. I do not seek to frighten any man into virtue; he who is frightened into a new life may be frightened out of it again. My hope is in love; but you have understanding enough of ordinary life to apprehend me when I say that love itself is bound to disclose all the realities of the case. Among the realities of your case, so far as I read the New Testament and interpret the mind of Christ, is a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation if you have not fled to the Cross and laid hold upon it as the answer to your sin. This is plain speaking, because the case is plain; this is direct appeal, because in such cases ambiguity would bring upon the speaker the just charge of exposing human souls to death.

### Chapter iii.

#### NICODEMUS.

LET us consider how possible it is to be much, and yet to be nothing. In other words, let us consider how possible it is to be near, and yet to be at an infinite distance. If we could make this idea perfectly clear to ourselves we should begin to ask great questions; we should indeed inaugurate in our own souls the only temper in which it is possible to study the greatest theme with advantage and success. What did Nicodemus want? He impresses us favourably at every point. He went amongst men as an elder, a superior, a councillor: what more did he need? What is our idea of completeness? Now we have an opportunity of coming into close quarters with human character, and of studying human character under the inspiration and guidance of the man Christ Jesus. Probably he never talked so grandly as upon this occasion; he kept to one point in the hearing of one man, and made that one night the most memorable period in the man's recollection. Nothing could stir him; again and again he came upon his theme with renewed and tenderer emphasis. Nicodemus had not a thousand messages to take home; Jesus Christ saw the kind of man with whom he had to deal, and, like a wise master-builder, he dealt with it according to its quality and scope. He fixed that large and open mind upon one point.

It is possible to occupy a very high nominal position in the Church, and to know nothing about the purpose of Christ. That is a terrible business; let us face it soberly but resolutely. Nicodemus was a man of the Pharisees, a ruler of the Jews, a master in Israel, and he knew nothing. Literalists do not know anything. There is nothing in the letter when taken by itself,



out of its context and atmosphere: "the letter killeth." If the discussion had turned upon the number of the folio and the number of the line on which a certain quotation was to be found, Nicodemus perhaps would have led the conversation; but here he stands in the presence of a Man who talks as he never heard mortal tongue talk before; he finds that his books and references and evidence are of no use to him: here is a Man who talked above them high as the heaven is above the earth. Nominal position ought to go for something. A man may be Archbishop

Canterbury, and never have seen the Saviour; a man may attain a conspicuous position in the pulpit, and never have seen the Cross. That is the infinite mischief. Men may make a profession of the ministry in any communion; not one can escape saying, I am not as other men. The ministry of Christ is not a profession: ministers are not professional gentlemen; ministers of the right kind are called from eternity, and they cannot help uttering what is in them, and they are not always aware of the reach of their own meaning. They pass through periods of madness, wondering what, and what manner of time the Spirit of God within them doth signify when it tells of coming blue skies, and summers that shall encircle the globe, and songs that shall make the welkin ring with infinite joy. Do not bind the poor solitary man down as if he had invented the message, and must grammatically interpret it and bind it within parsing bounds, nor judge him by his after-conduct; he is an instrument; through him God sends sounds mysterious, messages beneficent, gospels that are saving. He is not a professional gentleman. If any young men are coming into the ministry as a profession, God hinder them; build up a great granite wall in the very face of them, and starve them until they begin to repent and pray. We are either in the kingdom of God or we are not in it; if we are not in it we cannot climb into it by ways of our own making and processes of our own invention; and if we are in it men will know by a subtle, mysterious, magnetic music and power that we have something to say not to be found on the decaying and fading pages of earthly wisdom. Here is a man, then, who occupies a high nominal position in the then Church, and who knows nothing about the kingdom of God. Probably for the first time in his life he heard the expression "kingdom of God"

as it had never been uttered before. The emphasis was a commentary.

In the next place, we see that it is possible to be deeply interested in comparative religion, and yet to know nothing about the kingdom of God ruling in the heart. Comparative religion takes up all the religions known to men, and expounds them, and contrasts them, and compares them one with another: as thus, —Buddhism says so; Christianity says thus. The study is interesting; the study may be instructive and advantageous. I do not see any advantage to be derived from ignoring the religions of distant and unknown nations; I think that God may have revealed himself in all lands, in idolatry as well as in rational and spiritual worship. It is perfectly right, therefore, to trace the operations and disclosures of Providence everywhere; that is not the point in contention or in illustration: the point is, that men may be deeply interested and deeply learned in comparative religions, and may know nothing about the truth as it is in Jesus. You say, for example, that a theological professor must of necessity be a Christian. In Germany they say nothing of the kind. The German professor does not necessarily profess to be a Christian at all; he may teach Christian history and Christian evidences and Christian apologetics, and he says, I teach these things as I would teach Buddhism or Mohammedanism; I am not teaching them because I believe them, I am expounding these things to young and opening minds, giving the evidence on the one side and the argument on the other, and asking them to draw their own inferences and conclusions. That is a poor account for a man in such a position to give of himself. It means that Christianity is one of the sciences, or a branch of literature, or an aspect of philosophy; it ignores what we believe to be the fundamental feature and characteristic and nature, namely, that Christianity is a revelation, a sheet let down from heaven, yet held in heaven by the four corners thereof, within which man may find every food he needs for the sustenance and maintenance of his strength. If a man can profess Christian theology without experiencing Christian emotion and Christian piety, why not preach it? It is impossible for a bad man really to preach. He may be eloquent in words, but dumbness is more eloquent than

his rhetoric. He is not eloquent; all his sentences are a mere splash of syllables. The true eloquence is conviction, enthusiasm, reality. He is eloquent who tells you that your house is in flames; the sentence may be short, but it glows with truest eloquence. Men can only preach in proportion as they believe. The reciter is not a preacher; he is only unloading his mind of something which ought never to have been in it. His heart takes no part in the delivery; his eye is not interested in this great sight; his soul is miles away. Yet the mischief is that people will run after the reciter; they like the giddy climax, they call fluency—impious fluency—eloquence. These are the people who debase the pulpit and turn the altar to unholy uses. Give me one sentence of reality, one burst of sincere solicitude and enthusiasm; I shall know it when I hear it; however blundering the construction of the sentence, however ungrammatical, yet through it there will burn the very warmth of divinest love.

Here, then, we have a pitiful state of affairs: a man may have a high nominal position in the Church and not know what the kingdom of God is; a man may be deeply interested in comparative religion, and know nothing about the one religion that we believe is to save the world. We may come even closer, and astound ourselves with a greater amazement; for it is possible to conduct a reverent inquiry into Christian evidences, and to know nothing about their true force and compulsion. Here is a man in earnest, but he must not be taken as a master in Israel; that is not the point at which Christ will accept us; we must throw off our master's robe and go in nakedly. We must begin at the point of ignorance. Except ye be converted and become as little children—not masters in Israel—ye shall not see the kingdom of God. You must not come in with your supposed intelligence, and your great research, and your love of exquisite diction, and your conception of the Church; you must come in bare-footed, bare-headed, broken-hearted, and say, "I am no more worthy to be called thy son." Then you may move God into speech; otherwise he will only blind you with dazzling glory; otherwise he will only plunge you into what you call metaphysics. He will say, to the infinite startling of your soul, "Ye must be born again," and you will turn away and say, This is metaphysical.

So it is to any master in Israel ; but when a little child hears that, it seizes the meaning by a kind of sanctified instinct, or budding reason ; a singular miraculous operation by God the Holy Ghost in the soul, and, without being able to explain the meaning, it feels it and answers it.

We may come into still closer definition, and clear the ground absolutely of all sophisms. It is possible to go direct to Christ himself on the wrong business :—" Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God : for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." Jesus Christ does not want to talk about miracles. The miracles are but the dust of his feet. He wants to talk upon a greater subject. He will not discuss with any man the miracles. Herein we have put things into false perspective and altogether untrue relation. We have begun by thinking that if we could understand the miracles we could understand the Cross ; and therefore we have made a professional study of the miracles, and we have read the great argument of Hume, in which there is not the faintest fibre or shadow of reasoning ; and there we are, and there we may remain. Christ has nothing to say to such men. He says, If you will begin at the beginning, I will remain with you until you are a scholar in my school ; if you will come and ask me about inward, spiritual and vital subjects, I will tarry with you till the rising of the sun. Blessed Saviour ! sweeter than woman in love, tenderer than mother in compassion, wiser than all sages in understanding human nature ! If you want, saith he, to know how the soul may be reborn, sanctified, liberated, and finally glorified, we will take no heed of time. To earnestness there is no time.

We may therefore come to Christ himself, but on the wrong lines and for the wrong purpose ; and therefore we may get nothing from him but that which dazzles and bewilders us, so that the mind is lost in a new and infinite perplexity. Thus we see how possible it is to be near and yet far ; how possible it is to be much and to be nothing. What then can we want ? Here was lack of spiritual insight. Literal learning there was in abundance. Books are the ruin of some men. The distinction between information and genius lies there. The well-informed man says,

What does the book say about this? He reads, and operates accordingly. Genius takes no heed of the book, but sees through the case in a moment, and prescribes accordingly. Genius knows the case before it is stated; genius reads sign and symptom whilst the man is approaching him for the purpose of consultation. There was no spiritual insight in Nicodemus—he was a professional gentleman. Probably there was not a stain upon his professional robe; probably he was esteemed above many in the society to which he belonged. But he was blind: many gentlemen are—especially professional gentlemen. It is the heart that sees; it is love that pierces the cloud. Who was it that saw the Figure on the shore and said, “It is the Lord”? Was it rough Peter? Peter never saw anything until it was straight before him. It was John, it was the disciple of love, who said, “It is the Lord.” Love sees clearest, furthest, best. If we have not love we do not know God, or Christ, or the Cross, or anything Christian. If we have not been killed we have not been made alive. “Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die.” What is wanted therefore to understand Christ is spiritual insight.

Many men also suffer from looking for the wrong thing. They are looking for argument, demonstration, long and elaborate statement of *pros* and *cons*. They will be disappointed with Christ. He will have nothing but pureness of soul, love of heart, a desire after the very spirit and genius of childhood; where he sees these things there he abides, and he makes the heart burn with new love, and gives the eyes the delight of continually changing and brightening vision. Lord, make us little children; enable us to look for the right things, namely, the revelation of thy heart, thy love, thy purpose of redemption; deliver us from this satanic temptation of wanting to understand miracles, signs, and wonders, and impossibilities; lead us up the green gentle slopes of loving prayer and desire; and then when we get near the top we shall be able to look down and see the miracles as very little things; help us, Lord, and give us vision of soul. Spiritual insight can only come with spiritual life; in other words, if you have not the life, you cannot have the insight. Unless we live and move and have our being in God we cannot read the Bible aright. We must be in the Spirit.

This is the day of the Holy Ghost, this the Pentecostal era. Yet men are fooling away their time in asking wrong questions about wrong subjects; they are busy at the wrong door; they will agitate themselves about things that need not come within purview just now. When we can pray mightily we can treat the miracles aright. Meanwhile, if we have not the spirit, the temper, and the disposition of heart, everything will be difficult to us, and we shall be asking little questions about little things, as who should say, Who wrote this epistle? Was it a Deutero-Isaiah? When was the first portion written? What relation had the prophecies to the captivity? Why trouble yourselves just now about these things? Do you see the kingdom? Are you inside that kingdom? Have you been killed with Christ? Has every drop of blood in your very soul gone out of you in sacrifice? If so, you will be able to put all other questions into their right position and relation, and in due time, if there is anything in those questions that you need for the completion of your education, God shall reveal even this unto you. Meanwhile, here is the Book; whoever wrote it, it is here. We can read it through our reason, through our conscience, through our need and pain and sorrow and woe; we can read it best through our tears; and as to who wrote it, better say, who has read it with wise eyes and an understanding heart; and, maybe, when the grey day of time is gone we may alight upon some soul in the heavens that will say, I wrote the gospel you inquired about: I am the other Isaiah that puzzled you so much down there: why did you spend so much time about my personality? I wrote the book of Genesis and the whole Pentateuch. The day is not done when we pass from earth. We only begin the alphabet here. The reading, the music begins where the day is cloudless, where the school is heaven.

#### Chapter iii. 4.

“How can a man be born when he is old?”

#### ON HUMAN REGENERATION.

NICODEMUS did not deny the doctrine of the Second Birth, he merely started a difficulty. Though a master in Israel, he was apparently destitute of that spiritual insight which sees the possibility of the very stones being raised up as children unto Abraham—that sensitive and hopeful ideality which sees everywhere the throbbings of an inner life, and believes instantly in every word which even remotely hints at immortality. Nicodemus was a literalist; his ideas were cramped by the fixed meanings of words; he never could have written the Apocalypse; seal and trumpet and vial were not for such men as Nicodemus. He was startled by the word “born”; probably he doubted its exactness; it was, in his estimation, too specific in its common meaning to be literally applied to anything else; consequently he took his stand upon nature, and judged as if there were but one way by which life could come into the world. He who had been convinced by the miracle was astounded by the metaphor. What if there were no metaphors? What if pillars never became arches? What if dogma never coloured and brightened into parable? The answer of Jesus Christ was strikingly consistent with his whole method of teaching; the strangeness of his language excited attention, provoked thought, sometimes awakened controversy, and so, through a process of troubled inquiry and anxious strife, men often entered into the mystery of Christ’s rest. It is a hard way; but the men who travel it come into great strength. Simon Peter asked no questions at first, but Simon Peter denied his Master at last. Paul began with enmity, and ended with most passionate and rapturous love; Nicodemus expressed a wonder, almost dark enough to be a doubt, but in the

long run he took his stand by the dead body of "the Teacher come from God." It seems as if every man must at some time in his religious life have doubts and even anguish of heart respecting Jesus Christ and his kingdom; and as if some men particularly, of whom Simon Peter may be taken as a notable example, must be utterly dashed to pieces before God can begin his constructive work upon them. Nicodemus had been an attentive observer of the public life of Jesus Christ. He was one of those persons who always ground their course upon facts; they never throw themselves completely upon great principles, or risk themselves upon the supposed strength of an argument; they only believe history, they never make it. The facts which Nicodemus had observed led to reasoning, and the reason was expressed in this conclusion: "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." The admission is one of the utmost spiritual importance, because if the works are from God, what of the words? Can the same fountain send forth sweet waters and bitter? Can the worker have found his way to the Omnipotent except through the Omniscient? Yet, important as the admission was, Jesus Christ returned an answer, which apparently had no bearing upon the subject of miracles—"Jesus answered, and said unto him, Verily, verily I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." The subject which Nicodemus introduced was miracles; the subject which Jesus Christ introduced was regeneration. Did Jesus Christ, then, evade the question of miracles? No; he incidentally showed the true position and value of the mighty works as elements in his ministry; they were hardly to be mentioned; they lay somewhat remote from his great scheme; they were symbolic, and illustrative of one great miracle; they all pointed towards the final triumph of his power, namely, the second birth of creatures who had dishonoured their first estate.

When men are not sure of their ground they make sudden deflections, and raise side issues, so as to escape a perilous topic. Read superficially, Jesus Christ's remark about the new birth looks like the stratagem of a skilful controversialist; but looked at more carefully, we may find it to be strictly in the line of the



original subject. Earnest men often avail themselves of ellipsis. They are impatient of mere detail. They are straitened until their work be accomplished. Jesus did not evade the subject of miracles ; he merely passed the intermediate points, and went at once to the spiritual results which the great works of his hands were meant to prefigure and elucidate. Not only so ; he taught that unless every man himself became the subject of a miracle—the miracle of regeneration—his belief in other miracles would not admit him into the kingdom of heaven ; other miracles were to be looked at, this was to be felt ; other miracles were public, this was intensely personal ; other miracles were material, this was moral ; other miracles give new views, this gives new life. This miracle of regeneration is the only explanation of all other miracles ; and until a man has undergone its power, the other miracles may possibly be stumbling-blocks to his reason—except a man be born again, he cannot see ; cannot see anything as it really is ; specially cannot see the kingdom of God.

This call from outward circumstances to the deepest experiences which the soul can undergo, not unnaturally suggested the question, “How can these things be ?” And the answer does not attempt to clear itself of the original mystery—“The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth : so is every one that is born of the Spirit.” The meaning of the answer would seem to be that we are not to deny results simply because we cannot understand processes : we may see a renewed life, but cannot see the renewing Spirit ; we may gather the fruits of autumn, though we may not know by what cunning the leaf was woven, nor can we follow the skill that set the blossom in its place. Jesus Christ thus gives Nature an illustrative function ; all its beauty, its splendour, its force, is to teach something beyond itself ; there is a voice in the wind other than strikes the hearing of the ear ; beyond the common fragrance of the flowers there is an odour which reaches the soul ; the glitter of starlight comes from a fire veiled from all eyes. Jesus Christ thus found a common law in Nature and in grace ; the Spirit is the same, whether it direct the course of the wind or renew the springs of the heart,—the earth to the spiritual mind is but a lower heaven. This method of

reasoning from the physical to the spiritual gives great interest to life and nature ; it is not meant that we should force meanings from the things which are round about us, but we are certainly taught that there is congruity between the works of God, and that the limitation of our earthly knowledge should teach us modesty respecting the things which are heavenly. Look at the words, "Thou hearest . . . . but canst not tell." Man occupies an outside position ; even in common things God fixes a tabernacle of his own ; he will not tell man the whole of his secret ; he brings man to his appointed stature, and then says that man cannot, even by taking thought, add one cubit to it ; he counts the hairs upon the heads of his saints, and tells them that they cannot make one hair white or black ; he says to the master of Israel, "Thou hearest the wind, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth." As a mere matter of fact, then, apart from theological inquiries, there are limitations to human knowledge. Man does not even understand himself : on every side he touches immediately the boundary of his information and his power ; the atom baffles him ; the insect is only half comprehended ; the sea sounds like a great mockery ; the dwelling-place of the light is yet undiscovered, and as for darkness, no man knoweth its habitation ; the wise man knows only his folly ; he cannot tell by what way the light is parted which scattereth the east wind upon the earth ; he knows not whether the rain had a father, or who hath begotten the drops of dew ; he cannot tell out of whose womb came the ice, or who gendered the hoarfrost of heaven ; Mazzaroth, Arcturus, Pleiades, and Orion pay no heed to his voice ; he heareth the sound of the wind, but cannot tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth !

These considerations show the spirit in which the subject of the New Birth should be approached. It is to be a spirit of self-restraint, of conscious limitation of ability, and by so much a spirit of preparedness to receive, not a mere confirmation of speculative opinion, but a divine revelation of doctrine. The expression of wonder is not forbidden ; there is a wonder which belongs to the region of doubt ; there is also a wonder which accompanies glimpses of new phases of truth. This wonder is one of the joys of the soul ; it often forces the cry of delight, the

shout of men who have come suddenly on much spoil. A great shock of surprise seems to come upon every one respecting this new life. The shock comes differently, indeed, but always comes. Sometimes, for example, it comes on the intellectual side, as in the case of Nicodemus, throwing into confusion the arguments and theories of a lifetime ; sometimes the shock comes upon the selfish instincts, as in the case of the rich young man who cannot give all his possessions to the poor ; sometimes the shock comes on the natural sensibilities, as in the case of Bunyan, extorting groans and lamentations the most piteous and distressing. Such men represent the most dissimilar experiences. The young man who had large property might know nothing of the struggles of the master in Israel ; and John Bunyan, who had no riches at all, knew nothing of the desperate hold which property may get upon the heart. Hence the folly of setting up a common standard of judgment, or of any man measuring all other persons by himself. The intellectual man has troubles peculiarly his own. Is it an easy thing to pronounce oneself a fool before God—to give up intelligence and conviction, and begin just where little children begin ? The man finds it is hard work to give up one by one the elements which he imagined were necessary to his manhood, and to start again empty-handed, as it were, or, at least, with nothing that bears the mark of his own wit and independence—to know as much about the great changes of his heart as he knows about the course of the wind. He would part with money rather than with theories ; he would endure the laceration of his natural sensibilities, rather than surrender his logical position. What then ? He can only know the agony of birth by giving up what he prizes most. He might give all his goods to feed the poor, and yet remain out of God's kingdom ; he might give his body to be burned and yet keep the bad heart. God will not give his kingdom other than as a revelation, and a revelation always implies the ignorance and helplessness of the man to whom it is given.

Though the mystery of regeneration may for ever remain unexplained, yet it is important to have an idea of the truths with which it is inseparably identified. It would appear that Jesus Christ delivered the most complete and formal gospel

discourse to Nicodemus that he ever uttered. That discourse occupies twenty-one verses of the chapter in which the text is found, and touches upon such subjects as—the work of the Holy Ghost; the Lifting up of the Son of man; Faith; Divine Love; Salvation; Eternal Life. All this Jesus Christ spoke to the man who came by night to talk about miracles. Could he have said more if he had called the universe to audience? It is as if all the stars had come out together to light a trembling traveller along a lonely road.

What Jesus Christ himself has left as a mystery it would be presumptuous in any man to attempt to explain. We hear the sound of the wind; we cannot follow it in all its way, yet we know the analogy of intellectual life. Can we explain the origin and succession of ideas? How did they begin to expand, mature? Do we know where the child was displaced by the man? “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.” So, too, are many of the processes of the mind. As with thoughts, so with affections. Can we make plain all the secret processes of the heart, and trace the transition through which the soul passes from distrust to confidence, or from indifference to admiration and love? The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so, too, are the troubles and changes of the heart. All birth is mysterious. “Thou knowest not how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child.” Can we say why one grain brings forth thirty, and another sixty, and another a hundred fold? If we cannot understand these earthly things, how can we understand things that are heavenly? Yet, as the sound of the wind is heard, so are there results which prove the fact of our regeneration. Jesus Christ says that, if any man is in him, that man bringeth forth much fruit, as a branch that abideth in the vine. The Apostle Paul says that, if any man be in Christ, that man is a new creature, living in a new world, all old things gone. The Apostle John says, that men know that they dwell in Christ because Christ has given them of his Spirit. This is the practical side

of the doctrine of regeneration. Thou hearest the sound thereof—“secret things belong to the Lord our God.” The regenerated man is known by the spirit which animates his life, for it is the motive which gives quality to character; the regenerated man lives by rule, but it is the unwritten and unchanging rule of love; the regenerated man advances in orderliness, but it is the orderliness, not of mechanical stipulation, but of vigorous and affluent life; the regenerated man is constantly strengthened and ennobled by an inextinguishable ambition to be filled with all the fulness of Christ—his new life springs up for ever as a well of water that cannot be exhausted.

It is important to dwell upon the signs of regeneration, lest the doctrine be classed with merely speculative or metaphysical theology, a study of deeply intellectual interest, but powerless in the life. It is quite conceivable that an unregenerate man may do many outwardly decent or even beautiful things, just as it is conceivable that a watch may be altered by the hands, and not by the regulator, or as it is conceivable that the ruddiness of the cheek may be artificial, and not natural. If an unregenerate nature can produce the same quality of moral life as a nature that has been born again by the power of the Holy Ghost, the testimony of the inspired writers is simply untrue, because that testimony declares that “the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be; so, then, they that are in the flesh cannot please God.” “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” Thus, on the explicit authority of Jesus Christ and his apostles, the broadest possible distinction is made between the First Birth and the Second Birth. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; that which is born of the Spirit is spirit; marvel not that ye must be born again.

In making this great claim on behalf of regeneration, it is easy to see the ground upon which a condemnatory charge may be urged against those who bear the name of Jesus Christ. How is it that new-born men often walk as the children of this world? The answer is, that a man has not only a soul, but a body; that

while the soul is renewed the body remains in its own condition ; consequently, though the Christian delights in the law of God with the inward mind, yet he sees another law in his members warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into the captivity of the law of sin, which is in his members. "The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh ; and these are contrary the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." It is undoubtedly true that the spirit may attain great mastery over the flesh, so much so as to explain the apostle's words—"Ye are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you." Still, as a matter of fact, the body is dying ; an inexorable law condemns and hastens it to the grave ; what if, in going down, it should trouble and vex the spirit ? The Christian man is an anomaly ; in a sense which unregenerate men can never understand, his body and his soul are at constant war. What, then, is the complement of regeneration ? The complement of regeneration is resurrection, and not until resurrection has done for the body what regeneration has done for the soul, can men be perfect in the stature and quality of Jesus Christ.

Is there anything suggestive in the inquiry, How can a man be born when he is old ? What does the old man care for new sights, new eras, new services ? Does the old tree ever ask to be transplanted into new gardens ? Still the old should not be left without a word of hope. We have known the spring work a wonderful transformation even upon old trees, making them strangely beautiful with green leaf and blushing blossom. I remember standing in a large forest, on an early spring day ; the sky was bright, and there was a keen vigour in the air ; the great trees were stretching their branches, as if appealing to the heavens ; they seemed to be saying, "O Spring, come quickly, and clothe us with thy verdant beauty ! We have shivered through the long cold winter, and now would be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven. O Spring, thy kingdom come !" And what can I, a poor leafless human tree, do but carry forward that prayer to a higher significance ? "O fairer Spring, O richer Summer, O purer Light, make me beautiful as a child of God—Saviour, Father, thy kingdom come !"

Is there anything suggestive in the circumstance that Nicodemus came to Jesus Christ by night? Oh, the night!—how many troubled doubters and inquirers are weary of its darkness! Yet they are thankful for it, because it protects them in part from the sneer of a faithless faith, and gives them an opportunity of hiding the tears which daylight should never see. It is better that the night of the soul should not write its history. Let Christian men be mindful how they throw their weapons into the night. Some honest man may be struck; some anxious heart may be wounded; some who are coming to Jesus may be hindered. Those who come by night should be encouraged. God himself made the night, as well as the day; the moon is his, as well as the sun. We know little more of Nicodemus, but what we do know is sufficient. Where do we last find him? We find him at the Cross and in the light! He has found his way through the night to the morning, from the miracles to the Cross; and there shall all true inquirers be found at last—at the Cross and in the Light!

Let it be understood, then, that in speaking of the New Birth we do not attempt to explain the mystery; on the contrary, we allow it not only as a fact, but as a necessity. We cannot have religion of any kind without mystery. We cannot construct the clumsiest mythology without having mystery; we cannot be Pagans without mystery; we cannot carve a slab to the unknown God without sinking into the darkness of mystery. But through the Christian mystery there comes a Christian fact, and it is by that fact that Christianity must be judged. We know the new man by his new life; we know the new worker by his new works; we know the heart by the hand. A Christian is the best defence of Christianity. A living man is the most convincing argument on behalf of the Christian religion. We are called not to reformation, but to regeneration—not to morality (popularly so-called), but to theology as Jesus Christ interpreted it. If we accept the heavenly call, we shall at last be found—at the Cross and in the Light. It is finished. Christ and Christians are for ever one.

## PRAYER.

WE come to thee, thou loving One, because in thee are all our springs. There is nothing in ourselves; our expectation is from on high, in God we live and move and have our being. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing. The morning is thine, its light, its dew, its spirit of hope, its promise of opportunity; these are the gifts of God: enable us to receive them as such, and to walk worthy of the blessings with which thou hast entrusted us. Thou hast given unto us rest in sleep, thou hast called us again to duty, to worship, to endurance, to all the responsibility, the gladness, and the grief of life: may we answer thy call fearlessly, lovingly, reverently, and hopefully. The Lord will not forsake the work of his own hands; when father and mother forsake us, then the Lord will take us up, and his rod and his staff shall comfort us, though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Great joy have they that love the Lord; deep is the peace of those hearts that rest upon the Cross of Christ; none shall disturb them, or overwhelm them, or bring them into sudden and fatal fear; the Lord's arms are round about all who have believed in him, and no man can violate their sanctuary. How abundant are the providential mercies of God! Who shall count his compassions? who shall number the tears of his pity? who shall show where his loving-kindness begins or ends? Thou dost beset us behind and before, and lay thine hand upon us; there is nothing in our life for which thou hast not provided; thy circle round about us is without break or weakness. We praise the Lord with a common voice, we lift up our psalm of adoration, for great is the Lord, and wonderful is his way. We breathe our confessions because we have done the things we ought not to have done; we make mention of the name of our Saviour, for he alone is our Light and our Salvation, our Defence and our Comfort, our Rock and our Hope. Thy tender mercies give us assurance that thou wilt not cast us off for ever; thy withdrawalment is but for a small moment, thy coming again is an everlasting summer. We rejoice in all thy promises, we are rich in all the pledges of thy love: we have in Christ Jesus an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. Pity our littlenesses, our vanities, our transient conceits; lay them not against us as iniquities, regard them as the expression of infirmities: then come into the deeper parts of our life, its innermost recesses, its depths and abysses, which none can plumb but thyself, and there work the miracle of pardon through the blood of the everlasting covenant. Forgive the sinner, revive his hope in the midst of his contrition, and into his broken heart come with all the presence and beauty and tenderness of thy love. The day is before us: may it provide us opportunity for showing that we



have been with Jesus, and have learned of him; may we handle its duties strongly, wisely, and in the fear of God; may we accept its endurances and trials and difficulties in the spirit of sonship, and at eventide may we know that once more through the circuit of the sun God hath been round about us and within us, an infinite light. Let thy word be precious to us; let thy word bring to us our chief delights; let thy promises be our inspiration, and let all the duties of the life that now is contribute to the enjoyment of the life that is to be. Help the old and the young, the joyous and the sad, those who are heavily afflicted, and those who live in the open sunshine: upon all men let thy blessing come, thou Giver of the Christ that saved us. Our prayers we pray at his Cross: at that altar we breathe our praise, our confession, our supplication, and there we await the answer of joy and love and peace. Amen.

### Chapter iii. 10.

“Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?”

#### SURPRISING PEOPLE.

**N**ICODEMUS was a master of Israel, and “these things” he did not know. The question put to him by Jesus Christ was not necessarily a condemnation; we may import a tone of rebuke into the inquiry, but it does not follow that Jesus Christ intended to rebuke his visitor. A man cannot be much beyond his age; some great men are simply abreast with it. The child is not greatly ahead of his toys, nor is he to blame for his nursery enjoyments and nursery satisfactions: they suit the child, they are the measure of his age, they represent his present capacity. Jesus Christ was anxious to impress upon the mind of Nicodemus that there were things which even he, though a master of Israel, did not know. Our knowledge is helped by our ignorance: we are chastened by wisely recognised imperfections. If we could apply the rule which inspires this inquiry we should have no uncharitableness, we should feel that some brothers are older than others, that some students are a page farther on than other students are; nor is the one class of students to be praised, and the other to be vehemently and unsparingly condemned. Blessed is that faithful reader who has read up to the place where he now is, without skipping any, slurring any, but who has patiently, thankfully, and sympathetically received the message word by word. Do not overchide him lest he be cast down with sorrow overmuch; recognise his progress, and tell him there are still things beyond. It is important to bring into view the things

that have not yet been fully realised, because they may change all that has gone before, not in solidity, not in substance, not in the best spiritual uses; but they may set all things in a new relation, and invest all things with a new colour, and bring the mind to feel that even in its farthest studies it has but begun its divine schooling.

Or we may take it from the point of rebuke:—"Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?" then what is the good of thy mastery? Thine is a nominal mastership, thine is an office without an inspiration; thine is only the action of mechanism, it does not belong to the great astronomic forces and ministries of the universe. Away with thy mastership of Israel! It is a name, a label, a designation, but within there is nothing equal to the name which thou dost bear. It is a pity that a man remains nominally a master of Israel when he has lost his real mastership. It is one of the last lessons which a man is willing to learn, to know when it is time for him to retire. The man thinks he has still something more to say, some other work to do, some higher height to climb; it is hard for him to see the coming man and to say, "He must increase, but I must decrease": it is enough for a man to live in his own generation, and bless the souls that are nearest to him. This seems to be an easy thing to say, but it is almost impossible to utter it from the heart. Yet masterships are good, though they are temporary. A man who has taught us the alphabet has done us a service, though he may not be able to read as he ought to read the language in which he was born: yet he has introduced us to it. Let us be thankful for all past masterships, for all vanished schools of honest thinking and honest working; they were up to date, they told all they knew, but they never said it was all that was to be told. So let masterships be ruled by the spirit of progress, coming into full bloom, flourishing awhile, fading out, and yet not allowed to leave the world without recognition and gratitude and honour. It is difficult to combine the old and the new: the old is looked upon with superstition, the new is regarded as turbulent; or the old looks upon the new with suspicion, and the new looks back upon the old with vexation and with a spirit of resentment. Yet how many souls have to

live as between the two, holding with the tenacity of love all things that are true and therefore old, yet willing to look forward to new developments, new aspects, new views, and to give them a welcome and assurance of hospitality. This is hard work, only a few men can do it : the great lesson to be learned by those who cannot do it is that they are not to find fault, to be impatient, to be fruitful of condemnation and eloquent in deprecation ; they should rather say, These men are our leaders, teachers, fore-runners ; we cannot keep up with them, but little by little we shall conquer the ground they have traversed. How hard it is for men to know that truth passes through phases, that every phase has its own particular time of revelation ; and how difficult to learn that no man is expected to know more than what God himself has graciously revealed for the time being. Abandon the idea that there is any finality in thought. The utmost that the most vigorous thinker can accomplish is to begin. It is not in man to end. God hath yet more to show us, teach us, and reveal unto us, and put us in trust of ; let us patiently await all further disclosures, and not await them in a spirit of contemplation and dreaminess, but in a spirit of industry and faithfulness. The servant who works most shall know most.

All these principles have definite applications. We may admit the principles, yet it may cost us much to apply them. The application of those principles would cut down a great deal of our present action and thought. It is hard work for any minister even to indicate those applications. He may be misunderstood ; men can only go at a certain rate, and if you hurry them beyond their natural pace they complain, grow weak, and fretfully resent the scourge that is meant to accelerate their progress. What say we to a man who is found in the midst of June, with all its wealth of light and blossom and colour and promised fruitfulness, with his head prone to the earth, and voice choked with groaning, and who, on being asked why he moans, replies, When I think of the severity of last winter, its snows and frosts and bitter winds, I cannot be happy to-day ; I remember the winter that is gone, my thoughts live amid the cold snow, the dark nights, the tempestuous winds ? Would that man talk rationally ? What would be the view taken of him by ordinary

observers? They would say, The winter is over and gone, this is summer; we are not called to the recollection of the past winter, but to the enjoyment of a present gift of light and beauty: the rain is over and gone, and the voice of the turtle is heard in the land: stand up and praise the Lord. That would seem to be the voice of reason and the voice of nature. There could be no difficulty in a general acceptance of this principle; the difficulty resides in the all but impossibility of its theological and Christian application. There are men now who are thinking about the agonies of Christ, Calvary, its crucifixion, its pain, its cruel wounds: all these are historical verities, all these are tragedies that ought to make the heart ache, but they are over. Christ is risen, Christ is enthroned, Christ is in heaven: why seek ye the living among the dead? Christians are called to summer joys, and summer songs, and summer liberties and hopes. Are ye masters in Israel, and know not these things? Paul says, "Yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more:" he is the enthroned Lord, he is seated upon his Father's throne, and we have to deal with the present aspect of Christian history and Christian prophecy. Do we then forget the winter that is gone? We say, Probably owing to its severity we enjoy the gentleness and graciousness of the summer. So when we think of Gethsemane and Calvary and the Cross, and the pierced hands and pierced feet and wounded side and thorn-crushed temples, we say, The summer of our joy came out of the winter of that endurance. We are not to live backwards; our faces are towards the light, and no man can hold up his face towards the noonday of Christian truth and love and hope without being provoked by a gentle provocation to song and joy and sacred delight. This is the precious gift of God to every believing soul. Rejoice always, be glad in a risen Lord; even when you sit down to break the memorial bread and drink the memorial cup, remember that the words are, "Ye do these things till the Lord come." It is a prospective interview that makes the retrospective review sacred and fruitful of solemn joy.

Art thou a master of Israel, and readest thou the letter of the Bible? So many men go to the wrong Bible, therefore they are

afraid the Bible may be taken from them. No man can take love from the heart, devotion from the soul, trust from the spirit. You may steal a document, but you cannot steal a revelation. If we have only a theologian's Bible, it may be taken from us any day. If we have God revealed to the heart through the medium of the Bible we are independent of all criticism, all hostility; we have a sanctuary into which we can retire and within whose walls we can be for ever safe. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is superstition. Even many Christians have hold of the wrong Bible; that is to say, they have hold of the Bible by the wrong end. So they are always living in an age of unbelief; they are always saying, The age is oscillating between rationalism and superstition. The men who have hold of the wrong Bible live a troubled life; there is not a window in their houses that faces the south; they live in gloom and sadness and apprehension; every new volume of short essays published in criticism upon the Bible is thought to be another ebullition of the devil. Art thou a master of Israel, and troubled by any assault that is made upon the sanctuary of revelation? First be sure that you do not misunderstand the assailants; they may be making no such assault, they may only be aiming to clear away clouds and demolish fictions, and cleanse the air of superstitions, and liberate the mind from iniquitous bondage; it is due to them that we should clearly understand what they are talking about and aiming at. There are those who go to the Bible for the wrong things, and they are disappointed. What say you to a man who, wanting health, fixes upon the South of France for his winter's abode; but in journeying thither he is told that he may not have sufficiently considered certain peculiarities attaching to that portion of the earth?—Are you aware, quoth the one, that there are two distinct theories of the geological formation of the South of France? Are you aware that botanists differ about the fauna and the flora of the South of France? Are you aware that there are many contentions about the right political division of Continental countries? Saith the man, Why this bother? why this rude, strange, irrelevant talk? I am going to the South of France not because of geological formations or botanical curiosities, or political and imperial divisions and sovereignties: there the fresh air blows, there the sun is warm, there all nature

is a kind nurse, a loving mother, and back from the South of France I shall bring health, spring, hope. That is a wise speech. The man went to the South of France for the right thing, and he secured it, and he has returned in full enjoyment of the blessing he went in quest of. There are those who go to the Bible timorously, and saith one, Do you know there are two theories about the first chapters of Genesis? Are you aware that some persons have doubts whether the serpent really did speak to Eve? Are you aware that some parts of the Pentateuch are post-exilian in their composition? Saith the man, What is this craze? what are these long words? what can be the meaning of this muddle of polysyllables? I go to the Bible to see if the fresh air blows there, if there be aught spoken to the soul, if there be any touch that makes me live again: as to Genesis, whether it be first or last or midst, pre-exilian or post-exilian, Mosaic or written by John the Baptist, these are not the questions I am asking. I am saying, what is the living line of the book? what is the inner, eternal, redeeming spirit of the book? That man's Bible can never be taken from him; he has laid up riches where moth and dust do not consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. That Bible is hidden in the heart; that revelation is an eternal treasure; the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that this is the very revelation of God. In this sense the Bible asks only to be read—to be read patiently, thoroughly, sympathetically, to see if it cover not the whole breadth of life, answering all its deepest inquiries, and breathing gospels upon its broken-hearted penitence. Art thou a master of Israel, and hast been seeking to bolster up some book simply because thou hast been afraid that if its mechanical structure be altered its spirit will evaporate? That is not mastership; that is bondage. How is it that the Bible outlives all assailants, and breathes its benediction upon awakening and enlightening souls? It is because the spirit of the book is the Spirit of God; because the message of the book is a message of righteousness, atonement, reconciliation, spiritual purification, and the ultimate triumph of grace over sin.

There is a theologian's Bible as there is a physiologist's body. An interview with a physician would frighten you. Were he to

tell you all his polysyllables you would no longer believe you are alive ; were he to ask you about the curious nomenclature of the body, you would declare that you had no such things in you, you would protest vehemently that you never heard of them. And yet he would be perfectly right—he is a physiologist, and no physiologist could ever be content without an enormous quantity of Latin ; he thinks that physiology depends upon the Latin language for its real construction and the proper application of all its principles. There is an analyst's water. If you were to spend a day with an analyst you would never take a glass of water more as long as you live ; he could frighten you out of water-drinking, and he could frighten you out of bread-eating ; if he lay before you the exact constituents of the last meal you consumed you would regret that you ever rose from your bed. But there is another body, the body that was rocked by your mother, and sustained by your friends ; there is another water, there is another bread, there are great ministries in nature of the motherliest sort, meant to sustain and cheer and enrich and consolidate our life. So there is a theologian's Bible ; let the theologians keep it : it has never done them any good, and it will never do anybody any good. The Bible we all want is our mother's Bible, the heart Bible, the Bible that stoops down to the life to kiss it and bless it and lift it up, and breathe into it daily inspiration of divine sustenance and assurance of immortality. That Bible is open to the poorest woman, the tiniest child, the wisest man ; it is the world's wide-open book, printed in infinite letters, so that the blind may see it.

Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not the meaning of Christ in the constitution of his visible body the Church ? Yet what gateways we have put up round the Church. We have made it a theologian's church ; we have admitted into the Church persons who have very clear views. Be perfectly sure that if any man has very clear views he never saw the Church. So-called clear views have torn the Cross of Christ into splinters. The only view I can have of my Saviour is that he loved me, and gave himself for me, and has by his Spirit told me to say this in all my prayers, and by saying it with my heart I shall lay hold upon eternal life. This would involve a great many persons

being in the Church who are at present frightened away from it. Jesus Christ never frightened any man away from himself who really wanted simply and sincerely to see him and know his message and purpose. The disciples would have had a very extraordinary Church ; there would have been no children in it, there would have been no women in it who were so earnest as to cry after the Master for pity and for the exercise of his power ; there would have been nobody in it but themselves. It is a sophism of the human heart that only a man's self is really the prime favourite of heaven. The Church is hindered when one man asks another to agree with him in opinion. What is your opinion ? how long have you had that opinion ? who gave you the right to impose that opinion upon any other living creature ? Let us develop individual responsibility ; let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind : every one of us shall give account of himself to Christ. Let each soul have its own view, its own Saviour, its own rapture, its own assured heaven, and let us find our agreement in our spiritual division, and not in our intellectual monotony.

Art thou a master of Israel, and art thou fearing death ? Now there is no death : death is abolished : the body drops away, but the body never truly lived ; it was enlivened, but it never lived : to live is to live for ever. If masters of Israel are afraid of death, and afraid because there is panic in the heart, and afraid of loss, and afraid of affliction, and afraid because of tumult, where is their Christianity ? Mastery in everything means repose ; mastery means peace ; mastery means rest : he only is a master of Israel who says, Let the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, still God is our refuge and strength ; let all the seas thunder themselves into everlasting destruction, no tempest can touch the river which makes glad the city of God.



## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, our cry is for thy love. Thou hast made known thy love in Jesus Christ our Lord. Without thy love we cannot live; thy love gives us light and life and hope and joy. God is love. May we be like God; may we live in God through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Help us to know that we live and have our being in God; take out of us all unworthy self-trust, and may we live by faith and not by sight: Lord, increase our faith. The just shall live by faith. We would live that higher life, we would behold that furthest outlook, we would see descending heaven: then shall our life be glad with great joy, nor shall our gladness be content with itself, it shall go out unto others, until all men who know us feel the sunshine of our joy. Enable us to know ourselves, our proper measure before God and before one another. May we never cease to do that which is right in the sight of God, come what may; may our purpose be one of righteousness and charity, and may our course be straight on, knowing that righteousness and charity can only end in heaven. Thou knowest the burdens we have to bear, thou knowest all the tears we shed in secret; thou knowest our hearts and lives altogether: minister unto us according to our need, keep us by thy love, sustain us by thy tender grace, and give us confidence that when this present day shall cease our sun of life shall arise upon the clime of heaven. Help every one of us to be better; help the best to be better still: speak a word of hope to the soul that has no hope in itself; and call men who are wandering far away back to the home they have left. Let grace, mercy, and peace be shed abroad abundantly upon us; may our hearts be warm with the love of God. Hear thou in heaven thy dwelling-place, and when thou hearest, Lord, forgive. Amen.

## Chapter iv. 46-54.

“ So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judæa into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death. Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe. The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die. Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way. And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told him, saying, Thy son liveth. Then inquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. So the father knew that it was at the

same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth : and himself believed, and his whole house. This is again the second miracle that Jesus did, when he was come out of Judæa into Galilee."

### THE MIRACLE AT CANA.

**A**N incident which had occurred within a comparatively small circle had made itself felt in a wider area. This principle of self-extension is most noticeable throughout the whole ministry of Jesus Christ. Philip found Nathanael; the woman of Samaria ran into the city to tell that Messiah had come, and his miracles were reported by many who had been healed by his power. It is interesting, too, to observe how wonderfully a sense of the completeness of Christ's power had seized the people. That he had turned water into wine was proof enough to the nobleman that he could also turn disease into health. Yet what parallel is there between the two? There is not a shadow of resemblance obvious to the eye of mere reason, whether trained to poetry or criticism; but to the eye of religious faith there is indivisible unity in divine power as essentially as in divine goodness. Men are skilful in this branch or in that, and utterly unskilful in branches which are but a little distance off; as, for example, a man who has made a study of the eye, may have little knowledge of the ear, and an acute physician may be but a clumsy anatomist; so much for the necessary imperfectness of human power; but in the case of Jesus Christ, his ability was equal at every point of the circumference,—and the circumference was the universe!

A nobleman whose son was sick.—Then disease finds its way into every rank. We need to remind ourselves of this lest we slip into scepticism by doubting the equality of divine rule. There are no magical lines beyond which death cannot come. The great sea of trouble roars and foams over every line of latitude, and the bleak wind strikes the traveller in every land. Does the poor man suppose that pain cannot find a chink in the strong walls of the palace or the castle? Does he suppose that great advantages have made a wall of defence around the man of wealth and learning? Then he knows nothing of human history, nor can he be expected to know that the very advantages which he covets are themselves the sources of the great man's

fiercest temptations. The poor man thinks that the high spire is a long way from the flood ; so it is, but how much nearer the lightning !

Besought Jesus that he would come down and heal his son. —Thus where there is faith in the power, there may be something of dictation as to the method. A very pardonable dictation surely ! There is always some blemish on our prayers, is there not ? Think of a prayer without a flaw ! Not that the flaw always shows itself, for it may be deeply hidden in the heart. More than that, it may be a flaw beyond the consciousness of the man who is praying ! The nobleman did not see that the power which could heal was independent of time and space. He needed to be taught this, and the lesson was given him under circumstances which would save it from oblivion. Where is your child ? On another shore ? The Healer is there ! Is the child sick ? The Healer is at his side ! Wouldst thou make all the universe a home ? Then have faith in God.

For he was at the point of death.—So, Jesus Christ may not be sent for until the very last. In this case, probably the delay was unavoidable. But what of other cases ? There comes a time in human life when men want more help than is to be found in their own arm,—a time when a strange giddiness seizes them, and spectral presences fill the air with cold and unfriendly shadows. Then man puts out his arm and cannot draw it to him again,—he shouts, and his cry is turned into laughter ! In every history this point comes, viz., the point of death ! No man can so curve his way as to avoid it. It is a point at which none but fools can be flippant. The gospel tells us that Jesus Christ can turn the point of death into the point of immortality ! He hath abolished death,—it is but the shadow of the gate of life.

Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way ; thy son liveth.—Thus every promise of God challenges the contradiction of gainsayers. Mark the boldness and unreservedness of Christ's word. It was in no sense provisional. There was no parenthesis cunningly arranged for escape. It was, too, a word whose truthfulness could be soon tested. Words of this kind abound in the speeches

of Jesus Christ. He set very brief trial times, and risked many opinions which every hearer could test for himself. He told Nathanael's character to men who could have confounded him with disproof in a moment; he told the woman of Samaria all that ever she did: he told Simon where to find money for the tax: he told the disciples where to find the ass and the colt: and he took but three days to vindicate his promise of self-resurrection. All these patent and testable things were the first rounds of the ladder whose head reached beyond the stars.

Then inquired the nobleman of his servants when his son began to amend, and he knew that it was at the same hour in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth.—So, things that are understood should give the mind calmness and reverence in the presence of things yet unrevealed. Some parts of the divine way are known: study them; and if Socrates could say about human character—"What I know is excellent, therefore, what I do not know is likely to be excellent too," we can have no difficulty in carrying the criticism to its highest spiritual applications.

Hast thou a trouble in thy house? Have all helpers told thee that there is no more skill or strength in their hands? Is thy hope at the point of death? I congratulate thee! Out of weakness thou mayest be made strong. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, God the Son, has the key of the grave itself, and as for Death, it cannot bear the light of his eye. If thou wilt but sigh for him he will come, and when he comes he brings all heaven as his gift.

Have some of you been healed? You know not how much you may be indebted for your health to the prayers of others. You cannot tell who prayed for you in the extremity of your weakness. Your father paid a special visit to Jesus Christ on your behalf: unknown even to your father, your mother crept away in silence unexplained to seek the Saviour: and one from whom you expected no such service sent, from a troubled heart, a prayer which took the kingdom of heaven by force. Think of this, and spend thy health as a talent lent thee by the King.

## Chapter v. 2-8.

### BETHESDA.

"Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water" (vers. 2, 3).

THE porches spoken of in the text were once places of luxurious indulgence; rich, self-indulgent people were in the habit of using them for purposes of self-enjoyment. They lingered there, luxuriating in ease and quiet and pleasure. In process of time the porches became hospitals, and in these hospitals lay a great multitude of people who had lost their power—power of sight, power of limb, power of brain, power of hearing—some kind of power; and there they waited for the moving of the water. There are gathering places of human pain, and want, and sorrow. Say that all the pain in the world is scattered over the greatest possible surface, it is still there, and still a fact—for the man who has mind enough to take in the fact—that this pain, though widely diffused as to area, still exists. But there are gathering places, focuses of suffering. We do not see them in walking down the public highroads; we see nothing of them, but they are just off at one side a little. If you would turn down a back street and open some door, there you would see numbers, almost multitudes, of suffering, sorrowing, dying creatures. It does us good, now and then, just to look into one of those places; it makes us sober, it makes us thankful, it sometimes makes us sad. But think of sorrow focalised, of pain, suffering, distress brought to a head—a throng of sufferers. Surely the place would be a place of weeping! Such a place is described in the text. The people were a great multitude. Sorrow has always been in the majority. There is hardly one healthy man on the face of the earth. I think I may

go further, and declare that there is not a man in perfect health in existence. Pain has always been in the majority. It is a world of pain! Sometimes when we are inclined to be a little verbally poetic we say, "Surely no; it is not a vale of tears; it is a vale of light, of beauty, of song!" Thou didst speak in thy haste, my friend. It is, now that I have seen more of it, a vale of tears, and man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward!

A great multitude of folk represented a great multitude of diseases. Understand that the people referred to in this census of sorrow were not afflicted with one affliction. They were blind, halt, withered, and had "all the ills that flesh is heir to." Some painstaking student has counted some thousands of diseases to which the human frame is subject. I cannot undertake now, quoting from memory, to say how many thousands; but I give it you on good authority that diseases have been counted by the thousand. But let us say one thousand. Think of there being a thousand ways of taking a man to pieces; a thousand ways of whipping him to the grave. Think of God having a thousand scourges by which he can lay his hand of punishment and trial upon the sinner! It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God! Viewed in the light of this fact, health is a mystery, not disease. Think of a ship having to go over waters, where there are so many sunken rocks, or sandbanks, or whirlpools, or other impediments, difficulties, and dangers; the mystery is that it makes headway at all. Have you fire? I can run away from it. Water? I can escape inland. But who can wholly deliver himself from the hand of the Almighty? He can smite the head and the foot, the strong limb, the hearing ear, the seeing eye, the thinking brain; he can cover the skin with blotch and plague and death! Oh, who can escape the living One? My friend, hast thou health? It is a mystery; it is the beginning and the basis of true enjoyment. Without it life is a burden, and only by the highest ministries of divine grace can pain itself be said to be a discipline and a hope.

The world is an hospital, the whole earth is an asylum. Understand, that the man who is, popularly speaking, in the robustest health to-day may be smitten before the setting of the

sun with a fatal disease. In the midst of life we are in death; our breath at best is in our nostrils. Man respire and cannot get his breath again, and he is gone—we call him dead. Life is a perpetual crisis. We are always walking on the cobweb string; it is snapped at any moment. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." Blessed is that servant who shall be found when his Lord cometh, waiting and watching and working. Great God, we are all waiting, doing nothing! There they were waiting, groaning, sighing. That was a prayer meeting, if you please. A sigh was a prayer, a groan was an entreaty, a cry of distress was a supplication. All the people in the porches were waiting. Are we not all doing the same thing? The thing we want most seems not to have come yet—it never does come. We shall have it to-morrow, and in the inspiration of this hope we are comparatively strong and joyful to-day. To-morrow comes, and the cry is repeated, "It will come to-morrow." Thus God trains us by hope and by expectation. "Man never is, but always to be blessed." We are waiting for help, waiting till we get a little round, waiting till the ship comes in, waiting for sympathy, waiting for a friend without whose presence there seems to be nobody on the face of the earth, waiting for light, waiting for relief. There are two methods of waiting: The method which means patience, hope, content, assurance that God will in his own due course and time redeem his promises and make the heart strong; the other method of waiting is a method of fretfulness, and vexation, and impatience, and distrust, and complaining,—and that kind of thing wears the soul out.

"Waiting for the moving of the waters." Every life has some opportunity given to it. "There is a tide in the affairs of men." Every one of us has had a door opened, has seen the index-finger lifted, has beheld an angel beckoning. Hast thou not? Look, then, the finger is here now, the angel present to-day! We are always living in expectation. Expectation will save us from vulgarity and lift us from the dust; will mean heaven in promise, in reversion. We do not know who are suffering. There are people suffering who are not in the porches, not in public places; and there are people suffering who have a way

of keeping in their breath, and saying nothing about it to anybody. It is a suffering world. Some suffer in fatness and plenty; others suffer in leanness and want. A minister came to me the other day and said, "I am laid aside; the physician says there is a poison being manufactured within me which is taking away my life." Another minister wrote to me, "The physicians have ordered me to Germany to drink waters which are efficacious for my disease." Physicians sometimes order a man into Germany who has not a penny in his pocket, who has several little children that call him father, and who, when he ceases to preach, must cease to eat! I have sometimes been grimly amused at doctors who order a man who has perhaps eighteen shillings a week to drink port wine thrice a day, and to take nourishing things, and in other ways to take care of himself. It is a sad world. There are not five porches in it. It is one porch, and there is nothing in it but death till the angel comes or the Son of God!

"For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had" (ver. 4).

So troubled waters are sometimes healing waters. Not the little puddles you make with your own foot, but the troubles that God makes by his angels and by a thousand ministries, by which he interposes in the affairs of men. I thank God for some troubles in my life; they were the beginning of health and hope and joy. O aged one, when you look back you see now, do you not, that the trouble began it—began your better life, made you mellow, chastened you, ripened you, took the rough tone out of your voice, and infused a new music into your expression? Listen! The favoured ones who were upon the mount of light, called Transfiguration Hill, feared as they entered into the cloud; and a voice came out of the cloud saying, "This is my beloved Son, hear ye him." What if thou hast heard a voice in the cloud? What if thou hast met God in the troubled deep or in the storm? Thou hast had interviews with God which could not have been held if everything had been in a state of hush and quietness, and the people miles away could have heard the tones of your respective voices. What if God has created collateral noises that he may the more quietly speak to thee; finding in



publicity secrecy, in the very tumult of the tempest a little space of quietness and stillness, in which to talk his deepest things to thee? I do not deprecate trouble; I have known it. You may take hold of trouble by the wrong end; you may abuse trouble, or you may make a place of weeping a place of thought, religious review, Christian vow, and anticipation. So all have trouble? "No." It is indeed a very young person who says, "I have no troubles." Well, poor little child, we know that, but you may have them by-and-by; and we are now talking not about this little day only, but about all the days, for all the days are sometimes spoken of by wise men as thy day—The day. As if life were only a flash, having one rising of the sun and one setting of the same.

"And a certain man was there which had an infirmity thirty and eight years" (ver. 5).

In all classes of people there is a special man. I am groaning over something I have had ten years; and there is a man behind me that has had something for twenty-five years and never made half the noise about it. I have only one loaf in the house. Another man says he has not tasted bread for three days. There is always somebody worse off than you are. This is the beauty of pastoral visitation. If I were now addressing a consistory of preachers I should say: This is one of the blessings of pastoral visitation; when you are a little inclined towards grumbling and dissatisfaction and hypercriticism—about domesticities say—you go out for an afternoon into back slums, into dark, poor places, into hospitals, or infirmaries, or other asylums, and visit the poor in their houses,—see what a tea you make when you come back! Oh, it has been medicine to me many a time! I have just got a little dissatisfied with things; this was not smooth enough, and that was not fine enough, and there was a little black upon the toast at one corner, and life was becoming such a pain to me. I have gone out for an hour, and come back without seeing the little black upon the toast. Ah, if you could have seen this man of eight-and-thirty years' experience in suffering, you would have felt that God teaches us by contrast, and shows that even extremes may have great social influences for good connected with themselves. Richard Baxter exclaimed, who had been an invalid more

than half a century, "Thank God for fifty years' discipline!" Some of us are so coddled we cannot spell the word discipline, we have to ask somebody what it means : thirty-and-eight years, and he had not got us *used* to it ; he was still there, still wanting relief. We cannot get used to pain. The mystery is that we cannot get used to its cause. We cannot get so accustomed to pain as to care nothing for its presence, but we get accustomed to the sin that makes it. Without sin there is no pain. Sin opened the door, and death rushed in, and death will never go out again. He will be abolished, but he will never go out. So we shall have no controversy about the matter ; because I should instantly step into the witness-box and settle the case, so far as one fact is concerned. Do we not all talk more about the effect than about the cause ? We talk much of pain ; do we ever talk of sin ?

"When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole?" (ver. 6.)

When did Jesus ever say to a man, "Wilt thou be made sick?" The physician is not sent to those that be whole, but to those that are sick. "The Son of man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them." Wherever Jesus went he sought the piece that was lost ; he lighted a candle and searched the house diligently, and said, "I am seeking the lost piece," that he might put it in its place again. He is going up and down the earth to-day looking at us, his poor, broken-hearted, wounded, dying sinners, and saying to each of us, "Wilt thou be made whole?" and the very asking of the question has healing in it. Some people ask about our sicknesses and make us worse, and we are very sorry they ever came near us to make any inquiry. Other people ask how we are, and we seem to be almost better by the kind, gentle tone in which their inquiry is addressed to us. "Wilt thou be made whole?" is the inquiry of Jesus Christ to every one of us. Lord, heal me.

Let the man now speak for himself,—

"Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool : but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me" (ver. 7).\*

See the selfishness of pain ! When was pain magnanimous ?

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\* See this verse further treated in the following discourse.

When was suffering self-forgetful? It is here we come again upon the subtle working of sin. Sin works pain; pain is in our frame as sin. Does anybody say to this man who has been lying in pain thirty years, "Now you are worse than I am, I shall give you a turn this time"? Does any man say, "You have been ill thirty years, and I have been ill only seven years; you shall have my turn. The moment I see a ripple upon the pool I shall put you in, and wait till the next movement of the waters"? No. Is there not an ingratitude sometimes, an ingratitude even on the side of health? The man had been lying there a long time; he had suffered from his disease eight-and-thirty years. Great numbers of people had been healed; did any man of them say, "I will stand by you now that I am healed myself, and you shall have a turn"? See how blessing, unsanctified, may but increase our selfishness. One of them might have remained; but who can be grateful when health has been restored, when strength comes back again? Is there not a tendency to do the old deeds, and to be as atheistic as ever? See to it that our privileges do not deepen our atheism!

"Jesus said unto him, Rise, take up thy bed and walk" (ver. 8).

He has all power; his instruments are not secondary, but primary; he speaks, and it stands fast; he commands, and it disappears; he breathes, and the sun is dim; he breathes again, and the sun increases in lustre; he says, "Let there be," and there is. Jesus is Sovereign, Jesus is King.

Let us apply this whole thing to the matter of salvation. It was an angel that troubled the water. It is the Son of God that provides the fountain opened in the house of David for sin and for uncleanness. The water was moved at a certain time only. This atonement of the Son of God is open to our approaches night and day. Whosoever first stepped in was the case at Bethesda; but here the world may go in all at once. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world. Let us go to the fountain, and one thing we shall never find there,—we shall never find at the fountain of God's grace one dead man!

## PRAYER.

**ALMIGHTY** God, thou art our Father, though Abraham know us not. We know that thou art near us because of the glow of love that is in our hearts. We live in the presence and under the blessing of our Lord and Saviour. He has gone away from our sight, but we are still within the range of his gracious vision; he beholds us from on high, he lives with us; he says, Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. We cannot see thee, thou ascended Christ, but we remember thy word, Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed. Lord, we believe; help thou our unbelief! May we never look for thee in wrong directions; may our eyes be unto the heavens and unto the hills whence cometh our help; and may we know that the kingdom of God cometh in God's own way and not in ours. Save us from ignorance, from impatience, from all vain conceits and imaginings, and give us the peaceful life, the life of holy rest, the sabbath of heaven whilst yet we are upon the earth. Lead us according to thine own way; leave us but for a small moment only, that we may be gathered with everlasting kindness and mercies. When we are left alone teach us the purpose of thy withdrawalment, and leave with us thy blessing which shall make us rich. Thou, O holy, wounded, triumphant Christ, wast taken up ere thy blessing was fully uttered. Thou hast left us with a half-benediction; it is bread enough and to spare, we shall hear the rest to-morrow. Look upon us now, gathered as we are in the name of holy charity. Bless all these dear boys and girls: they are all thine; may they know it, and answer the grand appeal with simplicity of heart, and with growing love towards the Cross. We bless thee for the home in which they dwell, for the love which attends to their life, and we commend unto thee all who are interested in their education and in their prosperity. For all such exhibition of love we bless the Lord: this is the proof of the Cross, this is the evidence of the ascension of the Master: may we accept it as such, and live in peace and quietness for God. Open the way in life before all these little ones; may they find the key of every gate and open the lock, and pass on under the leadership of Christ; may the least be the most cared for, and may the blind be led every step until the threshold of heaven itself is touched. Now let thy blessing come upon our hearts, rest upon us, and give us peace. Teach us thy truth, help us to see its meaning, and to feel its force. Help us in all things to follow Jesus Christ through evil report and through good report, until we sit down with him on the throne which he has promised to the saints. And unto the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, whom we adore as one God, be the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, world without end. Amen.

### Chapter v. 7.

"I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool but while I am coming another steppeth down before me."

### LONELINESS.

A HUMAN being reduced to a state of helplessness! Take a man at his full estate, when his system is healthy, when his word is law to those who are about him, when a call will bring servants and friends, and one would regard it as impossible that such a man would be reduced to the state of helplessness described in the text. Yet look at the impoverishing and withering process. First of all, there is a blight upon his business, and his thousands are reduced to hundreds; then the great house is given up, and the proud head stoops under the humble roof. Presently, affliction strikes down wife and child, and the air becomes too cold even for the oldest friend. The next blow is at the man's own health; paralysis withers the limbs once so strong, and the hand which was once the sign of authority droops in pitiful weakness; the voice has now no meaning in it to anybody, its law and force are forgotten. There lies the man in pain, in weakness, quite alone, uncared for, lover and friend gone, and no counsellor at hand. There are hundreds of such men to be found in England to-day; or if there be any difference in the literal circumstances, there may be other considerations which still more deeply embitter the lot of wretchedness. A man without a man! A man left quite to himself. Such is the man in the text; he is alone in the crowd; the eye sees him, but has no pity for him; his unavailing struggles only add torture to his pain.

There is really a good deal of this kind of thing in society—a good deal of loneliness, helplessness, unsuccessful effort, and blighted hope. Oh those unsuccessful efforts, how they tear the heart right open, or heap upon it burdens which are too heavy! The bravest will is battered down by them. A resolute and good-hearted girl, reading what some great women have done with their pens, sets secretly to work upon poem or song, the price of which is to give her a measure of independence, or is to relieve the pressure upon other members of the family; she

writes till her ill-afforded candle expires, and writes again in the greyest light of the cold morning ; the lines please her, her fancy sees many a beauty in them, and the aching of her heart pauses under the exhilaration of a proud and thankful hope. Then comes the day of trembling expectation ; the manuscript is in the hands of a publisher, and all depends upon his criticism. The mornings come very slowly ; she can hardly sleep, and, when she does sleep, her dreams are of her book. At last the answer comes ; she hastens to some secret place to read it, and the scalding tears blind her when she reads that her manuscript is "declined with thanks" ; while she was coming, another stepped down before her. At that moment the sun cannot give her light ; she feels a strange darkness settling over her whole life. In various ways we have had similar experiences. There are young men known to me who have traversed our city streets, "Begging a brother of the earth To give them leave to toil," until they have fainted with weariness and hunger ; mile on mile they have wandered, till they thought all men had conspired to slay them ; at last they feel ashamed of being seen. They have feared to meet any one who would ask them of their success, for they had nothing but the old chilling answer. A poor creature came to me lately with a tale of bitterness. She had come to London to seek employment, but nothing came of all her labour. She seemed always to be too soon or too late ; at all events, no door opened to admit her even to a chance of getting her daily bread. She said, "I have walked the streets for two nights, and where to go to I really don't know." There was no professional tone in her voice ; she was not a trained beggar—she was an honest, but poor and suffering creature, who gave a straightforward and veritable account of herself, which I had every means of testing. Lonely—oh, so lonely!—yet within sight of the healing pools ! Most of us know what this means, for some form or other of the unhappy experience has befallen us in the working out of our life. We sometimes make merry with recollections of this sort now that we are strong, yet the gash upon the young heart is not quite overgrown ; we can still find it, and happy are we when our very failures have disclosed to us the purposes of love which God was working out. Those failures strained us much at the time ; they went far towards

souring our temper for ever, but we were saved from that ill fate.

We have come to see how long waiting at the edge of the pool has wrought in us a lingering and hopeful patience towards other sufferers, and we have learned to be more clement in our judgment of those whose eager haste for self-recovery made them apparently cruel to feebler men. Many a time, just when we were upon the point of success, a rival has overmatched us, and left us to suffer and pine by the pool-side.

This reminds us, that according to the text there is not only much helplessness, but much selfishness in the world. Every man has a case of his own, which is right enough; the point of selfishness is, that many men having been cured, have forgotten that their cure binds them in God's law of love to see that other sufferers are aided in their attempts at recovery. Of all who had been cured at the pool not one remained to give this man the benefit of his strength. What a world this would be without social beneficence—that is, without one man finding joy in helping another! Selfishness makes the world a very little place; a very cold, fruitless, gloomy corner. It may appear to be a very grand thing to write one's own name everywhere as owner and lord, but if the name be not written on recovered and thankful human hearts it will soon be rubbed out and forgotten. Love is the only ink which does not fade; love is the only memory which strengthens with time; love is the bond which never corrodes. We have only so much as we have given; by so much as we have helped other people we have laid up reserves of strength which will give us mastery and honour in time to come. I am thankful to be associated with benevolent people, and I gladly bear record how many poor sufferers some of you have helped to the healing pool; their names are all written, and so are yours, and there is coming a day of very glad memory. You have had part of the compensation already, and you know how sweet it is. When you have taken a child off the streets, and given it food and clothing, and shelter from the harsh wind, you did not want gold and silver as a reward. God put it into your hearts instantly, as if in haste to show his approval—such a warmth of holy gladness

as lifted you quite out of common worldly influences, and you wished you could be always giving. It will be a joy to my heart for ever that, as a boy, I was seldom allowed to sit down to my own Sunday dinner until I carried a portion to some sick man or poor woman; and that walk upon mercy's errand gave us all greater enjoyment of what was left, doubled it, made it sweeter to the taste, for it seemed as if Jesus himself broke the bread. No doubt it is a selfish world; yet, on the other hand, there is a good deal of genuine kindness among men, and it is well to think of this. There is very much benevolence among the rich, and there is also very much benevolence among the poor; to the poor many cups of cold water are given, and many a mite is secretly put into the empty hand. As a general rule the complaining man is not the most deserving man, nor is destitution always to be measured by outward signs of distress; there are some who cover their sorrow with laughter, and talk so hopefully that they are never suspected of want. And, on the other hand, there is a way of doing a kindness which looks as if no kindness had been done; a gentle and delicate way which adds preciousness to the gift. I have known some men do a kindness as if they were receiving it rather than giving it, so that the poor were not made to feel their poverty. This was Jesus Christ's method, and it will be ours as we approach his likeness. We need not look long for opportunities of helping suffering men into the pool of healing; every day is rich with such opportunities to the man whose eyes combine with the penetration of shrewdness the benignity of compassion.

This reminds us that Jesus Christ ever, as in the text, went about doing good; not waiting for the lost, but seeking them; not standing still, but going after them till they were found. Sometimes Jesus Christ's help was besought, sometimes it was offered; but whether this way or that, Jesus Christ spent no idle hours. The stream of his most merciful help poured from an inexhaustible fountain, and no poor, broken-hearted suppliant was ever excluded from the healing waters. This case illustrates his compassionate method. To whom does he address himself? To the loneliest and most helpless of men! Truly might that man say, "When there was no eye to pity, and when there was no arm to save,



thine own eye pitied, and thine own arm brought salvation." The same field of philanthropic service lies before us all; what if we should all resolve that every day we should make a point of assisting one man towards the pool of healing? A boy said some time since, as he was writing in a diary which the fancy of a moment had led him to buy, "Keeping a diary might change a man's life;" and when we asked him how it could do so, he replied, "Because at night, when he came to write in it, he would say to himself, What have I done to-day? And if he had not done anything, he might go out and do something." It was a child's notion, but there is a man's wisdom in it. We may not keep diaries, but a diary is kept for each of us, and day by day entry is made according to our industry or idleness. How many blanks are there in the diary! Are there many entries of healing or few? The Christian method of service compels men to go out and seek opportunities of doing good; and to every man Jesus Christ says, "When thou art converted strengthen thy brethren;" being healed thyself, help others to the place of recovery. It is an infallible sign that a man has not undergone Christian healing if he has no care about healing others; it is only an external cure, some poor patchwork of morality which fear of the law may have wrought upon him, not the divinely vitalised energy which warms and stirs the heart with all the impulses of far-reaching charity. The philanthropy of morality goes at the bidding of conscience; but the philanthropy of the Cross goes at the bidding of love. You know the difference of the two biddings? Conscience never yet developed a grand nature; it has striven with much urgent importunity and many a pricking smart to keep men erect and honest, but it has never wrought in them any overflow of good nature, and fruitfulness of generous service. Christianity never lulls the conscience, yet never seems to expect much from it; its chief hope is in Christianised human love. Conscience has but a limited sway; love has empire over the whole man. Conscience will use its plumb and square, and with sharp-pointed compasses will describe the range of duty; but love will wreath every straight line with flowers, and to the majesty of rectitude will add all the graces and delights of beauty. Conscience is as the watchman who travels round his beat at night time; enough for him that gates

and doors are closed, and that bolts and bars are all in their places ; but love is as the friend who watches by the sleepless pillow of sickness, and with many a kind touch smooths the hard way of the sufferer. Through all Christian service the same principle holds good ; conscience may tell a man what to do, but by an almost omnipotent constraint love makes him do it. You will find love at the pool-side, offering to help the poorest sufferer step into the healing water ; and long after conscience is satisfied love will add something to a day's work, which has far exceeded the twelve hours of the hireling. Oh those wretched calculating hirelings, who pinch their work up to the point of dishonesty ! The men who make nothing but technical rules cannot be honest out-and-out, and they will never make life very successful. People who are so clever at making rules for saving themselves, generally, and most deservedly, make fools of themselves by their very cleverness. No ; throughout life, in religion, business, government, and everything else, we cannot shut up human service within rules and bye-laws ; there must be grace above law, else alas for the poor lone man who has no one to help him to the pool !

This brings me to say that the lost man's hope is in Jesus Christ. He who saves the sufferer at Bethesda must save all other dying men. It is the glory of Jesus Christ that he saves when others give up in despair. He seeks the lost. When a man feels that the last human hope has gone out, and left his sky without streak or glimmer of light, Jesus Christ will come through all the darkness, and make it glow with the brightness of morning. But not till then. So long as man puts his hope in men, Jesus Christ stands off ; but as soon as the dying eye turns towards him all his heart opens in one great offering of life. This is the gospel which we have to preach ; can you wonder that now and again we are carried away in a perfect ecstasy of joy ? We have felt the sad loneliness and helplessness of sin, and none can tell what gladness was wrought in our hearts when Jesus Christ first spoke to us. There was a tone in his voice which was wanting in all others, a persuasive kindness which quite won us back to hope. Men could not help us ; but this Man said he could find for us the piece that was lost, and could

add all heaven to it. We remember how glad his word made us, how we rose, and walked, and leaped, and entered into the temple, praising him with a loud voice; and as the memory comes back, we can hardly keep down the song of love and blessing. It is this memory that will give us thorough congregational singing. When the heart is cold, when the old loving memories have died out of it, and we come up to the house of God merely in the performance of a decent ceremony, no wonder that we drone and mumble lest persons in the next pew should hear us. Such singing is horribly unnatural; it amounts to insult when regarded as an offering to God. But when the heart is alive, when we recollect what Jesus has done for us, when love tunes our lips, then we could drown the storms of the sea with our rapturous yet chastened and harmonious praise. There is no praise like that which is given to Jesus Christ; it comes from the innermost chords of the heart, and is lifted up by grateful, immortal love. Think what joy will fill that crushed and suffering heart of his when all whom he saved shall be gathered into one vast company! Innumerable throng! Every man of the infinite host having his own special reason for heightening the sublime ecstatic melody. Surely in that hour all the horrors of Gethsemane and all the anguish of Calvary will be forgotten in the splendour and security of a perfected redemption.

So the text has two sides—one dark, the other bright. On the one side we see what sin would bring us to, what loneliness, helplessness, and extremity of suffering; on the other we see whence comes the light of hope and the hand of unailing power. As the poor man at Bethesda was anxious for salvation, as Jesus spoke to that poor man, so he speaks to every one of us; and now is the solemn hour in which we may return answer to Christ's entreating love. Now are we without excuse. Jesus himself will testify against us if we complain of helplessness. His arm is our arm; his resources are ours; his divinity is our sun and shield. Do not throw from you this word of hope; hide it in your troubled hearts; listen to it when the world is gloomy and silent, and even though cast down you shall be saved by the One Saviour of helpless men. I charge you to hope in Christ!

## Chapter v. 14.

"Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee."

### A SOLEMN WORD.

[AN OUTLINE.]

JESUS went about doing good,—that is to say, he did not ever stand in one place waiting for people to come to him, but he found out cases of need, and proposed to undertake their relief and cure. He did so in this case. The impotent man did not go to Jesus; Jesus went to the impotent man. Thus Jesus worked in both ways: he stood still that people might come to him, and he went about that he might find the weary and the lost. The great act of salvation is an act of approach on the part of God. "When there was no eye to pity," etc.; "God so loved the world," etc.; "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Sin no more. It is clear, then, that there is a connection between moral life and physical life. Jesus did not seek to change the mere habits of the sufferer. He did not give the man a scale of diet. Nothing is said as to sleep, exercise, ablution, or any other physical discipline. The exhortation is profoundly religious—Sin no more! Where the spiritual is wrong, the physical cannot be right,—even when it is outwardly prosperous it is so but for a moment: its prosperity is threatened by a sword already poised. On the other hand physical discipline has a religious side. Cleanliness is a religious duty. Moderation is a command of God. Early rising may be necessary to the completion of the whole idea of worship. In a word, all our life is to be religious: "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

Sin no more. It is possible, then, to leave the past, and to

be good for the future. A solemn yet inspiring word is this! We may turn over a new leaf. We may bury our dead selves. In the face of this declaration made by the Son of God, what becomes of our excuses and pleas, such as "we cannot help it"; "circumstances are against us"; "the flesh is weak"? The first step to be taken is the formation of an earnest resolution. "Choose ye this day!" Then will come all the helps of study, companionship, healthful service in the cause of goodness, all conducted in a spirit of believing and hopeful prayer. But suppose we cannot reach the sinless state in this life? Let that be granted, still we may be moving in the right direction. "I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus." As it is possible to sin with the will, is it not also possible to sin against the will? God will judge the motive, and his mercy will triumph wherever triumph is possible.

Sin no more. Then it is possible to forget the greatest deliverances and blessings of life, and to go back to sin. The man had been healed. A mighty hand had lifted him out of the pit of despair and set him in the sweet light of hope; his youth had been renewed; his heart had gotten back all its best hopes; yet it was possible that all might be forgotten! The shipwrecked mariner may forget the agonies of the sea when his voice of prayer pierced the very storm, and forced itself into heaven. We say we shall never forget a mercy so great as this; yet behold in our prosperity we forget God! There is no spiritual eminence from which we cannot retire. There is a way back to hell even from the very threshold of heaven!

Lest a worse thing come unto thee. Then it is right to appeal to fear in speaking religiously to men. This is distinctly an appeal to fear. Some men are inaccessible except through the medium of terror, and they must be approached accordingly. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." To those who have rejected the gospel there is a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.

Lest a worse thing come unto thee. Then how many must be the punishments which God can inflict! Looking at this case one would have thought that even the wrath of heaven had been exhausted. Recall the facts: (1) Long-continued suffering,—“thirty and eight years”: (2) friendlessness,—“I have no man”, (3) continuous disappointment,—“another steppeth down before me”; yet in view of all this, Jesus speaks of the possibility of a “worse thing.” Who can number the arrows of the Almighty? Who can tell the temperature of his indignation? Who hath sounded the pit of darkness so that he can surely tell the depth thereof? Cannot God go beyond our imagination in the infliction of penalty? After he has touched our skin with a loathsome disease, and made our bones tremble; after he has sent a chill to our marrow, and made our pulses stagger in their beat; after he has struck us blind so that we cannot see the sun, and stopped our ears so that the storm cannot be heard; after he has loosened our ankle joints, and taken the cunning from the hand of our power; after he has withdrawn the light from our eyes, and caused our brain to wither: is there more that he can do? Yea! No man can number all his weapons, or tell where the confines of hell are set.

Application:—If we would sin no more, we must pray for a daily baptism of the Holy Ghost.

## Chapter v. 35-40.

“He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light. But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me. And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape. And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not. Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.”

### AN EXHORTATION AND AN ARGUMENT.

“HE was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light.” Jesus Christ is not paying any compliment to John. The text is always regarded as if Jesus Christ were wonderfully struck by the magnificence of his forerunner. Jesus Christ is now speaking not eulogistically but contrastively. John was a burning and a shining lamp—the best light you could have at the time. When do you put out the lamp? When there is a better light to see by; as soon as the sun comes the lamp is put out. The lamp says, “He must increase, I must decrease.” John was a burning and a shining lamp only until the dawn made the eastern sky white with young splendour, and promised the noonday. He was only burning and shining because the darkness was so dense round about him—a lamp before the dawn, a little light to be going on with until the impartial sun filled all heaven with his glory. Thus Jesus Christ is not praising John, but indicating the utility of John the Baptist until the true Light came which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. You can light a house with a lamp, but not a city. The lamp is of necessity local and limited, but very useful; so every man that came before Jesus Christ, how great soever in prophetic genius and noble in prophetic function, was a lamp that was only waiting until the sun shone; then the lamp, as if

conscious, would turn upon itself and withdraw, because its little usefulness was ended.

What, then, does Jesus Christ say of himself? He says, "I am the Light of the world." How arrogant, how intolerable, if he were but a man! The very contrast which he establishes is but an exhibition of infinite impertinence, if it be the contrast of man against man. The deity of Jesus Christ is not to be established by little grammatical discussions. So long as you have grammar as your demigod you will have wondrous controversies very skilful, word-fencing most agile and keen and wonder-striking. The deity of Christ runs through his whole spiritual action; every touch was the touch of God; every word had about it some glint of a light higher than the brightness of the sun. The deity of Jesus Christ may be established by this very instance. All other men are lamps, shining only until the dawn renders them useless; the moment Jesus Christ comes into the world all lamps disappear, and the glory is that of noontide, infinite and cloudless. We could not allow any man the use of such poetry; it is not poetry, it is blasphemy. He puts himself in a wrong relation to God, and sets himself in a wrong relation to us, if he be but talking blank verse. Do not find the deity of the Saviour in a Greek preposition, or the sudden turn of some verb in its mazy conjugation. Christ is God by his deeds, by his claims. Yet he does not hesitate to correct men's notions of God by declaring that he is only the Agent of the Father; at the same time, if you read his answer to the charge that he made himself equal with God, you will find the answer more mysterious than the original difficulty. He was correcting erroneous metaphysics, and erroneous theology, and in the very act of humbling himself he was leading men to worship him. This is the mystery of godliness.

The one witness which Jesus Christ had was the Father, and the Father displays his witness in two departments: first, the works; secondly, the word. And the works and the word were one, for God is one; the word is his work, his work is his gospel: he is evermore the same, unchanging, and yet never the same in any sense of monotony that tends to weariness. How



is it then that the Jews did not see that this man Jesus Christ was the Messiah of the Old Testament and the very Son of God come into the world to save and deliver it? Hear what Jesus himself says: "Ye search the Scriptures." Change the grammar from the imperative to the indicative: instead of saying, "Search the Scriptures," as if it were an exhortation, read "Ye search the Scriptures," as if it were an act already engaged in. Now mark the argument. "Ye search the Scriptures, because ye think that in the Scriptures ye have, or shall find, eternal life: and yet ye will not come to me"—lay the emphasis upon the "me," as filling up the whole meaning of everything that is in the Scriptures. Let us understand the position of these Jews. They had the right book. Observe that particularly. If they had mistaken the document, excuses would have been found for them, but they had absolutely the right book in their hands. Secondly, they took infinite pains with it, from their own point of view, and within the limits of their own purpose. They knew all about the structure of the book, the scribes lived to master the particulars of the book; thus they got their living, their eminence, their fame, their influence. And yet they missed the point. They could tell you how many books were in the Scripture; they could tell you how many words were in each division of the Scripture; they could point out the exact number of consonants and vowels in the literary composition of the Scripture; they knew all the details about the Scripture: and yet they had no revelation. That was the charge that Jesus Christ brought against them. Painstaking—where could you find the equal of such painstaking as that of the scribes in the perusal of the Scriptures? What music will you get out of a wooden alphabet, perfectly correct in every letter and in the number of the whole, and turning them promiscuously upside down—when will the music come? Yet it is the right alphabet, not a letter is wanting, and every letter is touched with a species of reverence, and all the letters are handled as if they contained eternal life; and yet they are so thrown about as to reveal no literature, no wisdom, no poetry, no hope. Precisely so did the scribes use the Bible, and precisely so are the scribes using it to-day. It is torn to pieces by grammarians, it is wrenched until it bleeds by all kinds of rough handling; yet there is no Christ in it. It is

the right book, and it holds the right doctrine, but it is a murdered book.

How was it that the Jews did not find in it the Christ? Jesus gives the answer: "Ye have not his word abiding in you." A man must himself be a Bible before he can understand God's Bible. There was nothing in themselves to which the Bible could speak. They handled it manually, mechanically, daintily, with more or less indeed of superstitious reverence; but there being nothing in themselves to which the Bible could speak, there was no masonry between the thing written and the heart reading. So it must be all the world over through all time. You will get out of the Bible what you bring to it. If you want to find God's word in the Bible, you will find it. If the word be already in you in some dim, unconscious, but surely felt way, the book will talk to you, and you will talk to the book, and you will seem to have met one another in some other world, the mystery of kinship will arise between you, and the forthputting of your respective action will be sacramental and blessed evermore. No mere critic can understand the Bible; no word-chopper can preach the Bible; no murderous grammarian that thinks by taking off letter by letter he can get at the meaning will ever reach the genius of any revelation given from the heavens. Suppose a man were appointed by us to report the oratorio called the Messiah. We ask him to tell us what the oratorio is. He says, I have taken infinite pains with my analysis, and I can therefore tell you exactly what the oratorio is: it consists of two thousand words; musically, it consists of fifty breves, two hundred semibreves, and nearly eight hundred quavers; it has solos—soprano, bass, tenor; its choruses require thousands of voices. This is the oratorio. That is a woodman's report; that is the oratorio by statistics. What could be more painstaking? Yet there are men who read the Bible just so, and boast that they read the whole book twice a year. What a man that must be who can get through the Bible twice in a year! I cannot myself get through it—every verse an angel, every discourse a revelation, every history a tragedy; and yet there be some canterers that can gallop through the whole of it twice a year. That is not reading the Bible. What do you think of the oratorio from this business-like report? Could

any man more industriously collect the facts? We are ruined by facts. He who can talk about oratorio and facts in the same breath does not understand either of the subjects on which he discourses. What would the oratorio be to such a statistician? Nothing. You might send him next into the woodhouse to tell you exactly how many bundles of firewood you have there: he would take the same notebook and the same pencil, and with the same hand that has not a soul in it would write down notes on bundles in one farrago. It is precisely the same through all time. We may have committed the whole Bible to memory, and yet know nothing about God's revelation. There are men who boast that they can give you chapter and verse for almost everything. That is a poor feat; it is not worth doing. A man says he got within ten feet of the top of the hill, and he wants you to praise him, and you would have praised him if you had not happened to see at the same time that there was a goat at the very top: the goat was higher than the man, the goat would not praise him. And so there be those who perform little mechanical feats with the Scriptures; they know how many chapters in each book, how many verses in each chapter, how many capital letters in each division of the book, how many verses in the hundred and nineteenth Psalm, and how many different representations of the Hebrew alphabet occur in the whole of the Psalter. All this may mean nothing. Ye search the Scriptures . . . and ye will not come. This is God's charge against us.

If we were Bible readers we would be Christ believers. In the whole course of this *PEOPLE'S BIBLE* we have insisted, with many a rebuking protest, that Jesus Christ is never read into the Old Testament, but is there, from "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." There are men who are ruining the ministry to-day by preventing their students doing anything but that which is literally grammatical. Read Christ into anything? The impertinence, the blasphemy of such a suggestion, that there is any place where Christ is not already before us! "By him all things consist." That is the reading that suits my soul better. Tell me that I may find him in every daisy in the meadow, in every little bird turned to song in the cloud, in every glint of

light,—that touches and evokes the music of my soul better than binding me down to mechanical alphabets. “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” What for? Who wanted them? Why this trouble? why this ruffling of the infinite tranquillity of the Eternal Essence? Why? Search the Scriptures, and you will know why. Heaven was arched that man might live under it and be saved, and pass through all the tragedy of this partial life into all the peace of immortality. The earth was made solid that it might bear Christ’s Cross. For that Cross is needful to populate the realms of the blessed. Beware of those who suppose that you are introducing Christ into something; better follow the spiritualist who finds typology everywhere than follow the literalist who finds God but in small places set up for partial uses. “Ye will not come.” Oh, sweet, sweet word “Come”! It means the toddle of a little child; it means the running of an eager servant; it means the hastening of one who is thirsty because he hears somewhere the splash of fountains. There is no dragging, no lashing; it is all “coming.” “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” “If any man thirst, let him come unto me.” “The Spirit and the bride say, Come.” “Let him that is athirst come.” Whosoever will, let him come.” Wonder of wonders it must have been to the great heart of Christ that men should be reading about him and not recognise him. It is the curse of modern reading that we do not see the thing we are reading about, feel the genius about whom we have been perusing eloquent testimonies. “There standeth one among you, whom ye know not; he it is” that shall save your souls. We do not all come at the same point. Some come to Christ because they see his miracles—“No man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Rabbi, thou art come from God.”

Let children come; make way for all men following Nicodemus. Some came because he took little children in his arms and blessed them: the moment he did that all the mothers came in; they said, This is he of whom Moses and the prophets did write. He had a way of handling children that showed he was the Father of them all. Some came to him because he went to be a guest with a man that was a sinner. They said, “He can touch pitch, and not

be defiled ; this is the sunbeam that disinfects, but never contracts the contagion that is fatal." Some came to him because of his hatred of wrong ; they love his righteous spirit ; they say, He never patronised iniquity or looked with favour upon unfairness or unrighteousness or corruption ; he never would allow the poor to be trampled upon without protest and indignation. He would never allow any man to force his way by violence to supremacies which belonged to righteousness. So there are a thousand ways to Christ. Come your own way—but come. Infinite mockery to have the Bible but not the revelation ; infinite mockery to have the shell but not the kernel ; infinite mockery to have the garments of the body but not the passion of the soul. O ye Christians, falsely so-called, baptised by an evil genius into an evil faith, beware ! you can do Christ more harm than any atheist can ever do. Drop your baptismal name, curse the God whom you profess to love, and you may do some good in the world ; but to be standing there with a Bible without a revelation, with an altar but without a God, you are the fathers of infidels, you are the creators of unbelief. Infinite mockery to be near the organ and never to hear its music, as if the organ were the wooden part, the timber or the metal, and not that mysterious almost spirit that makes them quiver and thrill under the dominion of some magic spirit. Infinite mockery to be in the garden and not to see the flowers. Oh poor, poor, account to give, to say at last, Lord, we had thy book, but in it we never saw thy shape or heard thy voice ; we had the Bible, we called it family Bible, but we never saw thyself in it. It was laid down with other books, it was not distinguished from them in any way, except that we worshipped it as a fetish ; it was in the house, and we never said, Lo, God is here. Ye search the Scriptures, and ye have no Christ, simply because there is nothing Christly in you to evoke, to develop.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, help thy servants to do the work which will bear witness of thee; help them to work while it is called day, so that at eventide they may have peaceful and grateful recollections. May we be jealous about our purity; may our life be a sacrifice; may our speech be a call to heaven. We mourn our inconstancy, our feebleness, our ignorance; but how great is thy mercy—greater than the sea, greater than the firmament; truly it is past finding out! May our Christian name be a Christian reality, and our hope in thee a light that shall make our whole life glorious! How rich in heavenly graces might our life have been had we walked with God! We might have been princes in thy house, whereas we are but as slaves, whose eyes are ever towards the dust. Pardon us, blessed Father. Bind us to the Cross—give us hope in thy dear Son. Amen.

### Chapter v. 36.

“I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.”

### GREATER WITNESS THAN JOHN'S.

MEN are often called upon to maintain their ground in society. Specially, if a man do anything very extraordinary, and so draw attention to the sphere of his operations, society will persistently raise the personal question; the man must give some account of himself—who is he? what are his claims? on what foundation does he stand? It is not an insignificant circumstance that men take deep interest in unusual manifestations of life; it is rather a sign of their high origin and great capacity. Is there any man who would not gladly increase his power, extend the volume of his being, and carry to a higher intensity his influence for good? This is the meaning of all study, and the end of all prayer. All truly directed life is an effort after God. Men may not always have the fact present to their minds; yet, on reflection, they will acknowledge that in proportion as they make sound progress in life they work

according to divine impulse and divine law. And, in proportion as they do so, they will occasion excitement and inquiry; perhaps, also, ungenerous criticism, and even malign action.

Strange as it may appear, this is even so. Men are not always satisfied with the instruments and methods which God adopts. They limit the Holy One of Israel; they appoint the chariots in which he shall make the circuit of the universe; and if, rejecting these human vehicles, he shall walk upon the wings of the wind, and make the clouds the dust of his feet—if he pass by kings, and exalt mean men to his ministry; if he refuse the silver trumpet, and elect the ram's horn—there will be wonder and disappointment among those who are the victims of their own blind and boastful conceit.

This method of criticism reached, of course, its highest application in the case of Jesus Christ. It is very instructive, as well as very humiliating, to study the discussions which prevailed about his personality, his authority, the seals and certificates of his ministry. The Jews were the very impersonation of the official mind. The first thing to be settled was descent or authority. Apart from this, all else was without value. Their intellectual operations, however exact in moving from cause to effect, seemed to be altogether unable to move from effect to cause. They saw a lame man leaping with new-gotten strength, yet they did not care to found an argument on the fact; they saw diseased men bloom with recovered health; yet, when they turned to the great Worker, their eyes were dimmed by a puzzled and even angry prejudice. That worker was only Mary's Son; he had a connection with Nazareth which vitiated his prophetic lineage; or there was some other flaw in his great claim to be heard and followed.

Is not the same kind of criticism active in our own day? Are we not all, more or less, tempted to try men by some merely technical standard? Do we not care more for the paper than the life, and believe a man to be good because the paper says so; or believe him to be bad, because he has no paper to show? If the life of Jesus Christ should have wrought one result above another

upon merely literary readers, it should have exposed the insanity of denying a divine origin to divine works. Let those who please demand the credentials of the sun; but be it our wisdom to believe that no testimony can be so convincing as his own splendid and impartial light. This is a matter which I would urge as of great importance. If men be looking for technicality where they should be looking for life, they resemble thirsty travellers who will not drink of a well until they have read the faded inscription which tells how it come to be a well at all. What say you to such travellers? For many a day they have wandered along the dusty road; their lips are parched with thirst; yet, when they come to a well of water, they ask who dug it? Who enclosed it? What families have drunk of it? Through what districts the water flows, or through what strata it rises? The questions may not be altogether without importance, but life is more important to all, and dying nature ignores every one of them, until its burning thirst has been quenched. Now, Jesus Christ was as a well of living water, and the men who were around him were thirsty; yet those men put their small questions, and started their small objections, it being of more importance that their notions should be satisfied than that their lives should be saved; and, blame them as we may, they were not the only people who have sacrificed the living present on the altar of a dead routine, or rejected a spiritual Saviour because he was not also a temporal king.

Every man, then, it would appear, is asked for his testimonials. It was the custom of the world, and Jesus Christ must feel its influence. Large testimonials were supposed to be valuable, but in the progress of opinion it has been found that a man must be his own testimonial if he is to establish himself as a fact in the world. By this is meant that a man must not only say, but do; the earnest heart must express itself in the noble action, and the final appeal must be—"Believe me for the very works' sake."

Jesus Christ said, "I have greater witness than that of John." Let us understand this point. Jesus Christ does not despise the testimony of good men, nor does he teach his servants to do so. "There is another that beareth witness of me; and I know that



the witness which he witnesseth of me is true. . . . He was a burning and a shining light." No man is at liberty to despise the opinion of good men. That opinion should be prized on every ground, but specially as a stimulant to a still higher life. The good man's word of encouragement helps us many a time to recover heart when going up the hills of hard duty, and is often to us as a word immediately from God. At the same time testimonials are also often as the preface to a book ; the preface may be good, but the book must stand upon its own merits. When the preface written by a friendly patron is too highflown, the disadvantage accrues not to himself, but to the young author in whose interest it was mistakenly written. There are men in England to-day who would be rich for ever, if they could live upon testimonials. Their testimonials are their greatest hindrances. Modest men shrink from the very idea of assisting persons whose pedestal is so immense and imposing ; consequently the great testimonial is but a millstone round the neck of its unfortunate possessor. Jesus Christ said, "I receive not testimony from man." Paul said, "It is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment." John said, "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater." We should want to know what a man is, and not what is said about him ; to see his work, and not to read his testimonial.

We are warranted in saying so by the words of the text, "The works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me." This was not the only time that the same doctrine was laid down by Jesus Christ. "When John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see : the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them." My object in calling attention to this text is to enforce the doctrine that, both in personal and ecclesiastical life, the grand and final appeal as to authority is to works. The moral quality of the worker will be shown in his whole conduct and

service among men. There may, in some instances, be crafty, and even successful simulation ; the holy word may be spoken by the unclean tongue ; the good deed may be attempted by the double-working hand ; but all this rather confirms the doctrine than opposes it, for no man would make base coin but for the value of the true metal.

It is, perhaps, hardly necessary to insist for a moment that I am not maintaining the doctrine of salvation by works ; there is no such salvation that I am aware of, any more than there is navigation in sand, or pedestrianism on the sea. I refuse to regard salvation by works other than as a contradiction in terms, and I put it in this strong way, that in a sentence I may have done with the suggestion once for all. A man's testimony, as a professed servant of God, is to be found in his works. Let a man prove his salvation by his holiness. If a man should say that God sent him, let him prove his mission by his life—having heard his word, we await his works.

Take the case of a church. You profess to be divinely called, but what is the proof ? Do not refer me to a long line of illustrious ministers, to a large and splendid sanctuary, or even to a dazzling subscription list. Are you felt in the neighbourhood to be a power for good ? Do you visit the widow and the fatherless in their affliction ? Are you eyes to the blind and feet to the lame ? Do the poor bless you, and those who are ready to perish hold you in grateful reverence ? I do not ask if the trust-deed be orthodox, if the music be scientific, if the seats be well let, if the congregation be genteel ; I ask if Jesus Christ crucified be the inspiration of your labour, and Jesus Christ risen the source of your power ?

If a man said he was eloquent, how would you judge him ? By the number of books he had read, or by the number of schools he had attended ? Certainly not. If he never moved you to tears, or compelled your consent to his reasoning, or excited you to enthusiasm, his pretension would be nothing but a barren name. On the other hand, there may be a man who has not read a book on eloquence, who could not give you a single canon

in rhetoric ; yet when he opens his mouth your attention is caught as by a spell ; his strong, earnest, pathetic speech, though perhaps broken and inexact, carries everything before it. Do you hesitate to pronounce him an eloquent man ? You judge by the "works,"—you believe him for the very works' sake, and you are unquestionably right. It would fail to convince you that he was an eloquent man if he merely repeated the rules of Quintilian and of Isocrates, or repeated from end to end the orations of Demosthenes and Cicero. You must hear the man speak. It is not enough that he pronounce keen criticisms on other speakers, showing what canons have been violated, and what vices have been set up ; after all this, the man must show his power to convince the judgment and captivate the heart and the fancy before you can yield him homage as a master of speech. Specially is this the case with the Christian minister. He may be unlearned, yet the might of God may be in him ; he may blunder and stumble, yet a mysterious dignity may invest his whole service. On the other hand, with spotless character, with innumerable testimonials, with a status conspicuous and influential, he may be brought to the lowest dust of humiliation, and to the distress of the most ignominious failure. Oh, ministers of Jesus Christ—servants of the One Crown—what manner of qualification should be ours ! We must have seals of our apostleship, and these we cannot have but as we labour in our blessed Master's spirit. Applause we may win ; a name we may make ; but wood, hay, and stubble shall perish—only the true gold will be of use to us at the last !

So there may be persons who question your standing as a Church ; according to their notions, you are not a Church at all ; your foundation is a swamp, your pedigree a broken chain. What do you answer ? Prove your call by your works. Show that the love of Christ is the all-compelling power of your lives, and by holiness, patience, and charity set up a claim too strong to be overthrown, too lofty to be defied. In the days that are coming we shall have much controversy on Church questions. Rival ecclesiastical theories will be zealously and ably maintained. In view of this conflict, let me say that works will be the only satisfactory standard of appeal. Ecclesiastical mummeries must

be crumbled and scattered to the winds. Artificialism must perish. Philanthropy alone will stand. The day will come when upholders of every church system will have to defend themselves by the argument of facts. What have our principles compelled us to do? Where are the proofs of our love? Where are the results of our voluntaryism? What light have we shed on the world? What sanctuaries have we built? Away with the theory that believes much and does nothing. Blessed are the men who are drawn towards self-sacrifice; the service that comes of love.

The appeal which Jesus Christ made on his own behalf is also the appeal which should be made on behalf of Christianity. There are two lights in which Christianity may be regarded: it may be looked at as classified in sectarian dogmas, and as upheld by any particular course of argument; in general terms, it may become a subject of criticism. Treated in this manner, it has been alike the object of ridicule and reverence. On the other hand, Christianity may be tested by its results as a practical religion. Its history is before the world. What has Christianity done? It has greater testimony than the commendation of its deep scholars and eloquent preachers. It has opened prison doors, broken down bad governments, aided all good causes, lifted up trampled honour and virtue; it has saved men's souls, given men's lives higher elevation, changed death into a beneficent liberator, and turned the grave into the last step towards heaven; it has made selfish men benevolent, harsh men gentle, timid men heroic, and sad men happy; it has blessed the cause of freedom, succoured the efforts of charity, upheld the claims of peace; it demands to be judged by its fruits, and its demand is reasonable and ought to be irresistible. We are called to maintain a practical testimony, to give the emphatic and convincing answer of noble living. We have had enough of literary testimonial; we have done enough in the matter of the evidences; we are thankful to every author who has spoken one good word for the truth; now let the truth speak for itself, let the Christian be the best defence of Christianity, let the life of the servant commend the doctrine of the Lord. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but

he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." "The fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is." What if our testimonials, our diplomas, our certificates, be all burnt up, and we have nothing to show but the smouldering ashes of an artificial life ?

The argument which applies to Christianity applies also, of course, with equal effect, to the Bible. If the Bible is to be judged by its works, there is, happily, an end of controversy. What is the best reply to attacks upon the Bible ? Circulation. When men say the Bible is not inspired—circulate it ; when they charge upon it inability to address the spirit of the times—circulate it ; when they say it has outlived the circumstances which called for it—circulate it ! Circulation is the best argument. Let the Bible speak for itself ; there is no eloquence like its own ; let it reveal itself in its own pure glory, not in the artificial flare of our commendation. The Bible must be its own vindicator. Not because our fathers believed in it ; not because it has a romantic history ; not because of priestly exhortation ; but because of its own proved power to enlighten the mind, to bless the heart, to elevate life, and destroy the power of death, must the Bible be held first in our love and highest in our veneration. "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit." "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good ; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil." What does the Bible bring forth ? What of manhood ? What of purity ? What of hope ? It must not be judged in detail ; it must not have meanings forced upon it : it must be taken in its entirety ; it must have free scope ; it must be received into the heart—then we abide by the verdict !

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we have tasted and seen how good is the grace of the Lord who died for us. It was a wondrous grace. The Lord Christ spared not himself from the death that we might never die. May we understand somewhat of our own sin, then shall we understand somewhat of Christ's wondrous death. Enable us to look within with careful eyes; may we not spare ourselves in the scrutiny of our heart; may we try our own reins, and search our own motives, and penetrate to the recesses of our own spirits; then shall we be better able to approach with thoughtfulness, intelligence, and acceptance all the mercy and all the mystery of the Cross. Thou hast led us by a way that we knew not, and by paths that we had not known; thou hast led us well; thou hast brought us always from darkness to light, from bondage to liberty, from littleness towards greatness. Thou dost never call men downward; thine appeal to mankind is an appeal to rise, to advance, to grow: herein we know the truthfulness of thy word and the divinity of thy command, and herein we separate it from all human words; they do not address our inmost soul, they leave us without bread which bringeth everlasting life; but because thy Word calls us upward and onward, in ever-expanding liberty, we know it to be thine; may we accept it, live and glorify it. We pray that human life may be sanctified, divinely taught, comforted from on high by such assurances as the soul can grasp and realise and appropriate. Thou knowest how wondrous is this human life; what a tragedy, what agony, what heartache make up the history of every day; thou knowest that our tears are often hotter and more in number than aught we can set beside them to counteract their influence. Thou knowest what clouds gather in our skies, how suddenly the light goes out, and how soon we are driven downwards towards dejection. Come to us according to the necessity and quality of our life, and command thy blessing from the Cross of Christ to rest upon it. Yet thou hast given us many joys, and we would be ungrateful not to remember them: life itself is joy, life is divine, life has in it the beginning of heaven; this is thy gift, thy mystery of love, thy mystery of purpose: may we enter into it gladly, until even life itself is a root out of which shall come heaven and immortality, through Jesus Christ the Head of the universe, the Saviour of the world. Set a light in dark places; make the poor rich in hope, in love of truth, and in aspiration after things divine; then shall they know nought of the poverty of time and earth and sense, but shall be glad in the Lord. Stop the bad man on his way; take from him the instrument with which he intends to do mischief, shut his eyes with blindness that he may utterly lose himself, until he begin

to think and repent and pray. If any man is laying a plot for another man, spoil his net, or ensnare him in that which he meant for the feet of others; and if any are shedding tears that no human hand can touch, O Saviour of the world, thou who didst die for men, come, and with thine own grace turn the bitterness of grief into the beginning of the best joy. Amen.

### Chapter vi. 2.

“A great multitude followed him, because——”

#### COMING TO CHRIST.

THAT word “because” opens the door to a thousand reasons. Every man who does follow Christ follows him for some reason of his own. Woe to the soul that has no Christ, but one that is outward, appointed by some skilled hand, preached by some eloquent tongue, imposed by some lofty authority. That is not Christ at all. Any so-called Christ will wither, will peel off the frescoed wall, will topple on the throne made for him by some cabinet-maker. Every man must lay hold of Christ with his own hand, for his own reason, and see Christ with his own eyes, and have a part or aspect of Christ which belongs to himself in an almost exclusive sense. Herein is the folly of trying to set up standards by which a million men shall be judged and tried; herein is the affront to the genius of the kingdom of heaven that would make all heaven’s soldiers of one height: there is no standard of stature, there is no shibboleth of orthodoxy; let the heart say how it sees Christ, lays hold of Christ, for what reason it in particular clings to Christ: that is enough. You cannot shake a man out of what he is really persuaded of in his own heart: if you have put him in trust of certain writings, he may lose them; if you have in some heedless or sentimentally reverent mood persuaded the man to nod his head to certain intellectual propositions, he will straightway forget what the propositions were: but if Christ be born in a man he remains there the hope of glory—his own Christ, not some other man’s Christ. When men begin to compare the Christs, then they begin to excommunicate one another. Saith one, You do not believe in my Christ, therefore you are wrong. Nay, saith the despised and banished soul, I have seen one flash of his glory, one view of his beauty, I have heard one tone of his music, and to that, what I myself have seen and known, I cling, and

thou canst not excommunicate me : I am in God's own eternal keeping. Nicodemus said, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that thou doest. The romantic acts have always had an effect upon certain minds ; not romantic in the sense of never having actually occurred, but in the sense of being infinitely above all commonplace, all natural conception of reasoning ; something apart from the imagination, something that opens new doors into infinity. Nicodemus laid particular stress upon the quality of the miracles—"these miracles that thou doest" : this particular kind of miracle—not the juggler's trick, not the necromancer's art, not the manipulation of skilled fingers, but "these miracles"—particular, distinctive, unique miracles. No man can do these miracles except God be with him ; in such handling is the movement of Omnipotence. Then let Nicodemus come in, let him take his seat in the household : he has his particular conviction regarding the power of Christ. Let him alone when he would seek to explain. Jesus Christ hindered him ; when practising his traditional casuistry and seeking to make himself master of an intellectual argument, the Lord referred him to the wind : "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth : so——" That is the right answer to all intellectual jobbers and tricksters and cunning thimble-riggers in the Church ; men who want to be able to explain what was never meant for explanation. But some men will say, How ? Said Paul, Thou fool !

Another class of men believed in Jesus when they saw the miracle of the loaves and fishes :—"Then"—every man has a birthday ; "Then"—every man has hours that are agonistic, and that result in birth and progress and illumination and consciousness of liberty ; "Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth the prophet that should come into the world." Nothing else would have convinced them : they had no ear for music, all voices were alike to them ; but they had an eye for curiosity, for wonder, for startling incident, and when they had seen the miracle they said This is the true prophet. Let them come in ; it is a



vulgar beginning, but it is a beginning,—and that is the fact we ought always to rejoice in. Every man must begin where he can. There are men who need all kinds of wonders to be done before their eyes, and through the gate of amazement they will get into some position in the upper and inner kingdoms of the world. Let them come; they are the lowest kind of men, they are the poorest quality of soul, but if nothing will get hold of them, do not despise initial effort, opening and hopeful endeavour. If a toy will please an infantile mind do not withhold the toy; after the toy may come the alphabet; after the alphabet—what is after the alphabet? All knowledge, all eloquence, all poetry. Begin when you can; begin with Nicodemus in astonishment at the quality of the miracle; begin with the vulgar mob in amazement that many people should have been fed out of little food.

Others, again, are convinced by argument:—"Many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did. And many more believed because of his own word." They are the highest class of men; they said, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know, by the music of that voice, that it was born in heaven; this is no earthly wind; this is no tumult of the dust; this is the rhythm of the universe, this is the tone of God." Let them come; they are men of doctrine, men of philosophy, men who can argue well; they are thoroughly equipped in controversy, and they have that gift of mental penetration which sees realities beyond figures, tropes, and symbols. Let them come! How will they company with those who believe because of the miracle of the loaves? They will never company with them, yet they may all be in one Church—not the formal, limited, sectarian, little church, but the invisible, blood-redeemed, sanctified, eternal Ecclesia; the assembly that shall never be broken up. It is not necessary that men should company with one another in the Church. The Church can exist without such fellowship. The true fellowship is the association that is founded on sympathy, or the association that is founded upon the giving and receiving of inspired assistance. When the loftier minds hold company with the vulgarer

minds—the word vulgarer in that sentence simply meaning commoner—it is by an act of gracious and unconscious condescension on the part of those who have walked the higher levels of sacred thinking and sacred service. One man has come in by the door of argument—let him come, and for a long time let him hold his tongue; one man has come in by the door of wonder because he has seen a miracle—let him come; his wide-open eyes will do us no harm; if he be modest he may one day be great.

Others believed in Christ because of known cases of spiritual conversion. They have seen what Christianity has done in the mission-field abroad, in the mission-field at home, in the city in which they dwell; they have known the lion turned into a lamb, and they have traced the transformation to belief in the Son of God, and they have said with honest logic and healthful thankfulness, If Jesus Christ be not the Son of God, faith in his name cannot result in such blessed and glorious issues. This matter of spiritual conversion has its outer aspect and counterpart in concrete instances which even the enemy cannot deny. Once the Sanhedrim was going to be very dignified. Peter and John were called in and rebuked—you cannot wholly destroy the impudence of the world; its extinction is a gradual process—and whilst the Sanhedrim was about to bring down thunder and lightning upon the heads of Peter and John, there was one thing that broke up the thunder and took the glory out of the lightning: that one consideration was the man which had been healed,—“And beholding the man which was healed standing with them,” they said in their souls, Confound him! if he were out of the way we could deal with Peter and John, but there is the man, and you cannot choke him, he will speak, he will sing presently; he has been walking and leaping and praising God, and look at his face now, eloquent with testimony, burning with gratitude. That is the way to convict and convert certain enemies of the Church. Let the Church produce the results of her working; let the Church be able to say, We found this neighbourhood a desert, and now it is a garden of the Lord; we found this district peopled as if by wild beasts, now the old men and little children play together as if they had consented to accept a new youth. Facts are arguments;

the mission-field at home and abroad must be denied and extirpated before the enemy can get at the heart of Christ with any fatal thrust.

Others trust to their own consciousness of change. They look within for argument ; each man says, What was I to begin with ? What am I now ? What were once my hopes, my fears, my pleasures, my apprehensions ? See now how new I am : old things have passed away, all things have become new. Once I was as a madman living among the tombs, naked, homeless, fierce, casting terror around me wherever I went ; now I am sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in my right mind, and Jesus did it all. I saw his look, I heard his voice, I was enabled to catch sight of his Cross, and to know somewhat of the meaning of that shed blood, and now I am in heaven. Blessed is the man who can turn in upon himself when he is short of arguments ; grateful should he be who is able to say to the enemy, Although I may not be able to answer your words in words of equal force, I know whom I have believed, and since I received Christ into my heart by faith, I have been a new man, a new soul, a new creature ; yea, all things are new, the earth and the heavens are new, death is abolished, and the grave is a dry road through the waters into the land of summer. The priests, the Pharisees were going once to be very severe. They gathered themselves together ; they said to a man who was in their presence, Give God the glory : as for this man, we know not whence he is ; this man is a sinner ; give God the praise ; be religious, not idolatrous. Said the man, Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not ; that is metaphysical, theological ; that belongs to a line of inquiry in which I have no scholarship. One thing I know : once I was blind, now I see, and you grey-bearded priests cannot persuade me to the contrary ; you never gave me sight, this man did ; you never offered to give me my sight again, this man found me, anointed mine eyes, sent me to the pool to wash, and I went and washed, and I came seeing : as for your metaphysical, speculative, psychological questions, I cannot enter into these, but so long as these eyes are open I will mention the Physician's name. These facts are at hand every day. Such miracles were not worked once for all, they are being accomplished morning by morning, night by night ;

the one thing men are now recovering is their eyesight. We shall miss the genius of the whole thought if we limit the word eye-sight to some bodily function or exercise. Sight means larger vision, keener perception, an awakening of all the faculties of the mind to a state of keen, exact, complete penetration. Lord, that I may receive my sight! Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law. The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. Saviour of the world, Eternal One, save me from looking at surfaces, outsides, transient shapes and symbols, and give me that peculiar penetrating vision that sees without staring, and that knows afar off what lights are coming up on the horizon.

The opponents of Christianity have then a large body of evidence to overthrow. They are not called upon to deal with any one class of evidence, their difficulty is not with one individual or two; all kinds of men are in the Church, and all kinds of men have come along all kinds of lines of approach; therefore, we have in the Church unity with diversity; one man hath an argument, another a miracle, another a personal consciousness, another a grand missionary fact, another a tongue, a prophecy, a psalm, a rapture. Do not seek to bring all these ministries and operations into one dead monotony; the enemy will not have to break down one bastion only, he will have miles upon miles of fortification to violate and overthrow. A single personal experience sometimes contains or combines a whole series of proofs. All men are not of one capacity; there are men who are themselves miracles. Sometimes a man may represent a dozen men: take him in argument, and he is strong; draw his attention to miracles, and he has seen them until they have become commonplaces; point out instances of spiritual transformation, and he will add to your knowledge instances which have come under his own observation; quote your personal religious experience, and his heart will burn within him as kindred recollections are awakened and expressed. But taking men as a whole, we must not expect that each man shall represent the whole body of Christian evidence. Let every man be strong upon his own one point. There are subtle assailants who would attack a man at his weakest point, and the fear is that the man, not knowing

that he has but a certain capacity, has only a certain quantity of force at his disposal, should imagine that because he has been overthrown at that point nobody else could have resisted the attack. Let each man live on his own ground, let every one speak his mother tongue ; it is possible for a man to know much about another language, and yet to be tripped up by some native of the land whose speech he speaks, on some recondite point of grammar. Every one should keep to the words his mother taught him ; the words in which his first wishes were expressed, his earliest prayers, his purest desires. Never venture upon foreign tongues in the expression of your deepest spiritual experience. If you have seen God you will be able to tell about it in English. It is wonderful how many beautiful things can be said even in the English tongue. There are those who know a little—oh, a very little—French, and a little—oh, so little—German ; but what poor English they speak ! There are many persons who know a little about theology, but they have no spiritual acquaintance with Christ, inborn, the miracle of the Holy Ghost in the heart ; and then when they come to speak about the deepest spiritual realities how they halt, hesitate, blunder, whereas they ought to have spoken with the fluency of thankfulness, with the precision of long-acquired and deeply-tested experience and familiarity. The witness of the Spirit is a great and often-neglected doctrine. “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.” If this is a conference of spirit, the Holy Ghost communes with the holy man ; they exchange as it were confidences : now the Holy Spirit is a comforter, now a teacher, now the minister of Christ, taking the deepest things of the kingdom of the Son of God, and showing them to the wondering and glowing heart. When spirits meet in conference there can be no literal report of the interview : what passed must be known only to the heart itself ; but it is so known to the heart as to constitute a fortress, a sanctuary, an impregnable argument.

Have we this witness of God the Holy Ghost ? Does he speak comfortably to us ? What do we mean by comfort ? In the great majority of instances the word comfort in the New Testament means stirring up, not soothing down ; encouraging,

warming, stimulating, not allowing to slumber and making life one dreary Sabbath afternoon. Let us not debase etymology : when the apostle prayed that the saints might be comforted he prayed that they might be stirred up, roused. Truly the apostles were ardent men. Great mischief will come if we begin to set one kind of experience against another in this matter of Christian life and Christian fellowship. We ought not to antagonise but to comfort one another. The man sitting next me may know nothing about miracles, but he may have a deep spiritual experience ; let us commune together so far as we may be able, and help one another. The next man may be mighty in argument ; let him not say to his weaker brother, If you cannot argue you cannot be saved. As well might one artist say to another, Because you cannot do my kind of work you are incapable. One man can bring into measurable canvas a whole universe of action, life, colour, suggestion ; another man can through the organ express what language can never represent, a whole apocalypse of dreamy thought. Shall the one man say to the other, Because you cannot paint, or, Because you cannot play, therefore you have no right in the sanctuary, and no right to recognition amongst men who are approved scholars and refined citizens ? Yet this is precisely what is being done in the Church. If any man's experience does not accord with mine, that man is an alien ; it would seem as if some persons ran all their thought into that unholy and despicable mould. Some men are Christians who do not know it ; there are men who have to be told what they are. When a man is troubled to ecclesiastically distribute himself or assign his precise right, if he could with a clumsy hand and too much ink and too broad a pen write down, "I love the Son of God," that would be better than anything he could indite. That is what we want more and more of all through and through the Church.

Do you suppose the world, the great million-headed world, labour-crushed, darkness-bound, is going to stop until we ecclesiastics and theologians have arranged all our little manœuvres ? The world is dying,—save it ! Testify out of your own experience, out of your own observation, out of your own knowledge ; then your testimony shall be eloquent and effective

through the power of the Holy Ghost. It should be a joy to us that there are so many ways of representing Christ. One star differeth from another star in glory. It should be the delight of the pastor to know that no two men in his church can agree with one another with a view to lifting up a standard that everybody else shall accept. Listen, saith he, being a man of capacious mind, and still more capacious heart, listen to all these speeches: there is a line of unity in them though the speakers do not recognise it. Hear: one hath a miracle, one a psalm, one a tongue, one a vision, one a dream, one a thought, one a broken heart. Listen: this is not conflict, this is not the *odium theologicum*, one man pelting another with hard words because he does not believe as he believes. Listen. What are the wild waves saying? They say that they are moving in harmony with the great astronomic force, pulsing, throbbing, thundering on the shore, and yet they all belong to the same great sea. Let us cultivate difference; let us accept difference as an argument and an illustration and as opening broader possibilities, and away, away with the monotony which has burdened, distressed, and hindered the Church of Christ!

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we come to thy house to complete our own home. The house is no home until we connect it with thy sanctuary; then the fire burns well, then is the bed the sanctuary of sleep and sweet rest; the bread then is sacramental, and the whole office of love a beautiful ministry. The tabernacle of God is with men upon the earth, sanctifying all their dwellings, and making their houses homes. Lord Jesus, abide with us; never go away: sit down with us at the table; break our bread for us, and feed our hearts with love. Be our housekeeper,—except the Lord keep the city the watchmen shall be blind. Keep our houses, our lives, all our interests. Number the hairs of our heads; watch us as if we were of importance to thee. Are we not important to thee, thou Son of God? Thou wast wounded for our transgressions, thou wast bruised for our iniquities; for us thou didst carry the Cross: we are therefore of consequence to thy love. Find in us the image of God, and restore it in all its beauty and grandeur; lead us away from all that is deathly and mean and dishonourable, and lift us up to the gate of heaven, the entrance of the dwelling of God. Pity us in our littleness, vanity, and infirmity; urge not against us thy great power: for who can stand against the thunder of God? May thy gentleness make us great. Surround us with love, indulge us with mercy, feed us with grace. The Lord hear us in these things, and surprise us by great replies. Amen.

## Chapter vi. 12.

“Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.”

### FRAGMENTS AND PORTIONS.

YOU can easily recall the many discourses which you have heard upon these simple and useful words. The picture is vivid: the thousands have partaken of the bounty of Christ, and when the feast is finished Jesus says, “Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost”: sweep up all the crumbs, pick up all the fallen pieces, leave nothing behind for beast or bird. Our fathers and our mothers have preached to us upon these beautiful words, and many admirable sentiments they have inferred from the incident which children can understand and admire. What lectures we have heard upon gathering up



the fragments! Economists have said, Gather up all the odd moments of time; never have any spare moments that you do not know how to use: when there is a little break in the continuity of your labour commit to memory some portion of Scripture, or some verse of poetry, or some words of a foreign language which you are anxious to learn and to speak. Never be idle; if you add up all your spare moments you will find in the course of the year that probably they will amount to days; be very economical of time, be very miserly of periods of five minutes and half-hours: gather up the fragments that nothing be lost. And we have said, Well done, economist; what thou hast said, thou hast well said. Then the motherly economist has come in upon us and said, "Waste not, want not," and she has chosen for her trencher one that bears that motto carven on its hospitable edges. "Waste not, want not": throw nothing away; if you have cut too much bread and cannot eat what you have cut, be careful to treasure the remainder, you will want it in an hour or two, and pick up all the crumbs, and throw no one to hungry dog or waiting bird; take care of the littles, and things that are great will take care of themselves; take care of the pence, and the pounds will manage on their own account. And we have heard the sweet old mother say all this, and have felt in our hearts that (excepting the dog and the bird) she was speaking words of truth and wisdom. Then she has said to her little seamstresses, Take care of all the little pieces, pick up all the thread ends, store away all the little cuttings; you can make something of them by-and-by—pincushions and dolls' frocks; there is no telling what you may do with these little pieces: gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost.

Have we a word to say against all this economy? Only this, that when it is proposed to base it upon this text it is nonsense. It is very good in itself; we all need to learn something of that economy, but we must not base it upon this particular Scripture. Hence the difficulty of using single texts; hence the mischief that is wrought by many poor teachers that would build a denomination upon a semicolon. If we turn to the Revised Version we shall find a change which has been pointed out by the Very Rev. the Dean of Llandaff, himself one of the revisers, as

important, showing the meaning of the text to be infinitely larger than the trifling economy which has prided itself on its own ignorance. "Gather up the broken portions that remain, that nothing be lost." "Fragments" is displaced by the word "portions," and to the word portions is attached the word "broken." "Gather up the broken portions that remain, that nothing be lost." Look at the word "broken": we have seen in Mark that Jesus took the bread, the loaves, and brake them; we have seen in Luke that the word "brake" is also used as denoting the action of Christ: now we read, "Pick up all the broken portions that remain, that nothing be lost." See the picture: observe the breaking hands of Christ: the loaves grow under his touch; he breaks until he is surrounded by heaps and piles and hills of bread; and still he breaks, and still the multitudes continue to eat, and when the feast is over he says, Pick up the broken portions that remain, that nothing be lost. Not, Gather up your leavings, but, Gather up my treasures; not, Sweep up your crumbs, but, Take care of the unsearchable riches of your Lord. All that we have heard of the little economy was neat and thrifty and domestic, but it is not authorised by this text; this verse shows the larger truth. There is no need to waste our crumbs or our leavings, but what Christ is teaching is that he has laid up treasures for ever, and we have to carry them with us wherever we go. What a different view is this! We started with economy, we end with faith; we began by keeping thrift-boxes (the thief heard of them, and took them all away one night), we end by keeping our treasures where moth and rust doth not corrupt, where thieves do not break through nor steal. I shall have enough, not because I have swept up the crumbs, but because God has broken bread enough to keep his universe through all the ages of eternity: only the universe must take care of the broken portions; that is where thrift comes in, the great thrift, the noble economy. We have had occasion to point out and denounce the miserable prudence of some people, the little nibbling mouse-like activity and industry and thrift and prudence of some small natures that always end by some act of glaring imprudence. You watch a man who is too prudent, neatly prudent, prudent on a small scale, and that man will die an open palpable fool; at the last, when nearing fourscore, he will

do some deed that will topple him over, and the world will laugh at his mouse-like prudence. There is another prudence, the larger, grander philosophy, the faith that lives in God, and that says, I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever, because the Lord is my Shepherd. That prudence will grow, that wisdom will be justified of her children; and many who trembled because of momentary eccentricity will live to see the day that he who trusted most in God had broken portions to eat that the world knew not of, the world did not give, and the world cannot take away.

Observe how characteristic this action is of the whole method of providence. God never gives just enough. If he does, tell me where. The calculator who is wise says, To-morrow month fifty guests will come to my table: for their satisfaction what shall I provide? The fare is detailed, totalised, pronounced sufficient, a little is thrown in for foam—what is the tankard unless it foam up high above its own level? That is supposed to be hospitality. With certain obvious qualifications it is what it claims to be. When does God give just enough, so that there is nothing to spare? I refer you to all you know of nature: is there just sunlight enough to last the little day and to creep to bed by? Does the one side of the earth say, I could have done with a million more beams, but they were not to be had, because the other side of the globe needed them? Why, God rains whole oceans of light upon the globe that the globe cannot retain; the little globe-vessel cannot hold the wine of the sunlight: down it comes in river and torrent, and Atlantic and Pacific—on and on—and running away over the sides of this too-little vessel to fill other globe-goblets with its largess of glory. When are there just enough leaves to cover the bare shoulders of winter, so that the Lord says, If I had more leaves I would clothe that little bare corner, that small bleak crag, but my ivy ran out, my grass was insufficient; I might have spared one flower, but that would have been all I could have done? Why, he wastes more blossoms than arithmetic can count. As for the leaves, have you numbered them? Have you had daylight enough to count the leaves upon one great oak? and what are these snowflakes under the tree? Shed blossoms! He could

have clothed another globe with them as large as the globe we live upon. When does God "brake" in nature just enough? Whenever he has broken in personal providence just enough it was not an indication of his want, but a proof that he was educating and chastening our lives. He has not always entrusted us with the broken portions; he has seen that now and again we could not be trusted with them, and therefore he has had to be his own treasurer. God has had to take care of his own promises; the Lord hath not allowed all the angel promises to come and sing to us at once, but he has sent them one after another, each with his little song, enough to last out all the darkness of our fear.

It was like Jesus Christ to give ten thousand times more than the people really needed. At the wedding feast they said there was no wine, and he gave them firkin after firkin of wine, a whole Niagara of the wine of the kingdom of heaven, that never made the judgment dark, or the knees tremble in weakness, or the mind play the tricks of the fool. He began well—"This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee." There never was so much wine in the little town before. When does Jesus do just enough to save the sinner? He saves the sinner with an eternal salvation, with an everlasting redemption; his Cross is not able simply and only to lift the world a little, it can lift the world to heaven. What a different meaning is this! We began by seeing the disciples sweeping up the crumbs, gathering up the little pieces that had been left over, and putting them into baskets; whereas Jesus Christ did not call them to this kind of work, he said, "Gather up the broken portions," he took the bread and brake it, and there was ten thousand times more than the universe could eat: and he said, Take care of the broken portions, my finger prints are upon them; these may be unto you some day as my broken body. Whatever Christ did he did sacramentally; he never uttered a word in any language without sanctifying that word, making it the gem of speech, the diamond of eloquence.

What about your little economy now, your small texts and neat quotations, and your religious labels? Why, all things are yours, if you will gather them up, and take care of them. God

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou hast indeed set a King in Zion, and his name is Christ: the name that is above every name, around which the universe shall gather in homage. We humbly desire that we may know the meaning of that name more and more deeply every day; that its charm may become mightier over our spirits; that we may be led forth by it as by an inspiration and a challenge to many a holy fight, to much high daring, and that it may work in us all the mystery of patience and long-suffering, that in the end we may be saved as with triumph. We bless thee that we have heard of the King whose name is Christ; we love him, because he first loved us, so that now we can say, The love of Christ constraineth us. He takes the throne of our heart and sits upon it, and is the monarch of our whole life. For such a King we bless thee; we would have this man reign over us, we would be subject to no other king. Reign over us, thou whose right it is to reign; cause us to submit our will to thine, to bow before thee in continual and loving and delighted homage, and may our whole life be marked by a loyalty to divine law, to divine light, to divine love. Thus may our lives become a daily sacrifice, not living for themselves or unto themselves, but going up evermore towards the one throne where our life is hidden in Christ with God. May this account for the unchangeableness of our devotion, for the constancy of our faithfulness, for the pureness of our loyalty; may no enemy have power against us to trouble us, to torment our peace, to disturb our expectations, but in quietness and solemnity and in the perfect assurance of indestructible and unquestioning love, may we rest in God, and hope continually in the Most High. We bless thee that thou hast made us to be reigned over. Thou hast put within us the element of subjection; help us to use that element aright, to bow down before the true King, to be faithful to the one throne, never to forsake the standard of the truth. We thank thee for these aspirations; we would that they might come to fruition in our lives. Yet for them, as inspirations only, we bless thee. Their utterance does the soul good; whilst we speak them in thy hearing our life is lifted up. Enable us constantly to see the unattained ideal, to fix our minds upon the mark we have not yet reached; enable us by the ministry of the Holy Ghost constantly to urge onward towards that high mark—forgetting the things that are behind, enable us to make advancement in things divine. We would not be to-day as we were yesterday, but to-day we would have some new knowledge, some quickened expectation, some widened and brightened hope we never had before. Thus may our life continually expand and elevate until it becomes perfect with the measure of Christ's own life.

Thy Book is the man of our counsel ; but how can we understand what we read except thou dost explain it to our understanding and our heart ? Holy Spirit, dwell with us, revealing the hidden riches of Christ, showing us the yet undisclosed depths of his infinite truth, and constraining us to follow him with increasing diligence and devotion of heart, that we may not be left behind, but be found ready when our Lord cometh to enter into all the fulness of his joy. We have come up to thy house from divers occupations ; we have brought with us memories of the world ; we are pursued by anxieties, difficulties, tormenting memories, as were the emancipated Israelites pursued by the Egyptians. Enable us now fully to flee away from these things and to enter into rest, the rest that remaineth ever for the people of God. Into this sanctuary may no worldly care come ; into this hidden place may nothing that is tormenting penetrate. Give us quietness for an hour, time to bethink ourselves, to collect our strength, and enable us to draw from the riches of thy grace a plentitude of thy truth and thy mercy, so as to qualify ourselves for the renewal of the conflict in the opening week. May all our battles be conducted in thy strength ; may all our difficulties be approached in the consciousness that God is with them that wish to be right and to do right. Enable us, in this sure faith, in the steadfastness of this revealed truth, serenely to walk forward into whatsoever direction thy Spirit may point, knowing this, that thou wilt cause all things to work together for good if our love to thee be a pure and constant flame. Regard us as representing many human experiences, many personal difficulties, and various human estates ; regard us every one with an eye of favour. Let not the fear of thy judgment be amongst us to destroy, but only to search out and to renew. May thy gospel come to every one as a new truth—old as eternity, yet new and beautiful as the summer morning shining round about us. Revive our best recollections ; brighten the hopes that are momentarily beclouded ; cause us to recollect the goodness that has ever passed before us, and may all our yesterdays be gathered up into an emphatic and sublime prophecy, foretelling the victories that are yet to come. Bless the stranger within our gates ; may this be to him his Father's house, a place of rest, a gate opening upon the Infinite Land, where there are no strangers, where the home feeling is supreme, where the whole family gather together into one, and are indissoluble evermore. Look upon those who are in special trials and peculiar difficulties. Forget not the house that has been darkened by bereavement ; remember the life suddenly desolated and impoverished ; look upon the tree from which thou hast stripped the bud and the blossom and left it very bare—send summer down upon its roots, may the dew of the morning visit its branches, and may it yet bring forth abundantly, and rejoice in all the summer joy of thy glory. Be with us as individuals, families, households ; remain with us as a Church and people naming the name of Christ, baptised with the Holy Ghost. Let thy ministry be luminous, mighty, powerful in tenderness, and may many people hear the Word of the Lord here, and receive it and bless his name, and give up their lives to his service. Hear this our morning prayer. Let not our psalm of praise be unheard in heaven. Send us down answers of peace. Thou wilt surely do so, for we are gathered at the Cross of Christ, we look up to his open wounds, we

remember the meaning of the sacrificial blood which flowed from his veins, and because thou hast given thy Son to die for us, thou wilt with him also freely give us all things. This thy will be done. Amen.

### Chapter vi. 15.

“When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone.”

#### CHRIST NOT A KING BY FORCE.

THESE words enable us to come to some just understanding of the place of force in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is a common saying amongst ourselves that some men have greatness thrust upon them. From all such men Jesus Christ separates himself, knowing that what is done by force or compulsion may by force or compulsion be undone. So he would not have a kingdom that was forced upon him, nor would he be forced upon a kingdom. Wonderful words are written upon the blood-red banner of this king. Read some of them: “Put up thy sword into the sheath.” “My kingdom is not of this world.” “He took upon him the form of a servant.” “Behold, I stand at the door and knock.” Are these kingly words? Is it the place of a king to stand outside and to knock? Jesus would not be a man-made king; in some other way he would come to the throne. The creature of a populace must live by popular favour; this man must rule by a deeper and nobler law. So he passes away from the impulsive crowd that supposes it could make a king, saying, “It is better to be alone than to be a creature of such creatures.”

What then has Jesus Christ done up to this time? He has actually declined twice to be made a king. It is not every man who has two such chances in one lifetime—Jesus had them and despised them. Once he was shown all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, and was told that they might be his if he would bend his knee to the offerer, and he said No. Then the people who had seen him work the miracle of the loaves and fishes proposed themselves to work a still greater miracle by forcing him to be king, and he said No. Everything depends upon how you get hold of your kingdom. If you have offered false worship for your kingdom it will rot in your grip, and if you have been forced upon a reluctant heart, that heart will cast you

off in the spring-tide of its returning power. We must, therefore, understand what true power is; we must go a little into the elements which constitute true might—there is influence and influence. The mystery about Jesus Christ's declining two kingdoms is this; that he actually came to be a king, yea, King of kings, Lord of lords, and he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. And yet, when he was offered a kingdom for one act of homage he declined; when the people were all going to get behind him to urge him to ascend the throne, he fled, for solitude was better than such mock-royalty.

I shall claim something for Christ out of all this. A man who can act so shall not be snubbed in my hearing without protest. He shall not be reviled without indignant remonstrance. Oh, he works by a very long line, this man. When a step would take him out of the common thoroughfare into the highway of royalty, and he declines to take that step, I say there is something in this man more than in any other man. And are we, his loyal ones, going to allow our faith in him to be mitigated or impaired or snuffed out by somebody who imagines he has found some fault in him which escaped the microscopic and penetrating eyes of Pilate? For my part, I intend to stand by him a little longer. There is a breadth in his way of doing things; there is an outgo of soul in this man that I have found nowhere else. May I have strength to go with him to prison and to death! The more I study his character, the more I find that I am independent of all that series of proofs described by the theologians as evidences. I value them as introductory; they are a needful part of my alphabetical education in the things of the kingdom of Christ; but the grand claim of Christ to the supremacy of the universe is not resting upon merely temporary considerations and formal arguments, it goes right up to the very centre and necessity of things, and it will be our business to try and elucidate that proposition in a few words.

It appears, then, that nothing has to be done in the kingdom of heaven by violence—by mere force. Did not Jesus Christ come to be a king? Yes. Well, then, what did it matter by what way he was proclaimed king? Everything. A man must prove



his title to his seat, or he may be unseated—dispossessed of the glory which temporarily encircled him. It is not right to do right in a wrong way. It was right that Jesus Christ should be king; it was wrong to seek to make him king by force. Let us say that it is right that men should pray. It would be wrong to attempt to force men to pray. It is right that you should come to church—it would be wrong to force any one of you to come to the sanctuary. Even a right end, therefore, is not to be attained by the wrong road; the end does not sanctify the means.

See how utterly powerless is force in all high matters, in all great concerns of the soul, the concerns that look outward towards education and maturity and destiny. For example, what can force do in this matter of prayer? You can force a man to kneel: true. You can force a man to speak, whilst he is upon his knees, religious language: true. You can force him to repeat all the devotional words of the Bible while you stand over him sword in hand: true. Can you make him pray? Never. There he defies you. A superficial observer would say, "We compelled him to pray," but he has done nothing of the kind. There is a line beyond which the tyrant cannot go, beyond which force is weakness: that is the line of perfect spiritual independence on the part of the individual judgment and conscience.

Take the matter of honesty. What can you do by mere force? You can by force compel a man to pay his debts—is that compelling him to be honest? Nothing of the kind. You can force him to pay the uttermost farthing of his pecuniary obligations, and you may be able to give him, on his so doing, a complete remittance and release from all such bond—have you made him an honest man? Perhaps you have only made him a greater thief! What is honesty? Something that force cannot create. What is dishonesty? Something that force cannot punish. You have a certain length of line, and that length of line must be used for social convenience and the purposes of social justice, but beyond that the man may pay you every penny he owes you, and be a thief in every drop of blood in his felonious heart.

They could compel a man to ascend the throne: they could not compel him to rule, nor could they compel him to be a king. Garment upon his shoulder, coronal upon his head, nimbus burning and glowing around his uplifted countenance—he is only a mean man still, a king in name, a creature of the dust in reality. What is true of the individual is true of the nation. You can compel a nation to build a church, but you cannot compel a nation to be religious. If you could do so, it would not be right—it would be out of keeping with the spirit of loyal worship; the very bloom and fragrance of all that is heavenly in religion would be destroyed. Think of this as deeply true to human nature—the very attempt to force a man to be religious destroys the temper which alone makes religion possible. Religion, truly understood, is the joyous sacrifice of the individual will to the will of the Supreme—it is the exaltation of God over every thought and purpose of the mind. Being all this, it is infinitely beyond the control of all force and penal compulsion.

Whilst all this is true on the human side, the real point to be considered is that Jesus Christ himself would never consent to reign over the soul by mere force. Observe that this is a two-sided question; if you could force men to Christ, you could not force Christ to men. If you succeeded in moving the finite, you could never succeed in also moving the Infinite. It is the Infinite that declines, it is God that says, No—I will not reign thus. Jesus Christ reigns by distinct consent of the human mind. Listen to these words; they should convert us all, they should make us love him: “If any man will open the door, I will come in.” That is the king’s word. “If ye seek me, ye shall find me.” “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” “He that believeth shall be saved.” If there is yet left in you, O man outside the kingdom of Christ, one element that mother or wife or sister could appeal to, I level my whole argument and expostulation in the direction of that element, and ask you to consider these infinitely tender words of him who came to be king—“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man will open the door, I will come in.” Only a soul lost beyond redemption could fail to see the gospel that is in these words.

If he will not be king by force, by what means will he become king? Force would seem to hasten progress—the sword is famous for cutting a short road to remote ends. But Jesus Christ declines to be made a king by force. How then does he expect to become king over all the earth? What is his own notion? Hear it: tell me if ever in common brain there sprang a notion so divine. What is his method? Preach me, is one of his injunctions—declare me, unfold me, show my doctrine, my purpose, my spirit—go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. That is a roundabout way, is it not? It is, but the swing of the divine astronomy is in it, the throb that stirs the planets. It is not the thought of a common man; whilst I look at him speaking these words, arrayed in his carpenter's garments he may be, but there glows through them a light that supersedes the sun, and I claim it as a tribute of mere decency, of elementary courtesy, that when a man has a high thought, he himself should be regarded with a feeling appropriate to the loftiness of such thinking, be he carpenter, be he king.

Is it enough to preach him? He adds another word—Live me—“Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”—I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, so do ye one to the other.—Follow me, show that you have been with Christ—prove what I do for you in the mitigation of your care, in the sanctification of your affliction; tell people what it is that makes you pluck the sting from death, and spoil the victory of the grave.

It is in this way that he is coming to the kingdom. I believe he will keep it. Now that I see his plans, I hear his words with the ear of my soul, and their true meaning comes with their music—“the gates of hell shall not prevail against it, against my church, against my kingdom.” What more does he say to us?—Lift me up—“I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me.” How lifted up? Not lifted up upon a cross—murderers gave him that elevation—but lifted up on the cross in the sense of sacrifice; in the sense of embodying the infinitely gracious purposes of God; in the

sense of making reconciliation for sin ; in the sense of being offered, the just for the unjust. There you have not a wooden cross, but the cross of the heart. Yet there is another sense in which we may lift up Christ—we lift him up when we love his law ; we lift him up when we submit to his bidding ; we lift him up when we reproduce his temper ; we lift him up when we receive with unquestioning heart all the gospel of his love. He who bears affliction patiently for Christ's sake, lifts Christ up. He who says to a looking and wondering friend in the time of agony and physical dissolution, "Christ makes me more than conqueror"—lifts Christ up—"and I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." A slow process ? Yes, but unchangeable in its results. A kingdom built on these foundations is an everlasting kingdom. We are to do our utmost to create in the heart of man a deep interest for Christ ; if we do so, we shall lift the Saviour up.

Now for the truly philosophical explanation of all this. We find it in the words, "We love him, because he first loved us." If it were a question of test, mere test, momentary probation, we might change. But this man lays hold of our entire love, leaves no element of it unclaimed, dominates the whole sphere of our purified and ennobled affection. "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his father ; to him be glory and dominion for ever."

There is still the element of endurance here—there is the divine compulsion moving through the heart, working along the line of the affections, getting hold of the confidence and the love—that means an everlasting reign. When I put these things together I cannot tell how my heart glows with love to this wondrous Nazarene. His words are like no other words ; his method is self-vindicating. It looks so unhuman at the first, it proves itself so divine in its effects. The man who can proceed to capture human nature as this man proceeded, is presumably a true king. I repeat that no adventurer, no empiric, would have acted as Jesus Christ behaved. Here is the kingdom—he said "No" to the devil. If he found out his mistake he would never have repeated it a second time. He refused the kingdom from the

devil, he refused the kingdom from violent men—he said he would be king, but not in either of these ways. The man who comes to take me captive by my judgment, by my conscience, by my will, by my love, by all that separates me from beast-hood, is likely to be a true king. Come and reign over us, Ancient of Days!

Let little children think of this: Jesus would not have you forced to be good—Jesus would not have you whipped to church—Jesus would not have you punished for not learning the Bible—Jesus would not have you injured because you do not care for him. He says, “I will speak to the little one; I will say, I stand at the door and knock; if any child will open the door, I will come in.” That is how Jesus Christ would treat you, little one. He would not smite you on the head because you do not love him; he would not crush you down by his great power, and try to make you love him; but he says, “I am standing still outside, and knocking still; I have been knocking all day and all night, and my hair is wet with dew: if any child will open the door, I will come in.”

He makes no proposition about going out. His proposition is to get in, but to get in by your consent, on the invitation of your necessity, on the compulsion of your love. I repeat, therefore, and make an argument of it, that any man,—Galilean peasant, never in Rabbinical school, never having learned letters, trained under no settled ministry of metaphysics or philosophy,—any man who had the notion that to reign for ever you must reign by love, is presumably a true king, the king, King of kings.

The Church should be like the Master: it should not rule by force. I would never compel even a child to go to church; much less would I attempt to compel any one who was momentarily in my power. I would not bribe a man to go to church—certainly I would in no way inflict upon him loss or humiliation for not going. I would try to make the church itself the attraction. No child should be punished for not learning its Bible. Punish a child if you please for not learning the spelling-book or the geography, but do not associate penal suffering with biblical learning.

The Church should be like the Master : it should seek to rule by love. Not one penny would I take from any man by the law to support any form of religion, either my own or yours. Whatever is done must be done of a willing mind, and everything that is given must have this written upon it—"The love of Christ constraineth us." And in proportion as Jesus Christ will not force you, ought you to love him. If it were a contest of force, then you might rejoice in the apparent victory which you win for a moment ; but when he says to you, "It is not a contest of hand against hand or sword against sword, but of your obstinacy against my love ;" when he says, "I could by mere omnipotence crush you between my fingers, but that would only be a triumph of physical power. No ; I will teach you, preach to you, love you, die for you, show you my hands and my feet," the very stripping of himself of his physical almightiness should constitute his supreme power as One who wants to captivate your love, and sit down on the throne of your confidence for ever.

## PRAYER.

O THAT this day we might see the Lord and have our whole mind filled with his light and joy! Lord, dost thou ask us what we would have at thine hands? Our answer is, Lord, that we might receive our sight! When men cry unto the Lord in their trouble, thou dost deliver them out of their distresses; in this hope we come now before the Lord, and even whilst we speak our hearts feel the burden rising. Sweet is the day of the Lord, quiet and tender in its sacred peacefulness, opening into the very heavens, and showing us the New Jerusalem as the city in which we shall no more be threatened by fear and humbled by weariness. For every blessing we offer thee our praise. Thou didst lead us through the solitary way, and thou hast spared us from the shadow of death. Our souls are thine; our bodies are thy habitation. Thou art mindful of us with great care, and thy banner over us is love. Oh that we knew how to praise thee aright, that our hearts might not suffer pain because of the weariness of our worship! Thy judgments are very terrible, but thy mercies are greater still. Our life is full of the mercy of the Lord, and our days are made bright by his goodness. Lord, let not our feet stray from the path of thy will. Lord, comfort us, encourage our souls in the day of fear, and let our weakness hide itself in thy great power. We lay down our own wisdom as ignorance, and run away from our towers as from defences that will crush the life that built them. We come to Jesus. We stand beside the Saviour. We know the power of his blood. Lord, help us. Lord, send upon us the blessing of thine infinite pardon. Lord, show us the light of thy face. We daily see how great a gift is life; we know it not, we have not seen the divine secret, we feel the pulse beat, but we see not the power by which it is moved. We are our own mysteries. Life itself is a religion. Life is a continual prayer. How weak we are, yet how strong! We cannot just now bear the full daylight, yet we shall pass the sun on our upward way to the glory to come, and his great lustre shall be as a spark vanishing in the ever-enlarging vastness of thy universe. When we think thus of thy kingdom our light affliction is but for a moment. Thy kingdom, Lord, how great, how bright, how strong! May we one and all have a place in that everlasting house. Thy mercy is greater than our prayer, and therefore do we hope even where we cannot reason. Send the gospel to our lost ones, and bring our wanderers home. Visit our sick chambers, and whisper to our sick ones the messages of consolation, so that their very weakness may itself become a privilege, and their loneliness become the sanctuary within which thou wilt meet them. We put our own life into thy keeping. We lay aside our own poor help as a temptation, and we accept thy strength as our perfect

ability. O thou God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when shall we be wholly swallowed up in thy great love? When will the devil leave us, and none but holy angels be at hand? How long the tempter tarries! He wears out our strength; he lures our fancy; he vexes our prayers; he tortures our very communion with thyself. Jesus of the wilderness, Jesus of Calvary, help us or the enemy will prevail. He is so strong, so swift, so wise; yet we can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us, therefore do we pray—Jesus, save us, or we perish! Amen.

### Chapter vi. 35.

“I am the bread.” “The water that I shall give” (iv. 14).

### BREAD AND WATER.

**T**HE subject is clearly, Bread and Water. You call these common things, and my object will be to show that their commonness is not a defect, but an excellence; that their very excellence has occasioned their commonness; and that their commonness corresponds to a common want in the constitution of mankind. I will take the simple idea of bread and water, and apply it socially in the first place, and trace it upward to its highest and divinest meaning.

Let us look in upon the greatest feast ever spread for the refreshment and delight of kings. All delicacies shall be there that can be found in wood and air and sea; the richest wines shall sparkle and foam and glow upon the sumptuous board; and the fragrances arising from this luxurious feast shall excite and regale the appetite of hungry men. Now what have we there? What is the fundamental idea? What is the nucleus of the abounding and tempting feast? Surprising as it may seem, the whole thing is but an adaptation of bread and water! It is bread and water decorated; bread and water more or less adulterated; bread and water supposed to be at their best as to refinement, and richness, and power of gastronomic temptation and satisfaction. And if you could follow the sated guests into their privacy you would hear them say, in effect, “All this fine living is well enough now and then, but only now and then, after all; let us have something plain and substantial;” in a word, let them have bread and water. What is this prodigious art of the high cook? He is bound, like other popular slaves, to produce



something fresh ; without novelty he sinks into a common baker ; a new relish may mean a new fortune ; a new gravy may give him a country house and a footman ; a new adaptation of an omelette may enable him to start a shooting box,—but it is bread and water that he works upon ; bread and water are the basis of his fortune. He lives by mystifying the public, and mightily laughs at the trick by which he has made men think that bread crumbs have some connection with far-off spice groves and Ceylon breezes. Offer your guests plain bread and water, and they will not often call your way ; but dress up the bread and water, torture them, colour them, spice them, and they will praise the delicacy and excellence of the viands. But bread and water survive ! These are the things that cannot be shaken. Empires of soups and entrées, wines and liqueurs, rise and fall, but the steady old friends bread and water remain as the unadorned and ever wholesome gifts of God. Ay, poor cook, clever trickster, half a creator, under all thy enchantments and wizardries there are the plain bread and water ; disguise them, bribe them, paint them, and wreath around them all manner of cunning ornamentation, they are but bread and water. The image and the superscription are the cook's, but the bread and water themselves are God's ! Name the dishes that delighted Babylonian gluttons, and rehearse the menu which made the Egyptian gourmands smack their sensual lips. You cannot ; these are forgotten delights, paste-boards that perished in the fire ; but bread and water come steadily along the ages, over the graves of empires and the ashes of royalty, having escaped the tortures of the cruelest cooks, and shown themselves to be the primary and necessary gifts of God.

Well, the application of this is obvious in higher spheres of life, such, for example, as the culture and satisfaction of the intellect. Reading and writing are the bread and water of the mind. Give a child the power of reading and writing, and let him do the rest for himself ; it is worth doing (at least some of it), and let him find it out and he will value it the more. Your duty is done in giving the reading and the writing, the intellectual bread and water. But fine cookery is imitated in fine intelligence and with like results in some cases, namely, mental indigestion and ill-health. Hence, we have imperfect French, caricatured German,

and murdered music, and the native tongue and the native history are passed by as quite secondary, if not beneath contempt. It is better to chatter French in a way which nobody can understand than to speak good plain exact English, is it not? We must be fine at all costs. We must have a few knick-knacks on the mantelpiece, even if we have not a bed to sleep upon. We must be able to say, *Parlez-vous Français*, even if we cannot pay our debts. When will people learn to prize bread and water? When will they see that it is better to know a little well, than to know next to nothing about a great deal? Oh, when? This is not a little matter; it is a matter of great importance, from the fact that it is an index of character. We do not laugh at a man whose learning ends at the multiplication table; but we may laugh with grim amusement at a man who speaks hotel French and then spells October with a "h." Give your children intellectual bread and water without grudging, that is to say, give them a thorough grounding in the beginnings and elements of knowledge, and let them do the rest for themselves.

These illustrations prepare the way for the highest truth of all, namely, that Jesus Christ is the bread and water without which we cannot live. He never says he is a high delicacy, a rare luxury, a feast which the rich alone can afford; he says that he is bread and water, he likens himself not to the luxuries, but to the necessaries of life, and in so doing he shows a wisdom, a reach of mind, a grasp of human nature, which should save him from the attacks of malignant men. An adventurer would not have seen in metaphors so humble a philosophy so profound. Adventurers like big words and glaring figures; they speak great swelling words of vanity; they search heaven and earth for effective figures; they disdain the sling and the stone. Not so with Jesus Christ; he is Bread, he is Water, he is Light, he is the Door, he is the Shepherd, and these words, so simple, stretch their meaning around the whole circle of human life, and by their choice alone is the supreme wisdom of Jesus Christ abundantly attested.

Let us go further into this matter by a little detailed inquiry and illustration.

(1) Man needs Jesus Christ as a necessity and not as a luxury. You may be pleased to have flowers, but you must have bread. Christ presents himself as exactly fulfilling this analogy. Our whole life is based on one or two simple but necessary lines; we must have food, we must have shelter, we must have security. But into how many glorifications have all these simple necessities passed! We have just spoken about food. Now look at shelter. How styles of architecture have grown out of that idea! We talk of Doric, and Grecian, and Gothic; of Norman arches and Corinthian capitals; and indeed we have a long and perplexing nomenclature, all coming out of the fact that man must have a place to go into when the weather is rough and when sleep is needed. Out of the need of shelter the science or art of architecture has come! Is this wrong? Most certainly not. It is a trait of civilisation. It is a sign of refinement and progress. But let an architect of high fancy be called in to build you a house, he gives you a fine elevation, a noble porch, a splendid dome; but in the fever of his fancy he has forgotten the foundations, overlooked the drainage, omitted the joists, and made no provision for the escape of the smoke. How then? Of what avail is it that there is much elaboration of cunning masonry on the front of the house? You could have done without the stone faces above the mullions, but you cannot do without the chimneys and the joists. It is exactly after the bearing of this analogy that Jesus Christ has often been presented in preaching and in books. He has been offered as an ornament merely. He has been preached as the most curious and entertaining of all riddles. He has been treated as the successor of Plato, or Solon, or Seneca. In this way, generally indeed intended to be respectful, the whole purpose of his coming into the world has been overlooked. He has not been presented as bread and water, or the very first and most indispensable necessity of life; he has been treated as a phenomenon; cabineted as a rarity in human history; labelled as a remarkable specimen; and in this way even some of his admirers have ignorantly betrayed and dishonoured the Lord. Jesus is not a phenomenon, he is bread; Christ is not a curiosity, he is water. As surely as we cannot live without bread we cannot live truly without Christ; if we know not Christ we are not living, our movement is a mechanical flutter, our pulse is but

the stirring of an animal life. It is in this way, then, that Jesus Christ is to be preached. It is even so I would ever preach him. I would call him the water of life; I would speak of him as the true bread sent down from heaven; I would tell men that it is impossible to live without him; I would say, with heightening passion, with glowing and ineffable love, that he only, even the holy Christ of God, can satisfy the hunger and the thirst of the soul of man. In this way I claim a distinct vocation as a preacher. I am not one amongst many who try to do the world good; as a Christian preacher, or a preacher of Christ, I offer the only thing that can vitally and sufficiently touch the world's condition, and thus the position of the Christian preacher is absolutely without similitude or parallel, in that the choice he offers is life or death, salvation or ruin, heaven or hell.

(2) What has been the effect of omitting to declare Christ simply as bread and water? Leaving the simplicity of Christ, we have elaborated theological sciences, established and promulgated with solemn sanctions the most intricate creeds; we have worked out a very high and cunning symbolism; we have filled the church with incense, with garments of many colours and many significances, ceremony after ceremony we have contrived; we have called councils, synods, and congresses; we have constituted splendid hierarchies, with mitres and crooks, and clothing precious with gold and glaring with ardent colour. All this have we done, O Son of God, though thou didst call thyself bread and water! We have gathered around thee liturgies and suffrages, and gowns and bands, and surplices and chants, and censers and albs, and stoles and chasubles, though thou didst call thyself bread and water! We have drawn a long and often mutinous procession of reverends and most reverends and right reverends and very reverends, and doctors and deans and eminences and holinesses, and suffragans and novices and licentiates, though thou didst call thyself bread and water! Horrible, indeed, and quite infinite is the contemptibleness of all this, and shall I not even say the sin? Suppose some inquiring stranger looking on and asking, What does all this mean? I should answer, not without sharpness and indignation, It means that man is a fool, and that he prefers vanity to truth. This is not the Saviour. This is not the way to

God. This is not the door of heaven. This is incubus and rubbish and abomination. Christ is bread ; Christ is water ; Christ is the one answer to thy difficulties, the one Healer of thy wounds, the one Saviour of thy soul. Oh, but the curse of this mischief is terrible to contemplate ! Poor souls are left to believe that they can only get to Christ by seeing ministers and priests and bishops, by learning catechisms, by swallowing dogmas they neither understand nor appreciate, and by listening to the mumbling and muttering of certain ecclesiastical men in livery. Oh, the horribleness ! Oh, the blasphemy ! Is not the devil laughing the while and filling his cruel hand with additional prey ? To those eager to know the truth, I say, Christ is bread ; Christ is water ; he is nigh thee ; take the pure Bible and read it for thyself, read it in solitude, read it with earnest desire to know its living claim upon thyself, and thou shalt see the Lord, and feel the Cross, and eat the heavenly bread.

(3) History furnishes a most graphic confirmation of these views. John Stuart Mill says, "Let rational criticism take from us what it may, it still leaves us the Christ." Exactly so ; it still leaves us the bread and water ! It still leaves us all we want. It takes away all human conceits and decorations, and it leaves the living bread. It mortifies the theological cook and confectioner, it humbles the decorator of tables, but it leaves the living water ! Theological revolutions have come and theological revolutions have gone ; timid souls have trembled as if the sanctuary had been destroyed, but when the noise has passed and the cloud has rolled off, behold the bread and water remain, and "Welcome," is written on the tables of the Lord ! Men cannot get rid of Christ simply because they cannot get rid of themselves. Marvellous is it to watch how the Lord allows the chaff to blow away, but saves every grain of the precious wheat ; and quite marvellous, too, is it to see how some nervous people think that the wheat is lost because the chaff has been scattered by the wind. The Lord will lose nothing. Society revolutionises itself, but society still lives. Theologies, Eastern and Western, wear themselves out, but the bread and water are still there, incorruptible and unlimited. Do we fear the dissolution of the earth because an owl's nest has fallen ? Will the sun not rise to-morrow because

a candle has been blown out? Bethink thee, faithless soul, they are but accidents that change, the essentials abide,

“Unhurt amid the war of elements,  
The wreck of matter and the crash of worlds.”

I fancy we should change our standpoint in viewing all the revolutions and disasters that occurred within the limits of Christendom. Hitherto we have thought of them as the results of intellectual pride or spiritual insubordination. We have mourned over men as fallen creatures because they have risen against the systems in which they were reared. But possibly we are wrong. It may be Christ himself who is at work. He is the great Revolutionist. This may be Christ's own way of clearing off the rubbish which has been piled upon his holy name. Christ pulls down papacies and hierarchies and rituals, that he may show that these are not needful, that all human contrivances are departures from his divine simplicity, and that he wishes to be known through all ages and amongst all men as the Bread and Water of human souls. He knows that our temptation is to make more of externals than of realities; hence he turns his providence against us, hurls down our cathedrals and temples and ministers, and says he will be known only as Bread and Water, not as a compound of coloured and poisonous confection. Oh the deceitfulness of the human heart in this matter of serving Christ! We tell lies to ourselves about it. We talk about enriching our services, ennobling our architecture, educating our ministers, creating universities, founding endowments, originating retreats of elegant leisure for the production of technical literature. Rubbish, all of it! Christ asks nothing of the kind at our hands. He prefers his own Spirit to our culture. It is “not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit,” saith the Lord. “Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity even the solemn meeting.” What, then, are we to do? “Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.” Thus we are driven back to simplicity; our “culture” is thrown down and dashed to pieces as a potter's

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vessel, and nothing stands but the bread and the water, the first verities, the essential graces, of the Lord's Christ.

I care not how rich our music, how noble our architecture, how imposing our method of worship, if all this be kept strictly in its proper place. I love beauty; I am moved to passion and heroism by inspiring music; I would make the Lord's house glad with every expression of love; but this done, I would write on the doorposts, on the roof, and on every panel, the words of Jesus: "In this place is One greater than the temple." I prefer knowledge to ignorance, but I prefer holiness to either. Culture, when not a chattering and fussy prig, may be right noble and even majestic; but nothing is so cold as culture, and nothing so mean, when not inflamed and impassioned by the spirit of Christ. To-day the pulpit is in danger of being killed by miscalled culture. Men think that because they have been to college five years they ought to be preachers; which is as logical as to say that a man who has driven an omnibus five years ought to be able to take a ship across the Atlantic. The Lord continually dashes these culture-pots to pieces like a potter's vessel, by making preachers of his own, and clothing them with mysterious but most beneficent power.

We must go back to bread and water. Our dainties must be given up. Our habits are too luxurious; we are killing our souls with sweet poisons; we are, by our fabrications and masonries and fine fancies, exalting ourselves above the Lord; so I would call myself back to the simplicity of Christ, and find all I want in his grace and truth.

## Chapter vi. 68.

“Lord, to whom shall we go?”

### THE DIFFICULTIES OF DISBELIEF.

YOU know too well that we are all tempted—sometimes tempted severely—to give up religious faith and Christian hope. The hand which grasps religious treasures is not always equally strong. In dealing with the state of things which usually attends this painful experience, I intend to raise this most practical question: Suppose we give up the Christian faith, what shall we have instead? Wise men are bound to look at consequences. They do not trust themselves to the so-called chapter of accidents. They move with critical caution, putting things into comparison and contrast, and judging the value of results. If any man were to ask you to give up your house, would you not inquire what you should do in such an event? Even if the house was not all that you could wish it to be, you would still desire to know what you were to have in exchange. Are we to be less careful about a faith than about a dwelling-place? Are we to concern ourselves about a house for the body, and leave the soul without a shelter or without a home? Be as sensible in the higher region as you are in the lower. Discern the signs of the times as clearly as you discern the signs of the sky, and the result will be acceptable to God.

Let me remind you that it is infinitely easier to ask questions than to answer them, and to pull down than to build up. This must be one of the earliest lessons which the earnest student must learn. Never forget it. The rule applies to every department of life, but bears with especial force upon the highest questions which engage the mind. Is it not easier, for example, to waste money than to earn it? Is it not easier to spoil a picture than to paint one? You can pluck a flower from its



stem, but can you put it on again? With the rudest hammer you can injure the sculptured marble; but can you shape any stone into beauty? These inquiries, made in the lower region of life and affairs, point towards the doctrine, that it is easier to tempt a man than to save him; easier to ruin life than to train it for heaven! There are men of vigorous but most ill-trained and incomplete ability, who give themselves to the work of unsettling the human mind upon every subject. They have a genius for destruction; they would be unhappy if there was nothing to break; they would kill themselves if there was no other life to be assailed! You who are earnest students of these great religious questions must know these men, and value them properly. If you listen to their utterances you will find that they quarrel with everything; they lay no foundations; they teach no distinct and positive truth; they give the lie to all faith, and throw distrust upon all experience. Mark how easy their task is, compared with the duty of the Christian teacher. A malicious man can do more mischief in one hour than a man of genius can repair in a lifetime! Let a ruffian have his way for one night upon any minster or abbey which was slowly reared through generations and centuries, and in the morning you may find it a smouldering heap! So with your infidels in their limited world; wherever they go they leave the mark of the beast, and their course may be tracked by the desolation which they leave behind. To all such men you must put the practical question found in the text, viz., If we go away from Christ, to whom shall we go? That is the question I would urge. Give up religion, and what then? Give up the first idea of God, and what then? We are bound to look at alternatives. Sometimes a course may appear to be ready-made to our hands, and to be simple, and to be self-justifying. Yet when we ask about the results or alternatives we may get a new and correct view of the whole case.

The tempter asks you to give up the idea of God, which we have so frequently endeavoured to explain; and every other idea of God which you have derived from the Scriptures and from your spiritual teachers. Well, what then? Remember, you refuse to give up the humblest cottage, until you

know where you are to go ; you will not throw away the poorest covering in winter until you know what you are to have in return ; you will not, on a dark road, put out the dimmest lantern until you are sure of having a better light in its place. Will you, then, recklessly give up the idea of God at the bidding of any man—the idea of the living, loving, personal God, ruling over all—without asking, “To whom shall I go ?” You can put away the mystery of God, and you get in return the greater mystery of godlessness. Your account of creation is then neither more nor less than a fool’s account. A chair could not have made itself ; but the sun is self-created. Your coat had a maker, but your soul had none. The wax flower on your table was made, but the roses in your garden grew there by chance. The brass instrument was fashioned by a skilled hand, but the voice of man, the grandest of all organs, was self-created. The figure-head on the ship was carved ; but the face of the carver became a face by chance, without design and without law ! We cannot believe such infinite absurdities. They not only destroy religion ; they insult and dishonour reason itself. Were we to accept them and lay them down as the foundations of life, we should lose all self-respect ; and feel that faith had been displaced, not only by intellectual madness (which may be a man’s infirmity), but by moral licentiousness and insanity ! I claim for the reverent and earnest believer in God the highest common sense. His is the only rational creed. You may ask him some hard questions, but he can put harder questions to you in return. Without doubt, as a religious man, he is surrounded by a great mystery, and he glories in it ! The great must always be a mystery to the little ; the arch must always be a mystery to the column ; God must always be a mystery to his creatures. If we could understand all, we should be all. Only the whole can comprehend the whole ; only God can understand God !

We teach that religion is the highest expression of reason. We can never consent to say that reason and religion are altogether different. Without reason there could be no religion ; and without religion, reason would perish within the prison of the visible and the temporary. Religion is Reason on her knees ; faith is Reason on her wings ; Christianity is Reason on the

Cross, on her way to the crown! You tell me to give up the idea of God. Then, to whom shall I go? Answer that, if you can. Shall I go to you who have tempted me? Are you prepared to take the consequences of your advice? If a storm should come, will you shelter me? If a sword should be lifted, have you room for me behind your shield? When the day darkens around my soul, can you guarantee me light? You must show me some of your works, that I may have an idea of your strength. I will go round with you and see what you have done, and infer what you can do; and if you can make out a clear case, then I may give up the idea of God. What is your answer to the assaults of great natural forces? Let us begin there. You tell me that you have built great fortresses—high, broad, strong—of the best stone that can be quarried. I ask you, Is it not possible for a bolt of lightning to shiver them to their foundations in a moment? You point to the noble bridges you have made, and you say, "That is my way over rivers." I point you to the floods which tumble their proud arches into confusion, and turn your harvest fields into a swamp. Where then are your sheltering places, and where are the signs of your strength? You have told me to give up the idea of God, and I only ask you this plain common-sense question in return: If I accept your advice and give up the idea of God—to whom shall I go? Remember, it is easy work to tell a man to give up this doctrine and that faith, and to surrender the chief hopes of his life. But he has a right to ask you to take the responsibility of your advice; and especially has he the right of reason, and the right of stewardship of his own life, to ask, If I accept your counsel, to whom shall I go?

The tempter tells you to give up the idea of the future as it is viewed from a Christian standpoint. Well, what then? We are not unwilling to listen to you; but you must make your case good before we can commit ourselves to it. What do you advise? You advise us to give up our idea of the future as it is viewed from a Christian standpoint. We must put this common-sense question in return, What then? If a man asked you to throw away a telescope, would you not inquire what you were to have in its place? Here is a father, whose only son has gone to sea,

and the poor old man is watching the receding vessel through a badly constructed glass. A passer-by mockingly says, "Throw away that paltry thing." Will the loving watcher throw it into the water because the mocker ridiculed the instrument? Even though the glass was known to be poor, yet in so far as it helped the naked eye, it was sure to be kept until a better glass was offered in its place. Will you act so with a telescope, and yet fling away the faith-glass through which you read the solemn and wondrous future? Look at the case. Christian revelation tells you that death is not the end of your life; it tells you that death is dispossessed of its power; that, as a believer in Jesus Christ, God the Son, you will pass from this poor weary scene into sanctuaries where there is no sin, and into activities which never tire the servant. It speaks of deeper studies, of holy mysteries, of higher engagements, of divine delights! It speaks with hallowed rapture of reunions, of immortal fellowship, of battles blest with complete and imperishable victories, of hope perfected in ecstatic and cloudless vision! If you believe in this revelation you draw water from the deep, cool well of its promises; your suffering becomes a joy through the support of its rich and inspiring grace. Under these circumstances the tempter says to you, "Give up this idea of the future." Will you give it up at his bidding without at least putting the question and waiting for an answer: If I give it up, what have you to offer me in return? I think this is a sound principle. The inquiry seems to be the very first question of common-sense.

I will suppose myself to be so tempted, and I will tell you how I should meet the tempter. I should say to him: You ask me to give up my Christian convictions about the future. I ask you, in return, Who you are that you should make a proposition so bold? Who are you? Give an account of yourself. Show me that you deserve the confidence which you ask me to repose in your judgment. You are bound to do this, and I insist upon its being done. Let me examine you. You have told me to give up my idea of the future as viewed from a Christian standpoint. You ought to be an able man; you ought to be prepared to answer some searching questions, if the counsel which you give me is to be viewed otherwise than the expression of the highest insanity.

Can you tell me, then, with certainty, what will take place in this city within one short hour? Can you tell me without a doubt who is, at this moment, in your own house as a stranger awaiting your return? Can you tell me the contents of a letter without opening the envelope? Can you tell me what I shall be thinking about in five minutes from this instant? You ought to be able to do all this lower kind of thing, or something equivalent to it. You ought to be able to make out a very strong case on your own side before you have any status which will warrant you in asking me to surrender my Christian idea of the future. You ought to have made your mark somewhere as a spiritual thinker, and seeing that you have challenged my attention, I demand to know where that mark is, that I may examine it. Why, suppose I were to surrender my faith at the bidding of every man who came to me, without asking questions and making such inquiries as these, what a life I should have! A believer to-day, an infidel to-morrow! I must know who these men are, who ask me to surrender the convictions which are the inspiration and the comfort of my life. But I am not now to be easily misled. I have listened and watched; and I must see much more and hear much more, before I give such men as I have referred to my confidence. If I believe you, the tempter, will you leave me in the long-run in the lurch? Will you suffer my trial? Will you snatch me back when I am slipping over the precipice into the desolate caverns of death? If, as the shadows of life gather around, I begin to feel that I have been misled by you, will you show me how to repair a wasted lifetime, and how to draw the sting of mortal self-reproach? You must not in the long-run leave the man whom you have misled; you must not add the cruelty of man-slayer to the flippancy of the unbeliever. Tell me, if I give up this Christian view, to whom shall I go, and what shall I have? It is easy for you to plunder me; but I must know how you intend to replace the faith you would take from me.

The tempter tells you to shut your Bible and to believe no longer in Revelation. Well, what then? We must still ask, To whom shall we go? We are invited by the tempter to believe that, even assuming the existence of God, it is impossible to find

any record of his will ; he has never spoken to mankind ; he has set forth no outline of human duty ; he has written no word for human comfort ; he has shed no light on the darkest questions of life ; he made us, but he takes no notice of us ; he fashioned us as we are, upright, above the beasts of the field in dominion as in skill, but never opens the gate of the city wherein he dwells to bid us welcome to the hospitality of his love ; he never bends down to see how his children are going on ; and never, never—though he sends down the light and rain, and breathes across the universe the healthful winds which bring life upon their wings—does he send any message to any creature of his hands. The man who can believe that, has a truly capacious and terrible faith ; he must be a very monster of a believer ! He must. His soul, if he has one, must be a bottomless pit of credulity ! Before I yield my hold of the book at his bidding, I must know to whom I shall go. The Bible says to me, “ The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.” And the tempter says, “ Shut up the Bible and be your own shepherd.” “ But I am bruised, and wounded, and heart dead.” He mocks with such advice. The Bible says, “ Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money ; come !” The tempter says, “ You have no thirst that you cannot slake in the muddy pools that lie at your feet.” The Bible says, “ God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” The tempter says, “ When you are in trouble dry your own tears, and get out of your own difficulties, and snap your fingers in the face of the universe.” The Bible says, “ Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” The tempter says, “ Lie down on the thorns ; pillow your head on the stones ; rest in the wilderness ; take a moment’s sleep in the desert.” The Bible says, “ Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.” The tempter says, “ You have never sinned ; what forgiveness do you want ? Go and wash your hands in the river and you will be clean.” Jesus in the Holy Book says, “ In my Father’s house are many mansions.” The tempter says, “ Your mansion is the dark cold grave ; get into it and rot away !”

After hearing the two voices I say that, considering what

human nature is, looking at its capacities, its powers, its desires, its wondrous thoughts, its marvellous accomplishments, the voice of the tempter is the voice of a liar! In all such cases I believe special importance should be attached to individual testimony, and in giving my own I believe that I am pronouncing that of a countless host of other Christian believers. When we have found God's book to be to us the book of God when we have most needed it—there have indeed been times in our history when the book was nothing to us but a piece of literature; there have been other crises in our life when the book has been to us all good books in one, with the addition of God's life and God's love—and we are asked to give it up, we only put this common-sense question in return, viz., It is very easy for us to shut up the book, but when we have closed it, to whom can we go? It is very true that we can get some satisfaction out of the earth, and out of things that are earthly. We are zealous in our pursuit of learning; we give our hearty support to every man who increases our knowledge of the universe. If a man shall come to me and say, "I have found such delight in scientific inquiry, such pure enjoyment in looking into the construction of nature and finding out the secret of the world!" I say to him, frankly, "I hail you as a friend; tell me all you can; I will consider the results under your tuition, and I will study the great stone-book of the earth, and the great fire-book of the universe; you may be able to turn over the pages and interpret the wondrous writing. I bid you good luck in your work; I say you have a right to find out still more secrets, disentangle still more difficulties, explain still more mysteries, and I shall be grateful to you for all you have done." But after the man has done all this I tell him, "Sir, I have a heart that you have not touched; I have an emotional nature that you have not yet approached. You have addressed my intellect, and I thank you for your eloquence; but you have not touched the springs of my life, you have not come near the place where my sorrow sheds her tears, where my soul thinks about the future, and where I wrestle with the deepest problems that can engage the human mind. You are on the outside, doing a wonderful work, and I give you honour for your service, and wish you God-speed in your researches; but my inner life, with its joy and sorrow, its

hope, its distress and pain, you have not, with all your science, touched. Is there not a voice that can come unto my soul, and breathe a sweeter music than yours?"

In view of this, then, I have to teach that if you leave the divine life and aspect of things, there is, so far as I can see, no alternative but outer darkness! Further, I have to teach, that he only who looks at things in a divine light can see creation itself as it is. The scientific man who has no God and no Saviour has seen a great deal; but if he knew God and loved him, he would have some more keys taken from the divine girdle and put into his hands, with which he could unlock still further and deeper mystery. Hear the astronomer speak to us, and he will elevate us because of the sublimity of his pursuits. As you look up to what you call especially our own firmament—the firmament whose great dim glory lies more or less within the vision of the naked eye—the astronomer says, "In that great arch how many suns do you find?" "One." "Look again." "How many," we inquire in return, "have you found?" "What say you to a thousand?" "You have not found so many?" "Multiply it by ten, and multiply that by ten more, and multiply that again. We have found in your firmament eighteen million suns!" "And is there no other firmament?" "Yes. This telescope has searched the heavens, and found another firmament above yours, and another higher, and another again, gallery upon gallery,—four thousand such firmaments arching over one another in ever-widening expanses!" Look at them, and cease your infidel babble! Measure them, and learn how poor a speck is the dust of man! Go to Christ, and hear what he says about them. The infidel, looking up there, says, "They came there by chance; they mean nothing; you see them all now that you look at them from the outside; it is a glittering nothing, and that's all." Jesus looks upon the blazing pomp, and turning to his poor one, he says, "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you." I prefer to believe the Saviour. The other theory insults my reason, makes a fool of me. Jesus Christ comes to me with poetry, which instantly becomes faith, and which is the truest reality of hope.



Look at that great cloud of fire. Do you see it? "Yes." Tell me what it is. Let the scientific man tell you. It is a comet. You speak about your great globe, what say you to that immensity? What is your great globe in diameter? "Why, about eight thousand miles, we have always been given to understand." Why, the diameter of the head of the comet, science says—not theology, not a fanatical zealot—science says, is nine hundred and forty-seven thousand miles in diameter,—a hundred thousand of your little globes, and twenty thousand more thrown in! Look at its wondrous train! How long is that train? "Two thousand miles—five hundred thousand miles—ten millions?" Away with your guessing! Science says, I have measured that train, and it is one hundred and thirty-two millions of miles long. And are these the arrows with which the quiver of the Almighty is filled? Can he strike with these terrible weapons? The infidel says, "Ah, it's all——" and then he waves his hand as if that settled everything. Jesus tells you, it is a messenger of the Almighty that is running, along the breath of his own purpose; and that finding its way through the universe it shall never stagger, it shall not disturb the tiniest asteroid in the great glory of the universe! I prefer to believe Jesus. It is more in keeping with reason, sense, common judgment, to believe that great wise teacher. To him I have committed my soul. If he is wrong, I would rather be in his company—looking at all his life, the beauty of his character, the sublimity of his disposition—than I would be elsewhere. With him I live; with him, if need be, I would choose to die! Yet I think we are very mighty men in our own estimation, are we not? We get up behind our little rail and we say, "Give up the idea of God; give up the idea of the future, shut up your Bible, do not go to church any more, and do not listen to Christian teachers any more." And then we shake our heads as if we had settled the case. Who are we? We are very mighty within our own sphere; but an inch out of it and we are weakness itself!

I had a great difficulty to contend with the other morning. It was intended, indeed, to be the most serious difficulty of my life. Two enemies of mine had conspired to shut me within my dwelling place, so that I could not get out; and they did their

work in the night time, and when I came out in the morning I found it quite finished. There was a barricade before my door ; it was a beautiful barricade ; it must have taken a great deal of construction ; I admired the thing. In the centre of it were two great spiders—mine enemies—who in the night-time contrived this wonderfully malicious scheme to shut me in. How could I get out ? There it was. I just took a walking-stick, and with one or two aims destroyed the web which was to have shut me in as with iron. And what is this but the feeblest illustration of the power of the Almighty ! When we have set against him our little reasonings, and have tried to put him out of his own universe, and have endeavoured to show our own power on a scale of stupendous magnificence,—what if he need not lift his finger, if he need but to blow upon our fortresses and our mighty works, to turn us into confusion and bring us to shame !

Is there any inquiring man who is giving his mind and earnest studies to any department of life ? I thank God for his earnestness. Am I going to take the book away from the man who is deeply and truly studying, with a view to knowing more about human life ? No ! Am I going to reduce the school hours of any man, who gives himself zealously to learning ? Not by a moment. What am I going to do then ? I am going to say this : You are indeed doing well. You are thinking ; and it is always healthful and beneficial in diverse ways for a man to exercise his intellectual faculties. But you are like the child who is finding his way home, and has got inside the king's palace. We are glad you are in the palace of your fathers ; but at present you are lingering on the great staircase—a noble, wondrous structure—but there is your Father's door. Knock at that, and it shall be opened unto you ! You are in the palace, on the staircase. Go into his sanctuary, lie at his feet and receive his blessing !

## PRAYER.

THOU hast invited us to speak unto thee, our Father, in the name of thy Son Jesus Christ, our one and only Saviour. We cannot see thee, but we feel thy presence. We know how near thou art, because our hearts glow with a new sense of love, and because our minds are lifted up to new elevations of thought, and because we are sure that beyond all we see there lies the true reality. Thus hast thou made us. We feel the greatness of our life even while we bemoan its littleness; we are of the earth, yet we are of heaven; we are dying, yet we die into immortality. Thou hast sent thy Son to tell us this, and he has told it to our hearts in music, he has expressed it in tears, he has symbolised it in the Cross. We know all that we do know of thyself through Jesus Christ thy Son. He called thee Father; he told us when we prayed to address thee as Our Father; he gave himself up to thy will, and he taught us to say in prayer, Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. From our childhood we have said this, but we have rarely felt it in all its meaning, in all its pathos, in all the sublimity of its obedience. Teach us day by day, little by little, a lesson at a time; for we are poor scholars in thy school, not apt to learn, wishful to have our own way too much, blinded by pride and vanity and self-trust; yet thou art patient beyond all motherliness of waiting, thou art tender beyond all we ever know of love; so thou wilt not drive us away if we ourselves wish to remain in thy school and learn a little more. Help us to bear the burdens of life; we can count the few tears we have to shed; at the most they make but a little rill amid the green delights of our inheritance and our joys. Teach us that these tears have a ministry of purification; show us that thou dost not willingly afflict the children of men, and that no chastisement is by thy hand delivered but in the spirit and with the purpose of love; thus we shall glory in tribulation also, and shall be exceedingly glad in conditions which make other souls afraid. Work within us all thy ministry; show us what thou dost mean by it all, and teach us that if we be crucified with Christ no stone rolled to our sepulchre door by man or enemy of what name or grade soever shall keep us in the earth, but we shall rise with him, and with him see all thy glory. Amen.

### Chapter vii. I.

“The Jews sought to kill him.”

### THE EVER-LIVING CHRIST.

THEY could never do it. To the end their purpose was unchanging in its cruelty, but they could never bring it to consummation. We have forgotten who killed the Son of

God. It would be an infinite relief to us if we could charge this wholly upon the Jews, or upon some persons who lived twenty centuries ago. That would be unjust and unwise on our part. The one thing that is forgotten is the name of the murderer: his name is Man. The Jews did not murder Christ, nor the Gentiles, nor the heathen, nor any one geographical section of the world, except in some local and narrow sense: the Son of God was killed by Man. Until we realise that we can make no progress in Christian knowledge, we shall be blaming the wrong parties; our commiseration will take a false direction; men who are blaming others should be broken-hearted about themselves. The perpetual difficulty is how to get rid of Christ. We want his place, not his company. We can do with him as a religious luxury, but not as a religious discipline. We love to hear briefly about him, but were the word to be shot into our heart personally, we should call it an affront, and take care that the wound never healed. Hence the weakness and the vanity of the Church.

The possibility of vanity being the inspiration of beneficence is a painful and horrible thought. Can men do good through ostentation? Who can have any doubt as to the answer? Can men make apparent sacrifices under the inspiration of vanity? Who will not fear, though he may not reply? If any man accused some other man of working through vanity, he would be distinctively human in his criticism and in his ill-nature, and his criticism would amount to nothing, for all such criticism should be turned inward, and the question should be asked, as with a spear thrust, by every man of himself, What is the inspiration of all I professedly do and want to be done in the name of Christ? We think we have dismissed Christ from human history, when, lo, he reappears in an unexpected form. We can only change the aspects of his relation to any time: the relation itself is vital and eternal. There is more than a point of criticism in that suggestion; there is a revelation of all the hopes that can animate and sustain Christian activity. A proper understanding of that suggestion would bring us comfort in many a dreary hour. Christ never goes down: the sun never sets, though we have a time we call the going down of the sun; we look westward with enlarging eyes, because the vision is

apocalyptic in glory and in colour, and we wonder as we should wonder at a king dying in a palace of gold. But there is in reality no setting of the sun. He sets to rise again. It is even so with this blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. His particular relation to a time may change, for a time he may even appear to withdraw altogether from our civilisation, but his is an eternal march, an ever-continuous evolution, a perpetual new-shaping of himself to the passing ages. Now he is a grand doctrine, and men say this shall be the abiding aspect of Christ; he is set forth in vivid dogmas, in what are called positive truths, in mechanically-shaped catechisms, and in stiff and orthodox standards.

Does it ever occur to the Church that sometimes Jesus Christ will come upon the ages other than as a doctrine? Such an idea never has occurred to the Church, but it has been thrust upon the consciousness of the Church by the undeniable providence of God. Sometimes Jesus Christ is in the world as an image of pity, a missionary of beneficence, an apostle of charity, touching the human heart with the sacred influence of clemency and tenderness, and making men's lives all tears. In such softening and bowing down of human obduracy there is a ministry of the Son of God. Such tears abide in fountains that are sealed to every hand but Christ's. Therefore, now Christ is a doctrine, and the age is theological; now he is a charity, and the age is benevolent; now he is an inspiration, and the Church is an aggressor, thundering at the gates of evil, cursing, with holy malediction, every form of wrong. What has changed? Christ? No; he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; but his direction of movement or his aspect of revelation may have changed. What the Church has to believe is that Christ cannot die. Yet, unless Christ come in some particular aspect, we have groaning and complaining over the **decadence** of faith, and the eclipse of doctrine, and the retrogression of religious feeling. It is ignorance that rebukes; it is ignorance that despairs: true conceptions of Christ will sustain the Church, saying, Now my Lord is a summer sun; now he is the bright and morning star; now he is the root and the offspring of David, in whom all history culminates in its final glory; now he is an

angel of pity, seeking the lost, blessing the unblest; and now a judge terrible in wrath, a lamb inflamed with judicial anger. Believe not those pessimists who think that Christ has been driven away, or that the Gospel is being no longer preached, or that faith is declining. Say the sun is exhausting his light, and the moon is losing her soft beauty, and the wind that brings freshness from southern lands and western climes is no longer equal to the task; say the ocean has lost its old throb of thunder;—these trifles may have occurred, but Christ can never yield his sovereignty. When an age is all controversy, when theology is turned upside down, when catechisms are sold for waste-paper, and orthodox standards are put in the fires as quickly as hands can put them in, is not Christ misunderstood and expelled? No; the door, perhaps, is the more widely opened that he may come unto his own home. We have papered him out of his own chamber; we have made it hard for him to climb up into his own palace;—if he had to climb up to it he would never get in; he descends upon it, and that way we cannot block, blessed be his grace, his tender, all-pitying love!

There is no spectacle to my own imagination more expressive of ignorance and unbelief than that of a Christian man who thinks that his Lord is getting the worst of the battle. Such a thing cannot be. Why throw your arms round an impossibility, and almost worship it as if it were a kind of idol? What we want strengthening in is the fundamental position that Jesus Christ must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. He will die upon a cross, but that will make no difference; he will be banished from this land or that, but such a policy has no effect upon the sum total of his purpose; he will himself change his aspect, but he will still be the Sun of Righteousness.

Yet a tremendous attack may be made upon the Son of God; but it cannot be made by the chief priests and scribes directly, it can only be made from the inside. This attack can only be conducted by a Judas. That is the most appalling of all thoughts. No man can injure you but one. Shall I name the man who can injure you? That man is yourself. Nobody can for a moment injure a true man in any vital sense; all criticism, all sneering,

all caricature, all attempts even to defame him, end in smoke so thick that it cannot curl, and so foul that nobody wants to preserve it. One man can injure me fatally; that man is myself. No man can injure the Church; but the Church can injure itself. There are many forms of Judas. How eager we are to study the character of some ancient person called Iscariot; how eloquent we are in blame; how damnatory in criticism; oh, how expressive and noble in judgment! We know not that we are condemning ourselves, otherwise our eloquent tongue would cleave to the roof of our mouth, and our memory of words would become a blank. Judas is alive, and Judas is still selling his Lord. If any man tells you that God left you out of his love when he created the world, that man is Judas Iscariot, whatever land he may live in, and whatever language he may speak. Should he sit in his own retreat and muse upon the goodness of God in choosing him, and in the discriminating grace which left you out of the bundle of life, he is a liar, a blasphemer, and a thief; he is the man that is doing the Church injury. He may be elected, but he has no right to say you are reprobated. God neglecting you, and choosing Judas Iscariot, is a suggestion which might make the angels weep. Poor soul! God's love is greater than your sin, if you have broken all the commandments every day you have lived since your birth. Soul of man, God's love is not new to thee; it is an eternal solicitude. Any man who will tell you that Jesus Christ is come to seek and to save a few sour-visaged, impracticable bigots is a Judas. The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. Are you lost? For you he came. The difficulty we have to contend with in preaching this glorious gospel is that some persons have picked up names that they do not understand, but that worry them in a most awful manner. For example, there would be those who would tell you that this is Arminianism. They do not know whether Arminianism is a theorem in Euclid, or a puzzle in algebra, or a speculation in the navigation of the Atlantic. But they have heard about it, and it has somehow the effect upon them of naming a mad dog. Whatever it is, it is my hope and trust and joy and strength that God leaves out no poor child, no old woman, no self-condemned, broken-hearted sinner.

Another form of Iscariotism is only too strikingly found in those who, having convictions, keep them in a state of continual chloroform. There are persons living to-day who have convictions they never express. They are the dangerous people. We have nothing to fear from blatant infidelity or disbelief; but we have nothing to hope from those who say, We keep our Christianity quiet, and our convictions we only mumble to ourselves. We need not go to this heroic point in order to display the sad state of affairs. There are persons in Christ's Church who never lift a finger for their Lord. Ask them to take office, and they are instantly so overwhelmed with modesty, that they will not open a door for him, or light a lamp, or sit on a footstool that somebody else may sit in the upper position. Can such men pray? Never. Can such men be saved? Not in that way. Are not such men Christians? They are anything but Christians. Ask a man who has a gift of song to join the leaders of the public psalmody, and he cannot do so, because he does not like to make himself conspicuous. He would not stand up for his Lord; then let him know that he has no Lord to stand up for; we must uncloak him, and unmask him, and tell him that his name is Iscariot. Ask for any service from some professing Christians, and they are pre-engaged. As if any man should be pre-engaged when Christ wants him! The greater law should swallow up the lesser. Astronomy should regulate Geography. We must not forget the motion round the sun, whilst we are so careful about the rotation upon our own axis. This is the state of affairs. It is pitiable lying for persons to be talking about the amount of infidel literature which is being published when they are acting thus towards their nominal Lord. The Christian has only one engagement, and that is to serve Christ; all other so-called engagements are incidental, transient, superficial, without value, or are only permanent and valuable in so far as they are inspired by the spirit of a larger consecration.

As judgment begins in the house of the Lord, so in the house of the Lord must begin a true revival, a solid and permanent reconstruction of all best thought and all holiest endeavour. We should have a time for the renewal of vows, an hour should be appointed for the repetition of old wedding words: again we



should accept the ring from the Lamb. Lives of consecration can never be sneered at with any advantage on the side of unbelieving argument. Sacrifice is its own eloquence; self-denial, patience, love, the enduring things of the nature of affliction for others, that is a piety that cannot be talked down or exploded. Have not our teachers been emphatic on the wrong words? Have not many of them been forcing us in wrong directions? There are some persons in an almost dying state of excitement to know what people did in the fourth century. I have no very keen interest in what they did or did not do; but there are minds so singularly constituted in the economy of God that they seem to have no relation to the century they live in. What was done about the year one hundred and thirty-nine after Christ? or what did Constantine think? I really do not know, and I do not care what he thought; it may be callous upon my part, but I have next to no interest in anything he ever did or said; a glance will show me all I want to know: but the men that are round about me are dying men; the masses are poor; many of the people are the victims of public temptation and private snares, and they are being drawn to their destruction by many a wicked way; the relations of class to class are wrong in many instances; temptations are lighted up every night in every city for the allurements and destruction of souls. To ask a man who realises these things what his sober opinion is about the Nicene Creed is to him intolerable; he wants to save the drunkard, to gather the little children into school, to repress the oncoming of every form of wickedness. He wants to be pure himself and to purify the State in which he lives. Such a man, it appears to me, better represents the Church of Christ and the meaning of the Cross than some other man who is painfully and sleeplessly excited to know what was done about the year two hundred and seventeen after Christ. Nor do I altogether depose such men from their amusements and their luxuries. Tastes differ, appetite has sometimes to be encouraged a little: I only wish to say that, personally, I am not akin to those men, though they may belong to a higher family. The relation of Jesus Christ to this age is a relation of sympathy, pity, beneficence. Leave the word-mongers to wrangle over their controversies, and go ye and seek out that which is lost, distressed, and without hope.

What is the Church? It is a body of living men sustaining a living relation to living realities. It is not a soft outline; it is not an antiquated skeleton. Whoever does Christ's work is Christ's kinsman. No man can call Jesus Lord but by the Spirit; no man can do a Christian work without Christ being in him. It may be found some day that those who were discarded and cast out as not Christian have all the time been Christ's loving bondmen, doing all his will, without recognition by men; yea, and without any right relation of their own consciousness to the solemn and glorious fact. What we have to understand is the changing relation of Christ. He is now a doctrine; now a history; now a mission; now a pity; now a manifold service, social, political, economical: but one eternal thought shoots through, and rules all the economies in which he enshrines and incarnates his glory. Whatever changes, this never changes—namely, that he wants to save us, every one. My creed is: God made us all; God loves us all; God wants to meet us all at Christ's dear Cross. I cannot believe that the spirit of Judas is growing in the Church. It is well to indicate what it is, and to point out the subtlety of its operation; but he would be a poor observer of events, an ungenerous and unjust critic of human history, who did not recognise the fact that in the Church there is proportionately but one Judas. There are men who really love the Saviour, and serve him, and who count not their lives dear unto them, that they may serve the blessed one of the Most High. There are men who can say humbly and truly: "For me to live is Christ. I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ." Yes; there has been a Judas in the Church; there has been also an Apostle Paul.

## Chapter vii. 15.

“And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?”

### JEWS MARVELLING AT JESUS.

THEY thought there was only one way of learning. Jesus Christ committed the crime of irregularity. Propriety can never forgive that offence ; it cannot in medicine, it cannot in commerce, above all it cannot in theology. There is a certain way in which things are to be done ; if they are not done in that particular way they are not done at all. Jesus Christ was a thorn in the sides of the devotees of regularity. They did not know what to make of him : he was born at the wrong place, he associated with the wrong people, he supported the wrong cause—the cause of the ignorant, the poor, the blind, and the helpless ; he turned upside down things that had for ages been regarded as sacred : he was not to be tolerated. The assault in this case is made upon his learning. There is no challenge addressed to his moral character ; but the wonder is that a man who never went to school should be able to read, and especially a man who never went to their school. They reveal themselves herein. What can you expect from such minds? Narrowness, bigotry, sectarianism, littleness, incapacity to understand either night or day—for the night has its mystery of stars, and the day its pomp and apocalypse of light. Yet the mischief is, that these men have in all time undertaken to preserve the faith ; have undertaken to patronise God and truth and eternity, and have specially registered themselves as the persons who know who is going up and who is going down. Until they and all belonging to them are swept out of the way, the kingdom of heaven, in all its ineffable blessedness, mercy, tenderness, compassion, love, can make no great progress. The kingdom of heaven suffers more from its nominal friends than it can suffer from its most hostile

opponents. Jesus Christ has not been understood by the schools. You cannot get at him through grammar. He is not to be parsed like a lesson in syntax; he is to be felt, touched, known by the spirit which is akin to his own. The mistake, we say, which these men made was that they supposed there was only one way of learning. There was a curriculum; certain books were to be read in a certain order, and certain examinations were to proceed under the scrutiny of a competent examiner. Any one who had not passed through this course, no matter what he said, what he sung, how much he knew, and touched and blessed the human heart, was uncertificated, was without rabbinic and official endorsement. Blessed be God for irregularity; the heavens be praised for the spirit that rises occasionally above all mechanism, formality, and so-called propriety and conventional limitation, and shows the spirit of liberty. This can only be done occasionally; there is a way that is prescribed, and that way must often be trodden: the danger is that some should imagine they can fall down upon learning as if making a great condescension, whereas they are the very people who ought to begin at the first point, at the alphabetic origin, and work their way, letter by letter, and syllable by syllable, until they are able to converse with the Master on things concerning himself. Instead of there being only one way by which men can be learned, there are ways innumerable; there are many schools and schoolmasters, many severe-looking teachers, and many gentle patient monitors, and many curious pedagogues who have undertaken by sharp instruments to lacerate men into knowledge, to flagellate them into intelligence. There are more schools than one. The mountain is not to be ascended by one path only; it may be climbed by a great number of roads, beaten by the feet of eccentric travellers, men of adventure and daring, who might have lost themselves, but did not.

Some have learned by experience what they never could have learned by lectures. Experience is a costly teacher; experience gives object lessons, and forces the truth home upon the mind and the heart in many curious and urgent ways. Parts of the Bible can only be read through the eyes of experience. Scholars cannot read all the Bible; they can parse it to a nicety, they can

correct its various readings with amazing erudition, they could die for a comma; but they do not know the Bible, necessarily, for all that. The broken heart knows what scholarship can never comprehend. Feeling has taught many men some of the higher and tenderer mysteries of the kingdom of God. It is the fashion to ridicule emotion; but without emotion what is human nature?—hard, narrow, austere, selfish. What garden can live in all its beautiful colour without the dew? We see oftentimes further through our tears than through our literary acquisition. There is a genius of feeling; there is an inspired emotion. Some parts of the Bible can only be read sympathetically; the grammar is all awry: some Biblical writers are here and there; they are desultors, now on this horse, now on that, but they never leave the horizon around which they were destined to ride with noble urgency. We must therefore know a good deal of the Bible by our feeling; it must show itself to us through our tears; it must come in through the rents and breaks and fissures which sorrow has made in the disappointed and wounded heart. There are men of such quick mind that they know the end from the beginning of every subject which they are capable of grasping; they are gifted with what is known as great intuitional power; they overleap processes. The anatomist boasted that if you gave him the bone of any animal that ever lived he could from that one bone construct the skeleton of the entire animal. Such genius is not given to all. There are those who, on hearing a proposition, know all the conclusions which are involved; we call them hot-headed, strong, impetuous, vehement, enthusiastic, wanting in that soul-patience which exhausts itself in the building up or finding out or putting together of processes. We are not all of one mould, one capacity, one temperament. When we learn this, and understand its meaning, we shall have less sectarianism, less bitterness, less mutual censoriousness, and a greater delight in the manifoldness of human things, seeing into the manifoldness of the giving God.

But “The Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?” Now above all things it is pre-eminently true that religion is not learned by letters; it is a divine action in the soul; it is a divine communion; it is the

claiming of a kinship long ignored or long misunderstood ; it is the look of friend to friend ; it is the recognition which comes into the eyes of the wandering child when through all his sin and sorrow and disablement he begins to trace the outline of a pursuing and loving father. Then grammar would be out of place ; only one eloquence is possible—the eloquence of sobbing, the eloquence that chokes the throat when it would talk, for talk in such circumstances approaches profanity. Yet there are those who can give you all their reasons for being religious. It would be harsh to condemn them. There is a piety that goes by the calendar ; there is a prayer appointed for to-day which must not be said to-morrow, and which would have been out of place yesterday ; there is a mechanical, formal, and even disciplinary way of living, but there is a religion that cannot give any reasons for itself beyond the reasons which childhood suggests, which love breathes, which an ineffable confidence clings to. We must make room for all these varieties. Wherein a man can explain his second birth, by all means let him explain it ; but another man says, The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth. So was I born of the Spirit : in my Christianity, such a voice might continue, there is only one logic, the logic of a persuasion which nothing can destroy. Make room for all and every kind of learning. Christianity is not a controversy ; it is peace, it is a sacred gladness of the heart that dare sometimes scarcely allow itself to hear its own voice, lest it should lose a charm, a possession infinite. There is a silence that is eloquent. Being justified by faith through our Lord Jesus Christ, we have peace with God—a peace that passeth understanding, a joy unspeakable and full of glory. There is a line beyond which language cannot go ; it says to the mind, I must leave you at this point ; we have had some sweet communion, but the next step you take will bring you into a region where I am not known. Farewell. Instead of speaking you must muse, burn with holy glowing, sing with immeasurable rapture.

Jesus Christ deigns to explain how it was that he had excited this marvel:—"Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me." By "doctrine" understand

teaching; not formal theology, not mechanical piety, not a thought shaped and thrust and consolidated in one form for ever, but teaching,—that endless process, that mystery of progress which claims eternity for its completion. “Not mine”; it is not an invention, not a theory, it is not something I have thought out and elaborated, and have brought to set before you in a given form; I am but a medium, I am but an errand-bearer. I do but speak the word I have heard and learned of my father; know that my incarnation is but the object on which the infinite silence breaks into the spray of speech. This was more marvellous than ever. Here is an inspired man. Behold a teacher who is teaching what he has heard in some other world! It is just there that so many teachers fail. They have only one world, and one world can hold nothing but its own grave. The teacher sent from God has all the worlds, he has the key of every mansion in his Father's house. What theories men have invented, what neat philosophies, what sublimities of impotence! Why? Because they have had no eternity, no infinity, no overshadowing greatness. So we have alphabet-makers and book-makers, and persons who have given us thinking in four-square form, beginning, continuing, and ending, measurable, estimable, for so much sold, for so much taken back again; where the ghost of eternity, everlastingness? They have not that spirit; what they say is their own, and therefore it can all be said. He who speaks from eternity halts, suddenly deflects, adapts himself to the capacities with which he has to deal; says, “I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.” Know the Bible in a thousand ways, and no man ever had the Bible taken out of his hands. That is the mystery. He may have had a book taken out of his hands that he was making a fetish of, an idol, a vain thing; but no man who ever grasped the Bible with his soul had it plucked from him; he does not hold it syntactically, he holds it with his heart.

Yet this knowledge has a human aspect according to the teaching of Jesus Christ:—“If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.” The English does not give the full force of the expression; the “shall” or “will” is not an auxiliary, it is the

word which carries the emphasis—if any man willeth to do his will, he must resolutely betake himself to it. Doing is learning. It is so in language. Speak the language if you would learn it. Your first utterances will be full of grotesque errors, and you will receive for replies things you never dreamed of; but continue, persevere, never mind even a sarcastic laugh; you are learning, and you want to learn, and you say, One day I will speak this language with precision and fluency and masterliness. Then do not turn back and take no more heed of it; go where the language is spoken, speak no other language, and soon by willing to do the will the language will become part of yourself, and you will not know you are speaking it. A man hardly knows that he breathes. It is so in athletics. No man ever learns to swim by standing on the shore. You have never known of an instance of a man becoming a great swimmer who always looked out of the window at the water and never went any nearer to it; we are not aware that history records a solitary instance of a man ever becoming an expert swimmer who never went into the water. If any man willeth to do the will, sets himself to do it, says, "In God's strength I will do this," he shall know the teaching, it will come to him little by little. Do not make the mistake of supposing that there is only one set or class of religious teachers. The Rabbis thought they only knew the law; the scribes thought they only knew what was written, and they alone could read it. There are a thousand teachers. Nature, Alma Mater, sweet old loving mother, says she will tell us a thousand things we never dreamed of if we will sit down and listen to her, or if we will accept her key and go into all the rooms she has, and study there; we shall come back with all the fresh winds blowing around us, with the light of the noonday in our eyes, with the fragrance of flowers. Little children are about the greatest theologians going, the greatest theological teachers. A prodigal son in a family helps the head of the house more than anything else to understand God. Many a man has been a sour-visaged predestinationist, handing men over to the devil in millions, until his own son broke his heart; then he began to read, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth." That made him a man,—a son of God; he could have answered any number of theological propositions, but when he



heard the tap on the door at midnight, and the lump came into his throat because he thought it was the wanderer who had come back again, he understood the theology of sacrifice, of love, the theology that carries with it the gospel of redemption.

History is a teacher. So we have many teachers as well as many schools,—nature, and children, and history. Go to some of these schools; accept some teacher. Do not feel yourself in the darkness more and more; accept counsel, and cry mightily unto God to point out to you the teacher that will understand you best, and for you work the miracle of a new life. No matter what a man knows if it will not bear the stress of practical life. Test your religion in the market-place. Will your creed go down to the place where merchants most do congregate, and there talk righteousness, and deal honestly, and look fearlessly in the face of insincerity and fraud and dishonourableness? It is a good piety; do not give it up because some charmer who has nothing to give in exchange for it tells you that he has been looking into certain ancient documents and finds such and such things are not there. Cling to the spirit that is in you; it burns rottenness like fire, it disinfests a pestilential area. Will your piety go home and help the sick one, and sit up all night, and teach you the art of touching the pillow without making a noise, and bringing help to the sufferer without increasing his agony? and will you in the morning say nothing about sleeplessness or hunger or disquiet, but smile upon the sufferer as if he had done you a great favour? It is not a bad piety: keep it; will to do that will, and who knows but that some day you may see the meaning of the apocalypse, some day God will come to you and say, In reward for your obedience, patience, self-sacrifice, here is the key, open my kingdoms, and revel in them by divinely invested right. No matter what a man's religion is or profession is, if it will not bear the stress which daily life puts upon human experience, it is a misconception, it is a lie.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we would be led by thy Spirit into all truth. He is the Paraclete, he can take of the things of Christ and show them unto us. This is his mission; we live under his dispensation; we continually await his incomming into our heart, that he may guide us into all the mystery of the divine kingdom. Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; but how much thou hast outdone all that we look upon when we turn in upon ourselves and see the mystery of manhood, the mystery of immortality. Thou hast in Christ Jesus thy Son shown us a light above the brightness of noontide; thou hast, in the words of Christ, brought us to listen to a music not elsewhere to be heard. We wonder at the gracious words which proceed out of his mouth: never man spake like this man. May we read his words not with wonder and admiration only, but with trust and thankfulness, and accept them in a spirit of obedience, that they may be turned into life and conduct and service. How great is the kingdom of God; yet how small are we, how unable to lay ourselves upon the infinite space covered by the purpose of God: may we therefore be humble, obedient, docile, expectant, always hoping for larger light and more room and better opportunity to work in. For this spirit we bless thee: this is none other itself than a miracle of grace. Thou hast subdued our rebellion and defiance and self-will, and hast brought us into an attitude of prostration; may our sincerity be without guile, may our faithfulness express the honesty of the soul, and may our hands go out to the living God in token of need and holy expectation. Satisfy us early with thy lovingkindness, and abundantly delight us with all thy goodness. We bow at the Cross, we name the only name by which men can be saved; we look at the Sufferer, we cannot understand the agony, but we know that he suffered for us, for our iniquities he was bruised. Whilst we look we pray, we wait, we say Amen.

### Chapter viii. 3-11.

“And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, they say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone,

and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more."

### THE CONVICTED WOMAN.

**I**N such an act did the power, the love, or the wisdom predominate? As well ask which colour predominates in the rainbow: they all blend into one arch of beauty.

Would we see Jesus in his most fascinating charms? Then we must look at him as he stands face to face with a notorious sinner. That face of his never lightens into such a glory as when it looks upon the darkness of penitent guilt.

This incident suggests four lessons:—

(1) It is possible to take an interest in social crime merely for the purposes of religious partisanship. Did these scribes and Pharisees care one tittle for the spirituality and sanctity of the law? When they found this poor unhappy creature, did their hearts bleed with pity, or their eyes dissolve in tenderness, or did they say with the sorrow of a great disappointment, Alas! our poor sister has been overmatched by the enemy of man, and we must save her from the pit on whose brink she lies? Not a word of it! Not a tear stained their eyes—not a pang of pity quivered in their steel breasts—their humanity was eaten up by their pompous and zealous bigotry. They looked at her through the medium of the stern law, on the one hand, and on the other regarded her as a practical puzzle for the revolutionary Teacher. They took an interest in criminals, indeed, but their interest was a stroke in business, a defence of policy, a blow at progress. I allude to this department of the story with special emphasis, in order to denounce a most pretentious and rotten philanthropy. There are men who find their meat and their drink in criminal statistics. They are most industrious in collecting facts—in visiting gaols, hospitals, workhouses, and penitentiaries—in cross-examining prisoners, paupers, and refugees—with what intent? What is the meaning of all this industry? I judge no man; but I do urge that it is perfectly possible to do all this, to earn the reputation of a great philanthropist, and yet all the while to be

using all the facts merely for the purpose of entangling and frustrating the representatives of a wider and diviner creed. These scribes and Pharisees acted as though they were glad of having found a rare example of crime, which they could use as a test of Messiah's morality. It was an opportunity not to be lost. It was a trap which must be skilfully set. It was an occasion which might lead on to victory. Now, it is worth while inquiring whether our interest in criminals and crime is really the expression of a piteous and yearning philanthropy, or whether we encourage it merely for the purpose of maintaining and illustrating some favourite theory? Are we naturalists, going forth to the mountains and dales for the purpose of collecting a museum of curiosities? Are we a kind of geologic moralists, digging into deep strata that we may find unusual specimens? Are we sportsmen who delight in capturing game, that we may nail to the hall door the memorials of our triumphs? Or do we, like the blessed Philanthropist, our Lord and Saviour, go forth "to seek and to save the lost," to lift up the downcast, and turn the wanderer into the right way? Let us guard against a lifeless and tearless philanthropy; let us dread the day when we can look on crime with eyes which glisten only because our favourite hypothesis is maintained; let us remember that it is one thing to be the policemen of the Church, bringing in poor prisoners for judgment, and another to be like him who wept and bled that prisoners might be free. Philanthropy may degenerate into mere formality. Men may be driven to any lengths in defending a sectarian idea. An anatomist may slash the dissecting knife through the heart of his own father for the purpose of establishing some favourite physiological dogma.

(2) The highest qualification for social judgment is personal innocence.—"He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her."—Jesus does not abrogate the law,—he does not set himself in opposition to Moses: the scribes and Pharisees desired to antagonise Moses and Jesus, but the answer which they received withered up their purposes, and gave their thoughts a turn which they regarded with supreme aversion. He shows, however, that the law is to be administered by clean hands; that the thunders of the law are to be articulated by pure lips; that

the stone of judgment is to be flung with the pity of holiness, and not with the wantonness of revenge.

I value this counsel for two reasons:—

First. It gives full scope to the faculty of conscience. Jesus did not accuse these men; they accused themselves. He might have arraigned them one by one, and passed judgment on each, but he abbreviates the process by making each man judge himself. He did not say, "There is not a sinless man among you," but he asked the sinless man to step forward and cast the first stone at the erring sister. Conscience takes the candle into the inmost recesses of our being. Conscience holds up a mirror to the leprous soul. Conscience shows us the cracks in our porcelain respectability, and the specks upon our boasted morality. This dread agent of God in the human soul showed that the main difference between the accused and the accusers was that her sin was found out, and theirs was not; the sun had got hold of her iniquity, while theirs lay rotting in the darkness. They wished to pass for respectable men—decent members of society—pillars in the temple of rectitude; but when conscience, commissioned by divine authority, began to rifle their history, they fled from the sanctuary without daring to fling the stone of retribution.

Second. It reveals God's view of human society. The Lord seeth not as man seeth. Man saw these scribes and Pharisees in eager haste to honour the law, to brand crime, to maintain righteousness; but God saw the under-lurking villainy, and marked every spring of poison which bubbled in the depraved heart, and bade them look at themselves before looking at and despising others. God sees the hidden chamber of imagery. His eye alights on the interior view, and it is by that view that all his judgments are regulated. Stripping society of its pompous garniture—laying off its gilded trinketry—he pours the sunlight into the caverns of the heart, and shows how the reptiles of iniquity are fattening there. God does not see us as we see each other as we sit in church; his eye searches the very core and spring of our being. Personal innocence, then, is the highest qualification for social judgment. He is a daring or a wanton man who lightly assumes the functions of social magistracy. Where there is most holiness there is most pity. It was

God's own holiness that wept itself into mercy,—such mercy!—mercy that died and rose again that sinners might “sin no more.” When we are under the full dominion of that mercy we shall need but the faintest breeze of appeal to shake the tears of pity from our melting eyes.

(3) Readiness to accuse another is no guarantee of personal rectitude. To have seen these men haling the poor woman and stating her crime so fully and emphatically, one might have concluded that they were themselves just men, who lived daily in the fear and love of the Most High; and yet such a conclusion would have been in utter antagonism to the melancholy reality of the case. We have all seen men who have gnashed their teeth with diabolic savageness through the quivering frame of a poor offender, and hung on to the swelling flesh with a pertinacity that would have done credit to the fiercest beast in the jungle; and these men all the while imagining that by dooming others to perdition they were proving their own meetness for the highest heaven. Alas! though such men may turn their red eyes to heaven as if in prayer, they have not the spirit of Jesus, who forgiveth and receiveth the world's worst sinners. The scribes and Pharisees were more ready to condemn than was Jesus Christ. The Saviour was not so intent upon condemning men as they were. Eagerness to hurry men off to perdition is but a poor pledge of piety. Many men would avoid this poor unhappy woman, who are themselves no paragons of excellence. I know not of a more distressing sight than to see one poor sinner dealing harshly and furiously with another. Each sinner seems to think his own sin less heinous than that of his neighbour. There, is a man who drinks himself into stupidity every night at his own fireside, and who renders himself disgusting to every member of his household,—yet that man turns scornfully away from this poor woman! There, is another, who is “such a son of Belial that a man cannot speak to him;” from whom his own children flee in terror; who cultivates the lowest and meanest of all tyrannies, tyranny in his own family,—yet that man turns scornfully away from this poor woman! There, is a stingy, shrivelled soul, that can hardly afford himself bread, who begrudges his family every article of apparel, who accounts himself clever if

he can cheat his tradesmen out of a shilling, who would grind and crush the bones of his workmen, and could see every one of them buried in a pauper's grave,—yet that man turns scornfully away from this poor woman! There, is a proud, haughty, glass-eyed, hard-hearted man, who expects the poor to clear themselves off before his imperial march, who never wept over weakness, never shed a smile on the orphan's lonely way, who talks to the poor of the parish laws, and points the breadless and homeless to the workhouse,—yet that man turns scornfully away from this poor woman! There, is a man who can spend hours in slander, who smacks his empoisoned lips like a debauchee, when he has words of dishonour to speak about another, who can whisper defamation, who can hiss syllables of cruelty,—yet that man can present himself among the sons of God, and turn scornfully away from this poor woman! Oh, it makes one's heart sore and sad to mark how one child of guilt can eagerly brand another, and send him, amid frantic clapping of unclean hands, to the fellowship of devils.

(4) True interest in social crime is best shown by saving the criminal from despair.—“Go, and sin no more.” The good man never ignores the presence of sin. Jesus Christ, with all his gentleness and mercy, did not tell the woman that she was innocent, nor did he treat her as an innocent woman. Christ was ever forward to maintain the broad distinction between right and wrong. I believe that if we follow his example we shall frown upon sin in all its aspects and tendencies, and never cast the faintest smile upon its downward course. We must never treat the thief as though he were honest, or the liar as though he were truthful, or the proud as though he were humble, or the miser as though he were generous. We owe such distinctions to the dignity of virtue, and they must be maintained for ever. At the same time our lesson is this: Never cast the penitent sinner into despair. Jesus said, “Go, and sin no more.” Take one more chance in life; turn over a page; begin again; treat this as a second birthday; go, and make the future better than the past. Thank God for such words of hope! The beams of mercy shoot far across the gloom of guilt; the voice of hope falls on the ear of the remotest

wanderer! Christ here teaches us the true method of rescuing and restoring the criminal,—never cast him into despair.

“Men might be better if we better deemed  
Of them. The worst way to improve the world  
Is to condemn it. Men may overget  
Delusion—not despair.”

If you can say one gentle word, or give one hopeful glance, to the prisoner who is brought before you, I call upon you in the name of God to do it. The blessing of him who is ready to perish will come upon you, and in a recovered life you may find your ultimate reward. Would not this poor woman for ever feel a kindling love to him who spake this word of hope to her? Would she hesitate for a moment on whom to pour the benedictions of her glowing and expanding heart? The righteous Pharisees, the holy scribes, would have smitten her with death; but the divine Saviour spread a new page of life before her, and told her to begin again. A word of hope may strike a happy influence through an entire lifetime. Those of us who imagine that we have never sinned do not know the value of such a word; but those of us who have taken our sins into dark places, and wept over them, and then taken them to the Saviour's Cross, and heard his voice of mercy, know how the soul warms, and gladdens, and sings in reply to the word of liberty and love. “Deal gently with the erring one.” To-morrow thou mayest thyself eat of the forbidden tree, and pine for some look of hope. The enemy may get a sudden advantage over thee, and if thou hast only scribes and Pharisees for friends, thine will be an unhappy lot. O pause, ere consigning a fellow-creature to the hell of despair! Arrest the harsh word which burns on thy tongue; consider thyself lest thou also be tempted. “With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.” The voice of Jesus to every man is, “Go, and sin no more.” Christ came into the world that he might make an everlasting end of sin. He is the sinner's only Saviour. “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” He not only bids us “sin no more,” but he helps us to conquer every temptation. Not only does he urge us to rise to heaven, but he puts forth his hand, and gives us the very power which he bids us employ.



### Chapter viii. 39.

“If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham.”

#### **HISTORICALLY TRUE, MORALLY FALSE.**

**T**HIS is an apparently novel test of kinship and pedigree. If a man is really in the line of Abraham, how can he be in any other line? or how can he be genealogically displaced? There are circumstances under which kinship is not a question of physical relation, but of mental and moral sympathy. Jesus Christ was always leading us out into wider and larger definitions. Presently, he will make us all, if we be obedient, into one family. He will begin where he can, or where we will allow him to begin: but judge not the Lord’s end by the Lord’s way of beginning; judge not the harvest by the handful of seed which is sown. “Abraham” is not the name of a mere individual. When it is pronounced by Jesus Christ it is the type of a special kind of life—the life Abrahamic, the faith-life; the life that takes its staff and goes out not knowing whither it goeth because a voice divine hath said, “I will give thee a land.” When does Jesus Christ adopt a narrow signification? When does he lose an opportunity of amplifying words into their largest meaning? Thus may we know who are Christians, who have learned of Jesus, who have been steadfast and reverent scholars in his school; men who enlarge all things beautiful and true and good, and see in symbols whole heavens of beauty and rest. We speak of children in various senses ourselves; we say they are children of evil, or we say they are children of light. Sometimes we describe a man as a “child of genius,” and there is a common phrase, namely, “children of grace.” We must get this word “children” out of its narrow roots and small limitations, as if it were a mere term of animal life, and must set it in the true light, and in its proper spiritual relation.

The great law which Christ here lays down is, that that which is historically true may be morally false ; men may be genealogically akin, and spiritually alien ; natural relation may be forfeited by moral apostasy. On what great principles he bases his teaching ! He introduces into human thoughts a law which overturns all our little sophisms and illusions, and gives us a new conception of God and life and nature. Again and again he says, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures" : you quote them, but do not cite their meaning ; you drag in the letter according to some old custom of interpretation, but you do not bring in the spirit with all its vitality and luminousness. Few men read the Bible ; the spirit of the Bible is not in them, and, therefore, they cannot read the Bible itself ; they pronounce the words, but they do not utter the thought. Nor is this peculiar to the Bible ; it is a law which applies to all human life. You cannot deliver the message of a man unless you are in sympathy with the man himself. You may deliver the very words he told you to deliver, and yet all the message may go out of them, and words which were intended as gracious salutations, and assurances of love and co-operation, may be no better than cold ashes. These men to whom Christ is now speaking said, We are Abraham's children ; and Christ said, No, there you are mistaken. They offered to produce the record, but he said the record was not a matter of paper-and-ink ; it is a matter of likeness, spiritual identity, soul kindred. If ye have not Abraham's faith, then you abuse Abraham's name by using it ; in justice to the dead let sacred names alone, unless in assuming them you fill them with the spirit by which they were first ennobled and consecrated. How Jesus Christ, then, dispossesses men of pedigree and claim and status and record, unless the men themselves are of the right bulk and colour and quality and force ! The Abrahamic dignity is not superimposed, or handed down like an heirloom ; every man must support his claim by his spirit and his action. "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham," but because ye do not the works of Abraham, you have no right to use the holy man's name. You do a certain kind of work and there is no mistake about its quality—there is devil in it at every point ; it throbs with devilism,—“Ye are of your father the devil.” Let us, then, look at our records, and see how

we really stand. Ours may be but a paper respectability; we may have nothing but a written pedigree to show. Why, a horse may have a pedigree! What are we? What do we? What would we do if we could?—These are the questions which test quality and descent.

Here are men who say, We are the children of the old Covenanters? Are you? If you are the children of the old Covenanters you are men of faith and conviction. Is there a conviction amongst you? Can the whole sum-total of you muster one conviction? If ye are the children of the old Covenanters, then you love God passionately; you hold truth with a grip which cannot be loosened; you will die for the truth, if need be. Are you children of the old Covenanters? Who would have thought it?—sleeping in church, never going out in foul weather, forming opinions, but doing nothing to support or sustain them that is of the nature of sacrifice. You, who never damped a foot in God's service, a child of the old Covenanters! Do not dishonour the dead. If you want to tell lies, tell them in your own name, limit them by your own personality, but do not bury the Covenanters in the grave of falsehood. If ye were the children of the Covenanters, ye would do the work of the Covenanters,—you would know the truth, and love the truth, and support the truth, and preach the truth, and no man would be able to stop your mouth in the hour of testimony. How stands the case now?

Here are more modern men who say, We are of a good old Methodist stock. Are you? I doubt it. We have portraits of old Methodists. Very likely. And what do they do for you? It is a pity you have them; they ought to be in the hands of better men. But if you are of a good old Methodist stock, then you will be men of enthusiasm, passion; you will be "sensational" Christians; at uncalculated times you will be breaking out into song, praising God, disturbing the decorum of too-dignified ceremony in church; you will be rapturous Christians, your voice will be heard in the psalm, you will love the exercise of prayer. The old Methodists hazarded their lives for the Lord Jesus Christ,—when did you ever hazard a meal? Do not dishonour

the dead; do not make conveniences of their names; do not try to acquire respectability by the use of their arms. If ye were the children of the Methodists, ye would do the work of the Methodists, and not allow some other section to leap up as if out of the dust to take your crown and leave you in the rear.

Others say, We are the children of gentlefolks. We can easily test that. You need not produce a single record. We have only to spend a day with you, and to see you under trying circumstances, to know your quality. What are gentlefolks? Just what the name implies—gentle, patient, large-minded, large-hearted; not impetuous, fierce, cruel, vengeful, but filled with the spirit of gentleness, taking the kindest view of every action and every deed, and happiest when doing most to increase the happiness of others. If ye were the children of gentlefolks ye would be gentle yourselves. If you are gentle, then your pedigree is proved, and it ceases to be a mere genealogy, and becomes a life of sacred fellowship and brotherhood. How many a man would to-day be the owner of a title and an estate if, as he says, he could only find one piece of paper. What a pity that any man should be kept back from a title and an estate because he cannot find one piece of paper! Can nobody find a piece of paper for him? It is a marriage certificate, an entry in a parish register; he has nineteen proofs, but because he has not the twentieth he is going to the workhouse, and he is going to pass out of the world namelessly. It is just so with many persons who claim to be the descendants of gentlefolks. They have everything—but the gentleness. Up to that point all their proofs are valid; the shrewdest, keenest legal eyes can see no flaw whatever in all the yellow writing; but when it comes to the one question of gentleness, charity, great heart-sweep, proof there is none, except proof to the contrary. All who are of pure descent from a pure origin are known by instincts, sympathies, and fellowships, which no transient circumstances can conceal or destroy.

Jesus Christ showed the Jews, and therefore showed all men, what the test is by which a pure descent is known. They said they were not children of fornication, they had one father, even

God—as if to say, There we are strong ; you may throw some doubt upon our Abrahamic descent, but God made us. Jesus said, There you are wrong once more ; you are always wrong, you wicked generation ! I have never heard from your lips one right word. If you quote the Scripture, you spoil it ; if you enter upon an argument, you fill it with sophisms ; if you make a statement, you simply invent a lie. Now, “if God were your Father, ye would love me”—that is the test—because ye would know me ; my disguise would not conceal me ; you would say, Though he is in the flesh, he is not of the flesh ; though he is on the earth, yet he is in heaven ; there is something about him that there is about no other man. “Ye would love me,” come to me, ask to be allowed to live with me ; like would come to like ; you would be moved by a strange feeling of kinship ; you would say, Though we never saw this man before, he belongs to us, and we belong to him ; he comes locally from a poor place, genealogically from a poor family, circumstantially out of poor conditions, but we cannot do without him ; in his face is deity, in his voice is music, in his touch is resurrection : we will take up our abode with him. If God were your Father, you would rise above all local prejudice, and seize the essence of the truth : you would know the divine through every disguise.

Do not boast that you are of God unless you love all that is godly. God is not a name. Regarded as a name it becomes a symbol, a symbol of all truth, purity, righteousness, goodness, gentleness, charity, redeemingness. If God were your Father, you would be godly. Jesus Christ has the best of the argument, even if the dialogue be judged merely as a human composition. What Jesus Christ says is fundamental, it involves the whole question, he leaves nothing untouched and unrelated ; the other talkers are mere chatterers, gossips, men who relate the little words of the little time without a philosophy that involves and includes the universe. When Jesus Christ speaks he lays down a law that crystallises everything that belongs to it ; he speaks like a philosopher—“Never man spake like this man.” How destructively he spoke upon this occasion ! When the Jews stood upon the Abrahamic pedestal, he swept them off, declaring that they should not stand there, posing as liars and hypocrites ;

when they claimed to be children of God he said that God knew nothing about them—ignored them : “ I never knew you : depart from me, ye workers of iniquity.” “ Ye are of your father, the devil” : you have a pedigree, you have a father ; if you want to search into origins I can take you down a straight line, and your father will be found to be a murderer from the beginning, one who abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him ; when he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own : for he is a liar, and the father of it.

Jesus Christ was not likely to make himself a popular preacher. He divided his congregation, he searched them with the candle of the Lord, he riddled them through the sieve of judgment and truth. What a great principle is this ! How it applies in all educational directions—namely, that if we are of a great teacher certain consequences will flow from that filial regard, and there will be no doubt whatever of the purity of our descent ; if we are of God, we shall know things godly, wherever we find them. Suppose we find some beautiful ethical principle in the writings of Confucius. What an awful thing to do ! Confucius actually wrote some proverbs as beautiful as those that are in the Bible ! What would Jesus Christ say to us when we came upon such proverbs ? He would say, If ye are the children of God, ye would know God’s Word wherever you find it. When the Chinese philosopher wrote that beautiful sentence he wrote as he was moved by the Holy Ghost. Ye fools and blind ! can God’s wisdom be bound up in any two covers made by human hands ? Why, if all that God had to say, Christ might have continued, were to be published, the whole world could not contain the books that would be issued. If, then, we are of God, and have the really godly spirit in us, wherever we find truth or beauty, or the beginning of the best life, we shall say, Lo, God is here, and I knew it not : this heathen book is, in respect of all these deep, true, pure words, none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven. Here is a flower growing in the fissures of a rock. Is it an orphan flower ? is it a self-made flower ? If it could come down from its rocky height and walk into the well-cultured garden, might it not say, We have all one father, and one gardener hath taken care of us

every one : I am glad to have come down from my stony isolation, and I am thankful to be able to join the floral brotherhood ? What if the garden brotherhood should say, We do not know thee ; we are of our father the gardener ? Who art thou ? what is thy pedigree ? They would be foolish flowers, and not deserve to live another year. It is by the operation of this same law that we know brotherhood. Being of the same quality, we accost one another in the same language. That is the secret of the Church. It is not a company of strangers ; although the men may never have seen one another before, yet they know one another by the genius of the heart, by the masonry of sympathy and love. Here, then, we have a permanent Church, because it is not built upon changeable conditions, but it is founded upon instincts, sympathies, impulses, aspirations—universal, profound, ineradicable. This is the brotherhood of man. We are not akin because we were born of the same parents, under the same roof ; we may be strangers at daggers drawn. We shall know to what family we belong as life evolves. It is at the end that men are born, not the beginning. At the first, all is experiment, novelty, uncertainty, but as life evolves, and men come and go, and the whole illusion of life expands, we begin to see who is our father, and mother, and sister, and brother ; then will we understand the words of Jesus Christ himself—he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my kinsman, kinswoman—here, there, now, and through eternal duration. If the Church were built upon arbitrary conditions, the Church would be a merely political arrangement, which could be changed by incoming or outgoing governments : the Church is a brotherhood, built on instinct, on family impulse and feeling, and therefore the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Is there not a completing truth ? Must the preacher end here ? Nay, for then he would leave half his tale untold ; he would not have begun to preach the larger gospel. What he has said may be true enough in all substance ; whatever re-adjustment of detail in argument or illustration might be made, the preacher might be substantially sound and correct up to this point : but is there not another word that needs to

be spoken? Can any heart suggest it? The intellect may not think of it, fancy may never direct her wing into that quarter, but may not the heart say that there is another truth to be told, and insist upon its being told? Let us yield to the gracious insistence. The other truth is, that though we may have been children of evil, we may become children of Abraham; though we may be by nature the children of wrath, even as others, yet we may become the children of God. If there is a way called apostasy by which man may lose his Abrahamic dignity and relation, there is also another way, upward, large, brighter than the sun at noonday, walking up which a man shakes off all that is impure, undivine, unholy, in his descent, and becomes an adopted child of God. Because we have been born in the family of the devil that is no reason why we should not belong to the family of the saints. "Ye must be born again." "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." We were as sheep going astray, but now we have returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls; we had not Abraham to our father, but by the mercies of God we are able to call Abraham our father, as he was father of the faithful. We were not born children of God, but children of wrath and of judgment; but being born again God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, whereby we cry, "Abba, Father!" He comes upon us like a new sunlight, like a dawn we have never seen before—the very Light of Eternity.



## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, thou knowest us by name, and canst come to us according to our special wants. Thou hast treated us as if we alone were thy children, as if thou hadst not a whole universe beyond us to care for and bless; as the sun doth bathe the earth in light, as if it were the only world over which thou didst set it, so thou hast filled us with hope and glory, as if we were thine only begotten sons. We come to thee with overflowing hearts; our mouth is opened in renewed praise; we have made haste to appear in this thy house; thou hast given us so much; thou hast held back nothing from us; thou hast made us rich with thine own self. We have left the pursuits of the world for an hour, and we thank thee that we have hope of rest in thee whilst we abide here. Wilt thou not hasten to help us? Wilt thou not give us a reviving? Why should we thus question thee when thou hast already answered us—Lo, God is here, and this is a holy place. Let us now see the littleness of earth, and let us feel the infinite preciousness of heaven. Help us to be truthful, noble, courageous, and every way like Jesus Christ; may we do our worldly business in an unworldly spirit; may we perform all our pilgrimage in haste. This morning give us the bread which, being eaten in secret, shall be pleasant; and the waters which, being stolen from the time of the world, shall be sweet. In this hour we shall live long—these are the moments which deepen our vitality. Though we are in the midst of the week, yet do we anticipate the Sabbath; we hear its voices of music, we feel its hallowing and quieting spell. Lord, make our whole life as a Sabbath. Give us rest even in the midst of labour, and divine elevation even amidst the distractions of an uncertain and unsatisfactory world. God be merciful unto us sinners. We cannot cease this prayer whilst we are conscious of the presence of our sins in our life; yet do we utter it in assured confidence that it is thy delight to forgive. We think of the Cross, and remember that Jesus Christ came to take away sins; we think of the Resurrection, and enter into the spirit and rest of our Redeemer's triumph. We shall be delivered from all evil; thou wilt clothe us as with white linen, and there shall be no stain of sin upon us for ever. Amen.

### Chapter viii. 42.

“Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father ye would love me.”

### SONSHIP.

THEN are not all men the children of God? It would seem, indeed, as if they surely were—as if, indeed, the necessity of the case excluded every other possibility. Did not God make

man in his own image and likeness? He did not make him as the beasts that perish; but he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and talked to him and confided to him high responsibilities. It was not a mimic creation. God was not playing at man-making when he fashioned Adam out of the dust of the earth. What is the reality of the case? We could have had no being but for God, and our being is of that particular kind which points to child-like relation and child-like dependence and service. How is it, then, that in the Scriptures we are constantly coming upon a distinction which separates between man and man, designating one man a child of light, another a child of darkness—one a child of God and another a child of the devil? We ought to be anxious to know the exact teaching of Scripture upon this point. Our perplexity arises from the fact that it looks, on the face of it, as if we must all be children of the Highest. Why, then, this particular distinction? Why this moral separation? These should be questions that give the heart no rest until they are determined by the authority of Holy Scripture itself. We read of Solomon these words, "I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his Father." Of Ephraim we read, "I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first-born." So here is the doctrine of separation. Here is something that looks like a law of discrimination and election. I want, so far as may be possible, to grasp the underlying and all-explaining principle of this pathetic and, in some respects, most mournful distinction.

There is a sense in which a man may not be the father of his own child! Our conceptions of fatherhood may be too narrow, so narrow indeed as to become really false in all higher aspects and relations. Consider for one moment this extraordinary proposition—there is a sense in which a man is not the father of his own child! We must appeal to facts in evidence, and in gathering those facts and sifting that evidence we shall be compelled to own to a greater mystery on the ground of the man's fatherhood than on the ground of his having no real relation to the child. We are not animals only. In the true and complete idea of fatherhood and sonship there must be the element of consent. You do not want to live in such animal affection as may subsist naturally between and amongst the beasts of the earth and their

offspring. That is not love in its divine significance and application. Here, for example, is a good man with a bad son. I say, they are not relations at all, in the higher sense. They are related physically, by the law of consanguinity; there is a blood bond between them which neither of them could help, but they are not father and son in the enduring and complete sense of those terms. Take such a son and ask him where the bond of union is between himself and his father. Your father is a praying man; he walks with God, his conversation, or conduct, is in heaven, he is filled with a godly and inspiring expectation which lifts him above the meanness and the bondage of time and earth; he walks in company with the angels, every morning is to him a revelation and every eventide a benediction. What is your life? Prayerless, thoughtless, godless, selfish, mean, sensual, self-indulgent, marked out upon the surface of time and without any settled and thoughtful relation to things unseen and eternal! To tell me you are the son of such a man is in the deeper sense of the term a falsehood. Kinship is in the soul. Your kindred are not of your flesh, but of your mind, your heart, and sympathy. "Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." The case will bear to be inverted. Take a bad man with a good son. What a mystery is that! Yet we have known it. We look upon some young persons and say, "How did they come to be what they are, considering the circumstances under which they were born and trained? What refinement, what intelligence, what high sympathies, what noble purposes and impulses!" How can you account for these? By atmospheric laws? Why, this is a miracle! I know of no miracle of a superior kind. Do you tell me that that bad, self-indulgent man is the father of that godly, devoted, self-sacrificing youth? But for merely animal considerations the youth might shake him off and disown him, with the contempt not of vulgarity but of refinement, as light shakes off darkness, and as that which is holy looks with repellent indignation upon everything that even appears to be of the nature of evil. What is it, then, that constitutes fatherhood? Fatherliness. You are not a father if you are not fatherly. But is it possible for a man who is a father to be *unfatherly*? Most certainly;

and therein is the plague of much home life. The man at the head of the home is no father. He is a governor, a leader, a paymaster, a tyrant, an overlooker; but he is not a father, full of love and wisdom and tenderness, strong in his sense of rectitude, yet beautiful in the dew of pity and compassion which make him charming and approachable. Why did you go to your father, dear child? Simply because of a physical relation between you? Then all children would go to their father the same as you did, but they do not; then there must be some difference. What is that difference? You went to your father because he was fatherly—a man of a great heart, into whose eyes the tears soon came, and into whose voice the tender tone leaped instantly when he saw you in weakness or fear. You went to him and prayed to him in an earthly, but very significant and beautiful, sense every day. Sometimes you made him do what you wanted him to do! That is what God permits in his high court! In common words he would say, "Tease, importune, give no rest, knock again and again; come up seven times, and do not go away until both hands are full, and your heart is overflowing!" "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force," that is, by the force of love and earnestness. You have not a God unless you yourselves are godly. Do not tell me of your intellectual and metaphysical god; he is vanity. Be mine a wooden Baal rather than a shapeless, intangible, mocking cloud. I will hug to my mocked heart some cold, deified stone rather than follow you in your metaphysical dreaming and God-planning and heaven-mapping. He has a God who is himself godly; he is a father who is fatherly.

We must remember, too, that though God may be our Father we may not be his children. For example, take this passage, "That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven." Take another passage, "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." Now, it is in this inner sense that I want to be a child of God. Here comes the element, as we have already called it, of consent. I am not a mere creature which I cannot help being; I am a willing child of God. I have said, "Abba!" Father, my heart has said it. I love to say it. "Creator!" So

says the beast of the field. "Father!" So says the awakened, living, consenting heart. Do not, therefore, give way to the sentiment which tells you that all are God's children, irrespective of age, condition, moral aspiration, or moral behaviour. That is a sentiment which will not stand against the shock of the trying wind or the flood of testing waters. Such reasoning does not consult our humanity; leaves our reason out of the question; takes no account of our moral consent. Such a theology drags men at its chariot wheels willingly or unwillingly. It is not, therefore, a gospel of the heart; it is a mere exercise of iron strength, and in such so-called sonship there can be neither loyalty nor worship. The appeal, then, to us is this, Will you become the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus? That is Paul's expression, and it cannot be well amended. Paul makes the distinction very broad and very clear; his words are these, "They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God." What is his idea? That a man must, as to his main purpose, be living either downwards or upwards. In other words, he is either a child of the flesh or a child of God. What is your dominating thought in life? There are some men that are verily flesh. With the full consent of everything that is within them they consent to the evil, they wallow in the mire, they find their enjoyment in the gratification of the flesh. It is not succumbing to a temptation. It is not being "overtaken in a fault." It is not an occasional slip or even sin, but a daily delight, a continual consent, a waking in the morning to repeat it, a sleeping at night to renew it in unholy dream, a turning of the earth into an incipient and preparatory hell; a joy, devil-born and devil-rewarded. Paul says of such people, "You are children of the flesh, and not the children of God." Let not my charity be evil spoken of, or perverted, if I say that I have great sympathy with men who may be suddenly ensnared by an evil, who may be overtaken in a fault, and who, now and again, maybe, depart a long way from the right course. I am not commending or approving them, nor am I holding them up as examples, and the solemn fear in uttering even one word of charity is, that some may eat the bread who are not entitled to it. Yet I cannot allow certain souls to be cast out of the sanctuary when I know that, how manifold soever their departures and

slips and sins, they can honestly say, "I hate them every one; I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto him, 'Father, I have sinned; God be merciful to me a sinner.'" At the risk of some dog eating the child's bread, I will not allow such persons to be mixed up indiscriminately with the class I have described who live on the brink of hell and enjoy the sulphurous fumes of the pit of perdition.

Then there comes this difficulty—which will presently be shot through and through with sunlight and become a golden cloud—namely, If you are children of God how does it come that you have so much sorrow and affliction? This is the seal of sonship! "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" "If ye be without chastisement . . . then are ye bastards and not sons." "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers trials, knowing that the trial of your faith worketh patience," and to patience God grants the most vivid and beautiful revelations of his grace. From patience God keeps nothing of God. "He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son." Who, then, would not love to engage in a fight when the guerdon is so rich in the case of overcoming? We must be tried in battle. God's is not a paper army, but an army of living souls. We must be tried by fire. God's gold is not to be mixed with dross. We must be chastened in the furnace of affliction. Ours must not be a doubtful love; it must be a love that goes up at the last, having fought well, having come out of the fire unscathed, having passed through affliction adorned with a more beautiful resignation, and inspired by a more confident hope. Life is not a holiday. Life is a discipline. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." "Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." Who will set any affliction against that? Who will venture to utter his little whimper of complaint against this great promise, spoken with all the thunder of God's power, and yet whispered with all the tenderness of God's love?

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, all things are in thine hands. Even when we suppose ourselves free agents, behold we are but working out thy will. Thou dost cause the wrath of man to praise thee, and the remainder thereof thou dost restrain. Thou hast fixed the purpose and the scope of all things ; it is ours to study, to obey, to suffer, to carry out all thy will, simply, lovingly, and hopefully. We have nothing that is our own ; we are stewards and trustees of the living God ; if we have wisdom, the lamp was lighted at the sun of thy throne ; if we have power, it is borrowed from thine almightiness ; every one of us shall give account of himself to God ; we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. If we could believe that thou art governing us all, directing our steps, upholding our way, behold we should be calm, in the night-time we should have song, and every morning would be a new opportunity for generous action and heroic service. Lord, may our faith never fail ; may we know that the furnace is thine as well as the fountain, that when we are condemned to suffer we are still under thy sceptre, and none can harm us ; all things are measured out and determined by the sovereign, loving Lord. All this we have learned in the school of Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Saviour, Immanuel, God with us. He showed us the Father ; he represented things eternal ; he embodied the everlasting mysteries, and out of his words and actions, out of his example and sacrifice, we draw lessons which enlarge our understanding, and ennoble our life, and lift us to new hopes, and point us in the direction of greatest destiny. Lift us up with Jesus on the holy Cross ; then we shall see what he saw, and in our measure feel what he felt, and despising the shame, we shall look onward to the final glory. May we have the seeing eye, the hearing ear, the understanding heart, lest we walk through life like fools, and have nothing to show at the end, being without noble recollection, and without solid thought, mere wrecks of manhood ; but as we go through the devious paths of time may we gather what we can of knowledge and wisdom, history and thought, and be devout students of the mysterious providence of God. May we begin our journey at the Cross ; may we conclude our travels at the Cross ; may we never wander from the Cross ; may we test everything by the Cross ; and when we examine ourselves, whether we be in the faith, may we examine ourselves at the Cross. God forbid that we should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,—the mystery of law, the mystery of righteousness, the mystery of love, the mystery of mercy. There may we find all we need—pardon, purity, peace, heaven. Amen.

## Chapter viii. 42.

"I proceeded forth and came from God."

## JESUS CHRIST'S CLAIM FOR HIMSELF.

**S**HALL I startle you if I say, notwithstanding the multitude of books written upon the life of Christ, there is yet not only room but necessity for a volume to be written on that unexhausted theme? We have had outward lives of Christ enough, perhaps more than enough—lives that tell us about places and dates and occurrences; books of beautiful colouring, high description of locality and scenery, and the like. All the circumstantial occurrences of the life of the Son of God have been given us with tedious and painful minuteness and repetition by book-makers of various degrees. What then is this other book we want? A complement, a completion, and an explanation of all other books, viz., "The Inner life of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Not a life of circumstances, but a life of thoughts, purposes, feelings, aspirations, desires; the inward, spiritual, metaphysical, eternal life of Christ. Can it ever be written? It will be often attempted—it will never be done, for no limited book can exhaust an illimitable subject.

Until we study this inner life of Christ deeply, all the outward life of Christ will be a plague to our intellect and a mortification to our heart; we shall always be coming upon things we cannot understand and cannot explain; not only so, we shall be coming upon things that seem to confront the understanding and to defy the intelligence of men. But if we get into sympathy with the inward spiritual life of Christ, then we shall do what Christ did—move out upon these outward and visible things, and see them in their right relations and colours and proportions. The inward always explains the outward; why should it not be so in this greatest case of all? Come to the outward only, and you will have controversy, difficulty, discrepancy, intellectual annoyance, moral surprise, and perhaps spiritual disappointment. But begin at the other end—get to know the man's soul, get into sympathy with his purpose, see somewhat of the scope and the outlook of his mental nature, and then you will take up the miracles as a very little thing.



Let me now give you, roughly, some hints of the kind of thing that is wanted. Suppose we saw one of the miracles of Christ. So far control your mind as actually to realise that you are present at what was called, in the days of Christ, the raising of the dead. Let us make this as realistic as we can : the dead man is here, the living Christ is here, the mourning friends are here—and presently the dead man rises and begins to speak to us, and we have seen what is called the miracle of resurrection. But now, is it trick or miracle you have seen? Is it an illusion or a fact? How am I to determine this question? I cannot determine it in itself. Why? Because my eyes have been so often deceived. I have seen what I could have declared to have been the most positive and absolute facts, and yet when the explanation has been given I have been obliged to confess that I was deceived and befooled by my own vision. If it has been so in a hundred cases, why not so in this? At all events, there is that suggestion which may be pressed upon me until it becomes a temptation, and the temptation may be urged upon me so vehemently and persistently as almost to shake and destroy my faith. I can declare that I saw a man get up—but the conjurer comes to me and says, “I will show you something equally deceiving.” I go, and I see his avowed trick : it does baffle me and surprise me exceedingly, and if he then shall follow up that conquest, and shall say, “It was just the same with what you thought the raising of the dead,” he will leave me intellectually in a state of self-torment. I shall still think I saw the event, but he will continue to perplex my vision by a thousand tricks, and show me how impossible it is for any man to trust his eyesight.

Then what am I to do? Leave the outward altogether. Watch the man who performed the miracle—listen to him : if his thoughts are deep and pure, if his mental triumphs are equal to his physical miracles, then admire and trust and love him. Take this same conjurer just referred to. When he is on the stage, and, so to speak, in character, he seems to be working miracles : they are miracles to me. Therefore, indeed, I go to see them, and have no other reason than to be baffled and surprised and confounded, and to have my keenest watchfulness returned to me without the prize which it coveted. His tricks outrun my

vision—my eye cannot follow his supple hand. How then? When he comes off the stage and begins to talk on general subjects I begin to feel my equality with him rising and asserting itself. On the stage I could not touch him—watching his hand I could not follow its manipulations at all. But when he comes away from his official character and his professional region, and begins to speak upon subjects with which I am familiar, I sound the depths of his mind, and get the exact measure of his character, and then he becomes clever, artful, surprising, delightful—but only a wizard, only a conjurer: wonderful with his wand in his fingers, nothing without it.

So when I go to Christ as a mere stranger I see him raising the dead, opening the eyes of the blind, and I say, "We have seen these things attempted before, and very wonderful successes have followed the wand of the wizard and the word of the enchanter. This man may be but cleverest of the host, prince of princes, Beelzebub of the Beelzebubs. I will, therefore, not go further into this case; I have no time to examine this man's credentials, I must be about another and a higher order of business;" but when he begins to talk I am arrested as by unexpected music. I say to him, "Speak on." His words are equal to his works. He is the same off the platform as on it. Not only do I say, "I never saw it on this fashion before;" but I also say, "I never heard it on this fashion before." I listen to his thoughts, to his purposes, to his desires, and I find that he is as inimitable in his thinking as he is in his working and acting. What then? I am bound to account for this consistency. All other men have been manifest exemplifications of self-inequality. We know clever men who are fools, strong men who are weak, eloquent men who stammer, men who are great in this direction, small in some other, self-contradictions, self-anomalies; and this want of self-consistency and self-coherence is at once a proof of their being merely men. But if I find a man in whom this fact of inequality does not exist, who is as great in thinking as in working, who says that if I could follow him still higher I should find him greater in thinking than it is possible for any mere man to be in acting; then I have to account for that consistency which I have met nowhere else, and to listen

to this Man's explanation of it: "I proceeded forth and came from God;" "I am from above;" that explanation alone will cover all the ground which he boldly and permanently occupies.

It will be infinitely interesting to study the inner life of Christ; to make ourselves, so far as possible, as familiar with his thoughts as we are with his works. And if we do this, we shall come to set the same value upon his miracles that he himself did. What value did he set upon his miracles for their own sake? None. When did he ever say, "Behold this mighty triumph of my power, ye sons of men"? Never. When did he sound a trumpet and convoke a mighty host to see the loosing of a dumb tongue, and the opening of a blind eye? Never. When did he ever make anything of his miracles other than something merely elementary and introductory, and of the nature of example and symbol? Never. How was this? Because he was so much greater within than he was without. If he had performed the miracles with his fingers only, he might have been proud of them; but when they fell out of the infinity of his thinking, they were mere drops trembling on the bucket: they were as nothing before him. We might as well follow some poor breathing of ours and say, "Behold, how wonderful was that sighing in the wind!" It is nothing to us, because of the greater life. And these miracles are puzzles, enigmas, confounding surprises to people who will come to Christ, along the line which begins in the outward, in the visible, in the circumstantial. If ever they can get hold of his heart, and speak to him face to face for five minutes, they will feel the heaving of his great sympathetic bosom; they will see the miracles as he saw them, then they will appear to be very little things, momentary spasms, examples to guide children through the grammar of a higher law, mere exemplifications, symbols, types of the infinite and the inexpressible.

It is very remarkable that this Man once said, "Greater works than these shall ye do;" but I will ask you to find a passage in which he ever said, "Greater thoughts than these shall ye think." I cannot find such a passage. You must not forget that in your argument about Christ's divinity when he

piled up his miracles, raising the dead, opening the eyes of the blind, feeding the hungry miraculously, unloosing dumb tongues and unstopping deaf ears; when he aggregated them all into one sublime spectacle, he said, "Greater works than these shall ye do;" but never did he say, "Greater thoughts than these shall ye think; greater words than these shall ye speak; greater purposes than these shall ye conceive." There he touched the unsearchable riches of his own nature, as in the miracles he pointed to circumstances and to events which would receive larger unfoldment as the ages went on.

Now let us look at this inner life of Christ from two or three points. I watch this Man day by day, and I am struck with wonder at his amazing power, and the question arises, What is the impelling sense of his duty? Why does he do these things? And he answers, frankly, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" Never did prophet give that explanation before. He is working from his Father's point of view, in the light of his Father's will; it is the paternal element that is moving him. He has given me that as his key; I will put it into every lock of his life to see whether he has entrusted me with the proper key or not. I defy the world to find him wrong as to the use of this key. Put it where you like, the lock answers it; and is no credit to be given to a Speaker who, at twelve years of age, took the key from off his girdle, put it into the hands of inquirers, and told them to go round the whole circle of his life with that key in their hands? He was but a boy when he gave up that key—he was but twelve years old—approaching manhood by Jewish reckoning, but merely a child in years. Can he keep up the high strain? Listen: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." "I and my Father are one." Can he sustain that high key when he is in trouble? Listen: "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." Can he go higher still? Listen: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." O ye who know the modes of music, tell me, is this harmony? The key note is, "Father." Away the Anthem rolls, high as heaven, deep as hell, tortuous as the paths of the forked lightning, and yet with infinite precision it returns to its initial note. Give Christ credit for this. He was but

a Galilean peasant ; give him what honour is due for preserving his rhythmic consistency through a course, not rugged only but most tragical and unparalleled.

Arguing from that point, another question suggests itself. If this Man is about his Father's business, what is his supreme feeling? What answer would you expect to an inquiry like that, after the self-explanation which Jesus Christ has given? Is his supreme feeling a concern for the dignity of the law? Is he jealous with an infinite jealousy for the righteousness of God? Does he come forth from his hiding-place saying, "I am jealous for the holiness of my God; I must vindicate the righteousness of the Unseen and Eternal One"? No. What is the dominant feeling of this Man Christ Jesus? It is named again and again in the New Testament. No change ever occurs in the term, and I will ask you to say how far it corresponds with the first declaration, "Jesus was moved with compassion." Ye musicians, tell me if that be consonant and harmonious? "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? Jesus was moved with compassion." It was always so; the word "compassion" occurs in no solitary instance alone, though its occurrence in one instance would still have been argument enough. But from beginning to end of his life he is moved with compassion. "Jesus, here are some thousands of people that have been with thee three days and have nothing to eat." Does he wait for us to say that? No. "But Jesus was moved with compassion when he remembered" that the multitudes were in that condition. Coming out once, and looking upon the crowds, "He was moved with compassion, for they were as sheep not having a shepherd." When he was walking to a grave, "Jesus wept." And when people came to him they seemed to know this sympathetically, for they said, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy upon us, have compassion on us, thou Son of God." He speaks like a Son, and is thus faithful to a Father's message.

What explanation does he give of his own miracles? Once he gave us an explanation, as it were, incidentally and unconsciously; but we caught the word, and it saved us from unbelief and explained all mysteries. How was that long-ailing woman

cured? "Virtue hath gone out of me." He did not say, "I have performed this with my fingers; this is an act of manipulation which no other man ever learned to do; it was by swiftness and suppleness and dexterity, and by a mysterious flashing of the fingers over certain parts of the affected body." No, but he perceived that virtue had gone out of him. No trickster, but a mighty sympathiser,—no manipulator, but infinite in the exercise and processes of his redeeming power. Whatever he did took something out of him. Behold the difference between the artificial and the real! What did our redemption cost? The healing of one poor sufferer took "virtue" out of him. What did the redemption of the world take out of him when he said, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The last pulse gone. Is he self-consistent still? Still!

And to what are all his triumphs eventually referred? To his soul. Not to his intellectual ability—not to his skill of finger—not to his physical endurance, but to his soul—an undefinable term, the symbol of an infinite quantity. "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." You know the meaning of the word in some degree. One man paints with paint—another paints with his soul. One is a clever mechanic—another an inborn and indestructible genius. One man speaks with his teeth and tongue and palate—another speaks with his soul: they use the same words, but not the same, as Hermon was not the same with the dew off; as the bush was not the same before the fire came into it. You say one man sings artificially, mechanically, correctly—every tone is right; the proper balance, the proper measure, the proper quantity: artificially the exercise is beyond criticism, but still the people sit unmoved. Another man takes up the same words and the same notes, and the people are stirred like Lebanon by a wind, like Bashan when the storm roars. How is it? The one man is artificial, the other is real—the one man has learned his lesson, the other man had the lesson awakened in him—it was there before, and an angel passed by and said, "It is morning: awake and sing." This Christ, this dear Son of God, shall see of the travail of his soul, of the outgoing of his blood—he sows the earth with the red seed of his blood, and he shall see the harvest and be satisfied. He was

often wearied with his journeying: when was he wearied with his miracles? His bones were tired: when was his mind enfeebled? The instruments of articulation might be exhausted, but when did the word ever come with less than the old emphasis—the fiat that made the sun?

Let us now ask—What did this man claim for himself? It will assist us in our study if we hear from his own lips a distinct statement of what he does claim on his own account. Reading in the book of Exodus about the great God, I find that he gave his name as “I AM,” that he amplified that name into “I AM THAT I AM.” We could make nothing of that name; it was too remote for us; our genius had never been in such high regions, never scaled altitudes so perilous. We could therefore but wonder. The name sounded grandly; it had in it all the boom of an infinite mystery, and we were content with it because the condescensions which that same God made to this human life of ours were so mighty yet so pitiful, so wondrous in their sweep and yet so compassionate in their lingerings that we had begun to think, though the name was mysterious, the grace was familiar enough. A marvellous word was that spoken to Moses—“I AM;” it seemed as if it were going to be a revelation, but suddenly it returned upon itself, came back to its centre, and finished with—“THAT I AM”! As if the sun were just about to come from behind a great cloud, and suddenly, after one dazzling gleam, hide itself behind a cloud denser still. The fulness of the time had not yet come. God’s “hour” was not yet. He had said “I AM,” but what he was he did not further say. By-and-by more will be said. It will be interesting, therefore, to inquire whether Jesus Christ connects himself with that mysterious name, “I AM THAT I AM.” If I can trace his talking, his thinking, his preaching, so as to find one point in connection between himself and that great name, then a new and large argument will take its inception, and a new and subtle evidence will be put in that this Man was more than man—as mysterious as the Name, perhaps as gracious. Let us see.

I cannot read the life of Christ without constantly coming upon the expression, “I AM.” Reading it, I say, I have met these

words before, and wonder where. My memory bethinks itself, and I hasten back into the grey old pages of the ancient time, and find that the Lord revealed himself unto Moses as "I AM THAT I AM." I want to know, therefore, if this great ladder, the top of which is in heaven, can by any means find a place upon the earth; can it come down that I may touch it? Yes. Jesus adds to the "I AM" little words, simple earthly words, nursery terms, school ideas—brings down the "I AM" so that we may touch its lower meaning, and hear its earthly messages. It will, then, be most interesting to see how this is done, and to listen to this modified music of the Eternal.

What does Jesus say after the words "I am"? He says everything that human fancy ever conceived concerning strength and beauty, and sympathy, and tenderness, and redemption. He absorbs the whole. He leaves nothing for you and me except as secondary owners, except as those who derive their status and their lustre from himself. Thus, "I am . . . the Vine." What a stoop! Could any but God have taken up that figure? Think it out. You have heard it until you have become familiar with it—forget your familiarity, think yourself back to the original line, and then consider that One has appeared in the human race who says, without reservation or qualification of any kind or degree, "I am the Vine." Thus is the mysterious simplified; thus is the abstract turned into the concrete and the inner into the visible, the simple, and the approachable. Will he ever say "I am" again? Many a time. Let us hear him. "I am the Light." Ah, we know what the light is; it is here, and there, and everywhere—takes up no room, yet fills all space; warms the planets, yet does not crush a twig. The "I am" fell upon us like a mighty thundering. "I am the Light" came to us like a child's lesson in our mother's nursery. Thus does he incarnate or embody or personify himself; thus doth the ladder rest in the mean dust, whilst its head is lifted up above the pavilions of the stars.

Will he say "I am" any more? Often. How? Listen: "I am the Door." Dare any but himself have taken upon him so mean a figure? "Ah," said he, "it is not a mean figure if you interpret it aright. A door is more than deal. A door is more



than an arrangement swinging upon hinges. A door is Welcome, Hospitality, Approach, Home, Warmth, Honour, Sonship—I am the Door.” Still more: “I am the Bread, I am the Water, I am the Good Shepherd, I am the Way, I am the Truth, I am the Life.” When I see how this Man absorbs all beautiful figures, all high and tender emblems, I begin to think that there is nothing left for us by which to distinguish ourselves figuratively and typically. If we take any of these words, they must be taken as with his signature upon them, having a first lien and a prior claim; we are but intermediary and temporary, and altogether subordinate in our stewardship and right of status. How any man could be a man only, and yet take up these figures, it is impossible for me to conceive. It is easier for me to say, “My Lord and my God,” than to say, “Equal with me; better only in the accidents of the case.”

Seeing that Christ claims so much for himself, it will be equally interesting, and will be the complement of the same subject, to start a second inquiry, namely, What does he claim from men? He claims everything. Sometimes in mean mood of soul I have wondered at his divine voracity. For once, a woman came to him who had only one box of spikenard, and he took it all. I was amazed—half distressed. I never saw such impoverishment made before. He did not say, “Give me part of it,” but took it every whit, and the woman had no more left of that precious nard. Could you have done that? Would your humanity have allowed you to do it? Surely you would have said, “Part of it—just a little; you are so kind as to offer me a donation out of your one box of spikenard, let me take a little myself—I must not have it all.” But this Man, what said he? He said, “Let her do it—I will have it all, substance and fragrance too.” And another woman—she might have touched his heart as she came along, for she was poor and poorly clothed, and had on a widow’s weeds—I expected that he would have said, “Poor woman, we cannot take anything from you.” No; she came along, took out her two mites, which make one farthing, put them in, and he took them both! Is he man? Is that humanity? Strange man; marvellous exceeding above all other men; not only did he take them, but he said, “She hath done more than anybody

else who came up to the treasury ; she hath cast in all her living."

Is he doing the selfsame thing in our own day ? Verily he is ! Look at this family, father and mother, with a boy and a girl as their sweet children. How many things has that boy been in his father's hopeful dreams ! A lawyer and a judge ; then a clergyman and a bishop ; then a merchant, a politician, a statesman, and a prime minister ! But one day the mother says that she feels " something is going to happen " ; a vague expression, but full of deep and sad meaning to her own soul. She tells her husband that " something is going to happen," and he smiles at the shapeless and nameless fear. And what does happen ? A proposal that the boy should become a missionary ! What ! the only son ? Yes ! " It cannot be," says the stunned father ; " no, no, it must not be ! " For many an hour there is silence ; ay, for days next to nothing is said, but many a wistful look is exchanged. At length the mother says, " I have been thinking and praying about this, and I remember that good Mr. Wesley used to open the Bible to see what answer God sent him to his prayers, and I have got my answer to-day. After prayer I opened the Bible, and my eyes could see no words but these, ' Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight.' He must go." The father is silent. A great weight of grief burdens his heart. He, too, goes to pray—goes a hale man under fifty—comes back in an hour an old man, crushed, blanched, withered, and grey, " but more than conqueror," and he, too, says the child—the one son, the heir, the first-born—must go. And Christ takes him ! Humanity would have spared him when so many large families could have furnished a missionary, but God takes him ; the God that took the spikenard and the mites.

It will be curious and interesting now to start a third inquiry to this effect : How did the people who were round about, and who were not malignantly disposed, who constituted the better class of his contemporaries, regard Christ ? Here is one typical man—a man of letters and of local renown, careful and exact in speech, somewhat timid in disposition, yet marked by that peculiar timidity which is capable of assuming the most startling

boldness. He climbs his way up to Christ, opens the door in the dark, goes up to him, and says in an undertone, lest the enemy should hear—"Rabbi, thou art a teacher come from God." Evidence of that kind must not go for nothing. Send men of another type of mind to him—men of the world, shrewd, keen men. Here are several of them returning from an interview with the Son of God. I hail them in English terms, and say, "Gentlemen, what say you?" "Never man spake like this Man." Add that to the evidence of Nicodemus. Here are women coming back from having seen the Lord; tears are in their eyes. What will they say? Never yet did woman speak one word against the Son of God! Mothers, did you see anything to blame? "Nothing." Women of pure soul—sensitive as keenest life—what saw ye? "The Holiness of God." Pass him on to a judge—cold, dispassionate, observant, not easily hoodwinked. What sayest thou, Roman judge? "I find no fault in him." What is that coming to the man now, while he is talking? A message. What saith the message? It is a message from the judge's wife. "Have thou nothing to do with this just person, for I have suffered many things this day in a dream concerning him." Let him go—nail his right hand, nail his left hand, nail his feet, lift high the dreadful tree, crush it into the rock, shake every nerve and fibre of his poor body, let him writhe in his last agony, and will anybody speak about him then? Yes. The centurion beholding this, accustomed to the sight of blood, knowing how men deport themselves in judgment halls and in prisons and in the supreme crisis of existence, said—"Truly this Man was the Son of God." Observe what he claimed for himself—what he claimed from others. Put these testimonies of observers one after the other, accumulate them into a complete appeal, and then say whether it be not easier to the imagination and the heart and the judgment to say, "My Lord and my God," than to use meaner terms.

Another question arises: From such a Man what teaching may be expected? Given, a man distinguished by such attributes and elements as I have endeavoured simply to indicate, to find out what kind or manner of teaching and public ministry we may expect from him. I shall first expect extemporaneousness. He

cannot want time to make his sermons, or he is not the man he claims to be. He is not an essayist. He will not be a literary speaker ; there will be a peculiarity, a uniqueness, a personality about him not to be found elsewhere. Does he retire to his study, that he may write out elaborate sentences full of nothing but ink ? Will he come before me as a literary artist, with well-poised sentences, beautiful periods, sounding climaxes, leaving the impression that he has wasted the midnight oil, and taken infinite pains to please those who went to hear him ? There is nothing literary about the style of Christ ; it is simple, graphic talk, much broken to our minds, occasionally incoherent, rapid in transitions, utterly wanting in elaboration, and the balance prized by men who have nothing else to do than to live by their folly. I shall further expect instantaneousness of reply by Christ Jesus if he be God. God cannot want time to think what he will say. Does this Man ever ask for time ; does he ever adjourn the interview ? He answers immediately, and he answers finally. He never asks for time to bethink himself, to refer to the authorities, to consult and connote the precedents. He does not say, "You have posed me by an unexpected question ; I must retire and give this inquiry my profoundest consideration." Never ; and he was but a carpenter. He had just thrown the apron from his waist ; he was but a peasant. Rabbinical culture he had none, high connection disdained the mention of his name, and yet there was an instantaneousness about him to which I can find no parallel but in the "Let there be light, and there was light." Give every man credit for his ability ; give this Man, carpenter and peasant of Galilee, credit for having extorted from his enemies the acknowledgment, "Never man spake like this Man."

What do I find in this Man's teaching ? High allegory, types of things unseen, incarnations of the spiritual, embodiments of the invisible, parables beautiful as pictures, wide as philosophies, lasting as essential truth. Strange man—marvellous productions of a barren soil. Why, he himself was an incarnation. What was his ministry ? An incarnation too. What had he to do with the men who heard him, and all succeeding generations ? He had to embody, to physicalise and bodily typify the kingdom

of God: hence he said, "It is like a grain of mustard seed; like a net cast into the sea; like treasure hid in a field; like leaven hid in three measures of meal." "It is like unto——" when we said that, what did he do? He repeated his own birth. He renewed his own incarnation, he was born again in every parable that escaped his lips. To embody the bodiless, to typify in allegory and figure the infinite and the inexpressible, was the all-culminating miracle of this peasant of Galilee. Then I ask myself, "Is it consistent with all I have heard about him?" And I am compelled to say it is exquisitely in consonance with all we have yet seen of his character and studied of his speech. A man like this coming up from unbeginning time must be extemporaneous in his speech, instantaneous in his reply, and allegorical and typical and symbolical in his method of presenting truth, for he knows the essential, and alone can give it beauty and expression, and movement and colour. Give him the credit due to his power.

Jesus Christ's is the kind of teaching that survives all the changes of time. It is seminal teaching: it is not like a full-blown garden, it is like treasures of living seeds and roots, and therefore it abides for ever. Where are the grand and stately and polished sermons of the great doctors of the Church? Do you know? I do not. But they were grand, were they not? Why did not you keep them then? But they were stately, majestic, complete, cathedral-like, strong in base, exquisite in pinnacle, almost fluttering in the delicacy of their architecture; indeed, why did not you take better care of them? Where are they? Gone into a stately past—majestic shadows of a majestic oblivion. What lives? Suggestiveness, what is called incoherence, want of finish, want of polish; the great mighty oak, the everlasting Bashan; not the cabinet-makers' pretty and expensive fabrication.

Now I will come to the final point, and it shall be of the utmost severity in its relation to this argument. The question I put is this: Did this Man Christ Jesus live up to his own principles? I can imagine persons of a certain kind of mind suggesting that the speeches and parables, and conversations generally of Jesus Christ, conveyed very high theories, very sublime philosophies

of things, but were too romantic to be embodied in actual behaviour. The question I press upon you is this, so far as the evidence in the Book goes, Did this Man Christ Jesus embody his own doctrine? What said he? "Bless them that persecute you." Did he do it? Let one of his disciples answer. "When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not." What said he? "Pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." Did he do it? One of his historians says that in his last agony he prayed, when he had no hand to stretch out upward to his God, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Is this to go for nothing? Are we at liberty to dismiss this witness, and say he does not know of that which he testifies, or that which he affirms? Be careful, for if you cannot confer a character you have no right to take one away.

I call you to this living Christ; I will try to go nearer to him than ever I have been before; I will call for him to come nearer to me, and I will press still nearer. He knows me, he speaks to me; there is a masonry between us for which you have no word or symbol: a grip of the hand he only can give, a symbol that hath morning in it, and hope and immortality, secret messages, transmissions in cipher which he makes the devil himself bring. Can I give him up? Can I sell him for thirty pieces of silver? Can I exchange him for some other master? Oh, then the sun would bring no morning with it, midday would be but a great black cloud, and the summer a mocking promise without an answer. To whom, then, could I tell my sin; to whom could I pray my prayers; to whom could I empty my heart in darkness and in close and absolute solitude, after I have looked all round the horizon to see even if an angel be there to watch the secret interview? Nay, I must serve him still, preach him still, and if he say to me, "Wilt thou go away?" I will answer in words I cannot amend, "To whom can I go? Thou only hast the words of Eternal Life!"

## Chapter viii. 43-59.

"Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not. Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me? He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God. Then answered the Jews, and said unto him, Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil? Jesus answered, I have not a devil; but I honour my Father, and ye do dishonour me. And I seek not mine own glory: there is one that seeketh and judgeth. Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death. Then said the Jews unto him, Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou sayest, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death. Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom makest thou thyself? Jesus answered, If I honour myself, my honour is nothing: it is my Father that honoureth me; of whom ye say, that he is your God: yet ye have not known him; but I know him: and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be a liar like unto you: but I know him, and keep his saying. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am. Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by."

### PLAIN SPEAKING.

**T**HIS section of Holy Scripture contains a very vivid example or specimen of plain speaking. The frankness would necessitate one of two things: either revenge or submission. We need not tell the name of the speaker in this dialogue. There are no words like the words of Jesus. We might risk the whole Christian controversy upon the tone and scope of this conversation. Let any frank-minded man stand by and listen to the colloquy, and then let him say by the music only where the truth is. We never know what the words of Jesus Christ

are until we have laid down our greatest author, and then opened the New Testament. Christ always sounds like a speaker of music, but he sounds the best always after the greatest man has finished ; he then proves his deity—not when answering some wild and embittered Jew only, but when following in succession earth's brightest speaker, earth's chiefest poet ; then do we see his stature. The sayings of Christ are unfathomable. How well he maintains his own if this be taken as merely a dramatic dialogue ! How calm he is ! How strong in positiveness, how clear in statement, how assured in the possession of every qualification that can dominate the history of men ! Yet he surprises us by the use of startling language. We speak of the meek and lowly Jesus ; but cannot that claim to meekness and lowliness now be set aside by quotations from Christ's own speeches ? Jesus Christ called the men who were looking at him—when did he speak to absentees like modern preachers ?—fools, hypocrites, liars, murderers, thieves, whited sepulchres, wolves in sheep's clothing, devourers, children of the devil. What wonder that he had not where to lay his head ? He might have had a downy pillow could he have talked the other way. Yet this is the meek and lowly Jesus ! What wonder that he sent a sword upon the earth, dividing whole families, and making relations strangers and aliens ? We have associated a tone of passion in connection with such words as fools, hypocrites, liars. Who could call another man a liar in cold blood, as if he were merely making a remark ? We have to be stung into the use of such descriptives. Jesus Christ had not. We should have heard the very tone in which he called men by these dishonouring but accurate names. He was not scolding, merely upbraiding, or trying to exasperate his hearers ; he was revealing spirit and character and purpose, and doing it with the calmness of philosophy. We could not call a man a child of the devil without being angry, and our anger would spoil the revelation. Never believe an angry man. It was the solemn, calm, serene manner of the speaker that made the terms so truly awful.

Is it not from the quietest that the severest always issues ? Does not lightning leap forth in a time of sullen silence ? We praise the majestic tranquillity of Science. Science, unlike



Theology, we say, is serene, never ruffled, most tranquil, lake-like in its sunny serenity. Is that true? We might speak of the meek and lowly Science; but Science is the most desperate character that is now abroad. There is nothing so tremendous as the Science which you praise as tranquil, dispassionate, altogether devoid of the *odium theologicum* which embitters all religious fellowship. Science is very calm, but very murderous. Picture some ancient battle with bows and arrows, with catapults and stones, battering rams and huge cumbrous weapons of war; picture a modern battle-field, with its arms of precision, with its devastating forces: what did it? Calm, impartial, tranquil Science. Look at that ship—torn, shattered, started out of the water, as if a ghost had struck it: what did it? Calm, impartial, tranquil Science concealed a torpedo, and went home to brood upon the ignorance of mankind, and retired to rest with the reputation of being so different from theology, so dispassionate, so tranquil, quite a meek and lowly thing. What tore the building in twain? What frightened the Parliament? What shook the bridge? Science—by nitro-glycerine, by dynamite; tranquil, dispassionate, lowly-minded Science, never agitated by her theological tumults, threw the Metropolis into a panic. Science is the greatest murderer known in history. Yet all done so tranquilly, leaving all fighting to be done in the Church.

We must look at this conversation, then, in another light. It comes up from behind Abraham's time; it looks upon Abraham as a very modern instance. This speech is delivered from the platform of eternity. There is no modern word in it; there is nothing of yesterday's paint or decoration or enamel about its high eloquence, its sharp glittering rhetoric; it is calm as eternity is calm. Jesus Christ says—

“Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar, and the father of it” (ver. 44).

This was not spoken in an excited tone. This is a philosophy, not an insult. That is the difference between a man who speaks superficially, and a man who speaks with the background of eternity. How familiarly he speaks of their father, who was a

murderer from the beginning! How well he knew ancient history—because there was no history ancient to him. A man who is the contemporary of all ages knows nothing about the meaning, in a technical sense, of what to us is ancient history. He was present at the birth of the devil; he has watched all his tricks and policies ever since he was born,—nay, the devil claims a kind of grim eternity. Jesus Christ thus adopts the principle of heredity, and starts it from a new point, and traces it up with scientific precision. He says, You are not yourselves only, you are a progeny; you had fathers, ancestors, and he takes them into the college of heraldry, and he makes them find out their crest and their motto and their father's image. "The lusts of your father ye will do." He speaks calmly of this fate. He does not upbraid the men as if they themselves were so much to blame; they express a historical moral necessity. There is a kind of ghastly consistency in their malice and obstinacy and hatred of truth; they keep up the family name well; there is no bar sinister on this diabolical escutcheon unless it be altogether in its very self a bar sinister on the escutcheon of the universe. Would that good men were as consistent as bad men; their consistency might accumulate into a pleasing and conclusive argument. We are worsted by our inconsistency, though the term inconsistency itself is not always fully comprehended and justly applied. Christians can falter a good deal; they have the gift of hesitation, they have the genius of incertitude; they spoil their prayers for want of emphasis.

But if this reading of heredity be true on the one side it will be equally true on the other; hence we have this declaration, completing the former, and giving hope to men—

"He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God" (ver. 47).

Here is a mystery which cannot be explained, but it is a plain simple fact. There are some men who cannot be religious, from any point that is obvious to our thinking. There are some ministers who cannot pray; they are scholars, they are expositors, they are earnest men, but they do not know how to pray. "He that is of God heareth God's words": he that is of music knoweth music when he hears it; he that is a child of

art knows the painter's touch from the daub of the unskilled hand. We are born what we are—musicians, poets, artists, housewives, merchants, lamplighters, journalists, leaders, heroes, cowards,—it is of birth, not of choice. This may seem to ruin a good deal of hope. It does nothing of the kind, properly accepted. Awaken yourselves; who can tell what angel sleeps in your dulness? Who knows what bright spirit has taken up its residence for a time in the hostelry of your soul? Arise, awake, put on thy strength! You cannot tell what you are, until all the awakening ministries have been brought to bear upon your indifference and your obstinacy.

When were deep sayings intelligible to corrupt hearts? The Jews did not understand this man's speech. They blundered in every remark they made upon it. They continually took it from the wrong end, and they so mingled the words that they lost all their philosophy and all their music. Blessed be God, therefore, that there are men who can teach alphabets. The Beatitudes are mysteries. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." The world heard and passed on to its merchandise, saying that some fanatic had taken possession of the mountain, and was raving there, harmlessly but most incoherently. "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." In that one sentence there is a whole library of the deepest, holiest thinking, an infinite philosophy of life. But the people who listened to Jesus knew absolutely nothing of what he was talking about. When he gave away loaves and fishes his congregation amounted to some thousands; when he began to give away his own flesh, and to hand out in cups of gold his heart blood, his congregation amounted to twelve persons, and even they stood with their backs half to him as if they would go away; in fact, he asked them if they were going. Blessed is he who can talk to men of his own kith—to poets who see a universe through the slot of a single proverb. Jesus Christ never had such hearers in his own day in the flesh, but they are gathering around him now, and calling his sayings ineffable in suggestiveness and sublimity.

The Jews thought they caught Jesus now and then. How little they became! How microscopically small!

“Then said the Jews unto him” (in a tone which can never be reported), “Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou sayest, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death” (ver. 52).

How can you talk to such men? What interest can you have in men who think that Abraham is dead? There is nobody dead. The Protestant says, What, worship a dead woman, the Virgin Mary! There is no dead woman. That is the mistake we make. Abraham is dead. No, he is not. You are wrong at the foundation. “I am the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob”: God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. Who can teach this doctrine properly? Who can feel it in all its heavenliness? Who can find house-room in the heart for this immortality? We might dwell long upon this and find it nutritious. To the Jews, people did die. To fools, people die now. There are even people who are wearing mourning. It will be a long day before Christianity kills Paganism. There are Christians who are going out to-morrow to buy mourning. You would not think it possible, but it is a fact. “Abraham is dead, and the prophets”: what an empty world they lived in who spake thus! How hollow their voices sounded in the chambers of the past! You can never teach such people anything. They think they are the only living people in the world. No man dies. The little child is not dead; it is like a dewdrop that has gone up to the sun to be used in the fashioning of a rainbow. The friend is not dead; he lives and waits; he is now half out of heaven looking for some of you: do not disappoint him.

“Jesus answered, If I honour myself”—if I have no water but that which flows on the surface, it can be scooped up with a cup and used, drunk at one meal, and there would be nothing afterwards but burning thirst; only that water is sure which comes up out of the rock—spring water, living water, water that the heat can never get at to dry it up. Then Jesus came upon them with a revelation which was too much for their ignorance:—

“Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am” (ver. 58).

That is true. His words establish the truth of the declaration,

They are not dictionary words, they are not rhetorical terms, they are not sentences and phrases fashioned and carved in the schools, and beautifully enamelled, and ticketed in plain figures for sale in the market-place; they are weird words, ghostly, eternal words. He said, "Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad" (ver. 56). Then the Jews perfectly revelled in contempt of the man: "Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?" Who can reproduce the tone of their bitter speech? Fact seemed to be so dead against this man. He has just turned thirty, but he looked fifty—he looked a thousand. It was a wondrous face. It might have been any age. Age seemed to have nothing to do with it. It was fifty faces. What sorrow it could wear! What joy flashed from it now and then! When nobody was supposed to be looking at him how far he went away from his face, and left himself physically a blank! How the tears came into those eyes, and how heaven shone out of them! When people said, What age is he? nobody could tell for certain,—by the record, thirty; by the look, thirty centuries; by the words, thirty millenniums. "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad." Who could bear such talk? Who could bear to have facts so trampled under foot? Who could have statistics ignored in this reckless way? What wonder that this man had not where to lay his head? People were afraid to take him in; he talked so incoherently, so insanely. Religion is always associated with insanity—and properly. There is no man religious who is not insane about it. To have been before Abraham was a necessity of making a true revelation. But when Jesus Christ made this revelation the people were moved to stone him—"Then took they up stones to cast at him." This also was natural logic; a true and proper sequence of all that had gone before. If congregations were to act according to their own feeling to-day they would stone all the best preachers. Instead of that they make a collection to defray expenses; a weak exchange, and remarkably foolish. We shall never be right until our preachers are stoned and spat upon. At present they are criticised, and neat little opinions are expressed about them, and they can go in and out of the temple as they please—and the sooner they go out the better. Jesus "went out of the temple,

going through the midst of them," concluding his miracle of language with a miracle of disembodiment. Who can stone a ghost? Who can throw missiles at a spectre? Who would shoot with a cannon at the light of day? It will be even so in the end with this Jesus. He will arouse men, excite them, madden them, work them into a tempest of wrath and delirium, and when they are in their madness he will walk through them like a sunbeam, and pass on, until they become calm enough to hear him once more.

How good it is to come near this divine teacher! How he soothes us and blesses us, yet how he excites and inspires us! When did he say, All things are very little, and not worth looking at? Herein he taught from the other end than that which was adopted by Solomon, because Solomon had bought all his things and he became sick of them. They were connected with bills and invoices, and estimates and valuations and umpires, and final appeals, and when he paid for them he said in effect, Take them where you please; I do not want them. Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher. Jesus did not buy them, he made them; he valued them therefore differently. All things were to him suggestive, significant, symbolic. The sparrow, the lily, and the little child, and the ear of corn, and the fig-leaf,—all these were signs of a kingdom infinite. On the other hand, how pitiful it is to be associated with men who always take little views of things, who suppose that Abraham is dead, that Jeremiah is in the cemetery, and Isaiah is in the churchyard, and the minor prophets are all dead and forgotten. What is there, then? Beware of false teaching. But sometimes Jesus Christ could go no further than this; he could only say, Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, of the Herodians: take care how ye hear: many false Christs go about in the world, and many arise to say Christ is here, and Christ is there; go not after them. Then saith an apostle, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God." Sometimes all the very best and bravest teacher can do is to warn his generation, and even sometimes that warning may not be put into words, because it is a warning that comes from the point of instinct, rather than from the point of logic. Do the children remember how this was said

to have been proved by an instance in natural history? May we not read it in our children's books at home? The man you see before you is a king of Persia, and he is devoted to the sport of falconry. Who can tell how many falcons the king has? He has been indulging in this sport hour after hour, and now he is weary and thirsty, and he stands before a dripping rock with his cup in his hand and his falcon on his wrist. He holds the cup to the dripping rock, and slowly catches drip after drip of water that he may quench his thirst. There is a little water in the cup and he will drink it, but as he brings the vessel to his lips the falcon throws out its wings, flutters itself, upsets the cup; and the monarch is angry. He will hold his cup a second time to the dripping rock, and oh, how slowly does it drip, drip, drip! and how hot and burning is his thirst! He fills his cup again, and again applies it to his lips, and again the falcon flutters, and throws out the water; and the king is angry and takes the falcon and dashes it against the rock, and kills the falcon. Presently there comes a servant to the king of Persia, and the enraged king says, Take this cup and go up to where the water is fuller, and fill it for me, and haste back; I die of thirst. The servant climbed the rock, filled the cup; on returning found that the channel of the little stream was intercepted by the head of a great serpent, dead, the foam of whose mouth is carried away by the stream. What was then the monarch's sorrow! How, then, could the king atone to the dead? By an instinct, which science has not yet explained, the falcon knew that there was death in the pot; by an instinct more than human it ruffled its wings and dashed the death-charged vessel from the king's hands. The falcon was not heeded, the falcon was slain; the falcon could not speak, could not explain; but the day of explanation came, and the king's heart grieved for the king's madness. There are men to-day who are stifling warning voices. They are thirsty, they must drink; the matter cannot be explained: but preacher, apostle, prophet, seer, poet,—these men are dashed to death or starved. But the day of explanation will surely come.

## Chapter ix. 1.

“And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth.”

### SINNER OR SAVIOUR ?

**W**HY did he pass that way? Could he not have gone by some other path? The answer is, No. Grace has its necessities; love has its predestinations. Jesus Christ always looked out for opportunities of doing good. He knew which road to take; he said, The blind man is down this road, therefore this is the road along which I am about to travel. This is how he came to find so many opportunities of doing good: he sought for them. We never see any openings for doing good: how can we? we do not look for them. Jesus Christ made it his business to find out who wanted him. He even stands at the door sometimes, and knocks. In a sense, does he not thrust himself upon men who need him? so graciously and quietly that it has no appearance of obtrusiveness or aggression; still he makes himself felt by events, by appeals, by sudden recollections, by suggestions from friends, by Church service and sacrament,—yea, a thousand ways he sends us hints that he is there, and has with him all the resources which are needed for our redemption, purification, and final coronation in heaven. When you felt inclined to pray it was Jesus Christ who moved you in that direction. When you said, I think I see more clearly to-day; truth seems to be enlarging,—it was Christ who was performing a miracle upon you. Trace all happy impulse, all sacred inspiration, all ennobling influence, to the touch, the glance, the benediction of Christ. He undertook work of the kind described in this chapter simply as introductory. Physical miracles were not worth doing if there had not been something more important to follow. The prologue was too sublime for the little drama if Christ came only to heal diseases, and to



relocate broken joints, and to give eyes to the blind or hearing to the deaf. All this was symbolic, introductory, and was intended merely to secure a kind of foothold for him, standing on which he might do his larger, nobler work. That is the reason he gives us bread in the morning. The bread is nothing and the body is nothing. Bread is only a kind of bribe to hunger, at best a species of compromise or truce; for the wolf comes back again with wider mouth and sharper teeth. But he gives the bread that he may give his flesh himself.

What an advantage he had in performing physical miracles compared with the delivery of his profound—yea, his unfathomable—discourses. Everybody could see a miracle: only a man in a multitude of instances could understand a discourse. The vulgarest onlooker knew when a miracle was wrought: it took an almost-angel to catch the first hint of the meaning of the Beatitudes. This is Christ's opportunity, therefore; he says in effect; This man wants sight; having given him sight I shall call attention to the work, I shall start a process of inquiry and thought in this man's mind at least; and who can tell but that an opened eye may mean an opened soul? let me, therefore, continued the blessed tender-hearted Messiah, begin where men will allow me to begin: they want their bodies healed; perhaps having felt my touch in that direction they may ask me to heal their souls. A medicine man has an infinite advantage over a gospel speaker, if he succeed in his work; and he is more likely to succeed, in some degree at least, than is the spiritual thinker and reformer. Who cares for a thought? There are men who have succeeded in allowing ten thousand jewel sentences to pass before them without seizing any one of them and keeping it as property. There are men who have seen perfect Niagaras of jewels rolling over the cataract who have never yet seized any one of them and taken it home as a treasure and a pledge of better things. There are souls on which—I will not say on whom, for I will not put grammar to base uses—all Shakespeare and Milton would be lost; they would as soon hear some street ballad with nothing in it but a running jingle, as the music of Eternity. But because it is the music of Eternity it can wait. Its opportunity will come. There are

some enjoyments we get through ; they perish in the using ; they amuse, they excite, they please, they gratify for the moment, but there is no wearing in them, they cannot bear stress ; they are good as the climate is good, as the immediate health of the possessor is good ; but they abide not day and night, ever and ever, in the soul, friends that can charm darkness and assure continual day and peace.

Christ excited surprise by his works more than by his thoughts, yea more than by his personality. The neighbours said, Is not this he that sat and begged ? They would have cared nothing about him if he had received a new idea into his soul. The moment he began to worship he was forgotten. As long as he was a curiosity men came around him and asked him questions, and endeavoured to provoke and exasperate him, so that he might deny the very hand that had touched his sightless eyeballs. Providence excites more attention than theology. Understand by "providence" great historic movements, the events of the day, the miracles of the transient hour. Men make their fortunes by telling lies about these things. They publish in the evening what has to be contradicted in the morning ; they misreport everything they hear in order that they may work out some ulterior purpose, as a felon only can work on stealthy feet and with velvety fingers. There are men who can create wars, who can bring messages from foreign courts without the slightest authority for doing so, and who can send the business of the world into tremor and panic by a lie. Men are more sensitive about their money than about their souls, their thoughts, their hopes of future life, their aspirations after God. You could take away any man's sleep to-night by telling him that by to-morrow morning all his property will have fled away like a frightened bird. Jesus Christ excited attention by his miracles, his works, his wonderful signs and tokens. The people ran away and talked about them. One woman left her water-pot and fled away in the greatest haste to say that she had met a man who had told her all the things she ever did in her life. We never heard of any one running down the mountain to report a single beatitude. It is infinitely difficult to get attention to spiritual thinking and spiritual inspiration. A story will scatter an

argument. Yet Jesus Christ worked on, doing the miracles, and hoping that some opportunity would occur through them of doing his greater work.

We find Christ enriching the Sabbath with holiest memories. This was a complaint that was made against him: "And it was the Sabbath Day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes,"—and gave him two Sabbaths for one, a whole heaven in exchange for a little cold earth. How many men can gratefully say, "and it was the Sabbath Day when Jesus—" then comes the particular incident, the personal recollection, the tender memory, the blessed thought! Who may not make music out of this or turn it into a refrain charged with pathos? It was the Sabbath Day—when Jesus touched my heart, opened the eyes of my soul, gave me a new view of truth, charmed me out of my despondency, lifted me out of the darkness and set me on a hill bathed in morning light. It was the Sabbath Day when Jesus opened heaven, so that I saw him standing at the right hand of God. This is the kind of Sabbath that legislation can never protect, and that iniquity can never put down. What is your Sabbath? If it is only a set of hours, then it may be handled by men, it may be ordered to begin at a certain time and close at a certain hour; the law may step in and meddle with it; but if it be a Sabbath of real piety, of real sympathy with goodness, an opportunity of prayer, an opportunity for deeper study of the Word,—if it be a time in which great miracles were wrought in the soul, a time when tears were dried, and bonds relaxed, and heavy burdens were lifted from the trembling back, then there is no need to protect this Sabbath; the heart knows when it comes, the heart knows how long it continues, the heart knows with what worship to mark the blessed gift. Entrust the keeping of religion to the heart of the people. It cannot be written in a statute book; it cannot be a supplement to an Act of Parliament; it cannot be regulated by men who know nothing about it: religion, true, pure, before God and the Father, undefiled as untrodden snow—this must be in the keeping of the renewed heart; and this must be the fountain of the Church, its daily inspiration and nourishment, its establishment and its endowment; and if there be not this to begin with, to

build upon, and to give assurance of security, then all patronage is burdensome, all protection is but violent weakness. Religion is of the heart, or it has no assured existence in the world. Could the restored blind ever forget the Sabbath Day? It came back week by week, and there needed no church bell to call the man to the renewal of that sacred memory; he understood the time; it quieted him like a mother's blessing; it opened some unsuspected door in the sky, and brought the glory upon him from uncalculated quarters. Never profess to keep the Sabbath if you do not keep it in reality. If you have nothing to keep, say so, and be good plain infidels, definite and estimable liars. Those men who have memories of the Sabbath Day ought to embalm those memories, sanctify them by enlargement of worship, by increasing publicity, and ought to make the name of Jesus known wherever there is another blind man. Tell who healed—his address—his name in full—abbreviate it not. Let it be, Jesus Christ of Nazareth, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, the Man of the Cross, the Conqueror of the tomb.

Here we have Jesus Christ dividing the thoughts of men:—

“Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them” (ver. 16)—

as there always must be. He is so great as to occasion controversy. There are those who would trace controversy to some mean origin. Probably they understand not the philosophy of the case. There is so much controversy in theology because there is so much truth in it. There is next to no controversy about a gatepost; the judgments of men are tolerably unanimous upon that subject. But given a great truth that is at once a commandment, a revelation, an inspiration, a discipline, a comfort, a promise, a friend on earth, a companion in death, a joy eternal; and probably you will find a good deal of discussion about it. Find in the controversies of Christendom the grandeur of Christianity. It is true that the grandeur of Christianity may have been debased, but that is not the blame of Christianity itself; it is a reproach upon those who have not discussed Christian subjects in a Christian spirit. Jesus Christ has a philosophy

with which to meet the world. It is not a theory, a conjecture, but a philosophy,—that is to say, it is based upon reason, it fits the universe, it harmonises all things, it is equally strong at every point. There be conjectures many, as who should say about the soul, It may be this way, It may be that way, It may be some other way. But Jesus Christ never changes; he lays down an infinite philosophy, and says he himself is the Light of the world, the Bread sent down from heaven, the Saviour of all men, and that without truth there can be no peace, and without purity there can be no rest, and without pardon there can be no heaven, and that without the shedding of blood nothing that stains the heart can be taken out of that seat of life. If we have debased a philosophy into a sectarian theology, let the reproach rest upon ourselves. Jesus Christ loved the world, and offered it healing for its soul. There is all the difference between a philosophy and an experiment even in earthly things. We see this in statesmanship. Some statesmen are philosophers; others are ratcatchers. Some statesmen grasp the whole situation, and they are so profoundly philosophical as to be above the touch of panic, above the debasement of fear; they deal with vitalities, with far-reaching issues, with the heart and soul of things; their balm is for the wound that is within. There are other fussy little constables that are going about arresting everybody, and making no end of uproar and tumult and various noise, and doing nothing else; they cannot understand a philosophical statesmanship. So there be reformers who are endeavouring to do a good deal of really useful work on the surface, but there is one Christ only who says to men, “Ye must be born again.” That is no trimming of the surface, no renewal of the enamel under which men hide their hypocrisies; it is a birth, a rebirth, a new manhood, a mighty miracle of God the Holy Ghost.

Here is Christ creating personal witnesses. The man said, “Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not,”—I am not a metaphysician,—“one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see,”—I—the very man—myself: look at me: I am not speaking about some man a thousand miles off. There are some persons who are very much afraid of egotism—they are

the greatest egotists in the world. You find a man who writes in the newspaper about some other man that he is "awfully egotistic," and you may be sure he dipped his pen in the inkhorn of his own infirmity. This man said—"I was blind, now I see." There is a heroic egotism, there is a grateful egotism, there is an egotism of pure sincerest thankfulness for blessings received, and if a man should prove himself to be awfully humble by speaking of himself in the plural number, let him do it. It is a singular pride that gives a man the right of plurality, talking about himself under the nomenclature "we." A suspicious humility! Suspicious? Let that word be withdrawn, and another take its place—a proved hypocrisy!

Christ completes his own work:—"Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him"—how did he happen to go that way? For the same reason that he went the way in the first instance. He knows all the roads—the little cross-road that runs up to yonder farm; that little well-hedged path in which you walk at eventide to meditate; the back way, the front way; he knows all the roads to human dwellings and human halting-places. "Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" He had a right to ask the question. He who has done good to the body has established a right to ask about the soul. He may do so without affront or roughness. The largeness of the first miracle is an introduction to any mind that remembers the wonder that was done. Now we come to the real pith and purpose of Jesus Christ's mission—"Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" Was it not enough that the man could see, that one of the senses had been brought back again or had actually been created for the occasion? Was it not enough that the man had a sound body? He had eyes, and ears, and hands; he could smell the flowers, he could touch the very bloom of creation—was it not enough? Jesus Christ must needs go to the inner man, and ask the all-involving question—"Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" O man, if thou dost not so believe thou art not a man in the full sense of the term; thou hast not yet begun to live. It is in this belief we see and feel and realise our life. Without faith we cannot

fly, we cannot be in heaven, we cannot get past the black horrible tomb, we cannot cope with death and throw the monster in the last wrestle. "Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?" We know some men by their tone, by their touch. This man seemed to realise already in whose presence he was. We sometimes speak with men from whom we expect the veil to fall any moment, that we may see the revealed angel. Sometimes we feel in talking to certain men that if they went one sentence further they would go beyond the common boundary and speak to us from another world. They are magnetic men, inspired men, men of sympathy and enthusiasm; men who know the mystery of the over-soul, and touch all other men as by a miracle of sympathy. "Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen,"—how appropriately that word occurs in this interview—"Thou hast both seen"—to this use have thine eyes been put; thou hast seen the figure, the body, the open and patent reality—"and it is he that talketh with thee." Oh, sweetest words! He might have known who it was: never man spake like this man. What a voice! what subdued thunder! what tender sympathy! what suggestion! what music about to utter itself! "it is he that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe,"—and he stood there—a man!

## PRAAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, do thou always show us to what higher height we may climb, in what brighter light we may live our day, and what purer joy we may realise in all the wondrous ways of life. Forbid that we should look down; enable us evermore to look unto the hills, whence cometh our help. Thou hast made the high places of the earth as altars; men worship there, they begin in wonder, they end in praise. They say, Lo, God is here; we knew it not. This is none other than the house of God, though in the open air, and this is the gate of heaven, made without hands. If thou wilt show us these higher heights and brighter glories, and fill our souls with the Holy Ghost, we shall go on from one degree to another of quality and of life, until we shall hardly regard heaven itself as a great surprise. Enoch walked with God, and he was not: without sound or violence or rush of whirlwind, he passed into his proper place. May we so live that we shall not die. When we come to what men call death may we know that it is but an ascension, a rising into the land of morning and the city of peace. We have learned these things at Bethlehem, we have seen Christ's star, and have been led to worship him; we have seen Christ's Cross, and have been led to cry out, God be merciful to me a sinner! May the star and the Cross always be before the vision of our hearts, then there shall be no darkness, and there shall be no despair. We bless thee every day and every moment for the Cross: it is heaven's gift, it is the gate of heaven, it is the answer of God to himself, it is eternity revealed in all its higher thought and issues. God forbid that we should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are there now; our arms are round about it in the embrace of love; our eyes are fixed upon the Victim and the Priest, and we find in the Lamb of God the Saviour that we need. Help us to be wise readers of all things; may we read one another clearly, may we read all nature and gather learning, may we read thy Book, and see that it is all good books in one. Help us to read Providence, and redemption, and inner ministries, and all the mysteries which make up the secret of life, and may we so read as to be masters of Israel. Pity the heavy laden; give the weary rest. That is all they ask for; they ask, not for riches, but for rest. Oh sweet, sweet rest! Not sleep, but rest; not unconsciousness, but rest. Give them such rest as Christ only can give. Amen.

### Chapter ix. 1-38.

#### INDISPUTABLE CURES.

“AND as Jesus passed by.” The eighth chapter closed with the words “and so passed by”; the ninth chapter, therefore, had better open with the expression—“And as Jesus was



passing by." Was this a casualty, something that happened, but might not have happened; quite an uncalculated and incalculable event in life; what we should denominate a chance, a singular circumstance, or a peculiar coincidence? Nothing of the kind. That is vain talk; it is not so written in the books of heaven. Everything is foreseen, foreknown; no revelation can be made to God, no surprise can be inflicted upon God. Wherever Jesus Christ went he went on purpose; whenever Jesus Christ was found in difficulty it was not because of love of difficulty, but because there was some battle to be fought, some extrication to be completed, some act of mercy to be done. Why do we not rest in his peace? Why do we not say, The enemy can only come the length of his chain? Why should we fret ourselves in any wise to do evil? If we are poor, God knows it, and before the last piece of bread is swallowed another loaf will be provided; we do not know how, but there is the bread. Why go into the metaphysics of the theology, or into the mystery of the providence? Bless the bread, and eat it as God's gift. Jesus Christ went that way because there was a man born blind who was awaiting his ministry. Jesus Christ did not happen one day in the eternal duration to see the earth, and then form the idea that he would go down and heal the little wandering rebel. He came on purpose. He knew the whole case from eternity; yea, from eternity he himself was slain on account of this very earth. He was not passing by on some kingly procession through the constellations, and happened to see this little leper. Nothing happens to God in that accidental, riotous, shapeless way. The very hairs of your head are all numbered. God knows how many sparrows there are, and not one of them falleth to the ground without your Father. If we could seize this truth and live it, there would be no infidels.

The incident is infinitely significant, because it brings Jesus Christ face to face with a vital and positive necessity. We have some six instances of blindness recorded in the New Testament, but this is the only case in which the man was born blind. We wanted to see our Saviour face to face with a case of this particular sort; we should have been uneasy, because the evidence would have been incomplete without it. The other

men might only have been partially blind ; very little assistance might have been needed in their case just to open the eyelids and restore vision to the fulness of its function and utility. What would he do if he met a man who was born blind ? When did Jesus ever shrink from the occasion because it was great ? Did he not, to our poor senses, enlarge himself as the occasion expanded ? He overtopped every stature. He overflowed every channel ; he "is able to do exceeding abundantly above"—how the language quakes under the apostolic assurance and under the apostolic inability to say the whole thought that glows in his imagination and in his recollection. It is recorded that Vespasian once cured a man who was born blind ; but there soon arose an historian of the very nation of Vespasian who said that the lives of the emperors were studied lies. We are born blind. Every man who to-day sees is a man who was blind from his birth. It would appear, difficult as explanation may be, as if sin did not come upon mankind after birth, inflicting its disadvantages and its penalties ; we feel that we are born disabled and mutilated ; that we are, so to say, born dead. "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." This we cannot understand. If any man should ask us to explain human depravity or original sin, we can no more explain it fully than we can explain the origin of evil. We must deal with facts. If any man was not born spiritually blind let him rise and say so. If any man was born wholly morally beautiful, stainless, pure, let us see him. The world awaits great sights, and will pay for great shows : what could be more attractive than the spectacle of a man who was born as good as God ? There is an argument of consciousness, as well as a declaration of revealed truth. Men can go into their own innermost heart, and settle this vital question for themselves.

Why is it so ? The answer is given, "That the works of God should be made manifest in him"—that God may have all the field to himself. God addresses himself to this disastrous condition of affairs, that he has only to deal with men who are born blind. If there are any cases of temporary blindness, accidental loss of vision, let the empirics get what fame and

money they can from these. God addresses himself to the born blind, where he cannot have any help, where the work must be his alone, where the action must be sovereign, undivided, and the glory incommunicable. There are some things we can do, and some that it would be folly to attempt. We cannot light the sun, but we can go forth into the meadows when the sunshine glorifies them, or we can accept the light as an opportunity for service. We cannot control the sea; no man has the key of the Atlantic; the Pacific is not locked up in some man's iron safe; yet there are uses to which the sea may be put. We cannot hasten the summer. We complain of the late snow; we speak with significant tone and expression of face about the biting wind: why not change it? There would be an opportunity for genius? Why not attemper the wind? Why not melt the snow? Why not kindle an artificial fire and warm the landscape? Able men, with a peculiar bent of mind, can calculate an eclipse, but not one of them can create one. Let us see what we can do; for the moment we step beyond the line we become trespassers or spies: within our limit we are giants; beyond it our iron muscles melt and our tones of thunder are choked into whispers of feebleness and humiliation. God himself alone will heal the born-blind. If any man is going to any other to have his born-blindness cured he will never see the light of day.

We see Jesus Christ working from the consciousness of his own authority: "As long as I am in the world, I am the Light of the world." That is not the word of a weak man; that is not the word of a man who is going to fail in a miracle. Men ought to be very careful how they address themselves to great events, because they may fail in the very middle of the process, and their boasting will be reckoned against them, and will increase the completeness of their humiliation. But Omniscience need not calculate, for it knows all things; Omnipotence need not pause, for it can do all things. He speaks himself God. Why did not some other man arise and say, "No; I equally with myself am the light of the world"? These words cannot be interpreted on the theory that Jesus Christ was only an excellent young man. He would have destroyed his own ex-

cellence by his blasphemy. In the fourth verse he says, "I must work the works of him that sent me." It is singular to notice that all the best manuscripts have a change of grammar in this verse; for they read thus, according to the most established criticism: "We must work the works of him that sent me," as if there were co-operation, fellowship, in these processes that lie round about us as indicative of our sphere of labour. Some other manuscripts read, "We must work the works of him that sent us." But no manuscript ever changes the singularity of the fifth verse: "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." What is this claim, being interpreted in plain terms? It is this: All blind men are in my charge; they are my parishioners; they are the souls that I must look after. If any men say they see, I have nothing to do with them. The Son of man is not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance: all the hungry people are mine; make them sit down, the feast shall be spread, this miracle shall certainly be wrought. All the ignorant are mine; enlarge the school, make it a night school as well as a day school, bring the most backward scholar in, yea, the man who is no scholar, not having seen one little letter in all his life; he belongs to me by the right of ignorance." It is our weakness that gives us our right to pray; it is our sin, rightly comprehended, that is our letter of introduction to the Cross. Righteous men, snow-covered men, away! ye have no invitation to Calvary. All the lost are mine. How he flushes with a consciousness of power when he is face to face with a case of indisputable necessity! He is as a warrior who sees the victory ere the battle is begun. This is precisely what the Church ought to do and ought to say. Here comes in the operation of the plural term: "We must work the works of him that sent us, while it is day." There may be both a singularity and a plurality of action in this divine beneficence. If we are called to partnership in the divine mystery of sacrifice, it is of God that we are called; he permits us to glorify ourselves through suffering. The Church should say, My programme is this: wherever there is a blind man, I claim him; a hungry man, he is mine; a poor child, that child belongs to me; a poor lost wandering one, that creature, homeless, destitute, friendless, is mine. If the Church could speak so, there would be nobody

to speak against it. It is when the Church speaks metaphysics that the infidel has his turn. It is when the Church becomes inexplicably profound that the sceptic gets up a rival institution. That is his only chance. Let the Church talk polysyllables, and infidelity will have a field-day; but let the Church do good, and talk sense, and claim the poor, the lost, the blind, the hungry, and insist upon having them, and treat them as nobody else can treat them; then might the Church extend her space, because her hospitality is good, large as the need of life.

Jesus Christ next comes face to face with popular judgment. The miracle has been wrought: now comes the criticism that was passed upon it. "Is not this he that sat and begged?" Otherwise, "Is not this he that sits and begs?" "Some said, This is he: others said, He is like him: but he said, I am he." Thus we have the criticism of the world to deal with. We cannot have an honest judgment pronounced, because of infinite and unmanageable prejudices. We do not like to confess the supernatural. It pleases us, because we are sensuous and vulgar, to say that the house was actually built with our own hands; the king likes to say, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built?" But when a thing is done without us, done whilst we are asleep or abroad, actually accomplished in all its fulness and utility without our being consulted, our pride does not like it. So we cast about upon the identity of the man, upon the reality of the work, upon the accuracy of the report; we are prepared to say that by-and-by the whole thing will be explained upon another basis: instead of simply and directly accepting the miracle, and blessing God for his interposition in life. The Pharisees proceeded upon another line. They began by taking away the character of the man who had done the miracle. "This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the Sabbath day." They will start their argument from the doctrinal point. Why not start it from the beneficent side, and say—This man must be of God, because he heals other men? Some minds cannot be taken away from the metaphysical centre. Only say the very words they say, and you are right, no matter if you pass all the blind men in creation seven times a week, and never speak to one of them. Other men will start their whole thinking

from the beneficent side, and say, That Church must be good, there must be a blessed spirit in it, because she is always doing good, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, teaching the ignorant, blessing the unblessed, and turning human houses into human homes. These latter are not metaphysical, therefore it is impossible for them to be orthodox; their words are too short for their doctrines to be right; they go too immediately to the mark to be really what they ought to be. The Pharisees denied his power; they did not believe concerning the man that he had been blind and that he had received his sight. Not only did they take away the character of the Healer, they took away the character of the healed, and practically they called that man a false witness. He had distinctly said, "I am he," but they would not believe it. What said they then, those pious men? They said, "Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner." Often this passage is misunderstood. We should collate it with the words which were addressed to Achan, who had stolen the garment and the wedge. The leader said to him, "My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him;" a form of oburgation which meant: Confess, speak the truth to God, forget all popular impression, and all selfish prejudice, and give God the praise; stand up and confess that you have been telling lies, and be faithful to God. Thus we make hypocrisy.

Here we have Jesus Christ in the hands of an honest straightforward man. What does the man say? "I am he." That is what we will not say. "Let bygones be bygones" is our poor proverb, our mean and ungrateful policy. Once a man forgets the hole out of which he was dug, all his testimony evaporates. We are only right in our elevation in proportion as we remember the degradation out of which we came. Keep the pit in view; keep the hole in sight; then go up to heaven, and your foothold is perfectly secure. "I am he." We want the reformed drunkard to stand up and say, "I am a sober man, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." We want the worldly man to say, "I am he": once I was a miser, a worldling, a mere grubber in the earth, piling soil and stones, and glorying in the accumulation; now I see that the world is nothing, that time is nothing,

that the reality is to come ; I seek a country out of sight : I am he. We do not want indirect witness ; oblique testimony is of very little consequence in this great argument : produce the living man, the actual soul. But there were metaphysical difficulties about it. The Pharisees knew that the Healer was a sinner. The man said, " Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not"—I cannot go into those questions—" one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." That settles the whole case. Produce one converted man, and Christ has won the battle. Has there ever been one genuine conversion ? Do you know of any man who once was as bad as he could be, and who is now by the power of God endeavouring with an honest heart to lead a better life ? That miracle is the miracle of God the Holy Ghost. But why seek these miracles in reports of other men ? Why not be the miracle yourself ? If you are building your theology upon anecdotes, your theology will be consumed and destroyed. If you are building your confidence upon the reality of your own consciousness and experience, no man can take away from you the testimony of your own heart. The man might have been born blind, but he certainly was not born dumb. He was a man who was on every side of the case too strong for his antagonists. He was a witty man ; he had a shrewd, keen, piercing tongue ; his voice no doubt was resilient, telling, carrying its emphasis right through to the last syllable and breath. " Why, herein," said he, " is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes." You ought to have known about a man of this quality ; this is not a mere cipher that society could do without : " we know that God heareth not sinners " ; that is acknowledged on every hand—" The prayer of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord"—" but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth. Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing." So the man added to a fact an argument ; but the fact came first, then the argument. Do not lie your facts on your arguments ; lie your arguments on your facts, and then build up heaven-high.

How did the Pharisees answer him ? As honest, straight-

forward men are always answered—they abused him. That is the trick of all time ; that is the unchangeable ingenuity of moral insanity. Sometimes it is done in Parliament ; it has been done in the Church ; but it is a continual fact in history—abuse the man you cannot answer. “ They answered and said unto him, Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us ? ” Impertinent fool ! Who art thou ? We had to call thy parents to identify thee, and now there is a mystery about thy birth ! “ They cast him out.” “ Jesus heard that they had cast him out.” When did he not hear that ? He has heard that about us all. He heard that they had cast him out ; he was watching the case ; he did not complete the miracle and then leave it ; he knew that certain issues would flow from this interposition. “ And when he had found him,”—for he knew exactly where he was, and went immediately to the spot,—“ he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God ? He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him ? And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him,”—he first gives the faculty, then the vision ; the eye, then the landscape ; the power of sight, and then the beautiful picture,—“ Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee ; ” thou knowest his voice, thou hast not forgotten the music. “ And he said, Lord, I believe,” that is the sentence that makes history ; that is the declaration that indicates regeneration. “ I believe ” ; then there is no more selfishness, no more self-trust, but a continual outgoing towards the object of faith. This was clear. “ And he worshipped him ”—went out to him, in trust, and homage, and love. It is in vain that we say we believe Jesus if we do not worship him. This is the testimony we want to-day. This man is a model witness. He spoke for himself ; he went to the point ; he stood by the history ; he planted himself on the fact. “ And they cast him out ”—just what should and must happen to us if we would be really found of God. God will not find us until we are cast out. So long as we have one foot in the house of our respectability he does not know us, but as soon as we are “ cast out ” we are taken in, received, and welcomed.



## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we bless thee for Jesus Christ as a Teacher sent from heaven. His words are words of life and power; they search the heart, they try the reins, of the children of men; they are sharper than a two-edged sword. We rejoice that thou dost enable us to submit ourselves to the searching criticism of Jesus Christ's word. We have been false to ourselves; we have concealed our true nature even from our own eyes; we have looked on the outside only; we have forgotten our inner life, the life of motive, of secret impulse, of purposes we dare not explain; we have looked only to our hand, when we ought to have examined the very life of our heart. But Jesus Christ, thy Son, doth not spare us; he searcheth us as with a candle; he kindleth upon us the flame of the Lord, and in the light of that fire he searches and tries us, and sees if there be any wicked way in us. We rejoice in the plainness and the vigour of his speech. We thank thee that Jesus Christ layeth the axe to the root of the tree; we bless thee for his radical teaching, for his going to the roots of all evil things, for his making the tree good that the fruit may be good, for his purifying the fountain that the stream may be pure. May we learn of Jesus Christ in these things, and seek to do thy will, not as man-pleasers, not with eye-service, but with all the simplicity of love, with all the strength of entire trust, honouring goodness for its own sake, and loving truth because it is the speech of God! Deliver us from all deceitfulness, all falsehood, all pretence, and enable us to serve thee in spirit and in truth; and out of a life based on godly sincerity, may there come works of love, pity, charity, and beneficence which shall bless all with whom we come in contact! Have mercy upon us wherein we have sinned. We have done the things we ought not to have done; we have left undone the things that we ought to have done. We accuse ourselves. If the surface has been right the motive has been wrong if our hand has been clean our heart has been leprous. Do thou wash us in the blood of Jesus Christ, shed for the sins of men,—the sacrificial blood which is our propitiation, our plea, and our answer before God! Let thine own people glory in the truth, feel its power, acknowledge its sovereignty, bless its giver. If there be before thee, or shall come within the influence of our word, any man who is hypocritical, who seeks to cover up his real state from the eye of society and from the eye of his own conscience, apply thy word to such as a flame of fire, finding its way into the secret chambers of the soul and lighting up the darkest recesses of the life. Make us glad in the Lord! In the world we have mortification, disappointment, tears, broken staves piercing our hands, much sorrow, great difficulty. But in God's house, on God's day, gathered as we are around God's book, surely thy children shall not plead in vain for the gladness which comes of thy presence! Amen.

## Chapter x. 19.

“There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings.”

## DIVISION OF OPINION.

THE last thing we should have expected about the sayings of Christ is division of opinion. Having proceeded forth and come from God, one would suppose that every word he spoke would be instantly recognised as divine, and accepted as wise and beneficent. This was not the case. Whenever Jesus Christ addressed men he provoked inquiry, controversy, sometimes direct and bitter hostility; his ministers do not accomplish this miracle—at least, not intentionally. What do they love so much as that all men should instantly applaud them? We deprecate controversy in the Church. There would be better and larger church-life if there were more controversy amongst us, were that controversy conducted in a benign, patient, forbearing, and intelligent spirit. How was it that Jesus Christ provoked such division of opinion? Let us hear him for ourselves:—

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers” (vers. 1-5).

What could be more beautiful? This is the very beginning of poetry. What could be sweeter, lovelier? So the people imagined, for they took no heed of it:—

“This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them” (ver. 6).

He was making new clouds, and showing those clouds in new lights. They were very beautiful clouds, but they seemed to have no direct relation to human life. He was rewarded therefore with the applause of silence. There could not be any controversy about a beautiful parabolical statement like that. Nor was there any controversy. Then where is the point of

anger? You find the explanation in verses 7-18, which must be read in their entirety.

"Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good Shepherd: the good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good Shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father."

How personal does the statement become now! It is no longer a parable; it is a direct personal application and claim. Now the tone of the assembly will change. Jesus talks about himself; instead of talking about some abstract or imaginary shepherd he speaks of himself as "the good Shepherd"; he says, "I am the Door," "I am the good Shepherd"; "The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. . . . I am the good Shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine"; "I lay down my life for the sheep." We shall have controversy now. The moment the preacher leaves the realm of parable and begins to talk personalities, himself or the people being the personal quantity, we shall have a new temper in the meeting. The original parable passed by as a gilded cloud might pass in the soft wind; now that the preacher begins to talk directly, now that he clothes himself with all the meaning of the parable, men will look at him from a different standpoint, and he who was once a dreamy, poetical fanatic, uttering very highly coloured and beautiful things, becomes a claimant of deity—a blasphemer, a man who is demented. That is the point of hostility through all time. When Christians make a personality of their Christianity

they will have to fight for their standing-ground. Unhappily, some of them have learned the art of parable-making; but they have not learned the art of turning the parable to concrete uses. The people who listen to sermons love to have it so. There is nothing so much dreaded as a personal sermon; there is no congregation on earth that could not be scattered in an hour if the preacher were faithful. But what love of poetry there is! When a climax closes with a jingling rhyme, how beautiful it is! Clouds in infinite number and infinite variety—how charming the upward look! But let a man attack the crimes of his day, the false weights and the false measures, and the false politics, and the false philosophies, and the hypocrisies that are to be found in places of fashion, and in places of poverty as well, and he will soon have to go a-begging. Congregations have an infinite voracity for beautiful parables; they can eat up endless parables at a meal; but applications are not popular. Instantly a man would say, That was meant for me—that was a personal appeal. Certainly; and that is the only preaching worth hearing—a preaching that comes down to you and says, Thou art the man! But who can afford, financially, to preach so? It costs a Cross. O thou popular talker, applauded idol, with an infinite genius for bubble-making and bubble-gilding, thou shalt have a hot place in hell!

But the matter does not end with the preacher; it has a large application. Let any man stand up to-day in the market-place and say about himself, "I am a Christian," and he will have a hard time of it from that hour,—the meaning not being, I am a Christian believer, a believer in certain ecclesiastical dogmas and theological positions; but, I am a Christ-man—my badge a cross!—and he will not be invited again to that company. This is how we kill Christ. Let a man say, "I lay down my life for the world," and he will be avoided as a leper, or a madman. Yet this is what every Christian is called upon to do in his own degree and in his own way,—not in the degree and way in which Jesus Christ laid down his life for the sin of the world; we do not lay down our life as an expiation as he did, but we lay down our life as a service, a devotion, a consecration. No man ever yet said, "For me to live is Christ; this one thing I do: God

forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of Christ. I am determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified," without driving the fashion, the pretension, and the hypocrisy of his day miles from the place of his feet. Let any man say, "I am a believer, I am a child of God, I embody, God helping me, all the truth of Christ's Cross," and no body of men will want to see him. If he could make blank verse he would be popular; if he could speak parables without applications he would be invited evening after evening to delight the minds that never think. Who wonders, then, that Christ was in critical controversy? Seize the meaning of this exposition, and keep vividly before the mind the fact that whilst Jesus Christ was speaking the parable the people were apparently quiet, even attentive; they did not know what he was saying, yet it sounded well: but the moment that Jesus Christ came to represent the parable in actual life and embodiment, the whole disposition of the auditory underwent a marked and undesirable change. Men are leaving the Church quickly now in many directions. Some are abbreviating the Church; many have a small pocket edition of the Church—which they often forget to take with them. Why? Because Christianity will, even in the most indifferent hands, give some indication of its anti-worldliness, anti-selfishness, its love of truth and fairness and justice and honour and progress. We do not like this. Sing some lullaby, O thou Son of man, and rock us to sleep by the splash of thy liquid music. Send no sword, no fire, no controversy: we want to be let alone.

The judgment that was pronounced upon Christ will be pronounced upon Christians also if they take Christ's course:—

"And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him?" (ver. 20.)

That is popularity of the right sort. There is meaning in that. Have people really opposed to you in some desperate way, and you may convert them. Some men have never been so near crying bitterly as just after they have been cursing and swearing, and denying that they ever saw the man Christ Jesus. Indifference is eating out the life of the Church; tepid

applause directed to so-called beautiful sentences is taking the place of enthusiasm that was willing to be burned and the sacrifice that counted the stake one of the thousand ways to heaven. No preacher can ever make himself felt for good throughout the whole world and through all time until he has been denominated mad. Trace the history of all the great pulpit reputations, to go no further, and you will find that there is not one of them that has not at the root of it a charge of insanity. Sometimes the charge is not made in definite terms; it is hinted at as eccentricity, peculiarity, love of notoriety, self-consciousness, and twenty other euphemisms, which, being correctly translated, mean—insanity. It was so with Christ; it was so with Paul; it was so with Wesley; it was so with Whitefield; it is so in many modern instances. On the other hand, there are more discriminating people now, as there were in the days of Christ, who say, "These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?" Ay, that is the question. The works must be our vindication; the good that is done must be our one argument.

So there was a division among the Jews, a sharp division; one party saying, "He hath a devil, and is mad"; another party saying, "These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?"—there is a wonderful background to this man's words; he does not reveal all his meaning at once; we come upon some of his significations suddenly; we are surprised by them; his words bear thinking about; they come into our dreaming, they follow us in the day-time, they whisper to us at unexpected hours and sometimes at inopportune seasons. No, this is a wonderful talker; never man spake like this man; and I know that he opened the eyes of one who was born blind. So Christianity must stand upon its effects. The men who have realised those effects must be bold enough—that is to say, must be grateful enough—to say that they have seen Jesus, and have learned of him.

This controversy led to a demand that appears to be very simple on the surface:—

"Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long

dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly" (ver. 24).

What is "plainly"? There are persons who think that all human conversation is divisible into Yes and No: the lawyers are addicted to that view of human intercourse. What is plainly? If the question were, Are you going east or west? a plain answer could be returned; if the question were, Did you put out the right hand or the left? there could be no difficulty in replying plainly: but the questions that gather around the name of Christ, that are summed up in his marvellous character, are not questions that admit of easy, plain, superficial, and conclusive answers. We must live with Christ to know him; we must love him to understand anything he says. To have said plainly, "I am the Christ," would have been to trifle with the infinity of his personality, his sovereignty, and his claim. Great subjects cannot be dealt with in this particular way, each wrapped up, and put on a place by itself, and appraised in plain figures. You cannot snap off an inch or two of infinity and say, That is a sample of it. Infinity has no samples. You cannot snip three inches out of the wind and say, This is a sample of the tempest. As soon might you take one little stone out of a palace and say, This will give you an idea of the royal residence. Christianity is a whole; Christ is Three-in-One, One-in-Three; a contradiction in number; he is here, and not here; he is a root out of dry ground, he is a plant of renown. Herein is the difficulty of what is called plain preaching. All plain preaching may be suspected; all preaching that goes from one to two, and from two to three, as if they included the universe, is mischievous. The plainer the preaching the more suggestive will it be of infinity. There will be plain points; there must be plain points, plain charges, plain declarations of divine love, plain welcomes to Christ's heart; but even these shall be so spoken as to be felt to be connected with eternity. The atmosphere of the discourse is an important quantity in the estimate of its value. There is perspective as well as straight line, and unless we have the perspective as well as the straight course we shall miss the wondrous power that is of the nature of spirituality. Jesus Christ spoke plainly enough. The Jews never asked Jesus Christ clearly to tell them their duty. We want plainness at the wrong point. When men come to

Christ and say, Lord, what shall I do with these scales, they are unequal? he says, Burn them. There is no mistake about that answer. Lord, what shall I do, for I am addicted to drunkenness? Give up your wine and strong drink, and never touch them more. That answer could not be well improved in plainness and directness.

Who asks Christ to be plain about duty? Who does not ask him to be confidential about speculation, imagination, and things eternal, without the being plain about Christian practice and discipline? Ask for plainness at the right point, and Christ will accommodate you: ask him for another miracle, and he will turn round upon you and leave you in the darkness of sevenfold night. The mystery of Christianity is in its infinity. It is because it is so great that it cannot be reduced to the comprehension of men who have no heart for its study. Hence we say that Jesus Christ told the people distinctly that they could not understand him because they were not of his sheep—"I told you, and ye believed not." They had a plain answer, and did not understand it to be plain. They kept it outside of them, and therefore they could not comprehend it. There are many persons coming to Christ when they understand all about him, when they can meet him upon equal terms, and say they completely comprehend all his meaning, and now they have no objection to admit him to their society. That is not the way of salvation. Many men are going to believe the Bible when they know who wrote it, when it was written, who signed it, who has seen the manuscripts, where is the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, where is the original copy of the Greek New Testament, where are the signatures of the prophets and the apostles,—then they will come in. It is much like men saying, regarding an empty house when they are in search of a dwelling, Who built that house? who planned it? where is the signature of the architect? name the forest where the wood grew. Other people say, Well, with regard to these questions, they are very important, no doubt; at the same time we are going into this house, and we will find these things out from the inside. They are the wise men. Come into the Bible; begin where you can; take up such portions of it as are applicable to your own case; find your way from point to point; and the



time will come when you will care nothing about Hebrew manuscripts and Greek autographs. You will say, This is none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven: this book talks to me, knows me, loves me; I cannot do without it now. There are two ways of coming to the book or of coming to Jesus Christ: one the outside way that will do nothing until certain long lists of questions are answered one by one; and the other by coming into the offered light and the offered blessing, and beginning where we can, and going on little by little, until we feel the inspiration of the book, until we get into touch with the heart of Christ, and thus become enabled to say, when he asks us, Who am I? Thou art the Christ of God. Let us beware of terminating with mere parables; let us be thankful to the men who have sacrificed themselves for our spiritual advantage; let us bless God for such men as Paul, to whom we can do no favour that he might lay down what he knew of the riches of the knowledge and wisdom of God for our using. Let us also hold in reverent and grateful remembrance the noble men who died for their faith that they might show us how to live. Christians can get through the world very easily by being only nominal professors, by loving parables and poetry, blank verse and rhyme; we can get through to the other end without much ado: but the other end is not worth going to. What we have to do as Christians is to begin where Christ began, walk where Christ walked, follow him in all things, take up his Cross daily; practise the mysterious art of self-denial, and thus through the Cross find our way to the crown. Jesus calls us in that direction. This would seem to be an age of intermission of Christian inspiration, but Christian inspiration is not therefore dead. There are times when the tide ebbs, and men say in ignorance, The sea is fleeing away: but the sea recedes only that it may flow in fulness of power upon the shore. So it is with Christian influence. To-day is the ebb time. To-day men are giving up Christian thinking and Christian worship to a large extent. To-day men are making a name stand for a reality, a profession is taking the place of a sacrifice. But this is only a question of time. He will come whose right it is. He will overturn, overturn, overturn; and after devastation he will bring in paradise and summer and peace.

## Chapter x. 41.

“John did no miracle.”

### LIFE WITHOUT MIRACLES.

[AN OUTLINE.]

LET us inquire how far it is possible to build up a really good and strong character without doing any works that are miraculous, romantic, or merely sensational. The life of John the Baptist furnishes us with an admirable study upon this subject. “Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist”; yet John did no miracle. He was “a burning and a shining light”; yet John did no miracle. “He was a prophet, yea,” etc.; yet John did no miracle. “All that John spake of this man is true”; yet John did no miracle. Now, how far is it possible for us to win the Master’s approbation, and to come into a great estate of honour and joy, without having any power in things miraculous? Some of us may think we are living a monotonous and profitless sort of life, remarkable for nothing but sameness and insipidity; morning, noon, night coming round and round without our ever doing anything that strikes observers with amazement; always working in the same place, always surrounded by the same faces, always tethered by the same short string. If I can send one word of comfort into any heart that is mourning the narrowness of its sphere and the monotony of its pursuits, my object will be answered. Human life needs some such cheering. No doubt many people are without ambition or aspiration, and they need no help; but there are others to whom a word of interpretation and comfort will be as refreshing water in the tiresome journey of commonplace life. Some of us, too, seem always on the very point of really doing something worth doing. It seems as if a miracle were the very next thing to be done, and that we only miss the doing of it by a hair’s breadth.

We shall get some help in the direction of our study if we answer this question—Upon what kind of life did Jesus Christ set the seal of his blessing?

(1) He specially blessed the spirit and ministry of John the Baptist; and yet John did no miracle: (a) It is possible to be true; (b) courageous; (c) self-controlled; (d) illustrious; and yet to do no miracle.

(2) That this approval was in no sense exceptional is made plain by other parts of Jesus Christ's recognition of man's life and work: (a) Seventy returned; (b) cup of cold water; (c) employment of talents.

All this is made the clearer by a case on the other side—"In thy name done many wonderful works," etc.

When did Jesus Christ ever set a man in higher honour in his kingdom simply because the man was a worker of miracles?

What, then, are the qualities which God most esteems in us? "A meek and a quiet spirit, which in the sight," etc. "The Lord loveth a cheerful giver," etc.

Nowhere is the brilliant man singled out, etc. "Many that are first," etc.

(1) A word to the poor; (2) women; (3) nobodies.

What doth the Lord thy God require of thee? Miracles? "To do justly," etc. Covet earnestly the best gifts, and yet charity above all!

## Chapter xi.

### CHRISTIANITY IN FAMILIES.

“Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha” (ver. 1).

**W**E can sometimes better understand Jesus Christ’s character and spirit when they are brought to bear upon a comparatively small space, than when they are so enlarged as to embrace the universe. Let us, then, study the relationship which Jesus Christ appeared to sustain to this family at Bethany. Let us see how Jesus Christ stands in relation to this family. From what we can learn of his relationship to one household, we may be able to infer something of the spirit in which he administers the affairs of the larger family of mankind. The family was in peculiar circumstances, as we gather from the third verse—

“Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.”

The family is in distress, and the family, in the midst of its pain and sorrow, sends for Jesus Christ, the one Healer and eternal Friend. There is something very pathetic as well as most instructive in the message which is thus delivered: “Behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.” It is no stranger’s name that is spoken to Jesus Christ. I am not sure that the name of Lazarus was pronounced at all. Sometimes it is better simply to indicate the character, and to leave the proper name out of the question altogether. The reverence of the man’s disposition will identify him at once. So the sisters, gathering up all the affection and desires which Lazarus entertained towards the Son of God, described their brother as “He whom thou lovest.” Sometimes people do not send unto Jesus Christ until they are sick. It would appear, from the very construction of this message, that Jesus Christ was on familiar terms with the family at Bethany

long before the event described in this verse occurred. Jesus Christ often has a stranger's name handed to him. He has, as it were, to look at the card again and again, and to say—(if I may attribute to him aught of the limitation of human ignorance)—“Who is this? I have not seen this name before. Who calls upon me now?” And he finds that it is a worn-out old life; a shattered manhood, which being unable longer to enjoy the things of time and sense, begs an interview with One who is supposed to have healing and comfort at his disposal. It was not so in this case: “He whom thou lovest is sick. The man thou knowest so well, to whom thou hast spoken so many tender words, whose spirit is dear to thee, lies now at the very gate of death.” How is it going to be in our own case? Are we going to defer our religion until the end of our life, and call in Jesus Christ when we have darkened the windows, and have made up our minds that it is a case of extremity? or, are we going at the very commencement of our life to say, “Now, in the very midst of sunshine and prosperity and great progress, join us, O Son of God, and be our companion during the remainder of our days”? Our years are going; they seem to steal away, they fly off, and if some of us be not very prompt in our dealings, behold we shall be old men presently, and our great account to the Living One will yet be to determine! My hope is, that in studying a subject of this kind—so tender and so pathetic, and so calculated to appeal to the best sensibilities of our nature—some will yield themselves to Jesus the Saviour of families, the Healer of the sick, the Redeemer of the world!

Look at the words again, for they are full of meaning as the grape is full of juice. “He whom thou lovest is sick.” Would the text not have read much better had it been worded thus: Lord, “He whom thou abhorrest is sick; he who has offended thy law and violated thy commandments and dishonoured thy spirit is in the grip of death”? We think there would have been a natural rhythm in a sentence of that kind. Yet the text reads just contrariwise, “Lord, he whom thou lovest is sick,”—the man whose eyes ought to have stood out with fatness, upon whose cheek ought to have been the ruddiness of health, whose blood ought to have been without taint or stain, because of his

love of them and their love of him. This, however, is God's way with men. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? "Now no affliction for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." One can understand a bad man rejoicing over this; pointing out the case with a finger of suspicion and scorn, and saying, as he points it out, "See, I should have thought that if any man loved Jesus Christ he would have been spared the ills of this life! Behold, the loved one is afflicted like other men, and he who honours the name of Christ pines and dies like the blackest atheist amongst us." Men who only see a little of the case may talk in that way. Men who look at the outside only have a very short way to take in order to get at such conclusions as please their own imperfectly trained judgments. When, however, we come to look at circumferences rather than at mere points, to put to-day and to morrow and the next day together, and to sphere off divine movement and divine purpose, we come to modify some of our conclusions, and to find that some of our reasonings have been immoral; and we have, with prostration of heart, to cry to God to pardon inferences we have falsely drawn regarding his spirit and his government. Do you know good men who are sick? Can you point to your friend in a given street in London or elsewhere, and say of him, "That man is a Christian; yet everything he touches seems to go to ashes at once"? Are you able to point out case after case of good men, who are always in the dust, who have their breath half taken from them and who are weary of this life? Are you sometimes inclined to jeer over them, to talk flippantly about their picity, and to trace their sufferings to their religion? Beware what you are doing; be careful how you draw your inferences. If we lived altogether upon the space of a finger-nail, you might have some right to your conclusions; because a sense of the divine presence in the soul does keep men back from certain kinds of prosperity. Some of us might have been in better health if we could have trifled with our spirits more. Some men might have been riding in their carriages if they had shut their eyes

when they saw wrong, instead of turning aside that they might escape the temptations of the evil one. I repeat, therefore, if the whole case rested upon the space of a finger-nail, some of your conclusions might be right enough. But to time add eternity, to man add God, and wait, for the time of drawing conclusions is not yet. It may be that weakness will turn out to be the highest strength, and some kinds of poverty may prove to be the only enduring wealth. I only ask for a pause; I only beg that men be not rash. We shall have time, by-and-by, to say how things have been managed. The people in Christ's day, who waited and saw his processes and kept themselves in restraint until those processes were completed, said in a shout, in a song, at last, "He hath done all things well!" It shall be so with those who keep a strong and loving faith constantly in exercise in the Son of God. Let us, however, proceed to see how Jesus Christ seems to dally with this case. But before doing so, we shall find one utterance of his that ought to be engraven upon every memory.

"When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby" (ver. 4).

Is it not truly beautiful to find that Jesus Christ knows the purpose of every event in our individual and family life? Many a messenger of providence comes to our door, and we are at a loss to see what that messenger signifies. Is it not a comfort to the heart to believe that there is One who knows why he caused our door to be opened, that the strange, mysterious, and oftentimes unwelcome visitor might be admitted? Jesus knew exactly why the sickness had fallen upon Lazarus. "This sickness is not unto death." It is not that death may finish the process that sin began in the history of mankind. But you shall see that in this case circumstances shall so conspire that the result of the whole will be an additional glory given to the Lord of Hosts and to his Son Jesus Christ. The earth and the heavens work together. Things below and things above come into strange union and combinations, and sometimes things have to be broken down that they may be lifted up. Oftentimes, indeed, God comes to us along a path which is strewn with wrecks, with blighted hopes, with thrown-down towers, and plans and projects of divers kinds; and we say when the wind rages very highly, and

when things are toppled over into confusion, "Behold, this is death!"—not knowing that in this way, strange though it may appear beyond all other mystery, God is working a way upon which his own foot shall pass. Is there not joy, peculiar and oftentimes intense, in the companionship of a man who has the gift of interpretation? Is it nothing to have at hand a man who can tell you what your dream means, what your pains signify, and what that great loss, which has so impoverished you, was intended to speak to your heart? There are some men amongst us who are gifted with the faculty, if I may so call it, of interpreting things. When they come into a family afflicted and deserted, they can speak so wisely and so sweetly about the affair, as if God had passed down the key of the lock to them and said, "Take that; turn it just so, and behold, you will open it, and bring light and comfort to those who sit in darkness and captivity." If it be so amongst ourselves; if a friend can revive us by suggesting a reasonable interpretation of certain things in our life; what of him who knows the secret of God, who holds that secret in his own right hand, and who can whisper to us amid all suffering and all loss, "The meaning of this, my brother, is that God intends to work out in your life a higher refinement and a nobler strength, a more dignified patience, and to perfect you by trial severe as fire"? This is what Jesus Christ does for men. He tells them the purpose of their sickness, he tells them the meaning of the brevity of time; he explains to them how it is that they have only a certain degree of strength, and why they are kept short of a higher degree still. He interprets things; he gives them their right meanings; he stops men from imperfect, and especially from godless, conclusions. In this way he enriches our life continually. I have taken many a hard case to him. There is not a man who has had harder cases to deal with in life than I have had to encounter; and this I know—and no man shall take away my boasting from me or my joy—that not until I have gone and told Jesus, and explained the thing from my point of view to him, has there come into my understanding and my heart such a sense of the rightness of things as has comforted me, and lifted up my soul from the midst of the lions that had assailed it and the darkness that was gathered around it. It is a great thing, amid misinterpretations,



and prayerlessness, and worldliness, to hear a man say that, in plain simple English, who affixes his own signature to it, and does not send men into dusty libraries to exhume antiquities to prove it, but who says in his own proper person, "I have received from communion with the Son of God interpretations of sickness and loss and hardship and loneliness and bitterness, which have cheered me and made me young again; and what I have received I wish to give,—having found out a well-head in the wilderness, I wish to tell every thirsty traveller about it. I do not wish, such is the effect of the living water upon a man, to run away and say, I shall keep the secret to myself, for I may want that well again! Contrariwise, I would proclaim that there is in Christ Jesus water for us all to quench the burning thirst of the life, to satisfy the necessities of the spirit and the understanding and the heart." The more we drink it, the more there seems to be. More than that. I wish to say, in English equally simple and direct, that every other well is poisoned, every other well is shallow, and every other invitation is a lie!

"Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus" (ver. 5).

Every member of the family,—there was nobody shivering in the cold outside who was not embraced in this all-redeeming and all-comforting love. There are sad hearts in many homes,—because there is one wanting who ought to be in the company; one young man not in the household who ought to be there,—a very genial, open-hearted, kind, noble young man in some aspects, but drawn off by the insidious tempter, and made corrupt and evil-minded; so much so, that it would not be safe to admit him into the presence of little children, or into the presence of persons who have any sense of purity or right. Nothing is said about him, but the heart goes out after him, sadly, moaningly, and would gladly bring him back again. Do we know a family that is complete in Jesus? We may know more than one such—a family in which we find the father and the mother, and all the children, loving the same Saviour and loved of the same Christ! Is there any picture on earth to be compared with that for simplicity, for beauty, for pathos, and for all the qualities that touch the deepest sensibilities of our nature? Alas, there are other families that are not complete, and you are the absentee,

perhaps! I call you home. Your father waits, and your mother and your sisters, and you only are absent, and they cannot be at rest until you come in. They have joy—great joy, that wells over the very sides of their hearts; but what an addition to their joy would come from the fact that you have said, openly and firmly, “I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned!” The joy, which is now very deep and intense, would then be completed,—nought would excel it but the rapture of heaven itself!

“Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus;” and they were all different. Martha was busy, anxious, fretful, industrious, a housewife from her birth, elect to have the control of household affairs; her sister was quiet and thoughtful, contemplative, pensive, silent; and Lazarus represented another side of human character altogether. Jesus loved them all. Oh, wondrous love! Our artificial lights can only give a little relief to the darkness of particular places; but the great sun in the heavens lightens, with impartial glory, the palace and the cot, the great landscape and the poor man’s little garden,—it enters every garret and window, as well as penetrates all the sumptuousness of palaces. It is even so with the love of Christ. Some of us can only love particular kinds of character. We feel that we must draw a line when certain persons come into connection with us, for we really cannot understand them, or appreciate them, and therefore our love becomes cramped, and says, “I cannot go any farther on.” But Jesus can love us all. He knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are but dust; he understands our peculiarities; he knows through what processes we have passed—processes that have roughened us and made us unlovely; processes that have gone far to break down our very spirit. Yet he sees what is left in us, and with impartial benediction he would bless us all. As the great firmament holds the mighty sun and the tiny asteroid, so that greater heart of Christ folds in its infinite embrace all mankind. Why, then, should one of us—the obscurest, the poorest, the roughest, the worst—stand back, as though he had no God, as though his name had not been thought of when Calvary was made the centre of the universe!

"When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was" (ver. 6).

This is an aspect of the divine government which we have great difficulty in understanding. Would not the sentence have read much better thus: "When Jesus had heard that Lazarus was sick, though he had a great deal of very urgent business on hand, yet he left the whole instantaneously, and sped to Bethany as quickly as he could possibly proceed"? There, we should have said, is the outworking of love; that is precisely how affection shows its genuineness and its depth. Yet we read that Jesus Christ, having heard that his loved friend was sick, remained two days longer in the very place where he received the intelligence. God does appear sometimes to be slow in his movements. Our impatience cries for him, as he sits still, as if we were but noisy children, not knowing what we were talking about. We say, "Speak to us, Lord, or it will be too late," because we measure time by a local standard; we call it astronomical time—time taken from the sun;—but God takes his times from something higher than our standards. We now and again wonder, and sometimes our reverence threatens to break down in the process of our wondering, that God does not make more haste than he appears to do. At such times there comes in this solemn, majestic sound, "A thousand years are in thy sight but as one day, and one day as a thousand years!" A sentence which means that God does not measure himself or his movements by our idea of time. He takes the beat of his step from another standard altogether, and at last he will show that he is not slack concerning his promises, as some men count slackness. Is God delaying? With whom is he delaying? "He is delaying with me," says some poor, fainting heart. Do I doubt it? Far from it. Has he not delayed with myself many a time? Do I not want him now, instantaneously, to come down to my relief? I do. Yet he sits yonder above the sun and stars, away on that great burning effulgent throne, and my prayers seem unable to hasten him in any one movement. I own it; I do not attempt to modify it; I accept it as a solemn and instructive fact. What then? This: Wherever I have been privileged to see anything of the meaning of his delay, I have always found that he has been delaying not for his benefit but for ours; and that

when he does come he will bring with him some greater blessing than we had ventured either to hope or expect. Let God be Judge. There can be but one Lord. The child is impatient with you because you do not move so actively as he would like you to move; but you, in your maturer wisdom and deeper love, are acting upon a principle which he cannot understand; and the child will come to know and learn that any impatience on your part, equal to his own, would mean the destruction of your family and the utter ruin of your peace. You must pause; you must be restful; you must be tranquil when others would like to see you excited. You must hasten slowly in some things, for your intent is to complete your work and rest it upon a basis which cannot easily be shaken. There are many mysteries about this side of the divine government. There are mysteries about every side of the divine administration, and we glory in this mystery. To-morrow is the mystery of to-day; night is the mystery of noon-tide; immortality is the mystery of death; heaven is the mystery of earth. I would not care to live if all mystery were taken away. It is in the exercise of a deep, tender, loving faith in the Unseen and the Unlimited that I find joy which animates my suffering and wounded heart! In the twentieth verse we reach the point at which Martha and Jesus meet:—

“Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat still in the house.”

They both loved the Saviour. Martha went out; Mary remained at home. Such is the difference of method by which we show our quality and our nature. Martha was restless, unquiet, anxious; she found consolation in activity; so long as she could be moving about she felt a kind of relief in the very change of position. Mary sat still; she found rest in wonder, in contemplation, in silent sorrow; if you moved her you discomfited and disquieted her. So do not let us say that Martha was more anxious about Lazarus than Mary was, or that Mary had a deeper love than Martha. We are made differently. We are the same, yet we are not the same. We may be born in the same house, and so far as difference of character is concerned we might have been born in different zones. What then? Let us be gentle in

our judgment of one another. Do not let Martha, as she hastens fretfully down the road, say, "Mary does not love her brother so much as I do, or she could not sit still as she is now doing,—she would come out and meet the Master." And do not let Mary say, "Oh, that fretful, restless, anxious sister of mine, there is no peace wherever she is! If she had more piety she would have more composure." Nothing of the kind. We are made, I repeat, differently. It is difficult to understand one another. Blessed be God, we can get enough of mutual appreciation, if we be in Christ Jesus, to enable us to take the most favourable view of circumstances and of movements which we cannot fully understand.

"Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" (ver. 21).

It is just the speech that Martha would make. We find—so true is it that extremes meet—that when Jesus came into the house Mary made precisely the same speech to him. It was a speech of love, yet of ignorance. It was a speech of trust, and yet a speech that arose from the want of a right understanding of divine power and divine relationship. Hear the words: "If thou hadst been here." She limited the Holy One of Israel; she assigned locality to the Saviour. As yet she had not entered into the meaning of the words, "Lo, I am with you always!" Nor do I wonder at her not doing so. The full revelation of the Spirit had not been given; the entire purpose of the scheme of mediation had not been revealed and applied. Martha did just what we ourselves, under similar circumstances, would have done. What have we now to do? To learn this: That presence is not bodily; that presence is not formal; that the Son of God is here, though I see him not. "For wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I." May two or three not be gathered together in his name in the house of affliction? Yea, verily so. The afflicted ones are standing by the bed side, and they are one in their earnest desire that Christ would interpose—and Christ is there, if the desire arise from a penitent and believing heart. Then why does he not heal the sick one? Healing! Knowest thou what thou sayest when that word escapes thy tongue? What is healing? He is healed who

dies. He who lives is patched up for a moment. Death is healing. We do so suffer by the narrowness of our interpretations. We put such small meanings upon words. When your dear little child was breathing its last you said, "Oh, that it might be healed!" And when the last breath went out of it, it was healed! You said, "Dead"; the angels said, "Born." You said,—

"It was our home's undoing,  
Oh, the ruin!"

Jesus said, "Let the little ones come unto me." "Healed! Plagued, you mean; more keenly tried, you mean; tossed about more violently in the world, you mean." They are healed whom he takes. "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat; and the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and lead them unto living fountains of water; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

"If thou hadst been here." This was an expression on the part of Martha that arose from great love, great trust, but void of a true understanding of the meaning of Christ's presence. What, then, have we to preach? This. We shall all die! Do not let us postpone the intimation of our need of the Son of God until we are so faint that we can only receive him at the side of our death-bed. Do let us be more decent, more courteous, more civil. We shall all die! That is a fact that men have never been able to reason out of human history. If they could come to me and say, "We will guarantee you shall never die, you shall always be as you are—young and strong and active and prosperous," then I might incline an ear to their reasonings more deferentially than I am disposed to do at present. But when they are talking to me against religion and against the deeper life, against faith and spiritual love and service of the unseen, what do I behold? Oh! this: Over their shoulder, a grim, ghastly spectre called Death! Do not let us postpone our prayers until Death knocks at the door, because when he knocks we cannot send him away and tell him to come another time. "Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

## Chapter xi.

### “IF.”

**I**N selecting this word we are struck with the frequency of its occurrence in this chapter. This would seem to be the field in which the word grows. Some soils suit certain plants; this soil would seem to suit the word “if” admirably. I know not of any other chapter in which it occurs so frequently, so variously, and so instructively. It is not legitimate to choose the word “if” for a text if the meaning be to hang upon it whatever may first occur to an unlicensed imagination. The word “if” is not fantastically chosen, but is chosen from the point of view of an expositor. It is not a little word to be trifled with, a cherry-stone to have an image engraved upon it; it is a keyword, solemn, indicative of serious thinking, and of the philosophies of life. Keep within the bounds of this chapter, and say if this be not so. The word is used by everybody—by Jesus, by the disciples, by Martha, by Mary, and by the chief priests and the Pharisees.

First of all, here is the “if” of wisdom:—

“Jesus answered, . . . If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world” (ver. 9).

From Jesus himself we first receive the word. Then he gives us an instance of the “if” of otherwise unimaginable folly:—

“But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him” (ver. 10).

But will any man be such a fool as to walk in the night when he cannot see his own hand before him? Is not this a dream bordering upon romance, and not far away from insanity? No man will walk in the night. So we should certainly have said; but Jesus Christ points to a different possibility. Who can tell the limits of insanity? Who knows the boundaries within which

the evil heart exercises itself in all iniquity? There are men that love the darkness. They wait for it as you would linger for a chosen companion. They look round and say, Would the darkness were here! They cannot stir but in the darkness; they are not children of the light or of the day or of the morning or of the summer; but owls and bats—evil men that work in the darkness with faithful industry. The word "if" as thus used is not indicative of many of those possible actions which are usually associated with the term: the Lord is laying down a great philosophy of work; he is indicating that there are times and seasons for labour, and that not only is work to be done, but done at the proper time—the light for labour, the darkness for rest. "The light he called Day, and the darkness he called Night;" and each has its needful opportunity that will not exchange places. If an irregularity is set up in nature, so that night becomes day, until that irregularity has become custom it disturbs and upsets, and creates painful tumult.

Then here is the "if" of human hope shadowed by fear:—

"Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well" (ver. 12).

We know how that "if" was spoken. We know how many ways there are of passing a lie. We know what it is to give consent with reservation, to yield acquiescence with unspoken reluctance. The disciples seem to have felt that Lazarus was dead, but hearing Jesus say that he slept, the disciples said, "Lord, if he sleep." Who does not know what it is to have a mocking doubter in the heart whilst the tongue is confessing all manner of theologies and orthodoxies? Who does not know what it is to have a spectre overlooking him, even in the middle of prayer, and to hear that spectre whisper with cold breath, Thou liar? Who does not know what it is to say to the sick one, You are better to-day? It was not the heart that spoke; the visitor or the friend thought it would be well to cheer the sufferer, and therefore said, You look better. How could you say so? You knew that the cheek was whiter than yesterday, the lips more livid, the eyes more lifeless: how could you say so? And yet it seemed to be right to say just that at that time. We cannot be kept back by cold fact, judicial impartial reason; sometimes the heart leaps and outruns the head, and is at the sepulchre



before the lumbering Peter can come up. Who would have himself tried by arithmetical rules and geometrical figures? Who would not have many sides to his nature, so that his imagination may be miles ahead whilst his limping reason—poor, shuffling, ambling cripple—is looking round for staff or crutch? Does not a blessing come with those whose ministry is such as to enable them to speak words of hope when their hearts are cold with fear? Do we not sometimes say, *It is so*,—when we mean, *We wish it were so*? Do we not play false with grammatical forms, and change moods and tenses at will, coming with holy violence against the custom of speech in order to tell a gospel or sing a line that will cheer the fainthearted? Sometimes we have said, *Lord, if there is another world*,—if there is a resurrection,—if there is a Judgment Day. We put the case as if we were stating a creed and stating a doubt in the same breath; so it is a troubled utterance, a most tumultuous expression, understood in heaven, and there only can any creed be understood. We do not believe the less because of this shadowing “if”; yea, we would seem to believe the more,—that is to say, we would take more blessing “if” we could, or might. *Lord, help our incapacity!*

Now we come to another “if,” uttered by the two sisters, in almost identical words, probably with identical meaning; but it is the “if” of ignorance:—

“Then said Martha unto Jesus, *Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died*” (ver. 21).

They conversed together, and to that woman Jesus revealed some aspects of his personality and ministry that might have been revealed to an attentive universe. Then Mary comes upon the scene:—

“Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, *Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died*” (ver. 32).

Is there a tone of reproach in that statement? Does it mean, *If thou hadst come, instead of abiding two days still in the same place, our brother would still have been with us, and the little house at Bethany would have been as bright and cheery as ever*? Or does it involve a philosophy? Does it say, *Lord,*

where thou art no death can be : death and Jesus cannot be in the same chamber long ? Probably the meaning was exhausted by the first view, namely, that Jesus Christ came too late ; if he had come earlier the event would not have occurred : the two sisters agreed in that ; activity and contemplation found a common resting-place in the assurance that if Jesus Christ had not been in the house death dare not have come in at the front door. This is a beautiful "if," without doubt. It is employed for the purpose of increasing emphasis, deepening and enlarging spiritual certitude, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" : thou didst love him, and though death stood at his bedside ready to leap upon him as a conqueror might leap upon an overthrown foe, yet thou wouldst have kept him back, and my brother had been alive to-day, leading the household psalm, and distributing the household bread. Yet this is a doctrine marked by ignorance. For death is the servant of God—the black, grim, weird servant who finds his wages in his work ; he eats millions a day, and hungers for millions more. Why do we separate the devil as if he had a little universe of his own in which he was sole king, constituting a court that owed allegiance to no sceptre ? Why do we think of death as something wholly apart from God ? As an enemy that has taken advantage of God's absence from the household of creation ? The devil is a chained dog ; a beast capable of infinite barking, but the chain is on his throat. And Death—old, old Death—thriving these countless ages upon beast and bird and fish, and then leaping upon man and overthrowing him,—this monster is a servant of the court of heaven. The Lord reigneth ! Has not the Lord a right to send for those whom he will, for those who are ready, for those whose mischief upon earth must come to an end ? What could the Lord do without death when he has so little space to work upon on the face of the globe ? Death is a necessity. If emigration relieves the congestion of nations, so death relieves the congestion of the globe. Death is servant, not master. Yet, a beautiful thought is it that where Jesus is there can be no death.

"I am the resurrection, and the life : he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live : and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (vers. 25, 26).

Men do not die when Christ is in the house ; they ascend

Let Pagans die ; Christians must languish into life. Let beasts die ; but men must be liberated, must accept the word of emancipation and receive the crown of freedom. With Jesus in the house there can be no death ; the little child will not die, but go up like a dewdrop, called for by the warm sun. In the house of the saint bereavement itself becomes a sacrament. Death doth but enlarge the horizon, and show the greater width of the universe.

Then here is the " if " that calls to faith. Only Jesus Christ himself could speak this " if."

" Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God ?" (ver. 40.)

Could she not see the glory of God without believing? No. Can you see the stars without the telescope? What can you see with the naked eye? You have invented lenses that can search a leaf, a grass-blade, or a water-drop, and that can search the infinite spaces of the heavens,—here is a lens called Faith by which we see the glory of God. If men will not use the microscope, do you say that the microscope is useless, and that there is no under-world to be discovered? If men will not use the telescope, do you proclaim the universe a blank, saying, Even the street lamps have been put out, and death reigns in all the arch of the sky? You say to such people, You ought to use the means. But when the theologian or the Christian or the apostle says, "You ought to use the means," he is called a fanatic. People who distrust the naked eye in everything want the naked reason to discover the metaphysics of the universe. This cannot be done. Lord, increase our faith! God holds nothing back from faith. He would give us a brighter summer if we had more faith ; he would send us brighter mornings if we had larger faith capacity to receive them. We could frighten death away if we had faith ; we could create harvests anywhere if we had faith. We should have plenty of bread if we had plenty of faith. When we hear that a man has discovered a new star, we never find it added that he discovered it with the naked eye. Sometimes men say to amateurs, "Get the focus right." What has the focus to do with it? Can I not see? Have I not eyes? No, you cannot see, and what eyes you have want

assistance,—get the focus right. So say those who teach the inner and upper mysteries of the kingdom eternal: Brother, get the focus right; see that the glass suits your eye; see that you are on the line of vision; see that no hindrance is in the way intercepting the revelation,—“Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?” We cannot have this great telescopic faith all at once: we may have it little by little. Sometimes we begin at a very humble point. Who has not in his childhood smoked a piece of glass rather than not have some medium through which to look at the sun, at an eclipse, at some peculiar view, or some startling phenomenon of the heavens? Some of us are no farther on religiously. Understand that a kaleidoscope is not a telescope. There be many who have theological kaleidoscopes: looking through the kaleidoscope they see Methodism—all the Methodist preachers that ever lived; another turn, Congregationalism—all the Congregationalists. You are only looking at pieces of glass; the stars—cold, bright, glorious—are away yonder, and you must have another instrument by which to scan their glory. One man was no farther on than this—it was a poor telescope, but he saw a good deal through it. He said, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.” There is a cloud on the glass,—O Blessed One, take it away, then I shall see thee in thy beauty!

Now we come to the “if” of human despair:—

“Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him” (vers. 47, 48).

Even the Pharisees must have an “if”—“If we let him thus alone.” There are some men who must do mischief, who must circulate evil reports, who must pass narrow criticisms, who must write stinging articles in journals that have small enough circulation to take them in, in the hope that they may sell an extra copy. There are people who must run down other people, depreciate them, who say, “There are spots on the sun,”—there will be spots on the earth as long as they live! So the Pharisees get into a council. There are some men never strong except when they are on a committee. Meet such men one by one, and they are deferential; let them get together on a committee, a

council, or a board of directors, and perhaps a finer set of cowards could hardly be met. They assist public deliberations by crying, "Vote, vote!" "Hear, hear!" That is the sum total of their contribution to the illumination and advancement of great questions. The Pharisees must get into council. One will speak and another will say, "Hear, hear!" and the rest will applaud, and nobody can tell exactly who said it. When did a Pharisee boldly and frankly come up to Jesus Christ and face him as man faces man in singularity? Oh, when the pack of hounds met how the hounds barked and yelled! Some men have been killed by councils, killed by committees, killed by numbers of persons who have absorbed their own personality in the troubled existence of other and indescribable lives. This matter is a personal one. We cannot be saved by councils, nor ought we to fear being condemned by them. We cannot be saved by committees; why should we wait for them as if they had it in their power to pervert our judgment or trouble our conscience? Be right, and go on; be sure of your ground, and then stand still, and advance, pray, and consider as the circumstances which come and go may determine.

Were we not right in saying this chapter is fruitful in "ifs"? If I might go beyond the chapter it would be to quote two other "ifs" full of meaning: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Is it possible for a man to say he has no sin? So it would seem, because the supposition is here affirmed. There are people who believe in their own respectability—"not that they wish to be proud," when they are so proud that the universe can hardly find a throne high enough for them to sit down upon. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves"—we deceive nobody else. We are liars, and the truth is not in us. We must make acquaintance with our own sin; we must face it, name it, weigh it, measure it, and call it ours. This may begin the reckoning. But you cannot reckon upon your soul's destiny in the dark. Men must be faithful to themselves, right-down frank with their own spirits.

Now comes that second "if"—a gospel, an opening heaven—"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins,

and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." How admirably is the statement put in both aspects! "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves,"—If we confess our sin God will follow confession by absolution. Thus stands the matter. Let no man trifle with it. For ages men have lived upon these truths: hence the Church; hence all evangelistic effort; hence all holy doctrine; hence all comforting proclamation. There are times when men need precisely such words as these, "If we confess our sins." We are not always in a mood to receive that exhortation: sometimes it comes to us weakly, most feebly; so much so that we resent it, and say that preaching is for churches on Sundays, and not for market-places and the common thoroughfares of life. But, sometimes, even in the city, a man would be glad if he could hear a voice behind him saying, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." He would account the market-place a church if he could hear that sacred word. When he has been robbing his employers; when he has been playing false with sacred oath and vow; when he has been doing the things he ought not to have done; when he is living in fear of detection because to-morrow the audit will take place and the day after judgment will be delivered; when every wind that blows around him is a breath from perdition, a blast from hell; when every step he takes is a step into a quaking bog; when every voice he hears may be the voice of judgment final and irrevocable; then if some one could say to him, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins," he might be turned to better thoughts; it might soon be said of him, "Behold, he prayeth!"

## Chapter xi. 7, 8.

“Then after that saith he to his disciples, Let us go into Judæa again. His disciples say unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee and goest thou thither again?”

### CHRIST'S COURAGE.

[AN OUTLINE.]

“THE Jews sought to stone me” would be, for certain natures, a sufficient reason for not again venturing into their presence. Christ teaches us one divine lesson by this act of fortitude, viz., to go wherever there is work to be done. In Judæa there was a sleeper who could be awakened by his power alone; hence he returned to Judæa, in spite of the malignity which he had recently endured. Christ was called, by the sympathy of his own heart, to remove the sorrow which threatened to engulf two bereaved sisters, and to prove his divinity by a miraculous exertion of his power. He knew that in Judæa there were multitudes ready to put him to death; yet his own convictions overbalanced the fury of his enemies, and brought him to the graveside of his beloved Lazarus.

Christianity develops true fortitude. There is a bravery which results from animal passion, there is a courage which arises from ambition, pride, love of applause; but these must be distinguished from Christian heroism. The valour of a Christian is the result of regnant conviction: he is heroic because he is right; he fights to prove his loyalty to divine principles. Can your faith bear stoning? Dare you venture into Judæa when every hand is ready to smite you? These are test-questions. It is but a lean, shivering, pitiable faith that dreads any form of reproach or chastisement.

Clamour is not necessary to the exhibition of true fortitude.

Some men cannot fight without acquainting the public with their battles. Christ was often dumb in his sufferings; he had not always the relief which speech or groan often insures, "he opened not his mouth." His was true endurance; his deepest sufferings secretly exhausted themselves. Christ endured many stonings of which history is ignorant. The severest trials of fortitude are not necessarily visible: the deadliest blows are aimed in the sacred hours when eye and pen are excluded.

The Church that fears stoning is useless for practical purposes; it may be ornamental, but its beauty is perishable. It will make no vital impression on a neighbourhood; it is a delicate hot-house plant, that cannot bear the climate of an unsympathetic and ruthless world. Christ in a Church will lift that Church above the fear of stoning; for Christ transforms the churches into his own nature. We shall be surrounded by weaklings and cowards, until the fellowship of professors be entirely impregnated by the spirit of him who never quaked in the presence of danger, or blushed in the enunciation of the principles on which his life was founded.



## PRAYER.

**ALMIGHTY GOD**, we would see Jesus as we have never seen him before. This is the glory of the Lord, that he shines with different lights, that his glory varies as we look upon him, heightens as we adore him, and encompasses us round and round like a divine defence. We have seen Jesus at Bethlehem, we have heard his teaching in the Word and somewhat of it in the spirit; we have seen him upon the Cross, and we have seen him ascending into glory; still we want another vision, a brighter, fuller, tenderer disclosure of Jesus Christ's presence and ministry. We have heard that he prayeth for us in daily intercession, taking up our poor cries of need, and magnifying them into prevailing prayer. Give us faith to hold fast by this sweet doctrine, then we shall have more faith in our prayers, because they are taken up by him and made availing through his Cross and blood, and ascension and intercession; yea, they become his prayers uttered from his heart and by his lips, and they must elicit answers that will satisfy our poverty and all our desires. When we read the Holy Book may a new light shine upon it from above, and a fuller glory rise from within itself; then in thy light shall we see light, and there shall be in our souls light above the brightness of the sun. Thine is a marvellous light, O Son of man, O Son of God! We cannot imagine it, we cannot forecast it, we cannot say, It shall be thus; for we know not how great is thy power, how gracious thy purpose of self-disclosure. Surprise us with new light: at midnight may there be a shining as of the dawn, and at noonday may the sun be sevenfold in strength. May we look at everything from the standpoint of Jesus Christ's ministry, specially from Jesus Christ's Cross; then shall we see meanings otherwise undiscoverable, then shall we see the unfolding of purpose, passing the discernment of human sagacity: we shall see God working out his plan of love, caring for all, caring most for the least, mighty in all, but omnipotent in the uttermost weakness. Thus shall we have great contentment of heart, deep tender peace of mind; we shall hail death as a friend, we shall say the garden is not complete until a grave has been dug in it, and we shall know that life is nothing till it is thrilled with the agony of heavenly expectation. We bless thee that we see life's meaning somewhat: it is a poor life in itself, it is a glorious life in its indications and possibilities. Now it is a pain, but by-and-by it will be a joy, and the joy will be greater because of the preceding pain. Enable us to stand upright in the strongest wind, and to look straightforwardly, even though the darkness challenge our vision. May we say, There is no darkness with God; this poor cloud is transient, easily punctured; it may be gone in a moment. Thus in thy

strength, thou mighty Bearer of the Cross, may we carry our life with all its burden and all its pain. Grant unto aged servants renewal of youth; grant unto thy youngest children sense of thy nearness, the responsibility and solemnity which come of conscious nearness to God, and to all thy servants who are busy here and there teaching the lesson that they have nothing that is certain except that which they have given away; and thus may all life be blessed, and every day become a gate opening upon heaven. Cheer the despondent; thou knowest how sad the life is and weary: oh for one breath of summer wind, one look of summer light! Guide the perplexed and the bewildered, and lift up the stumbling lest they totter to their fall; and as for those who are weak enough to vow and break the vow, the Lord give them strength from on high, and make the most infantile the most gigantic. Spare us yet a little while, that we may recover ourselves, and smite us not down in wrath; when thou dost call for us let it be by some angel's whisper, not by some great storm. Amen.

### Chapter xii. 20-29.

"And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast: the same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus. Philip cometh and telleth Andrew: and again Andrew and Philip tell Jesus. And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour. Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. The people therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to him."

### CERTAIN GREEKS.

THESE were not Greek Jews; they were simple Greeks: otherwise translated "Gentiles"; real, indisputable outsiders. That was the thing that made Jesus so glad. There were Greek Jews; but we must not confuse the one class with the other. The whole point of this glowing interview will be lost if we fail to fix our minds upon the one instructive fact that the Greeks were Gentiles, in the simplest, broadest sense of that term. And when Jesus heard of them he said, This is glory, this is daylight, this is the meaning of it all; and such a radiance overspread that face as well-nigh put out the sun. "Certain Greeks": only a few, but not a few to Christ; because Jesus

Christ does not reckon by our arithmetic. That is an invention of our own. Without the faintest authority we have said that two and two are four. That is a purely human supposition, and altogether questionable, except on the ground of convenience. "Certain Greeks": quite a handful; perhaps two, perhaps five. But the light must strike some point first: what if it struck these few Gentile wanderers in the first instance? What do we mean by the word "few"? Sometimes we have a contemptuous significance; but if we looked at things really as they ought to be looked at we should regard a few as equivalent to a pledge, the first drops that precede the rich rain. What about the first blade that pierces the dull earth and stands up in green beauty: is it a favourite? No: it is better; it is a harbinger; it says, I have only come first; they are all coming. It is not elected in the sense of other green blades having been blighted underground: it is elected in some sense of precedence; it outran the others; they all started together, but this little one came up first, elected to preach the harvest, called, not to singularity, but to expressiveness, to algebraic suggestiveness, saying, This is the indication that you must presently get your sickles ready, for we are all alive and all unfolding and all coming; to-morrow the land will be green, and the day following it will be yellow with corn. The blade is only first, because there are more to follow. It would be neither first nor last if there were no succession; it would stand alone, it would be without an arithmetical indication at all, except there be some word that signifies loneliness, some figure that typifies isolation; it is either first or last, because there are more.

"The same came therefore to Philip," and "Philip cometh and telleth Andrew." Why that "therefore"? Read: "There were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast: the same came therefore——" That is not evident. "The same came to Philip," possibly: but why "therefore"? What is this unexpressed logic? What is this subtle ministry that urges a man to watch, to sleep; that bids him sit down and wait till the traveller comes up who will tell him all the rest? There is a "therefore" that seems to have no antecedent; there **is** a conclusion which seems to be without premise, major or

minor. Poor man-made logic! It touches scarcely anything, and is rich only in principal blunders. Why not live upon this larger "therefore"? Why not avail ourselves of what the logicians call the *enthymeme*, in a far larger sense, feeling that everything is unexpressed but the conclusion? Why did you call upon me? I do not know. But you had to do it. Why did you not go next door? I could not: I was brought to your door, and you have an answer to my question, and you will give it. There were certain Greeks, and they came to Philip, and Philip to Andrew. Very singular that these are the only two disciples that have Greek names. "Philip" is Greek, "Andrew" is Greek, and "they" were Greek, and they got together: how? We cannot tell. Why did we go? We do not know why we went. Why did we not go? We cannot tell why we did not go. Are there ghosts in the air? Yea, verily. The universe is a ghost: we have made it into something vulgar. How does like come to like? How does the magnet attract its own metal? Why this stirring among all the filings? Is some one breathing upon them? No. Is some one touching them? No. How they move! What is it? A magnet held over them, or under them, or at some little distance from them. It is singular that the Greeks should find the Greeks, and that the Greeks who were found should be only Greek in name. Who can write the history of love, of sympathy, of friendship, of congeniality, of masonry that has no banqueting-table but at the heart? They are the mysteries of life. In old times names had significations; now they have none. A man will call his son "Philip" or "Apollon" without the slightest reason for doing so. Heathenism has given us our names, and yet we are Christians. We owe the name of every day of the week to pagan mythology, and yet we are followers of Christ. We call a man jovial, jolly, jubilant, not knowing that we are talking astrology, that we are going back to the time when the astrologer found in Jupiter the origin and fountain of all these names. We describe a man as "Mercurial," never thinking that the astrologer gave us that name; and we speak of "Saturnine," and "Saturnalia," the dark revel, not knowing that we are talking paganism. Yet we call ourselves a Christian nation. There is a law, inscrutable, indisputable, immeasurable, that brings us together. Every preacher has his own audience.

They are all alike, if you could see the right line or stand at the right point of view ; their heads are all alike, and their shoulders, and their purpose. We do not see it, because we see nothing, poor moles ; but as seen in the right line the preacher and the congregation are one, all moving in the same direction, all excited by the same appetences, all stirred by the same aspiration : the differences are external, superficial, transient ; the likeness is a likeness of soul. Why does not a certain preacher get a larger congregation than he does ? Because there are not so many people of his sort. He cannot get a larger congregation than he has ; all that is settled. Why not have gone to some other disciples ? Simply because they could not.

What was the appeal, so tender, and so simple, and almost childlike ?—"Sir, we would see Jesus." Perhaps it was unconscious, certainly it was imperfect ; they did not know what they were going to see, and yet they must see the object of their search. When we come to understand that inquiry the Christian Church will be much enlarged. We cannot all see the same aspect of Jesus ; we cannot all take in the same quantity of Christ. One man takes in the good-doer, and follows the Good Shepherd, the good Samaritan, the child-nurse ; he cannot go away from him. Another man of another quality and range of imagination takes in all the miracles ; he has no doubt about curing the eyes of the blind, unstopping the ears of the deaf, unloosing the tongues of the dumb, and raising the dead, and quieting the seas ; he has all that quality of imagination that can take in the whole series ; he cannot give up the miracles, the other mind never took them up. A third will find out all the theology, and construct a system for himself, and will put other people in jail who do not adopt what he has written,—he is a broadminded bigot. See as much of Christ as you can. What do you see of him ? That is enough ; certainly enough to begin with. Have you touched the hem of his garment ? By-and-by you shall rest your head upon his beating heart. Did you see him take up a little child and bless it ? Hereafter ye shall see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man. Do you say you can understand little parts of the New Testament but not all ? Then walk by the light you have, and the light will

come more largely as you obey more implicitly. Above all things, do not argue. Obey, serve, sacrifice yourselves; keep close to what little you do see, and ere you are quite aware of it the sun will be in the zenith and you will have as much daylight as you need. Who knows how far his questions reach when they come out of the heart? Blessed be God that we know so little, not because it is little in itself, but because everything we can know is as nothing compared with that which remains to be known. Avoid the men who say they know all things that can be known here and now; and follow implicitly, and honour as with a crown of love, the man who tells you that we know nothing yet as it is and as it will one day be seen, but who charges you with loving exhortation to follow on, to pursue, to press forward. There is life in his voice; it is a resurrection trumpet.

What was the effect of the appeal upon Jesus Christ when Andrew and Philip told him? What did they tell him? See how they went to him and said: "Jesus, there are some Greeks who want to see thee." See the effect. How Jesus Christ erects himself, takes on him the port of a conqueror, and says, Already the fields are white unto the harvest. He did not say, They are only two or three little green blades; we must not make too much of these, presently I will attend to these Greek inquirers. No: he saw in their coming the fulfilment of prophecy, the coronation of his own wounded head, the uplifting which meant the elevation of the world. In effect he said, They are coming, they were promised to me; I am to have the heathen for mine inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for my possession, and here I see the beginning of the great promise. He says, The rain is ceasing, the storm is crying itself to rest, and out of these black clouds that are left the sun will make a thousand rainbows, and presently you will hear the voice of the turtle in the land. How much good it did him! Christ needed encouragement; the cup was heavy, the darkness was dense, the Cross was a great burden; to have whispered in his ear by two friends that certain Gentiles wanted to see him was to have heaven opened and the earth turned into one grand cornfield, requiring all the angels for its reaping. To Christ this was not

a mere inquiry; it was a revelation. Another quality of mind would have limited it to an inquiry, but Jesus Christ's quality of mind enabled him to multiply it into a revelation. Do not despise small numbers. Certain events are to be weighed; for others it will do to number them. Look at events typically: what do they mean? What do they portend? They are index-fingers; they do not terminate in themselves; they say, The meaning of all this is presently to be seen. The proverb declares that one swallow does not make a summer; but the proverb is wrong, as most proverbs of man's making are; they are only clever, they are not inspired; they are only sharp, they are not philosophical. One swallow does make a summer, typically viewed, rightly understood. No swallow was fool enough to mistake winter for summer; when that swallow came, it said, You may think I have made a mistake, I have made none; mine is an exact calculation; whilst you are making your poor little proverb over me I will be joined by a thousand other swallows, and then away goes your proverb, and a dozen more, and the summer will be here presently. Thus Jesus Christ judged of events. Does one man pray? If so, the whole world will presently be on its knees. That one man is the pledge of all men. Christians must take this view of events, otherwise they will often be discouraged. If there has been one man saved, that means the salvation of the whole world, if the world will receive the Son of God. What then becomes of your statistical inquiries? What do they amount to? They amount to arithmetic, not to philosophy, certainly not to revelation. What is the right way of looking at circumstances? To look at them in their typical significance, in their symbolical suggestiveness; not to say, Here is one green blade, but, Here is the beginning of harvest; not, Here is one poor man praying, but, Here is the first man, and the others will presently join him. All events are related, and interrelated, and a mysterious "therefore" connects all the so-called accidents of time.

How Jesus Christ always rejoiced when any outsider came to him! It is most instructive to notice the difference in Jesus Christ's mental mood when any heathen came and wanted to speak to him. Said he on one occasion, "Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." On another

occasion he said, "There hath not returned to give glory to God, save this stranger." On another occasion he said that a Samaritan came where the dying man was. Thus he rebuked the Jew; he would not accord to the Jews, locally and temporarily his own nation, the honour of having cured or helped the wounded man; it was upon the head of a Samaritan, a stranger, an outsider, that he put his crown. And the Syrophenician woman overthrew him in the friendly wrestle, lifted him up and threw him by the might of love. He wished to be so overthrown; he loves to be beaten in a controversy when he tries our faith, and momentarily obscures our hope that afterwards he may fill it with a brighter light; he loves to give way under the pressure of that gracious violence which takes the kingdom of heaven as if by storm. How his heart glowed! How he leaped beyond the Cross and entered into his glory! How eloquently he talked when he heard of these Greeks asking about him! Said he,—

"The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour."

How little these Greeks knew what they were doing! How little you know what you would do if you were to return to your human father to-night and say to him, "Father, I have sinned." It would make the old man young again; the midnight would be as the midday, and there would be no fire hot enough in the house to cook the smoking feast. A question may revive and reconstruct a life. Are men to remain outside us always? Is there to be no time of dawn-breaking, heart-yielding, hand-*uplifting*? You will not always be an outsider. The outside is cold; the inside is home and love and safety. To Jesus Christ all nature was full of symbols: "Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." There comes a time when it is difficult to distinguish between the spring and the harvest. There may be four months according to the almanac, but there are not four moments according to the spiritualised imagination, the fancy fired from the holy altar; then the spring is the harvest, the seed-time is the gathering



time, the outgoing is the home-coming, and the field is but the road to the granary.

Then he knew there was something to be done. For a moment the depression returned; the Cross had yet to be carried—"Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say?" Note the punctuation of this verse, for everything depends upon that, "Now is my soul troubled; shall I say, Father, save me from this hour?" Put the mark of interrogation after the word "hour"; then you have the whole meaning,—“Now is my soul troubled; shall I say, Father, save me from this hour?” Then he answers himself: “For this cause came I into the world; for this cause came I unto this hour”; I will not say, Save me from this hour: I will say, Father, glorify thy name. Then there came a voice from heaven, saying, “I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. The people therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to him.” Thus it always is: there are always two explanations of events: the vulgar will call the explanation thunder, and the spiritually refined will call it an angel. Would we see Jesus? Then say so. The very saying of it will be the realisation of it. Say so to the right people. The unbeliever can never show you Jesus. The man who lectures against the Cross can never expound it. Say so with the right spirit; mean it, insist upon it, and there is no cloud in heaven that will not shake out of it the stars that belong to your faith. To have seen everything but Jesus is to have seen nothing. Where can we see Jesus? Really only in one place. We say of certain men, You have never seen them until you have seen them in debate; you have never heard certain men speak until you have heard them in high argument; you have never seen certain other men until you have seen them at home, in the midst of domestic surroundings; other men you have never seen till you have beheld them under some strain that developed their quality and tried their temper. Of Christ we may say we have never seen him until we have seen him on Calvary.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we know thee through thy Son. We see not God, but we see Jesus: it is enough. He fills our vision with glory; his presence is an overflowing blessing in the soul. Lord, abide with us. There is no darkness where thou art; thou art the Light of the world; there is no need of the sun in thy heaven; thou art the light thereof, none other is needed. If we be in thee, thou Light of the world, we ourselves shall become children of light; then shall we let our light so shine before men, that they, seeing our good works, may glorify our Father which is in heaven. May we understand somewhat of the ministry of light, may we in very deed be children of the day; let us say to our souls, The night is over and gone, we now stand in heaven's eternal dawn. May we live in the morning of thy love; may our path be as the shining light, shining more and more unto the perfect day, because in our hearts we are just. Help us to obey thee more and more, with a tenderer love, a fuller obedience, a more persistent constancy: in obedience is growing life, and in growing life is growing light: leave us not, thou Light of the universe. We pray for light whilst kneeling at the Cross; there is no other altar for sinners that are lost. All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way, and we are now found at the foot of the Cross by no will or motion of our own, but by the overflowing and ineffable grace of Christ. There is room for all at the Cross; may the worst know that the Cross was set up most of all for him. May the prodigal return, may the backslider retrace his steps, may the cold in heart be warmed this day; inflame us with heavenly zeal, thou God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

### Chapter xii. 35.

“Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you.”

### WALKING IN THE LIGHT.

ACCORDING to the Revised Version the text reads, “Walk while ye have the light, that darkness overtake you not.” This word “while” is full of significance and energy. Christ used it more than once. It indicates opportunity, chance, occasion. It is as if one should say, Now is the time: be no longer languid, reluctant, dull of heart; now, behold, this is the day: arise, know the light, and receive it with thankfulness. Jesus Christ himself said, “I must work while it is called day.” “While”—the same word again. So he was constantly saying to those

round about him, Now is the time : watch, be ready : me ye have not always. You have me to-day, make the most of me ; to-morrow I shall be gone. There should be no to-morrow in Christian love and Christian service. There is only one time to the Christian, and that is To-day. We do not realise this with sufficient clearness ; we still think that to-morrow will come. It may come and bring with it darkness ; we have nothing to do with any time that is future, however near that future may be. We are so constituted that there is but a step between us and death. Our breath is in our nostrils ; we are as a flying shadow ; therefore, said Christ, Work whilst ye have the light : I must work while it is called day. "Lest darkness come upon you" is a tame expression ; it is not kindred in energy to the earlier part of the statement ; there must be some better word. The Revised Version says "overcome." But what does "overcome" mean ? Does it mean that there will be more darkness than light ? It may mean that, but it means much more. Set forth in its literal graphic meaning, the text would read thus : Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness tear you down.

We have no particular objection to darkness overtaking us, coming upon us ; it may come quietly, silently, inoffensively ; we may hardly know it until the twilight has deepened into sevenfold darkness. But that is not the figure. It is the figure of being pulled down, torn down, arrested, collared, seized, and humiliated. That is what happens in life. We are not dealing with trifling issues, we are not face to face with momentary inconveniences ; as who should say, If you do not make the most of to-day you will have an opportunity to-morrow of recovering your ground. Do not be unduly in haste ; the darkness will come, then you will rest. That is not the tone of the text at all. Shall we put it in an image ? Imagine a man going on a journey. He is travelling along a road known to be frequented by robbers or known to be frequented by ravenous beasts ; it is altogether a dangerous road. Then the idea is, Get on as fast as you can, make the most of the morning, the danger is least whilst the light is brightest : do not tarry for the afternoon, for the lengthening of the shadow. There are on that road beasts that prowl by night, robbers that live by the darkness ; make all the haste you can ;

it is morning. Up! and be well on your road by twelve o'clock in the day, lest ye be pulled down, lest the tiger spring upon your shoulder and bring you to the dust, lest the robber lay his strong hands upon you and throttle you, or cast you down and violently assail you. Make haste! Thus said our blessed Teacher and Lord. While ye have the light, walk—walk quickly—make the most of it; because after a certain part of the day who knows what evil ones may break out upon your road and tear you down? That was the practice as well as the doctrine of Christ. He said, "I must work while it is called day; the night cometh when no man can work." I must make the best of my opportunities, I must not fritter away the light; light is dowry, fortune, opportunity, responsibility: all I have to do is to watch the light and make the most of it. And if he must work while it is called day, how much more we, poor, infirm, imperfect creatures, who can at the best do so little, who seem to need an eternity to make a mere beginning. How ardent should be our zeal, how industrious our hands, lest the darkness tear us down.

This idea admits of large application to Christian thought and life and progress. In fact, this text supplies a doctrine of philosophy for the whole development and education of life. The Bible is not only a theological book; it is the best book upon every subject. It may not go into detail, but it lays hold of the principle, the essential thought; it connects everything with the fountain of being. There is little need therefore that the teacher of youth or the guide of life should go elsewhere for a text than to the one that is now before us. "Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you"—overtake you, overpower you, spring upon you, and drag you down. Here is an encouragement; here is a warning; here is an inspiration. What darkness can come upon us? All our life is exposed to this overpowering darkness,—the darkness, for example, of impaired faculties. Read whilst your eyesight lasts; get all the books you can into you. Do not put off your reading until you cannot read. Your eyes can only work for a certain time; they want to work, they were made to work, now use them and take in all knowledge and beauty, all spectacle and all event, that thus you may carry your library for ever. What are you wasting

your eyes upon, man of business, young man, worldlying, pleasure-seeker? Are you using your eyes by way of abusing them? or are you reading the prophets and the seers, the teachers and the poets, and the mighty suppliants who have the gift of prayer, and have written for you words that will make you calm and wise and triumphant in all times of danger and perplexity and battle? "Walk while you have the light": read whilst you have your eyes; be active while your limbs are supple. You know nothing to-day, you stalwart youth, of rising ground; all ground is on a level to you. You have the full use of your limbs, you can go where you please; you would as soon walk five miles as one; you do not know the meaning of weariness. How are you using that gift of physical suppleness and activity? Are you going about doing good? or are you putting off going about to do good until you cannot walk? God doth not want your cripplehood; he says, I give you youth, energy, light of a physical kind,—walk while you have the light, lest darkness come and tear you down, and you cannot call upon your next door neighbour. Now—this day—nay, this day?—this breath, this flashing moment; now, do right, be good, serve the Lord.

We might go into the school with the text and talk to our little ones, and to the academy and talk to our elder pupils, and say, Store the memory while the memory is plastic. There comes a time when we have no memory. We read over the sweet hymn and think we will remember its beginning, its continuation, and its conclusion; but we cannot do so. When we were five years old we could have committed a hymn to memory in a few minutes; when we were at school we had quite a quick, sensitive, receptive memory; what we learned then we cannot forget. We can repeat whole lists of words that have no connection or cohesion. We can recite now in advanced years the whole list of adverbs, prepositions, words that have no meaning in them, simple arbitrary tokens and signs of language. There comes a time in life when we can commit nothing to memory. What saith the text? Speaking academically or educationally, it says the very same thing that it says theologically and spiritually. This New Testament is the world's book, spreading its instruction over the whole area of human want and human

power. Store the memory, saith Christ, while it is young. What you are treasuring up now will be your companions in old age ; the little Sunday School hymns will come back upon you, and your earliest prayers and memories will revive within you, and in old age you will re-live your youth. This is one passport to a not insubstantial immortality.

There is darkness yet to come upon all of us and tear us down if we have not made a right use of the light. There is the darkness of affliction and sorrow. That will try our quality. A man is in reality what he is in his deepest affliction or his most poignant agonies. Pain gets at a man's faith. Even atheists have been known to cry mightily towards an empty heaven for help in the time of their distress. Do not hand me some written creed made in a time of health and fatness and wealth and prosperity ; that creed is but so much paper and ink. Tell me what you said when the teeth of the enemy closed upon themselves through your heart ; tell me what you said when the night was very dark, when the firstborn died, and with it died every bird in the forest and every sunbeam in the sky. What did you say then ? Had you made any preparation for that dountearing ? Men should lay up in store ; they should know there will come a time when they will be arrested, sprung upon, torn, and overpowered, if they themselves have not strength to overpower. It comes to one of two things : we must be overpowered, or we ourselves must overpower the assailant. In order to overpower the assailant what shall we do ? Walk while we have the light. We cannot carry the light into midnight. Midnight and midday each has its own place. Be minute, observant, jealous, miserly. Know this, that the light is for a time, and that time is Now.

Darkness sometimes comes suddenly. Sometimes it is dark at noonday. Do not call any man strong or rich ; there is no such man in the world, except for the passing and uncertain moment. Let not the rich man boast of his wealth. When he opens the lid of his treasure-box to-morrow morning he will find that place of treasure empty in all the four corners. Let not the strong man boast of his strength ; whilst yet the boast is upon

his lips the marrow in his bones may be turned to ice. Let us have no boasting, and let us have no atheistic or selfish calculation about the downcoming of darkness. You left your friend yesterday hale and strong, and with many kindly words you promised to meet to-morrow. He died last night. Quite suddenly? Yes: he was boasting so much that the Lord said to him, Thou fool! Are we prepared for this sudden darkness? How can we be prepared? Only by laying in the light. Walk in the light, receive the light, store up the light. What shall be the issue of it? Christ tells us. He tells us that if we walk in the light we ourselves may be the children of the light; that is to say, not have the light outside us but within us. That is the test of spiritual progress. Christ is here that he may be within us. He does not want to stand in front of us historically, the finest spectacle on the landscape. He wants to come to us, and take up his abode with us, and be part of us, and live with us, and never go away from us. Oh, whilst he tarries be you up and doing! Let me seize the moment of his presence that I may receive him into my heart. I do not want to make an external study of him; he is not a forest to be painted, a landscape to be sketched, a lamp to be gazed upon: he is a Life, a Light to be received within, that he may shine forth from my heart. Herein is that saying true, "Ye are the light of the world." Walk with the light, that ye may become light; walk with Christ, that ye may become Christ's; so company with the Saviour that others shall say of us, As he was, so are ye in the world. A gentle kindly word, a sweet gracious possibility, is set before us. While ye have light, believe in the light of God, that ye may be the children of light, that ye may be fountains of glory, centres of splendour, out of your life going forth an irradiating illumination that shall make your families, your neighbourhoods, and your several countries glad with your brightness. Perhaps you thought that the light was always to be outside of you; it is to be an internal or spiritual light. This is what the Saviour is himself, and what he is so would he have his servants be. This growth into light may become so perfect, as it has done in himself, that in heaven there is no need of the sun; the old servant is dismissed. He has done well; he was made to rule the day, but there is no

heaven for the sun because there is no need of him there. How is the place lighted? By the Lamb, by life. Light is fire; life is light. Why have we been living the beast's life? Why have we been always in the dust and at the trough, and sleeping deep sleeps, made wild by nightmare, when we might have been living up towards the light; having shed off the crust of the body our souls might have blinded the sun with superior splendour. Walk while ye have the light.

There is a darkness that will come—come upon all—must come. Men call it night, men call it death. Death is night; death is darkness. We must all die. That sentence is now called commonplace—to such vulgarity have we grown! If a preacher should stand up and say, “Man is mortal,” he would be said to have uttered a platitude,—so have we fooled ourselves away! Yet we speak of spendthrifts and prodigals and persons who do not take hold of life by the right end, but prosper at the bank, in the shambles, in the marketplace. Why, we are spendthrifts who have got through these elementary truths that ought to constitute the very capital of Christian meditation and practice. We must—I repeat it at the risk of uttering a commonplace—we must all face the darkness of death one by one. We have wronged ourselves by living much in crowds. It is well for us now and then to know that each for himself alone—ALONE—must die. What preparation have we made for death? There is only one rational and sufficient preparation, and that is walking while we have the light. Christ is the Light of the world. Walking whilst we have Christ—an opportunity of studying Christ; an opportunity of receiving Christ into the heart; an opportunity of serving Christ by all good deeds. If you have made any other preparation for death you are foolish; and the very wisdom you have shown in making other preparation aggravates your folly. You have insured your life—you have let your soul go without defence. You have barred all the upper windows against the thief—you have left the front door of the house wide open. Sevenfold in folly are they who have made every possible preparation for death, except walking in that light which sends a glorifying beam through the whole valley of its shadow.



We have the same word in other places. For instance, we have in chapter i. 5—"The light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not"; in the Revised Version, "overcame it not"—in the margin, "overpowered it not." There is the idea, the idea of overpowering; the Light was in the world, the Christ-light, and the darkness did not pull it down, the light remained; the storm came, the wind blew, the rains descended, and the whole heaven seemed to be angry, and yet the light outshone the darkness. We are to be as Christ was in the world. John speaks of Christ as of a Light that shone in darkness, and the darkness did not pull it down, tear it towards the earth; the light remained, nothing could extinguish it. Atheism as a doctrine cannot extinguish God as a fact. This is our supreme comfort. There is only one darkness we may fear, the darkness of being separated from God by sin. Can the worldling hear all this and make no answer? Thou wicked and slothful servant, out of thine own mouth will I condemn thee. Thou hast a perverted version of this very text. Show me that Bible, I will read it to thee. Why, here in the worldling's own book is this text in other words. What saith it? Why, these are the very words, "Make hay while the sun shines." O soul, is life to be a question of haymaking, money-making, worldly progress, body-feeding? Is that life? Exalt your own proverb, carry it on to its noblest expansions and applications, and you will find it consummated and glorified in the text, "Work while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you." This is no haymaking, no secular life merely, but a great salvation of the whole nature. Herein is the beauty of Christ's religion: it comprehends all, includes all that is good; it sends men away to the hayfield, saying, "Make hay while the sun shines"; it sends men away to thrift and economy, saying, "Gather up the broken portions, that nothing be lost"; it sends men away upon industrial pursuits saying, "Work while it is called day, for the night cometh wherein no man can work." Christ heals the body that he may get at the soul. He is no doctor of the bones, no surgeon of the joints; he will undertake that minor practice that he may get at the immortality that is being ruined. All the bread he gives you is sacramental. There are some men who never get beyond eating and drinking. They are feeding a body, they are

slaking a thirst. But when Christ gave me the bread he said, "Son, this is my body"; when he gave me the water, he said, "This is my blood."

And then the text occurs again, and this is final, in the awful sentence "Be sure your sin will find you out." Be sure your sin will overtake you, overpower you, pull you down. Let that be a warning to hearts that keep a private hell; let those words sink into souls that have consecrated darkness as the sanctuary of the devil. Be sure your sin will find you out. You say "find you out" is a tame expression; so it is in English, but as originally written or spoken it means just what the text means—tear you down, pull off the straw garland, tear away the sheep's clothing and show the wolf; pull you down from your pride, your titles, and your distinctions, your local fame and your national influence; pull you down, and send you out into the world a leper white as snow, naked, without a fig-leaf to cover your shame. O earth, earth, earth! hear the word of the Lord! But I could not end with these words of thunder and darkness and terrible night; if our sin is sure to tear us down, so, if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. "There is a fountain filled with blood." It is opened in the house of David for sin and for uncleanness. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Do not therefore say we are waiting to be torn down by the wolves of a just retribution. No man need be torn down if he will first tear himself down, if he will pull his heart to pieces and go to Christ, to God in Christ, and say, "Father, I have sinned!" The wolf of law will be ordered away. There will come into the soul the experience of a great release. All over the life there will shine a new morning—let us call it Heaven!

## PRAAYER.

**ALMIGHTY GOD**, we know thee in all ways, some by this, and some by that ; but we all know that behind what is seen is the unseen, the eternal, the all-shaping, and the all-ruling power. Thou hast made us variously, yet are we one ; herein is the mystery of our nature, and herein is the mystery of thine own being. We see without looking, we look without seeing ; we feel without reasoning, we reason without feeling : in the dark we see ; when there is no one present we lay the hand of our love upon a life that cares for us and redeems us. It is all mystery, radiant mystery, tender, enlarging, ennobling mystery ; verily this night is full of stars. Come to us, thou Son of God, and make us feel that thy chariots are twenty thousand in number, and that thou dost ride forth in each as it doth please thee, and blessed is the man who sees thee in some aspect, in some light, in any way, for he too is caught by the beauty of the vision of God. Saviour wounded, Saviour crowned, hear us now, and always hear us, for thy hearing is an answer. Amen.

### Chaper xii. 43.

**"For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."**

### THE FALSE ESTIMATE.

**W**HO were the people spoken of ? Had this declaration been made of some persons we should not have wondered ; we should have been surprised indeed if any contrary declaration had been made. We must turn to the context to make ourselves acquainted with the character of those who are thus characterised : " Among the chief rulers also many believed on him ; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue : for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."

This is the fatal calamity. They were believers, not confessors. In their own hearts they said all the while, Truly this man is the Son of God : never man spake like this man. We have been accustomed to look at men and form an estimate of their capacity and their purpose, but we never saw a man like this before.

Why did they not say so audibly, publicly? Why did they not make confession, and follow the man in whom they believed? To that inquiry the text is a reply—frank, complete, humiliating—“for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.” Is this the reason why many do not confess Jesus Christ to-day. Is there a good deal of secret belief, unspoken wonder difficult to distinguish from faith? Do some hearts go to Jesus stealthily, and look on until they burn? and does the glow become so intense that the tongue almost speaks? How we are conquered by immediate circumstances! The future, the larger, can have but little effect upon men who are thrust down by that which is present, immediate, and overshadowing. A most startling revelation is this from another point of view. Ought not the praise of men and the praise of God to mean the same thing? Is it possible that the Creator is praising one thing and the creatures another? What is the meaning of this? Was it so at the beginning? One would have thought, and justified the thought by high reasoning, that what God approved man would instantly accept, and that he would be ashamed to put his opinion in opposition to the judgment of heaven.

Men got wrong when they threw off the theocracy. Democracy, poorly defined, is a lie and a blasphemy; so is every other humanocracy. There is but one rule that can touch all time and hold beneficent dominion over all forces and ministries, and that is the theocracy, the rule of God, undisputed, lovingly accepted, loyally obeyed, longed for. Yet this is not conformable to fact. What wonder, therefore, if serious questions have been asked by philosophers and theologians? What wonder if various theories have been propounded to account for this? Is it any comfort to us to know that we have grown up from a plasm almost imperceptible to the microscope itself, and have struggled thus far in a process of development, evolution, and that therefore we are not to be judged as if we had been guilty personally or ancestrally of an original apostasy? That would be a comforting doctrine up to a given point. But every man must be his own accuser in this matter. He says, Whatever others may accept. I cannot accept that explanation, for I have known the right and yet the wrong pursued; I could have done the right, and I

neglected to do it. In instance after instance a thousand strong I could have been true, righteous, noble, kind, and I failed; if I had been asked to do something which I could not now do, then I might promise myself that by an elaborate evolution I might in a century be able to accomplish it; but I have seen things that I could do and I did not do,—nay, I purposely neglected,—nay, I thrust them behind me, and said, I will have my own way, I will play the God to myself. So this balsam does not heal this wound; this proposition will amuse me in my hours of leisure, and enlarge the margin with which my speculation takes its nocturnal walks in the infinite darkness of the unknown; but when I come to think of it all, and to know what I could have done and what I have not done, I feel that philosophy daubs the wall with untempered mortar, and cries, Peace, peace, when there is no peace. What wonder if theologians have begun the argument from the other point, and have said, “God made man upright, but man sought out many inventions. All men like sheep have gone astray; they have turned every one to his own way: there is none righteous, no, not one”? It is not a comfortable doctrine; yet sometimes it feels as if it were true. It is incredible surely that men of intelligence, such as chief rulers, men of education, should love social praise more than divine commendation. There is no music in that statement. It rolls backward. We long to contradict it. Given God and man to judge a case, and what can occur but that man shall be silent until God has pronounced; and then man shall take up divine conclusion, and hold to it, so that none shall modify the tenacity of the faith? The facts are against that theory. We are afraid of one another. Society victimises itself. Yet where is society? Who can arraign it, cross-examine it, disprove its positions, inflict upon it adequate penalties? It is here, yet there; there, yet yonder, farther on—near—distant; a tremendous burden, an impenetrable presence. But what a tyrant it is!

Moreover, to accept social praise rather than divine commendation is the most shortsighted policy. But men are shortsighted. Their proverbs are often manufactured by their shortsightedness. Their very wisdom is folly, when they detach themselves from the currents that are spiritual and unseen, and set up

intellectual and moral action, rising from themselves 'as from the point of origin. Who does not like to be satisfied with to-day? If we could take into our purview to-day, to-morrow, and the third day, the whole policy of our life would be changed; we should do things which to the shortsighted would be foolish; we should take seed, and throw it away, and men who know not the chemistry of agriculture would say, Fools are they who waste their bread-corn. Nay, we should reply, this is wisdom, this is the longsighted course and policy, this is the very philosophy of life; we must give if we would get, we must reason in harmony with all the ministry of nature if by-and-by we would put in our gleaming sickles and cut down the golden grain, and enlarge our barns to hold the largess of heaven.

Not only is it incredible and shortsighted—it is servile. See man looking out to see what his brother man is going to do before he himself will take a definite position. Moreover he does not remember with vividness sufficient to make an impression upon him that his brother man is at this moment watching him to see what he will do. This is what we call servility, walking softly where we should walk straightly; peeping where we should look squarely and directly; muttering where we ought to speak like thunder. How often has this been proved to be servility, because when a heroic soul has arisen, how many has he drawn forth from their obscurity and attached to himself, and how they thanked him for his paternity, for in very deed he became their father, their leader and king. It would be so in many quarters now.

We want the loud voice. Many are prepared to sing who are not prepared to begin the tune; some could join a little who would be almost ashamed to be heard singly; and oftentimes when the multitude is great even a harsh voice is softened and fined by being overpowered and mellowed by the mightier strain. If the father in the family could speak one decisive word, he might turn a whole household round, and stand up in a new sovereignty, and finally be blessed for a most sacred influence. If a young man in the city warehouse could with modest boldness say that he is a Christian, without any ostentation or impious

consciousness of vanity, others might come and thank him for making that bold and simple declaration; and out of that declaration might come additions to numbers and to influence, and there might be originated periods and exercises of prayer and praise and godly activity—all coming through the influence of the one man who dared to say, "As for others, I will serve the Lord, whatever they do." This would be longsightedness, this would be genius, because it takes in such a large view. All great life must have a great sky to live under. This little earth needs every inch of sky that you can see, and every little flower needs the whole solar system for its growth and nourishment. He who lives in God wants all God's creation-temple to offer his homage in. We are ennobled by the vastness of the space which we claim, and intellectually and morally occupy. Who will consecrate himself to the service of the living God by simple, bold, and emphatic testimony as to the effect of Christianity upon his own soul? Let a man come forward and say he has thought of Christianity as a controversy, and he will awaken responsive debate; his words will be argued down by greater speakers than he is himself, by masters of sentences, and masters of quotation, and by casuists of every degree and calibre; but let a man come forward and say, "Once I was blind, and now I see; once I was wandering from the light, and now I have my face straight to it, and my very vision is warmed by its tender glow;" let him make a personal testimony of it, and it will be difficult to answer that testimony, because the character of the man is the invincible defence of the argument.

What does God praise? Wherein does he separate himself from the judgment of his creatures, or wherein do they separate themselves from his criticism? Search the Scriptures, and see what God actually praises. If we cannot find out the Almighty to perfection in this matter, we may make companionship with Christ, and watch him in his distributions of judgment. Upon whom is his praise pronounced? "Except ye be converted, and become as little children." Does he praise little children? Always: he makes them types of the kingdom of heaven; he says unless we become like little children we cannot see the kingdom of God. Whom does he praise? Hear this word:

“Verily I say unto you, This man went down to his house justified rather than the other.” Who was “this man”? The man who had been in the temple, and had said with broken-heartedness, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” Whom else does he praise? He says, “She hath done more than they all.” Who? The widow who gave the two mites; but they were her last, nothing in a series, but everything in a single point. Two mites out of two thousand would have been a calculated insult to the majesty of heaven, but the last two outshone the diamonds of the skies. Whom does God praise? Whom does he commend? Along what line does his criticism operate favourably? Along the line of moral beauty: “I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat.” Go to heaven! He cannot speak sparingly when he commends; he would seem to have nothing less than heaven to give. “I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink”—pass on to the eternal summer where the fountains never cease, and throw up their living water to the higher sky. God praises good character, simple purpose, religious zeal, self-abnegation, spiritual consecration; along that line God comes to crown the workers, and to entrust them with his heaven.

Whoso would secure the praise of God must be prepared for temporary sacrifice. “Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die,” has a bearing upon this philosophy of life. If a man will save his life, he shall lose it; if a man is prepared to lose his life for Christ’s sake, he shall find it. God tests men. He sees what they will do when the immediate blessing is taken away: sometimes it is a child, sometimes it is a fortune, sometimes health, always it is a depletion that makes the heart momentarily sore. God does not take away a little thing, for then no man might miss it; but he takes away something that really interests the affections, involves the deepest solitudes, and thus he tries the constancy and the faith of men. The praise of men can bear no strain. What is it that men praise? “Men will praise thee when thou doest well to thyself.” Men praise the skilful trick, the act that is agile and successful; men applaud that which is immediate, momentary, an advantage that can be realised instantaneously. But the praise of men will bear no stress upon it. You must not rely upon that commenda-



tion ; there is no wine in those waxen grapes of human praise and applause and caress. If you live upon human praise your encomiasts will leave you the moment they feel the sting of fire ; they will not know you ; they can turn their once beaming faces into the uttermost blank ; they can pass you on the street, and they would not drop a crust for your eating, lest some man should see the crust that was dropped and mistake it as a sign of friendship. It is written of one man, having left his father's house and gone into a far country, and spent his living, "There arose a mighty famine in that land, and he began to be in want, and no man gave unto him." Human eulogists can disappear. The praise of men is a flying wind, a kindly breeze when the sun shines upon it ; but it can soon cease, or fly away, or deepen into a groan, or heighten into a storm under change of circumstances. To be commended of the good is desirable beyond all rubies, because the good man values no commendation that is not deeply religious. The good man cannot praise bad character. No flower will he plant in the accursed soil of mere ambition, pretence, or hypocrisy. Where the good man sets his seal it is immediately under the sign-manual of God. When, therefore, we speak against the praise of men, it is against the praise of selfish, worldly, little-minded, prejudiced, self-loving men ; we speak not of encomiums which are pronounced upon good men by good men ; we long to hear their kind word. We live in the sunshine of encouragement. We read of children who plucked the good man's gown that they might share the good man's smile. Without such mutual recognition life would not be worth living. In denouncing, therefore, the praise of men, it is to be understood that it is a certain kind of men whose praise is accounted worthless and is despised.

Look at the effect of this miserable servility upon public men. The temptation in this direction is severe. By taking a certain course you can win a hundred votes. You know that course is wrong, but how the mind reasons, how it sways to and fro, how on the whole it grasps the votes ! It says, If I had those votes I could make good use of them in another way ; perhaps I had better secure them ; for the moment I know I should be doing wrong, but I should bury the moment in oblivion and retain the

instrument for a great work. So the poor fool commits the act of self-dementation, the act of moral suicide. See how hard a position is that of the public man who dares to defy worthless praise. How bitterly he is detested! How ardently is he persecuted! How mockingly is he sneered at! How he is charged with all meanness! How his very goodness is turned into an argument against him, as who should say, He plays his goodness like a trump, that he may take the trick; this is calculation, this reckoning; all this is part of the manipulation; his prayers are tessellated into his policies, that he may carry them with the more effect and certainty. What a temptation it is to a man to go on the side where the praise is flowing abundantly, and is distributed lavishly! A young man coming into society says, If I adopt a certain course, social or political, there is nothing to hinder me from going straight to the throne. There is a great want of talent on that side; the men upon that side are poor thinkers and poor speakers, and they would covet a man who had a certain faculty and power: if I go on the other side there is a plethora of talent: I shall count for nothing, I shall be a secondary man there. I think I will go into the paper sky, where I shall be a planet of the first order. These temptations do assail men, and there have been men, blessed be God, who have resisted them, who have chosen rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of self-suffocation as to moral principle and purpose for a season. There have been men who have said, Whether it be right in the sight of God to obey man rather than God, judge ye, but we cannot but speak. That was divine impulse; that was heavenly inspiration. "Who-soever is ashamed of me and of my words," said Jesus Christ, "of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in his glory." Who, then, will testify for Christ? Only they can testify for him soberly, modestly, and successfully who are living in Christ, who are, so to say, absorbed in Christ, who have found joy in agony, triumph in humiliation, the root of heaven in Golgotha.

### Chapter xiii. 15.

“I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.”

#### CHRIST'S EXAMPLE.

THE incident recorded in this chapter is made the more beautiful by certain features of surpassing grandeur which are found in immediate connection with it. There seems, indeed, at first an inequality between the majesty of the mountain and the value of the frail flower which blooms on its sunny height. We are startled by the difference between the introduction and the progress of the narrative. It is as if God had called attention by great thunderings, and when he had excited the expectation of the universe, introduced, not a burning seraph—who might have maintained the high tone of the introduction—but a quiet little child, a miniature of his own gentleness and purity. This is the introduction, hear it, and say whether the representation now given be correct. “Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God——” At this point wonder is excited. We inquire what will he do now, at this critical and trying juncture of his life? Jesus knows the fulness of the mystery set forth in his incarnation; he sees the beginning in the light of the end; he knows all; he sees God behind him sending him into the world,—sees God before him welcoming him after the completion of his earthly ministry. What will he do now? Jesus has come within sight of the end; all the fragments of his life are gathering themselves together and taking wondrous shape, as he beholds them coming into union and forming themselves into their hidden meanings,—what will he do now? We wait almost breathlessly for the next sentence. Let us read it as our imagination might dictate it. Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God and went to God, unfolded secret wings and went up into the light;

unveiled splendours which had been concealed under the guise of his flesh ; called angels—host upon host, a dazzling throng—to bring the crown he had left in heaven. This is our notion of greatness, of pomp, of circumstance. But, just as when the disciples asked who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven, Jesus set a little child in the midst of them,—so when we ask, What will he do when the great mystery is revealing itself to him? he does not any one of the supposed wonderful things which he might have done, but, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, he began to wash the disciples' feet! Who but himself could have afforded such an apparent anti-climax? Where is there any creation of your romance that can play so with the public? What man can afford in one moment to affect sublimity and grandeur and majesty, and in the next ask to wash your feet? It seems as if Jesus Christ might have washed the disciples' feet in the midst of his most obvious humiliation. He need not have reserved that display of his humility for the supreme moment of consciousness, when God's eternity was round about him, beating in waves of immortal blessedness upon the earthliest and poorest aspects of his mission. Yet it was then, when the whole thing, in all the brightness of its glory, showed itself to his inmost heart, that he stooped to wash the feet of the men who had followed him!

Consider this attentively. We ourselves, creatures redeemed and sanctified, sometimes have moments of special spiritual vividness. Now and then we see our grandeur as sons of God. In such moments we get views of ourselves as seen in Christ Jesus which bless us with divine elevation and peace. Now, what is the social expression which we give to such sublime consciousness? How is that consciousness made to tell upon the people who are round about us? The consciousness will surely perish, leaving no heart-blessing behind it, unless under its inspiration we do deeds of nobleness, compassion, charity, which shows how even the commonest and poorest side of life may be lifted up and made beautiful. This was how Jesus Christ turned to practical account his highest consciousness of Sonship : knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God, he began to wash

the disciples' feet! Sublime consciousness was thus turned into condescending service; high spiritual dominion and joy found expression in a deed of humility without which even the greatest revelation of majesty, the revelation of the Son of God, would have been incomplete. The deed was simultaneous with the consciousness. Jesus did not wait until the keenness of his joy had abated a little. In the very fulness and glory of his power he laid aside his garments, took a towel, girded himself, and began to wash the disciples' feet. Do not let that picture pass away from your minds as if it were nothing. He laid aside his garments, took a towel, girded himself, and began to wash the disciples' feet. If that picture will not melt men and make them solemn, it can do them no good. It was in the highest moment of his consciousness that he did this. We are to do even little things when we are at the highest stretch of our strength. All the work of life should be done under inspiration. Not only the greatest things; not only the fine carving, but the mortar-mixing; not only the fighting of splendid battles, but the taking home of straying lambs and the gathering up of fallen fragments. So, if we catch aright the meaning of Christ, the elevation of our consciousness is to express itself in the beauty of social charity and service. It is not to consume itself in beatific quietism and sentimental contemplation; it is to prove itself divine by embodiment in visible and useful labour. The apostle says, "We know that we have passed from death unto life." Pause a moment, then, and let us try to find out the reason. Because we feel very comfortable in our hearts, because we like to sit very closely to the fire and read a favourite author, because we have occasional gushings of very tender feeling, is that how we know we have passed from death unto life? The apostle says, No. His argument is this: We know—the same word that we have in the text, Jesus knowing—that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren. Alas! there is this danger about our religious life to-day: We think, when we get hold of a favourite book, and repeat certain familiar hymns, and look upon ourselves, in relation to the social blessings with which God has gifted us, that we are doing everything that is needful to show our relationship, to prove our redemption by Christ. The Saviour, knowing the full mystery of God's

purpose concerning his ministry in this world, seeing his hands filled with the gifts of God, opened those hands that he might wash the feet of the disciples. There is a contemplation of which I am afraid. There is a species of spiritual luxury which amounts to the most terrible temptation and snare. Do you say there are times when you feel as if you could wash the feet of the poorest disciple of Christ? Then why do you not do it? You wear away your feeling, and incapacitate yourself for its recurrence in all its finest sensibility, by allowing it to reach the highest point without turning it into the most condescending service.

In the course of his attention to the disciples Jesus came to Simon Peter. We are entitled, are we not, from the structure of the sentence, to infer that Simon Peter was not taken first? We do not stop to debate the question. The point is of little importance except as bearing upon those who draw mischievous lessons from the supposed supremacy of Peter. The principal point is found in the conversation which passed between the wondering disciple and his condescending Lord. When Jesus Christ came to Peter that disciple spoke to him. "Dost thou wash my feet?" "Yes." "Lord, thou shalt never wash my feet." Peter reasoned from a much lower consciousness than Christ's. Peter saw nothing beyond the mere fact of washing the disciples' feet. To him it was only a fact; it was not an emblem. It lost its meaning because he did not look at it in a spiritual light. It was only something done; it was not a parable full of secret meaning, palpitating with divine mystery. How true it is that to the wise man, whose eyes are in his head and whose heart has any sympathy with God, "things are not what they seem." Now, in Jesus Christ's answer to Peter we find the other half of the gracious truth on which we have been insisting. It has been said that consciousness is to express itself in service. We now see that, as consciousness sometimes precedes service and dictates it, so occasionally facts prepare the way for consciousness. There is a kind of reciprocal action. Some men can work from consciousness best; can work from the intuitive, the subjective, the internal, the spiritual. Other men can only work from the point of information, from the point of mere fact; they must see something, handle something, and work their way from the

visible to the unseen. It was so in the case of Peter: hence Jesus Christ said, "What thou knowest not now thou shalt know hereafter." We are not always to work from the point of knowledge, observe. We are not always to work from the point of understanding. There are occasions in life when our highest powers of reasoning are to be set aside, and we are to become little children, creatures of yesterday, receivers only. Those who are blind are invited to put their little hands into the great hand of God. It is as if Christ had said to Peter: "Let the thing be done. Do what I wish. Do the will, and afterwards thou shalt know the doctrine,—that external thing which occasions nothing but wonder now, which seems a mere waste of power on my part, shall in due time be seen to have deep meaning, shall become a precious emblem and an inspiring example."

Illustrations of this are not wanting in daily life. You may find one in the ordinance of infant baptism. To each infant it may be said, "What thou knowest not now thou shalt know hereafter." This baptism is a fact of which the spiritual meaning and spiritual blessedness will come by-and-by. Let it stand at the very beginning of thy life, and God will tell thee all the intent of it when thou shalt be able to hear him in thy heart. Ordinances are not to wait for reason. There are persons who affect to find amusement in observing the ordinance of infant baptism. They talk about the crying little children, and they quite shake themselves with a species of inexplicable fun as they look upon half a dozen poor trembling little things brought up to a basin of water. They say, "What do they know about it, and what can they understand about it?" as if we understood anything,—forgetful that the old man is a young being! When shall we give over looking at our ages according to the returns of registrars and the calculations of actuaries? The oldest man amongst us is old and venerable as a man within the limits of this earthly discipline and pilgrimage; but manhood is only a fraction of being, and ten thousand ages are nothing when set against the eternity of God. We know nothing. We understand in its fulness and perfectness nothing. What if we should be pushed aside, and Jesus should take up one of those sweet little infants, and say, This is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? It would be

very humiliating to us,—because we know and we understand, and we snatch a moment's vulgar sniffing from seeing little children baptised in God's house.

Sometimes things are to be done, and the explanation is to come after the fact. Our first question must always be, Is this the will of God? If so, we shall find the explanation of the mystery in God's way and God's time. I planted a little seed, and, as I was hiding it away in the dark ground, it asked me why I did not let it lie in the sunshine, where it could see the bright blue day and hear the singing birds. I answered, "What thou knowest not now thou shalt know hereafter." The sun came and the dew and the living air, and for awhile they tarried at the prison-door of the seed. By-and-by the prisoner came forth, beautiful in form and exquisite in colour; day by day it grew in strength and increased in loveliness; and in the fulness of the summer time it knew, without asking me, why I had hidden it in the earth. It is even so with children whose minds and memories are stored with the truths of God's Word. At first they know but the letter. The knowledge of the letter may come through strife and pain. For long years it may lie dead in the heart; but in some season of special sorrow, in the day of trouble and sore distress, when heart and flesh do fail, it may arise and bring deliverance, and lead away the soul into the very presence of God. Believe, then, in the mysteries of life; believe in facts, ordinances, means. The intent and purpose of each do not lie upon the surface. Wheresoever God may bid us go let us hasten to the place, for there we shall find his blessing.

I have said that the explanation of a fact may come by-and-by. In the case before us the explanation came immediately after the event. After he had washed their feet, and taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, "Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet." Suppose that Jesus Christ had laid down the abstract doctrine,—Christians, ye ought to wash one another's feet. What would have been the result? Who would have believed him? We



should have found in that an instance of mistranslation; there would have been great hunting up of grammars and lexicons upon that point, because it stands to reason that the thing is utterly absurd. There is a missing letter; there is a wrong punctuation; there is a great difference of opinion between critics, we should have said, as to the meaning of this. But what does Jesus Christ do? Instead of merely laying down the doctrine, he gave the example. This shows how teaching may start from either of two points,—from philosophy or from life. It may be based upon a course of reasoning; it may express itself in example, in service, in deed. Some teaching must, from the necessity of the case, be purely intellectual; it does not admit of incarnation. Other teaching may at once be practical; it may rise out of the life, and prove by positive demonstration the practicability and beneficence of its philosophy. Christ's method did not admit of debate. It was not a theory, it was a fact. There it was,—a stoop that could never be forgotten, an argument which no ingenuity could ever impair. It was practicable; the Lord and Master had done it. It was worth doing, or he who never trifled with life would not have set the example. This shows in a wonderful manner the vocation of men to whom God has assigned positions of lordship and mastery in life. What is our business in proportion as God has set us in eminent places, given us great talent or great wealth, or great position of any kind? Our duty is to set examples of lowliness and charity,—the lowliness which comes out of righteousness, the charity which stands upon law. We require all the stimulus of illustrious precedent in order to do some things which are unwelcome in life. We have not courage to do some things solely on their own merits. Even if we could see them to be duties we could never bring ourselves to discharge them. We want somebody else to do it first. We want to hide ourselves under a great name. Christ provides for this peculiarity of our nature. He allows us to use his name and example. "You may say that I did it. If ever you are caught in the humiliating act of washing your brother's feet, and there should come into your cheek a tingling of shame, you may say that I did it." You will in life—such are the combinations of society—occasionally want precedent. You cannot always work upon the abstract

and the right. Sometimes you will want the defence of a name ; you will occasionally want to be able to point to somebody behind you and say, "He did it first." "Now take my name, I have given you an example." So we get out of a splendid precedent what we never could have got out of an abstract command. We all know well what this is in life. The young man who wants to try some new plan of doing his work, trembles a little before doing so, and then he says, "I will do it." And when he has been brought to book about it, it has been an encouragement to him when he could point to some older man and say, "He does it." We thus live in one another, and the Past becomes the inspiration of the Present ; and precedents and examples are vitalised into the living influential forces of to-day. This is how our greatest work has been done.

*[See another treatment of this subject in the discourse which follows.]*

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, we draw near to thy throne without fear or trembling, because thou hast exhorted us to come boldly unto the throne of grace. We come that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help us in time of need. Our life is one crying want. We have nothing that we have not received ; thou art the Giver of every good gift and every perfect gift. We humbly desire, therefore, to thank thee for all the mercies we enjoy, and all the grace which has strengthened and soothed our life ; for all the hope which has inspired us in the dark and cloudy day ; and for the manifold comforts which hath healed our diseases and consoled us when the help of man was vain. We have come up from our households that we may bless God in his own house. We have come to speak the praises of the Most High God, for thy mercy, O King of saints, endureth for ever ! We have not forsaken the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is ; but with one accord are found in one place, and we lift up our hearts with one consent. Each worshipper brings his own tribute, each heart has its own song, each hand its own gift. Yet have we common mercies, for which we can find common praises. We can all unite in praising thee for the light of the heavens, the air on which we live. Thou hast spread our table in the wilderness ; when we had no bread thou didst multiply the crumbs that were left ; when the cruse of oil did fail, thou didst cause it to flow on ; when the staff broke in our hands, thou didst give unto us thy rod and thy staff, and they comforted us ; when the road was hilly and stony and difficult, thou didst uphold us with strength unfailing, thou didst bring us to the mountain top ; when the wind was cold, thou didst shield us from its blast ; when the dark night came suddenly down upon us, thou didst set thine eye in the darkness, and behold, it was bright as day beneath our feet ! What shall we render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards us ? Some have come from the toils of business, the anxieties of earthly life, and are hardly able to emancipate themselves from recollections and apprehensions, from fears and suggestions, which are unfavourable to worship, and which mar the continuity of their contemplation and interfere with the stream of their devotional love. Do thou grant them release from all worldly torments, from all earthly cares, and give thy people to feel the liberty of heaven, the joy of the presence of God ! Some have returned to thy house after long absence ; thou hast seen fit to lay them aside from the busy crowd, to give them hours of pain, days of restlessness, and nights of weariness. Now that they have returned to public worship, they desire to speak of the goodness of God, his peace, his healing power, and to be thankful for his sustaining grace. Lord, hear the grateful psalm of such, and abundantly sustain and comfort them, now that they have formed resolutions of intenser devotion and more constant love. Most of us have brought sorrow with us ;

some little shadow or dark cloud, some wearing grief, some tormenting, oppressive burden,—sorrows we cannot tell, we dare not sigh, lest listeners should suspect the hidden grief. We can only bow down ourselves before God, praying that the sorrows of our life may be sources of joy; that out of our very grief we may be able to extract honey which shall refresh the strength of our souls. Do thou sanctify the discipline of life to us; give us control over events and circumstances, so far as to enable us to feel that thy shaping hand is moving amid all the chaos of life, and that thou art working out thine own wondrous order and beauty. It will be enough for us if we know thou art near, and that thy throne absorbs all other powers. The stranger is here, far away from home; the young man is here, far from early association and restraint of home love; the wanderer is here, not knowing why he was born, surrounded by difficulties, depressed, almost despairing; the unsuccessful man, who has knocked at a thousand doors, and no kindly hand has opened one to him that he might have hospitality; the hypocrite, with well-set visor, with double-painted mask, well fitted to his face, the man who can say words with his lips which were never dictated by his heart; the inquirer is here, tossed about by doubt and difficulty and perplexity, sincere in his heart, yet there is a heavy mist upon all his thinking, and he is groping his way towards God, towards life; the little child is here—the summer bud, the June flower—and even the parent's eye cannot foresee altogether the development and destiny. Look upon us as we are before thee! Lift up those that be bowed down. Strike the visor from the false face. Soothe the sorrowing; dry the tears of grief. Give stimulus and strength to every man in whom there is high aspiration, to every heart in which there is a noble purpose. Enable us all, whether tottering on the brink of the grave, or looking out from earliest life upon all the wonders of existence, to know that thou art our Father, our Redeemer, our Sanctifier, and in God may we have our being! Have mercy upon us, thou loving One! Thou delightest to forgive; we all need thy forgiveness. Help us from our heart of hearts to confess our sins. May we show how truly we confess it by the intensity of our hatred of it. When we own our guilt, may we tremble and be in despair, until we see the Cross, the light of the advancing Saviour, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. Wash us, and we shall be clean. Let thy blessing now go from congregation to congregation, from minister to minister, until all who are engaged in worship feel the fire of devotion glowing in their hearts. May souls to-day be reclaimed, be re-established, be edified, be comforted. Thus at eventide we shall be a Sabbath day's journey nearer home! Amen.

### Chapter xiii. 15.

“For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.”

### WASHING DISCIPLES' FEET.

**T**O know the full force and value of those words we should connect them with the third verse of the same chapter, which reads thus: “Jesus, knowing that the Father had given

all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God." That is the introduction. It excites expectation that amounts almost to intolerable rapture. What will he do now, in this supreme consciousness, in this hour of the resurrection before the time, the Cross behind, the resurrection past, the whole meaning of the divine sovereignty in the incarnation of Jesus Christ revealed in cloudless, dazzling light? Now he will take wing and flee away! He knows now who he is, what he is, what God's meaning in his incarnation and whole ministry is; he sees, from the human standpoint, the beginning and the end; he lays his hands, so to say, on both ends of the chain. What will he do in the moment of supreme consciousness? He will show his diadem now; with his right hand he will take away the cloud which veiled it, and the shining of that diadem shall put out the sun. What will he do in this summer time? We have analogous times in our own consciousness, when we feel what we are, when the divinity stirs within us, when we feel the blood of a hundred kings burning in our veins. What is our wish under the pressure of such heroic and tempting consciousness? Surely to do some great thing; surely to vindicate our right to be called by brilliant names. What did Jesus Christ do? Mark the time: the whole pith of this part of the discourse is in the point of time—"Jesus knowing"—in modern words, the consciousness of Jesus urged to its highest point, realising its utmost sensitiveness, receiving into itself the full revelation of the divine meaning. "Jesus knowing"—that his right hand was full, and his left hand—yea, "that the Father had given all things into his hands"—what did he do? He arose from supper, he laid aside his garments, he took a towel and girded himself, he poured water into a basin, "and began to wash the disciples' feet." Surely this is madness; surely the sentence frays out here into feebleness. That is our way of looking at all things. We do not know the meaning of what is taking place around us; we do not see that the circle is always bending, and that things made of God are in circles. That is the simple geometry. We cannot tell the meaning of condescension in the divine economy; we do not see that God is always stooping; we do not see that the Infinite is always doing this very self-same thing, and that suspension of such service would mean the ruin

of all finite things. This is what God is doing: he is always washing the feet of angels and men, and the whole universe. God is love; love lives to serve; love does not want to sit down in stately ease—sweet angel! she is only happy when she is busy and cumbered about many things.

Let us look at the matter from the human standpoint first of all. Says Jesus: "I have given you an example." Bold—how dare he speak so? "Is not this the carpenter's Son?" Do we not know his father and his mother and his sisters? Are they not all with us—common folks, like ourselves? But he was both. Compared with his audacity, the boldness of Isaiah was blushing modesty. When did Jesus Christ ever copy an example? Never. These circumstances constitute, to my mind, the most connected and cogent argument in proof of Jesus Christ's deity. Never did Jesus Christ ask for time that he might put his thoughts together; never did Jesus Christ withdraw a speech and ask to be allowed to substitute another in its place; never did the Saviour amend a solitary sentence that he once delivered; in no instance did Jesus Christ say, "This is an example which I myself must copy." Trace him from beginning to end, and he owes no man anything. He gives; if he receives it is to return in ampler love. He never learned letters, yet he was never second in conversation. He was always in himself above his age. He said: "I have given you an example." Many can give advice, many can administer rebukes—many can offer all these, but few can set examples towards which they challenge the criticism of all time; yes—that is the point—all time. It were not difficult to set an example that might live through one cloudy day—a day so cloudy as to make it almost impossible to distinguish between one colour and another; but to set an example that should hold its own against all the coming and going of time—brighten and shine over all the days of tumultuous life—surely the good of such an example, if it stand the test of time, is the quietest and completest miracle ever wrought by the Son of God. We must find the universal element in the teaching of Jesus Christ, or it was only a lesson for a day—a transient speech to an assembly which dissolved in the very act of listening to it. We must have nothing local in Jesus Christ's teaching.

Whatever he says must spread itself over all time, all space; must be equally at home at the north pole and the south pole, in the tropics and in the coldest regions of the earth; must have the faculty of entering into all languages, tabernacling in all symbols, and looking out with bright, angel-like hospitality from every tribe, and kindred, and people. In the moment of supreme consciousness Jesus Christ did something that can be done seven days a week on every habitable line of latitude and longitude through all the ages of time; and in this universality and adaptation I find a subtle but invincible testimony to the completeness of the mind, the dignity of the character, the deity of the personality of Jesus Christ.

Being about to leave the world, as we call leaving, what will Jesus Christ do? Look at the disciples as they had never been looked at before, with a countenance whose revelation would mark the critical point in their personal consciousness and history? No. Order them off to some mountain solitude, where, as hermits, they might wait for death? That is not the course which Jesus Christ pursued; he simply—we should say he profoundly—adopted the course of washing the disciples' feet. That is the unfathomable simplicity of Christ—the thing which appears to be so intelligible, and yet that carries with it all philosophies, theologies, and possibilities of thinking worthy of reference. Where is there a man who does not suppose that he instantly sees the whole meaning of an incident of this kind? Yet the angels desire to look into it. We lose so much by dismissing so many things as merely simple. The simplicity of Christ was the profundity of God. There is nothing simple in Jesus Christ. The cry—the fool's cry—"the simple gospel"—it is an affront to heaven! There is no "simple" gospel, except in the sense that simplicity is the last result of omniscience and omnipotence—not a simplicity at the beginning, but at the end: the outflow and last miracle of the divine mind and power. I wonder not that believers in the simple gospel—vulgarly and mistakenly so-called—reel, and totter, and abolish themselves.

The eternal meaning of the text is: that humility is to be a social advantage. There are many humble speakers who ought never to open their mouths in the cause of humility. There are

many speakers whose hearts are humble, but whose mouths were not made for mincing. We must leave the inner and complete judgment to him who made us. Criticism of others is not humility; inverted pride is not humility; the confession of some barren sentiment is not humility. Humility is dumb; humility keeps no looking-glass; humility is unconscious of its own blushing; humility wists not that its face, having been turned towards God in long fellowship, burns with the reflected glory of the Image it has gazed upon. Humility has to be an active power in life. The greater we know ourselves to be, the humbler will be the service we shall render, without knowing that it is a service of humiliation—not self-display. There is a way of washing feet which says in the doing of it, “Your feet do very much need to be washed, therefore I am washing them.” No; the feet will be the viler for the touch. Do not say how servile is the work you are doing, how menial the service you are discharging, and, therefore, how humble you are in endeavouring to carry out the word and wish of the Son of God. Service of this particular kind can only be done in Christ’s spirit. It can be done otherwise in the letter; but done in the letter it is not done at all; going to church because you must go—you do not go. Washing feet, or doing any service symbolised by that phrase, cannot be done—let me repeat—except in the spirit of Christ; but being done in that spirit, it is no longer the service of humiliation, because it is balanced by the consciousness out of which it came. In Christ’s own instance: “Jesus knowing—Jesus washed.” If we do the washing without the spiritual consciousness, it is menial service, it is a slave’s reluctant oblation on the altar of obedience; but coming out of great prayer, out of something like complete vision of God, it is done as if it were not done, and in the doing of it we do but add to the consciousness which was its first inspiration; and thus whilst we are on earth we are in heaven, and being in heaven we stoop to take dear little earth up and cleanse it, and lift it back into its Maker’s smile.

This is Christianity—not letter worship, not eye service, but the unconscious doing of works of humiliation through the higher consciousness that there is nothing mean that is done for Christ’s



sake. When this spirit is in us we shall have no dainty dislike for certain kinds of service in the Church. We do now sometimes pick and choose. We have no objection to high office, but we are not going to do certain things which other people of smaller income might very properly do. We are not going to keep the church door, or light the church lamp, but let us pay a man a few pence to do it—a man we can order about, a handy man, who can be here and there and everywhere, and dare not answer us again. O wounded One, Man of the five mortal wounds! Thou washer of the disciples' feet! this is what we have done. Wilt thou look on us? We dare not look at thee. In thine eye is not anger—that we might for a moment bear—but pity, weeping pity, divine pity, that we dare not look at; it hurts us by its pathos. We cannot do service in the Church, men and brethren, except in the Spirit of Christ—by that I mean service that shall have in it the true quality of Christian sacrifice and oblation on the one altar of the Cross. We cannot preach except in that spirit. To preach without great hot tears is not to preach; if there be not times when the heart says, "I cannot bear it any longer! O this pity for human souls!" there is no preaching. We may preach sentences we have made, phrases we have measured off mechanically; but preaching that shall be a washing of men, a cleansing of their lives, a going down to them and lifting them up, is the very gift of God; there is nothing like it, though men do not acknowledge that—the painter first, or the poet, or the politician, or the entertainer, or the man of musical genius; but if we knew it, there is but one great man in all creation—he who does not know he is great, but who is swallowed up in the love of God and the consequent desire to cleanse the lives of men. In what spirit are we working? Are we willing to be anything or nothing? Is our Christianity: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Are we willing to be London ministers, but not African missionaries? Do we covet the honours, but leave other people to do the drudgery? Or is the drudgery the honour, the deeper the higher, the meaner the diviner? Hast thou so reckon? No man then shall take thy crown.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God our Father, made known to us in Jesus Christ thy Son, we will open the day in thy name and in thy love. We would begin it in thy fear, and in confident hope in thy mercy because thy mercy endureth for ever. We can have no fear if we fear God; we are rich if we live in him; we shall be filled with a sacred contentment if we tarry alway at the foot of the Cross. Help us to bring forth abundant fruit to the honour of thy name; may we now be mindful of ourselves more than ever: may we hear the apostle saying unto us, "Look unto yourselves," that in education and discipline and refinement we may make great advance in the things pertaining to the life that is in God. Thou canst do great things for us, yea, thou canst do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. We bless thee that thine answers are not limited by our prayers. Thou knowest what we need, thou knowest what is best for us; keep back what would please us and yet harm us, and give us that which we dread if in its use we shall find ourselves nearer God. We bless thee for all the past. It has been wondrous music; thou hast done great things for us whereof we are glad. We have changed our way of life, we have gone from house to house, we have seen all the varieties of business life; we have known what it is to be at school, to be suffering from bodily disease, to be rejoicing in abundant health; we have walked in the summer garden, and we have seen the winter snow: and through all the varied way thy hand has led us and thy right hand has upheld us. We will therefore not be silent in thine house, we will make a joyful noise unto the Rock of our salvation, yea with loud songs and psalms will we praise the right hand of the Most High. We thank thee above all other thanks for the gift of thy Son by whom alone we know or can know the Father. He has spoken gently to our listening souls, he has fed us with the bread of life, he has not kept back from us any visions that our eyes could endure; he has saved us from our sin, he has led us to higher character and to more wondrous destiny. Blessed be the Son of God who is to us God the Son, who loved us and gave himself for us. We leave ourselves under thy care, thou loving One, Father and Mother of us all, the great Creator, the tender Redeemer, the wondrous Sanctifier: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. We rest in thy hands, thou mighty One, eternal in majesty and eternal in love. Thou knowest what our purposes are; help us to realise them in so far as they are good. Thou hast made us after a wonderful fashion: we do not know ourselves, we are surprised at our own littleness and at our own greatness; we are amazed by sudden visions that lighten the whole heaven as by a flash from thy throne, and we are amazed that we are so soon overthrown and made to fear and tremble as if we were in the hands of chance and not in the hands of God. Enable us, at home, in business, in the Church, on the highway,

at school, in the sick-chamber, everywhere, to know that things are meted, we are in the hands of a watchful gracious Father, and that not a sparrow can fall to the ground without his knowledge. May we live and move and have our being in these great principles; then we shall be calm, restful, contented, and our life shall be as the outgoing of solemn yet tender music. Amen.

### John xiii. 18-35.

18. I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me. [The impossibilities of history; the ironies and contradictions of things; the ghastliest ingratitude; the thing that never could have been imagined,—‘He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me’; the bread must have turned to poison.]

19. Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he. [We vindicate our prophetic function by tokens. The historian reviews, the prophet foretells. Remember what I said to you: It is about to take place; watch events, and be just to the prophet.]

20. Verily, verily [Assuredly, assuredly], I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. [Lives are related to one another. All human life is a marvellous tessellation. There is no individuality in any sense of absolute isolation. The father means the child, and the child the father, and man may mean God.]

21. When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said Verily, verily [Assuredly, assuredly], I say unto you, That one of you shall betray me. [Yet not necessarily be worse than the rest. There is a transmigration, there is also a transformation, of souls. We represent one another. When Adam fell, all that is Adamic fell. Every man is a Judas, an Iscariot; every man has put in his pocket the price of Christ's blood: there is none righteous.]

22. Then the disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake. [Their characteristic ignorance; their affected simplicity: yet every heart was quickened. The accent might fall upon any syllable, but the word would be one, the deed would be unbroken.]

23. Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved. [Loved in spite of what was wicked in him; not in consequence of it, but in spite of it.]

24. Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake. [Beckoning and whispering. There are times when it is profanity to speak aloud. The eye must speak, the hand must signify; a whisper must convey the tremendous question. Find out for us, thou loved One, the meaning of this foretelling.]

25. He then lying on Jesus' breast saith unto him, Lord, who is it? [Who is it that shall act for us all? Who is it that shall seem to be the worst? He will not act for himself alone: a great tragedy is involved here, and it cannot be limited by Iscariot's individuality,—who is it?]

26. Jesus answered, He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. [That was Iscariot's cross. There are men who feel the heavy weights of the world. There are burden-bearers as well as singers.]

27. And after the sop Satan entered into him. [Satan took more full possession of him; Satan lighted every piece of fuel that had been brought from hell; Satan fired him through and through; Satan leaped upon him, drove him to madness.] Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly. [Through no fear on the part of Christ, through no wish for mere haste, but to express detestation. Do not roll thy hands in blood—dip them and be gone; do not linger in murder; take no holiday in crime; let it be done shortly, sharply, almost imperceptibly as to time.]

28. Now no man at the table knew for what intent he spake this unto him [Thus meanings are lost, or are half-caught and are misreported, and the speaker is misjudged, and the reporter is the unfaithful witness.]

29. For some of them thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, Buy those things that we have need of against the feast; or, that he should give something to the poor. [Thus attaching false meanings to the deepest words; thus using the sun as a light to pass up and down in paths of frivolity.]

30. He then having received the sop went immediately out: and it was night. [What unconscious poetry! What a marvellous coincidence! What a background! "It was night." No other word would have fitted that frame of things; any other picture would have been out of place there. "It was night": sevenfold night, midnight, darkness that might be felt, a night in which a man might commit suicide.]

31. Therefore, when he was gone out [A wonderful change took place in the atmosphere: it was all over; the bitterness of death was passed], Jesus said, Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him.

32. If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him.

33. Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you.

34. A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

35. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

**Chapter xiii. 26.**

“Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon.”

**JUDAS ISCARIOT: A STUDY OF CHARACTER.**

IT will help me very greatly in my delicate work of examining the character of the betrayer of our Lord if there be an understanding between us, that it is not presumptuously supposed on either side that every difficulty can be explained, and that perfect unanimity can be secured on every point; and especially if it be further understood that my object is not to set up or defend any theory about Judas Iscariot, but solemnly to inquire whether his character was so absolutely unlike everything we know of human nature as to give us no help in the deeper understanding of our own; or whether there was not even in Judas something that, at its very worst, was only an exaggeration of elements or forces that may possibly be in every one of us. We always think of him as a monster; but what if we ourselves be—at least in possibility—as monstrous and as vile? Let us go carefully through his history, and see. My purpose is to cut a path as straight as I may be able to go, through the entangled and thorny jungle of texts which make up the history of Iscariot. I propose to stop here and there on the road, that we may get new views and breathe, perhaps, an uncongenial air; and though we may differ somewhat as to the distance and form of passing objects, I am quite sure that when we get out again into the common highways we shall resume our unanimity, and find it none the less entire and cordial because of what we have seen on the unaccustomed and perilous way. First of all, then, let us try to get a clear knowledge of the character of Judas Iscariot, the disciple, and apostle, and betrayer of the Son of God.

**I. EXPOSITORY.**

“Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?” (John vi. 70.)—Who, then, will say that the men with whom Christ began his new kingdom were more than men,—not bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, but a princely sort, specially created and quite away from the common herd in sympathy and aim? He chose twelve men who fairly represented human nature

in its best and worst aspects,—they represented gentleness, ardour, domesticity, enterprise, timidity, courage,—and one of them is a devil. Not a devil in the sense of being something else than human. Judas was a man like the others, but in him there was a pre-eminent capacity for plotting and attempting the foulest mischief. We are certainly not to understand that our Lord chose twelve men who, with one exception, were converted, intelligent, sanctified, and perfect; nor is it by any means certain that our Lord chose even the most intellectual and influential men that it was possible for him to draw into his service. I do not know that we are entitled to regard the apostles as in all respects the twelve best men of their day; but I think we may justly look upon them as an almost complete representation of all sides of human nature. And as such they utterly destroy the theory that they were but a coterie,—men of one mean stamp, without individuality, force, emphasis, or self-assertion; padding, not men; mere shadows of a crafty empiric, and not to be counted as men. On the contrary, this was a representative discipleship; we were all in that elect band; the kingdom of God, as declared in Christ Jesus, would work upon each according to his own nature, and would reveal every man to himself. A very wonderful and instructive thing is this, that Jesus Christ did not point out the supremely wicked man, but merely said, “One of you is a devil.” Thus a spirit of self-suspicion was excited in the whole number, culminating in the mournful “Is it I?” of the Last Supper; and truly it is better for us not to know which is the worst man in the church,—to know only that judgment will begin at the house of God, and to be wondering whether that judgment will take most effect upon ourselves. No man fully knows himself. Jesus Christ would seem to be saying to us, At this moment you appear to be a child of God: you are reverent, charitable, well-disposed; you have a place in my visible kingdom,—even a prominent place in the pulpit, on the platform, at the desk, in the office; appearances are wholly and strongly in your favour, yet, little as you suspect it, deep under all these things lies an undiscovered self—a very devil, it may be; so that even you, now loud in your loyalty and zealous beyond all others in pompous diligence, may in the long run turn round upon your Lord and thrust a spear into his heart! Can it be that the foremost some-

times stumble? Do the strong cedars fall? May the very star of the morning drop from the gate of heaven? Let the veteran, the leader, the hoary Nestor, the soldier valiant beyond all others, say, "Lord, is it I?" Which of us can positively separate himself from Judas Iscariot and honestly say, His was a kind of human nature different from mine? I dare not do so. In the betrayer I would have every man see a possibility of himself,—himself, it may be, magnified in hideous and revolting exaggeration, yet part of the same earth heaved, in the case of Judas, into a great hill by fierce heat, but on exactly the same plane as the coldest dust that lies miles below its elevation. Iscariot's was a human sin rather than a merely personal crime. Individually I did not sin in Eden, but humanly I did; personally I did not covenant for the betrayal of my Lord, but morally I did,—I denied him, and betrayed him, and spat upon him, and pierced him, and he loved me and gave himself for me!

Of course the question will arise, Why did our Lord choose a man whom he knew to be a devil? A hard question; but there is a harder one still, Why did Jesus choose you? Could you ever make out that mystery? Was it because of your respectability? Was it because of the desirableness of your companionship? Was it because of the utter absence of all devilishness in your nature? What if Judas did for you what you were only too timid to do for yourself? The incarnation with a view to human redemption is the supreme mystery; in comparison with that, every other difficulty is as a molehill to a mountain. In your heart of hearts are you saying, "If this man were a prophet, he would know what manner of man this Judas is, for he is a sinner"? O thou self-contented Simon, presently the Lord will have somewhat to say unto thee, and his parable will smite thee like a sword.

"The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed."—I think we shall miss the true meaning and pathos of this passage if we regard it merely as the exclamation of a man who was worsted for the moment by superior strength, but who would get the upper hand by-and-by, and then avenge his humiliation. These words might have been

uttered with tears of the heart, Woe will be the portion of that man who betrays me; yea, woe upon woe, even unto remorse and agony and death; the chief of sinners, he will also be chief of sufferers; when he sees the full meaning of what he has done, he will sink under the intolerable shame, he will give blood for blood, and be glad to find solace in death.

And if our hearts be moved at all to pitifulness in the review of this case, may we not find somewhat of a redeeming feature in the capacity for suffering so deep and terrible? Shall we be stretching the law of mercy unduly if we see in this self-torment a faint light on the skirts of an appalling cloud? I do not find that Judas professed or manifested any joy in his grim labour; there is no sound of revel or mad hilarity in all the tragic movement; on the contrary, there is a significant absence, so far as we can judge from the narrative, of all the excitement needful for nerving the mischievous man to work out purposes which he knows to be wholly evil. All the while Judas would seem to be under a cloud, to be advancing stealthily rather than boisterously; he was no excited Belshazzar whose brain was aflame with excess of wine—though he, too, trembled as if the mystic hand were writing letters of doom upon the old familiar scenes. So excited is he that a word will send him reeling backward to the ground, and if he do not his work “quickly” he will become sick with fear and be incapable of action; as it is, he has only bargained to “kiss” the Victim, not to clutch him with a ruffian’s grasp. Then came the intolerable woe!

This great law is at work upon our lives to-day. Woe unto the unfaithful pastor; woe unto the negligent steward; woe unto the betrayer of sacred interests; woe unto them that call evil good and good evil;—to all such be woe; not only the woe of outward judgment—divine and inexorable—but that, it may be, still keener, sadder woe of self-contempt and self-damnation. With such sorrow no stranger may intermeddle. The lesson to ourselves would seem to be this, Do not regard divine judgment merely as measure for measure in relation to your sin,—that is to say, so much penalty for so much guilt; it is more than that—it is a quickening of the man into holy resentment against himself, an arming of the conscience against the whole life, a subjective



controversy which will not be lulled into unrighteous peace, but will rage wrathfully and implacably until there shall come repentance unto life or remorse unto death. Shall I startle you if I say that there is a still more terrible state than that of such anguish as Iscariot's? To have worn out the moral sense, to have become incapable of pain, to have the conscience seared as with a hot iron, to be "past feeling,"—that is the consummation of wickedness. That there is a judicial and outward infliction of pain on account of sin, is of course undoubted; but whilst that outward judgment may actually harden the sinner, the bitter woe which comes of a true estimate of sin and of genuine contrition for its enormity may work out a repentance not to be repented of. If, then, any man is suffering the pain of just self-condemnation on account of sin; if any man's conscience is now rising mightily against him and threatening to tear him in pieces before the Lord, because of secret lapses or unholy betrayals, because of long-sustained hypocrisy or self-seeking faithlessness, I will not hurriedly seek to ease the healthy pain—the fire will work to his purification, and the Refiner will lose nothing of the gold;—but if any man, how eminent soever in ecclesiastical position, knows that he has betrayed the Lord, and conceals under a fair exterior all that Ezekiel saw in the chamber of imagery, and is as a brazen wall against every appeal—hard, tearless, impenetrable, unresponsive—I do not hesitate to say that I would rather be numbered with Judas than with that man.

"It had been good for that man if he had not been born."—Then why was he born? is the question, not of impatient ignorance only, but of a certain moral instinct which God never fails to respect throughout the whole of his intercourse with mankind, and which he will undoubtedly honour in this instance. Take the case as it is ordinarily put: Judas, like the rest of us, had no control over his own birth; he found himself in a world in whose formation he had no share; he was born under circumstances which, as to their literal and local bearing, can never be repeated in all the ages of time. So far as we can gather from the narrative, Jesus spoke to him no word of sympathy, never drew him aside, as he drew Peter, to tell him of preventing prayer, but to all appearance left him to be the blind and helpless

instrument of the devil, and then said, "It had been good for that man if he had not been born." This cannot be the full meaning of the words. Instantly we repeat the profound inquiry of Abraham, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" He may, and must, transcend our understanding; he will, by the very nature of the case, dazzle and confound our imagination by the unsuspected riches and glory of his many mansions; but he must not trouble our sense of right if he would retain our homage and our love. Personally, I can have no share in the piety that can see any man condemned under such circumstances as have just been described; it is not enough to tell me that it is some other man and not myself who suffers,—a suggestion ineffably mean even if it were true; but it is not true; I do suffer: a tremendous strain is put upon my sensibilities, and I cannot, without anguish, see any man arbitrarily driven into hell. Upon his face, writhing in unutterable torture, is written this appeal, "Can you see me, bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh, thus treated, weighed down, crushed, damned, by a power I am utterly unable either to placate or resist?" That man may be my own father, my own child, my most familiar friend; and though he be a stranger, of name unknown, he has at all events the claim of our common humanity upon me. I have purposely put the case in this strong way, that I may say with the more emphasis that I see no such method of government revealed in the narrative now under consideration. If I saw anything like it in any part of the Word of God, I should say, "My understanding is at fault, not God's justice; from what I know of his method within the scope of my own life, I know and am sure that righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne, and that his mercy endureth for ever." I see things that are mysterious, incomprehensible, baffling; I come upon scriptures which utterly defy all scholars and interpreters; but this is the confidence that I have—"The Judge of all the earth will do right." As to the particular expression in the text, two things may be said: first, it is well known that the Jews were in the habit of saying, "It had been good for that man had he not been born,"—it was a common expression of the day, in speaking of transgressors, and did not by any means imply a belief in the final destruction or damnation of the person spoken of; and secondly, this passage has again

and again exactly expressed our own feeling in many crises of our own life : it must be for ever true that non-existence is better than sinfulness. When the lie was on our lips, when part of the price was laid down as the whole, when we dishonoured the vow we made in secret with God, when we rolled iniquity under our tongue as a sweet morsel,—at that time it had been good for us if we had not been born. Such, indeed, is the only form of words equal to the gravity of the occasion ;—better we say, again and again, not to have been born than to have done this ; if this be the end of our being, then has our life been a great failure and a mortal pain. I hold that these words were spoken not so much of Judas the man as of Judas the sinner, and that consequently they apply to all evil-doers throughout all generations, and are in reality the most tender and pathetic admonition which even Christ could address to the slaves of sin.

We may get some light upon this expression by considering the fact that “it repented the Lord that he had made man.” In studying all such passages we must have regard to the order of time. St. Paul said, “If in this life only we have hope, we are of all men most miserable ;”—so, if we break off our own life at certain points, we shall say the same thing of ourselves, and if we interrupt human history, so that one fact shall not be allowed to explain another, it would be easy to find sections which would prove alike the disorder and malignity of the divine government. We know what this means in some of the works of our own hands. Thus, for example : You undertook to build a house for the Lord, and your heart was full of joy as you saw the sacred walls rising in your hopeful dreams ; but when you came to work out your purpose you came upon difficulty after difficulty,—promises were broken, contracts were trifled with, the very stars in their courses seemed to fight against you, and at length, after many disappointments and exasperations, you said, “It repents me ; it gives me pain, it grieves me, that I began this house.” Such is the exact state of your feeling at that particular moment. But other influences were brought to bear upon the situation, resources equal to the difficulty were developed, and when the roof covered the walls, and the spire shot up into the clouds, you forgot your pains and tears in a

great satisfaction. You will say that God foresaw all the difficulty of building the living temple of manhood, that the whole case was clearly before him from eternity; that is, of course, true, but the pain of ingratitude is none the less keen because the ingratitude itself was foreknown. Take the case of Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, as an illustration; he foresaw all the triumphs of his Cross—all heaven thronged with innumerable multitudes out of every kindred and people and tongue—yet he prayed that the cup might pass from him, and he needed an angel to help him in the time of his soul's sorrow. In magnifying God's omniscience we must not overlook God's love; nothing, indeed, could surprise his foreknowledge, yet it grieved him at the heart that he had made man; and he called upon the heavens to hear, and upon the earth to be astonished, because his children had rebelled against him!

“This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein.”—It is more to the credit of the apostles themselves that this should be regarded as an after-thought than as an undoubted conviction, or an established fact, at the time that Judas sat with them at the Paschal Supper, or even at the time that he asked why the ointment was not sold for the benefit of the poor. This is the more evident from the fact that the writer indicates Judas as the betrayer, whereas at the moment of the test his identity was not established. There is no mystery about the insertion of this explanatory suggestion, for we all know how easy it is after a character has fully revealed itself to go back upon its separate acts and account for them by their proper motives—motives unknown at the time of the action, but plainly proved by subsequent revelations of character. This was probably the case in the instance before us, else why did the disciples allow Judas to keep the bag? Why did they not humble and exhaust him by an incessant protest against his dishonesty? And why did not our Lord, instead of mildly expostulating, say to Judas as he once said to Peter, “Get thee behind me, Satan”? Here, then, is a great law within whose operation we ourselves may be brought,—the law of reading the part in the light of the whole, and of judging the isolated act by the standard of the complete

character. Illustrations of the working of this law will occur to you instantly. Let a man eventually reveal himself as having unworthily filled prominent positions in the Church—let his character be proved to have been corrupt, and then see what light is thrown upon words and deeds which at the time were not fully understood. How abundant then will be such expressions as these in recounting his utterances :—

“He advised prudence and care and very great caution in working out Church plans; he counselled concentration; he deprecated romantic schemes: this he did (as we now can see), not that he was a lover of Prudence or a worshipper of Wisdom, but because he was a thief, and he feared that bold and noble schemes would shame him into reluctant generosity.”

“He urged that the church should be built with the least possible decoration or ornament; he spoke strongly against coloured glass and elaborate enrichment: and this he did (as we can now see), not that he was devoted to Simplicity or absorbed in spiritual aspiration, but because he was a thief, and feared that every block of polished marble would increase the sum which his respectability would be expected to subscribe.”

“He denounced all heretical tendencies in the Christian ministry; he knew heterodoxy afar off; he never ceased to declare himself in favour of what he supposed to be the Puritan theology: and this he did, not that in his heart of hearts he cared for the conservation of orthodoxy, but because he was a thief, and had a felonious intent upon the reputation of independent thinkers whose shoe's latchet he was not worthy to unloose.”

All this comes out after a man has revealed himself as Judas did. But let me also say that the “thief” may be dictating our speech even when we least suspect it, certainly where there may never be such a disclosure as there was in the case of Judas. There are conditions under which we hardly know what influence it is that colours our judgment and suggests our course,—may it not be the “thief” thus underlies our consciousness, and so cunningly touches our life as never to excite our suspicion or our fear? We know how subtle are the workings of self-deception,

and perhaps even the godliest of us would be surprised to know exactly the inspiration of some of our most fervent speeches,—surprised to find that though the outward orator seemed to be an earnest man, the inner and invisible speaker is the “thief” that prompted Judas! Who, then, can stand before the Lord, or be easy in the presence of his holy law? It is under such inquiries that the strongest man quails, and that the swiftest of God’s messengers humbly prays, “Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord; for in thy sight shall no flesh living be justified.”

“Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you?” (Matt. xxvi. 14, 15.) Why should there have been any bargaining, or why should there have been any difficulty, about the arrest of Christ? We must look to an earlier verse for the solution. The chief priests, the scribes, and the elders, had met for consultation in the palace of the high priest, Caiaphas, and the principal question was, not how they might take Jesus, but how they might take him “by subtilty,” by craft, deceit, guile, as if they would have secretly murdered him if they could,—murdered him in the darkness, and in the morning have wiped their mouths as innocent men! Judas would appear to have gone to them secretly, and offered himself as one who knew the haunts and times and methods of Christ; and in doing so he showed the weak and vicious side of his nature, his covetousness, his greed, his love of money,—and herein his guilt seems to culminate in an aggravation infernal and unpardonable. But are we ourselves verily clear in this matter? Are we not every day selling Christ to the highest bidder? When we stifle our convictions lest we should lose a morsel of bread; when we are dumb in the presence of the enemy lest our words should be followed by loss of domestic comfort or personal honour; when we soften our speech, or hide the Cross, or join in ungodly laughter that we may avoid an ungodly sneer, we are doing in our own way the very thing which we rightly condemn in the character of Judas.

“Then Judas which had betrayed him, when he saw that he

was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood : and he cast down the silver pieces in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself" (Matt. xxvii. 3-5). Is there not a tone in these words with which we are familiar? Is there not, indeed, something of our own voice in this mournful story? Let us look at it carefully :—

"When he saw,"—that, at least, is familiar! Not until our actions are set a little off do we see all their relations and all their meaning; in their progress we are too near them to get their full effect; if we take but one step back we shall be affrighted by the very actions of which the doing gave us a kind of frenzied joy. We make our own ghosts. We shut the eyes of our minds whilst we are doing certain things; and when the last touch is given to the deed, we are taught by the bitterness of experience that Temptation destroys our sight and that Guilt restores it. Recall the case of Adam and Eve,—“And the eyes of them both were opened!” Very short and cloudy is the sight of the body: how keen, how piercing, is the sight of a self-convicted soul! Before that discerning vision the air is full of eyes, and the clearest of all days is dark with menaces and gathering thunders.

"When he saw that he was condemned."—At that moment the surprise of Judas himself was supreme and unutterable: evidently he did not expect that this catastrophe would supervene; he may, indeed, have said to himself—as a man of inventive and daring mind would be likely to say—I am quite sure, from what I have seen of his miracles, that he will prove himself more than a match for all his enemies; he has done so before, and he will do it again. They said they would cast him down from the brow of the hill, but he went through the midst of them like a beam of light, and when they took up stones to stone him their hands were held fast by that strong will of his. He has provoked them to their face, heaped up all their sins before them, taunted and goaded them to madness, and yet he held them in check and played with them as he listed. It will be so again; besides, he may just want a plan like mine to bring things to a point; I will put him into the hands of these men, then will he shake them off, proclaim his kingdom,

drive away the spoiler from the land of the Hebrews, and we shall come into the enjoyment of our promised reward. Judas may not have used these words, but in effect they are being used by sinners every day! This is the universal tongue of self-deception, varying a little, it may be, in the accent, but in substance the same all the world over; a putting of one thing against another, a balancing of probabilities, an exercise of self-outwitting cunning; a secret hope that something can be snatched out of the fire, and that the flames can be subdued without undue damage,—this is the method of sinfulness of heart, a method confounded every day by the hand of God, yet every day coming up again to fresh attempts and renewed humiliations.

“When he saw that he was condemned he repented himself.”—Is there not hope of a man who is capable of any degree of repentance, even when repentance takes upon itself the darker shade of horror and remorse? I know what the word is which is translated “repented,” and I remember with joy that it is the word which is used of the son who said he would not go, and afterwards repented and went; it is the word which Paul used of himself on one occasion in writing to the Corinthians. But even if the word be rendered “was filled with remorse and shame and despair,” I should say, “So much the better for Judas.” Under such circumstances I should have more hope of a man who had absolutely no hope of himself, than of a man who could sufficiently control himself to think that even such a sin—infinite in wickedness as it must have appeared to his own mind—could ever be forgiven. It is easy for us who never experienced the agony to say what Judas ought to have done: how he ought to have wept and prayed and sought forgiveness as we now should seek it. We cannot intermeddle with his sorrow, nor ought we harshly to judge the method of his vengeance.

“I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.”—Not, “I was hurried into this by others”; not, “Others are as much to blame as I am”; but, “I did it, and I alone.” Not, “I have made a mistake”; not, “This is a great error on my part”; but, “I have sinned,”—the very word which he might have heard in his Lord’s parable of the Prodigal Son,—the word



which our Father in heaven delights to hear! "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, for his mercy endureth for ever." "If thy brother turn again, saying, I repent, forgive him;"—Judas repented himself! "How often shall I forgive him? Seven times. Seventy times seven!" . And shall I forgive him the less because his repentance has deepened into remorse, and he has lost all hope of himself? Surely the more on that very account. And if he slay himself because of his sin against me? Then must I think of him with still tenderer pity, nor cloud his memory with a single suspicion. And here let me say, as to the spiritual application of this matter, I have no faith in the moral value of fine-drawn distinctions between repentance and despair; my belief is that until we reach the point of self-despair as to our sin against Christ, we can never know the true meaning or realise the true joy of repentance. That Judas should have slain himself with his own hand is, in my view of the case, wholly in his favour. It must have appeared to him, indeed, to be the only course open to him; floods of tears he could never set against the blood of an innocent man; to cry and moan and weep bitterly, would be just to aggravate the appalling crime. With a stronger light beating on our life than ever Judas was permitted to enjoy, guarded by all the restraints of Christian civilisation, living under the ministry of the Holy Ghost, we are by so much unable to sympathise with the intolerant horror which destroyed the self-control of the betrayer of our Lord. So far as I can think myself back into the mental condition of Judas, his suicide seems to me to be the proper completion of his insufferable self-reproach. And yet that self-control was preserved long enough to enable Judas Iscariot to utter the most effective and precious eulogium ever pronounced upon the character of Jesus Christ. How brief, how simple, how complete—"innocent blood"! If the proper interpretation of words is to be found, as it undoubtedly is, in circumstances, then these two words are fuller in meaning and tenderer in pathos than the most laboured encomium could possibly be. Consider the life which preceded these words, and you will see that they may be amplified thus: "I know Jesus better than any of you can know him. You have only seen him in public, I have lived with him in private; I have watched his words as words of man were never

watched before ; I have heard his speeches meant for his disciples alone ; I have seen him in poverty, weariness, and pain of heart ; I have heard his prayers at home ; I trusted that it had been he who would have redeemed Israel from patriotic servility ; I curse myself, I exonerate him,—his is innocent blood !” How glad would the Jews have been if Christ had been witnessed against by one of his own disciples ! They would have welcomed his evidence ; no gold could have adequately paid for testimony so direct and important ; and Judas loved gold. Yet the holy truth came uppermost ; Judas died, not with a lie in his right hand, but with the word of truth upon his lips, and the name of Christ was thus saved from what might have been its deepest wound.

“Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition.”—At the first glance these words would seem to put the fate of Judas Iscariot beyond all controversy, yet further consideration may show how mercy may magnify itself even in this cloud. Judas is called “the son of perdition” ; true, and Peter himself was called Satan by the same Lord. And if Judas was “the son of perdition,” what does Paul say of all mankind ? Does he not say, “We are by nature the children of wrath, even as others” ? But in this case “the son of perdition” is said to be “lost” ; but does the word “lost” necessarily imply that he was in hell ? “We have all erred and strayed like lost sheep” ; “The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost” ; and, “There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth [Judas repented himself], more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.” It is our joy to believe that wherever repentance is possible, mercy is possible ; and it is heaven to us to know that where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. And are we quite sure that there is no ray of hope falling upon the repentant and remorseful Judas from such words as these, “And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me [and that he gave him Iscariot is clear from the very passage we are now considering] I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day” (John vi. 39) ? But there is still more light to be thrown on this great gloom. Take this passage (John xviii. 8, 9), “Jesus answered,

I have told you that I am he: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way; that the saying might be fulfilled which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me I have lost none." Now suppose that the ruffians had answered, "No, we will not let these go their way; we will slay them with the sword at once,"—would it follow that Jesus Christ had lost his disciples in the sense of their having been destroyed in unquenchable fire? The suggestion is not to be entertained for a moment; yet this is the very "saying" which is supposed to determine the damnation of Judas! As I read the whole history I cannot but feel that our Lord was specially wishful that his disciples should continue with him throughout his temptation, should watch with him, that in some way, hardly to be expressed in words, they should help him by the sympathy of their presence,—in this sense he was anxious to "lose none"; but he did lose the one into whom Satan had entered, and he refers to him not so much for his own sake as that he may rejoice the more in the constancy of those who remained. But the whole reference, as it seems to me, is not to the final and eternal state of men in the unseen world, but to continuance and steadfastness in relation to a given crisis.

"This ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place" (Acts i. 25).—One reputable scholar has suggested that the words "go to his own place" may refer to Matthias, and not to Judas; but the suggestion does not commend itself to my judgment. I think we should lose a good deal by accepting this interpretation. I hold that this is an instance of exquisite delicacy on the part of Peter: no judgment is pronounced; the fall is spoken of only as official and as involving official results, and the sinner himself is left in the hands of God. It is in this spirit that Peter speaks of Judas,—

‘Owning his weakness,  
His evil behaviour,  
And leaving, with meekness,  
His sins to his Saviour.’

## II. PRACTICAL.

Such a study as this can hardly fail to be fruitful of suggestion to the nominal followers of Christ in all ages. What are

its lessons to ourselves,—to ourselves as Christians, ministers office-bearers, and stewards of heavenly mysteries?

(1) Our first lesson will be found in the fact that when our Lord said to his disciples, "One of you shall betray me," every one of them began to say "Is it I?" Instead of being shocked even to indignation, each of the disciples put it to himself as, a possibility; "It may be I. Lord, is it I?" This is the right spirit in which to hold all our privileges. We should regard it as a possibility that the strongest may fail, and even the oldest may betray his trust. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Do you suppose that there was but one betrayal of the Lord once for all, and that the infamous crime can never be repeated? "I tell you, nay!" There are predictions yet to be realised—"There shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them;"—"Lord, is it I?" It shall surely be more tolerable for Judas Iscariot in the day of judgment than for that man! Living in the light of gospel day; professing to have received the Holy Ghost; ordained as a minister of the Cross; holding office in the Christian Church—is it impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance, seeing that they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame? "Lord, is it I?" "In the last days perilous times shall come: men shall be traitors;"—"Lord, is it I?" Governing our life by this self-misgiving spirit, not thinking all men sinful but ourselves, we shall be saved from the boastfulness which is practical blasphemy, and our energy shall be kept from fanaticism by the chastening influence of self-doubt. Looking upon all the mighty men who have made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience—Adam, Saul, Solomon, Judas—let us be careful lest after having preached to others we ourselves should be cast away. It is true that we cannot repeat the literal crime of Judas; but there are greater enormities than his! We can outdo Judas in sin! "Who-soever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven

him : but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come" (Matt. xii. 32). We cannot sell the body, but we can grieve the Spirit. There can be no more covenanting over the Lord's bones, but we can plunge a keener spear into his heart than that which drew forth blood and water from his side ; we cannot nail him to the accursed tree, but we can pierce him through with many sorrows. Judas died by the vengeance of his own hand ; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy who hath done despite unto the Spirit of Grace ? Judas shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it, because when he saw the error of his ways he repented himself, and made restitution of his unholy gains ; but we have rolled iniquity under our tongue as a sweet morsel, we have held our places in the sanctuary while our heart has been the habitation of the enemy !

(2) Our second lesson is a caution against mere intellectual sagacity in directing the affairs of the Christian kingdom. It is admitted on all hands that Judas Iscariot was far ahead of the other apostles in many intellectual qualities, yet "Judas by transgression fell." How self-controlled he was ; how stealthy was his step ; how lingering and watchful his cunning ! And if Whately and De Quincey be right in the suggestion that he merely wanted to force the Lord to declare himself the Prince of princes and make Israel glad by despoiling the oppressor, it discovers the instinct of statesmanship, and shows how his strategic ambition sought to ensnare the Roman fowler in his own net. Judas is supposed to have reasoned thus with himself : This Jesus is he who will redeem Israel ; the whole twelve of us think so ; yet he hesitates, for some reason we cannot understand. His power is astounding, his life is noble. This will I do, I will bring things to a crisis by going to the authorities and making them an offer. I believe they will snatch at my proposition, and when they come to work it out he will smite them with his great power, and will avenge the insult by establishing his supremacy as King and Lord of Israel. As a matter of fact we know that this kind of reasoning has played no small part in the history of the Church. The spiritual kingdom of Christ has suffered severely at the hands

of men who have been proud of their own diplomacy and generalship ; men fond of elaborating intricate organisations, of playing one influence against another, and of making up for the slowness of time by dramatic surprises alike of sympathy and collision. It is for this reason that I cannot view without alarm the possible misuse of congresses, conferences, unions, and councils : these institutions will only be of real service to the cause of the Cross in proportion as spiritual influence is supreme. Once let political sagacity, diplomatic ingenuity, and official adroitness in the management of details become unduly valued, and you change the centre of gravity, and bring the Church into imminent peril. Unquestionably human nature loves dexterity, and will pay high prices for all kinds of conjuring, and loudly applaud the hero who does apparent impossibilities ; and from this innate love of mere cleverness may come betrayals, compromises, and casuistries, which crucify the Son of God afresh. Judas looked to the end to vindicate if not to sanctify the means ; and this is the policy of all dexterous managers, the very soul of Jesuitry, and a chosen instrument of the devil. I do not pray for a leader, fertile in resource, supple and prompt in movement ; my prayer is for a man of another stamp, even for an Inspirer, who, by the ardour of his holiness, the keenness of his spiritual insight, and the unction of his prayer, shall help us truthward and heavenward ; and under his leadership we shall hear no more about secularities and temporalities, but every action—the opening of the doors and the lighting of the lamps of the sanctuary—shall be done by hands which were first outstretched in prayer. Not the crafty Judas, but the loving John will help us best in all our work ; not the man inexhaustible in tricks of management, but the man of spiritual intelligence and fervour, will deliver us most successfully in the time of straits and dangers. Managers, leaders, draughtsmen, and pioneers, we shall of course never cease to want, and their abilities will always be of high value to every good cause ; yet one thing is needful above all others—closeness to the dear Lord, and daily continuance in prayer.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we are gathered around thy Son in his humblest form, and we wish to hear every word that may be spoken by the voice of his heart. The traitor has gone out, so now we may hear the music of love—the inner word which traitors may not hear. They have gone out into the night to be lost in the darkness they love; but here we tarry in the morning, in the summer glow, and we are all bending forward to listen to the sweet Gospel voice, full of love, full of hope,—so gentle a voice, hastening, as it were, to its own death to rise again in trumpets and thunders of sovereignty and power. But we will hear its lesser tone, we will listen to the gentler speech; we will listen with our hearts. Speak, Lord, for thy servants hear! We are tired of all other voices; we would purge our ears of all inferior sounds; and if thou wilt circumcise our ears, we shall hear, and nothing shall escape our adoring and grateful attention. Our hearts need thy voice: they are lone and weary and full of troubling wonder; yea, they are often sore afraid. They need to hear the voice from the great light, saying, “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” The voice is comfort, the call brings with it great strength in every tone, the battle is already won; whilst our Master speaks to us we rise like men enriched with answered prayer. We love thy tabernacles, thou God of Zion; our souls have a desire and longing to enter into the courts of the Lord. There we find great liberty; there we spread out our whole strength—no fold that is not rolled out to its fullest length; there we eat and drink abundantly; there the high festival of thy love makes us forget all weight, all burden. We are thine, bought with blood, sanctified by the Holy Ghost, made meet by thy grace to be partakers of the inheritance of life. We would know to whom we belong: we would see thy signature written upon our life, we would feel thy claim in our hearts urging us by sweetest persuasion of love to do some nobler deed. Thou hast led us to despise time and the earth, and all things we can see, when compared with the eternity of heaven and invisible realities. Thou dost train us by our impatience; our being kept so long outside the door that opens back upon the heavens is itself an education. We knock, and are not answered; we wait, and there is no reply; we linger through the night and are wet with heavy dews, still the door is not opened from within; but we wait, we still continue, we cannot go away; our standing at heaven’s gate helps us to do earth’s weary work. We have come to make many speeches to thee, because our hearts are many and our histories a great number. Hear the plaint of the sad and those who are ill at ease—disappointed men, vexed and troubled hearts,

souls that love right, and wish evermore to walk in the light, and yet are hindered by those who ought to help them; men of feeble will, whose prayers break right off in the middle and fall down to earth again, who wish to do right and feel as if they could not, who put out their hand to the altar and quickly let it fall; men who are full of concern about health and business and domestic affairs and success and ability to live honestly in the sight of all men—things will not come right; if they are put right overnight, they are all wrong in the morning. These men are full of trouble, and they are like to fret themselves to do evil. The Lord have pity upon them and put an end to their vexation, lest it become a stumbling-block over which they fall and never can rise again. Thou dost train us by a way that is often weary. Our eyes are vexed by the prosperity of the wicked; our souls are full of wonder because they are not in trouble like other men. We cannot understand their fatness, their abundance of gold, and the innumerableness of their cattle; but thou hast surely set them in slippery places, and presently the tremendous solution will begin. We commit one another to thy care. Draw us closer to thyself; speak as we are able to bear it; adapt the light to our vision, and when we would pray, let thy Spirit work mightily within us; teach the heart great words to express great desires. Qualify us every day for broader service, for more patient suffering, for deeper and more loving obedience; and when the little flame of life's short day dies down and goes from human eyes quite spark out, may our souls hail thee in heaven's eternal morning! Amen.

### NOT NOW, BUT AFTERWARDS.

“Not now, but afterwards.”—JOHN xiii. 36.

THE whole verse reads thus:—“Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards.” Children will have everything now: “afterwards” is a word that plagues them. It is a most mocking word: it points to a time that can never come: it may be to-morrow, or next year; but whether to-morrow or next year, it lies beyond the vision and beyond the range of the little grasping hand. As life advances we become more intimately acquainted with the word “afterwards,” and, indeed, we come to like it. As for time, it is nothing: we begin to touch the meaning of the august expression, “A thousand years are as one day.” We know that nothing is so near as the future; we know that yesterday is gone beyond recall, and that to-morrow is always coming and is always available. It is the mystery and the charm of this little life. How throughout the whole of this chapter Jesus Christ is



Lord and Master ! The title fills the whole chapter, gives nobleness to all the Divine speeches, covers with tender radiance all the interviews which Jesus Christ conducts on this day of shadows with his wonder-struck and fear-troubled disciples. It is a master's tone delivered with a brother's heart and voice which says, "Not now, but afterwards." This is the second time in the chapter that Jesus Christ has said the same thing to the same man. Simon Peter was never more impatient than within the lines of this chapter. Said he, "What is the meaning of this feet-washing? I do not know what thou doest"; and the answer was: "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter." Then again he comes before us: "Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards." So this child-man was constantly put back and told to wait till the clock struck and the hour had come when he should have the keener vision, the more sensitive heart, the more receptive spirit and understanding mind. This was the training Peter needed: Peter was a man who wanted everything to be done instantaneously; there must be no waiting; to-morrow must contrive to push itself into this day, and everything which the impatient heart desired must be supplied the moment the desire was expressed. The Lord, knowing this, always said to him, "Not now," that most vexing and teasing word. We want it now; we could do well with it now; it seems to us as if this were the very time to have it; and when we are in that high blood—mad with impatience—he quietly, with sovereignly tone, says, "Not now." He says it as from a throne, there is no halting or incertitude in his way of saying it; at first he taught with authority, and not as the scribes, and now, the shadows gathering around him quickly into darkest night, he still speaks with the authority which at first made him conspicuous. This is a grand doctrine; who can receive it? We have to be drilled into it; patience of this kind is not born in us. Blessed be God, we can be chastened and mellowed into the reception of the doctrine that afterwards is greater than now, and that not to have an afterwards is to be imprisoned and impoverished. Jesus Christ lived in to-morrow; early in his ministry he said, "Hereafter ye shall see."

Look at this in the direction of revelation. We cannot follow any great Scriptural doctrine now in all the range of its thought, in all the scope of its imagination, in all the possibilities of its issues. Who can explain the Atonement? The angels desire to look into it; the Voice from above says, "Not now, but afterward." We begin in the right spirit when we begin in the spirit of waiting. Personally, I accept the Cross, but cannot explain it; personally, I need the Atonement by a necessity for which there are no words, but which presses upon my heart with all the gnawing agony of hunger. It cannot tell the quality of the blood, the measure of the oblation, the efficacy of the sacrifice. It is called "precious blood," it is called "self-sacrifice": the words dimly hint to me a meaning very gracious and comforting; what they imply in all the compass of their thought I know not now, but shall know afterwards. Is there then an afterwards for me, a higher school, a brighter day, additional facilities, closer intercourse with things and spirits and forces Divine? To be assured of that is to know the meaning of the mystery, "Death is abolished."

Or look at the same doctrine in relation to the mysteries of daily providence. "Thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards," the direction not being from one locality to another, from one point of space to another, but a following in thought, purpose, meaning, and sovereign decree—a mighty flying after God, a keeping up *pari passu* with the great Leader, whose way is in the whirlwind and in the cloud. I limp now, halt and stagger and fall and half rise again and am down before I can straighten myself; I cannot follow, except in the dim far distance now, but afterward —. We want to know why we were made as we are—so singular, constituted so mysteriously, with a will so easily led, with passions so instantly ignited, with dispositions now rising upwards, now flinging downwards, with a life that seems all forms; why not have been made otherwise, dear Lord,—with stronger wills, with tenderer hearts, without perversity, without selfishness? And the Voice says, "Not now, but afterwards shalt thou know." This individuality is a heavy burden; this personal secret of the Almighty, which every man carries in his heart, is a most tormenting fire. An explanation would help us to bear it. To think that if we had been just

otherwise made, in some line or curve of being, with an additional element, with a certain quality that is omitted from our constitution, we should have prayed ourselves into answers and have lifted ourselves by the power of intercession into the temple where there are no clouds, no nights, but where the interviews are face to face with hand locked in hand. We want to know why; it would comfort us to have some hint of meaning, and the only reply we can elicit is—"Not now, but afterwards." Why this suffering? Who did sin, I or my parents, that this burden is laid upon me—a burden for which I have certainly no light and certainly no strength? But for it, I could fly; with it, I am buried every day. What a life would yours be but for the one thing in it that enters the soul like iron! Old age could never touch you but for that one thing. It is that one thing that takes the erectness out of your figure, and makes your hair white in a night, and ploughs your cheeks into great furrows through which the tear rivers roll. A hundred times have I heard you say, "But for that I could sleep soundly all night, and be cheerful all day; the eating of bread would be a sacrament and the going out of the house an eager hastening to fight for God and the truth; why should I have had this chain upon my feet, this manacle upon my hand, this black night shadow bound round my poor eyes? Why?" And the answer is: "Not now, but afterwards." "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."

There cannot be an afterwards of revelation unless there is a now of obedience. The now is not evacuated of all meaning, stripped of all urgency, and turned into a blank nothing; now has its agony, now has its immediate fight. To obey in the darkness is the great thing. Were I to say, "I will trust God in the seventh trouble because he has delivered me in six," I should be saying something hardly worth saying. There is a subtle selfishness in that verbal piety; there is a most suspicious selfishness about that reasoning, though it sounds so holy. Hear it: "He hath delivered me in six troubles, and in seven he will be with me." The testimony in itself is good, and is sincere, because it is historically true and is meant to be full of solace

from the historical side ; but do not make too much of it as a test of growth in grace. Who then has grown in grace ? This man who says, " Though he slay me, yet will I put my trust in him." That is faith. If you tell me that you have been so reduced, that you knew not how to turn, and at the very moment of extremity light appeared and deliverance was wrought out, and therefore you intend to hope even under similar circumstances, your speech within narrow limits is perfectly good ; it is a most valid testimony, but it is no necessary sign of growth in grace. This I want to be able to say : " I have nothing, I know not in what direction to turn, and if nothing should remain nothing, my hymn shall still be sung ; though the fig tree shall not blossom—I don't say, though there be a late harvest of figs, but though the fig tree shall not blossom—I will be as pious as ever." That is growing in grace, that is maturity in the life Divine, and that is the lesson which we learn now ; the afterwards is not in that particular lesson : it is the agony, the stinging fire of the immediate moment. How many persons make a deep mistake here ! They think they are pious because, having been delivered out of six troubles, they feel sure they will be delivered out of the seventh. That may be a species of profanity ; on the other hand, it may be the testimony of a grateful heart. But this is piety—to have nothing in the right hand, nothing in the left, nothing in the world, and then not to pray, which is a beggar's attitude, but to sing, which is a child's and a prince's posture. This is the miracle of God ; this is the ideal attainment. We are bound to keep it steadily before our dazzling eyes ; we count not ourselves to have attained : far from it ; but this one thing we do—we press toward the mark. We know our selfishness better than any other men know it, and we mourn it, but seem as if we could not get rid of it ; yet the grace of God is equal even to this miracle. So, whilst we pray, we will sing ; and whilst we mourn, we will also hope.

Obedience now is revelation afterward. We shall know if we follow on to know. He that doeth the will shall know of the doctrine. Obedience is preparation for revelation. Blessed is that servant who shall be found watching, waiting, when his Lord cometh ; verily, I say unto you, he will put keys into that servant's hand, and call him to honour, and sit him in inner

places, and make a son of him. "Mine, then, is a drudging life." Be it so. "I have to keep beating at this door so—no sign of opening." No matter. "The Lord told me to knock, and here I am knocking, knocking, knocking; I want to fly, but he says, 'Knock'; I want to go inside, and hold festival with the angels, but he tells me to knock." Obedience prepares the mind for revelation, takes out of that revelation the light that would dazzle the spirit's vision, and prepares the heart to receive wider demonstrations of the sovereignty and grace of God. We must be blind three days before we begin to see the outline of things; we must lie down as blind, helpless creatures, simply and lovingly waiting for any prophet God may send to us to open our eyes and teach us our first lesson in the higher alphabet. This does not suit us: we want to walk more quickly, pass on, because we are measuring time by a false chronometer. We do not know the joy which is laid up for us in complete obedience to the word, "Stand still and see the salvation of God." There is marvellous graciousness in a gradual revelation. If "the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day," it is because his spiritual education is imaged by that same fair symbol. The next piece of knowledge comes easily. Were the child to be compelled to overleap seven years of the process of education, and to commence a lesson which lies seven years ahead of the page he is reading to-day, he would be overcome with fear, and no strength would be left in him. What the child has to do is to read the next line, and then to turn over the next page. What we, as Christian students, have to do is to keep to the present truth, obey the immediate duty, do the work that lies next and easily to hand; and then the revelation will, so to say, steal upon us, and then encompass us without the violence of haste and without the unrest of surprise. We cannot tell how the light grows in the heavens. In the morning it is seed-time, and at noon-day the harvest fields of the firmament are white with an abundance of result; hardly is the morning seed-time past than the noontide harvest is ripe. So in mental illumination and in spiritual culture and growth. We shall know when we receive our last accession of truth. God's accessions are known by various names—sometimes by the starting up in the mind of a distinct fact; sometimes

by the gift of an impression ; sometimes by the prick of a new impulse ; sometimes by the glow of a new ambition ; sometimes by a mysterious, profound, all-calming peace. But when the accession comes—be it under this name or under that, the great fire, shocks of whirlwind, tumults of thunder, or a still small voice—we shall have no doubt about its identity. Divinity cannot be successfully imitated.

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#### NOTE.

“Towards the close of our Lord’s ministry St. Peter’s characteristics become especially prominent. Together with his brother, and the two sons of Zebedee, he listened to the last awful predictions and warnings delivered to the disciples in reference to the second advent (Matt. xxiv. 3; Mark xiii. 3, who alone mentions these names; Luke xxi. 7). At the Last Supper Peter seems to have been particularly earnest in the request that the traitor might be pointed out, expressing of course a general feeling, to which some inward consciousness of infirmity may have added force. After the supper his words drew out the meaning of the significant, almost sacramental, act of our Lord in washing his disciples’ feet; an occasion on which we find the same mixture of goodness and frailty, humility and deep affection, with a certain taint of self-will, which was at once hushed into submissive reverence by the voice of Jesus. Then too it was that he made those repeated protestations of unalterable fidelity, so soon to be falsified by his miserable fall. . . .

“Judas had left the guest-chamber when St. Peter put the question, Lord, whither goest thou? words which modern theologians generally represent as savouring of idle curiosity, or presumption, but in which the early Fathers (as Chrysostom and Augustine) recognised the utterance of love and devotion. The answer was a promise that Peter should follow his Master, but accompanied with an intimation of present unfitness in the disciple. Then came the first protestation, which elicited the sharp and stern rebuke, and distinct prediction of Peter’s denial (John xiii. 36-38). From comparing this account with those of the other evangelists (Matt. xxvi. 33-35; Mark xiv. 29-31; Luke xxii. 33, 34), it seems evident that with some diversity of circumstances both the protestation and warning were thrice repeated. The tempter was to sift all the disciples, our apostle’s faith was to be preserved from failing by the special intercession of Christ, he being thus singled out either as the representative of the whole body, or, as seems more probable, because his character was one which had special need of supernatural aid. . . .

“After the agony of Gethsemane, when the three, Peter, James, and John, were, as on former occasions, selected to be with our Lord, the only witnesses of his passion, where also all three had alike failed to prepare themselves by prayer and watching, the arrest of Jesus took place. Peter did not shrink from the danger. . . . Thrice, each time with greater vehemence, the last time with blasphemous asseveration, he denied his Master. The triumph of Satan seemed complete. Yet it is evident that it was an obscuration of faith, not an extinction. It needed but a glance of his Lord’s eye to bring him to himself. His repentance was instantaneous, and effectual. The light in which he himself regarded his conduct is clearly shown by the terms in which it is related by St. Mark.”—SMITH’S *Dictionary of the Bible*.

## Chapter xiv.

### THE REVELATION OF THE FATHER.

[AN OUTLINE.]

THE testimony of Scripture upon this point is most explicit. Thus: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." This, then, is one answer to the inquiry, What has Christ done for men that men could not have done for themselves? Namely, he has revealed the Father.

What does this expression mean? Three things are clearly excluded: (1) Christ did not reveal the existence of God; (2) he did not reveal the Fatherhood of God, for God is repeatedly called Father in the Old Testament; (3) he did not reveal the mercifulness of God, for God himself revealed this to Moses. In what sense, then, did Christ reveal the Father? Clearly in the sense that, as far as human conditions made it possible, (1) he visibly embodied the Father,—“He that hath seen me hath seen the Father”; (2) he made the Father universally intelligible,—“My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me”; “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature”; (3) he made the Father universally accessible,—“For through him we both have access by One Spirit unto the Father.” The first revelation carries with it the remaining two, for if Christ made the Father visible, it follows from the necessity of the terms that he also made the Father intelligible and accessible in exactly the degree in which he himself could be understood and approached. We are not to insist on a literal visibleness, for that is impossible; but on a manifestation so unique and distinct as to justify the declaration, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.” I propose a new use of these words, as elucidatory of the whole life of Christ. Thus:—

“He that hath seen me healing the sick and feeding the hungry hath seen the Father doing these things; the invisible

care of God has been exercised from the beginning, but now is made manifest, and ye see it in this action of mine,—what you now see is but a revelation of that which God in secret has never ceased to do! He that hath seen me teaching the ignorant and offering the weary rest, hath seen the Father doing these very things; from his habitation in eternity he has been doing even so ever since he made man to possess the earth; this, therefore, is no new act, no new love, no changed affection, it is the invisible revealed to your eyes! He that hath seen me seeking and saving the lost, receiving sinners and forgiving sins, hath seen the Father so doing; and he that hath seen me sorrowful unto death, surrendering my own will, taking upon me the form of a servant and becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross, hath seen what the Father has been and has done through all time; he has always been pitiful and forgiving, always sorrowful and self-sacrificing, always on the Cross! This is a great mystery, and only to be seen in those occasional moments which surprise the soul into a consciousness of its own grandeur and value. He that hath seen me rising from the dead, and ascending high above all heavens, that I may fill all things, hath seen the Father in those invisible processes by which he turns the death and corruption of buried seed into the life and fruitfulness of golden harvests. The things which have been hidden from eternity, and which have been the secret and mystery of the universe, have thus been revealed in my earthly ministry: ye believe in God, believe also in me."

Or take the same truth in another form:—

(1) He that hath seen me hath seen the Father, accepting humiliation yet escaping indignity. No man suffered as Christ did; yet whilst he was on earth he was in heaven. Such was the dignity that could never be impaired. So God has been mocked, defied, grieved, disowned by his children, distrusted by his saints, abandoned by his worshippers; yet he has fed the sun with fire, and sent abroad the arrows of his lightning, he has weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance; in all his humiliation he has never been less than God.

(2) He that hath seen me hath seen the Father, offering sympathy, yet escaping defilement. This was what man could never do. Man could pity the leper, but Christ could touch him.



This power of God was the divine gift to man ; to ancient priest, and modern apostle : " I give unto you power to tread on scorpions and serpents, and over all the power of the enemy ; and nothing shall by any means hurt you." " They shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them." " And Paul shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm." From the beginning God has been in the midst of the wickedness of those who have forsaken him, yet the contagious corruption has had no effect upon his holiness. Who can touch pitch and not be defiled ? None but God.

(3) He that hath seen me hath seen the Father, stooping to death, yet escaping annihilation. He that hath seen me die, hath seen the Father die. You think of death as extinction, and therefore you shudder at the thought of God dying. But see how I die ! My enemies kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do ; I allow the body to die ; I enter the grave ; but at the appointed time I rise again and spoil the power of the enemy. It is so that the Father dies. He is grieved, disappointed, and his voice is lifted up in lamentation ; yet he will overthrow the evil one and turn again the captivity of his own distress,— I have come to show you that that which you sow is not quickened, except it die.

How, then, is it true that they who have seen Christ have seen the Father, and yet only they have seen the Father to whom Christ has revealed him ? This reminds us that there is seeing and seeing ; every one knows that there is a seeing which sees nothing ;—" Eyes have they but they see not ; ears have they but they hear not ; and hearts have they but they do not understand." Seeing is truly the gift of God. " But their eyes were holden that they should not know him." " Mary saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus." " Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus." Clearly, then, something more is meant than the mere sight of the body ; to see the Bible is not to see a revelation ; so to see the form of Christ is not to see " the image of the invisible God." To whom, then, will the Son reveal the Father ? To the man who is humble and of a contrite heart ; not to the wise and prudent, but unto babes.

## Chapters xiv., xv.

### THE SELF-REVELATION OF CHRIST.

**W**E cannot understand the opening of the fourteenth chapter unless we read it in immediate connection with the close of the thirteenth. "Peter said unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake. Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice." "Let"—notwithstanding all cowardice and recession and loneliness—"not your heart be troubled": life does not end in a cloud; all appearances will be against me and against you, but the issue will be right. "Ye believe in God, believe also in me," and wait with sweet prayerful patience until the dawn; when the light comes all things will be seen as they are. There are many imperatives in the speeches of Christ which do not instantly appear. It is better that this verse, so full of comfort, should be read with three imperatives, thus: Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God; believe also in me. It is singular that in this gospel, which is supposed to be the very gospel of life, Jesus Christ should be delivering commandments in the voice of Sinai, yet with a subtle and suggestive accent of Zion. Again and again he uses the words "command," and "commandment." Has it come to this? Does history thus recur upon itself? and is there an all but impalpable line connecting Sinai and Zion, the mountain of thunder with the mountain of peace?

In these chapters Jesus Christ speaks pastorally; so to say, he excludes all who cannot understand him, and reducing the number of those to whom he will speak to a minimum, he says even to them, Come nearer: I do not want to lift up my voice above a whisper. A tone might destroy this music; it needs the finest whisper; if we increase the volume of sound beyond that,

we shall lose much. Let none stand away ; let each come closely to me. This is the pastoral relation, when the voice of the teacher is lowered, when he does not want the misunderstanding public to hear him, but only those who are in closest fellowship with his soul ; the very attitude is pastoral, the very voice is charged with solace. Yet there will be more than sentiment ; even in the impartation of this comfort there shall be rousing appeals, great promises, somewhat now and then of military strain ; for the disciples are not about to be lulled to rest, to be put to bed at an untimely hour ; they are to be fed with comfort, and then sent out to fight life's great battle. We have seen in our expositions that the word "comfort" in the New Testament is a singular word, often misunderstood or too narrowly applied ; we have resisted the notion that it simply means soothing, lulling, caressing. We have seen that when Barnabas was called a "son of consolation," he was really designated a rousing preacher. That is an idea which is seldom attached to the word. Hence many men are called sons of consolation who know nothing about comfort ; they have no power to sustain the human heart by the right quality and range of solace ; they think if they say nothing, if they put out the hand in a patting and caressing manner, if they sigh, if they aspire, that they are comforting the heart. There is nothing which a man in grief dreads so much as uncomfoting comfort ; he cannot bear to be spoken to by those who do not know what comfort really is. He comforts who rouses ; makes life more conscious of itself and its powers ; enlarges the scope of vitality ; brings up in a man the self that was going down in sleep. An awakening is a comforting teacher. We shall find as Christ reveals himself that he means out of all this consolation to make an army invincible.

Look at the twelfth verse as a proof—

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also ; and greater works than these shall he do ; because I go unto my Father."

Jesus Christ thus indicated a period of working. He never made anything of his miracles. Other people were surprised at them, he was never amazed ; beholders exclaimed, What a worker of wonders !—Jesus went out that he might pray. To pray is the greatest wonder of all ; to touch heaven by right of

love and faith is the supreme token of filial fellowship with God. As to quieting storms, and soothing seas, and raising dead bones, these are infantilities, trifles, things hardly to be accounted of at all ; but to hold God by the violence of prayer is the great end and aim of spiritual education, to be consummated in the other world by an exchange of prayer for the delight and the satisfaction of praise. When did Jesus Christ ever call his Church to less and less work ? When did he say, By-and-by, all this necessity will cease, and then the whole week will be one hymn-singing Sabbath day ? Never. He said, You have worked well to-day, but to-morrow with what sinew, with what strength, will you ply the vocation of God ! You have done well this week, but next week you will not know your former selves ; you will be giants refreshed, you will have new programmes, new enterprises ; you will see new heavens, new earth, new possibilities, and there will be no holding you back. This is the mission I open to you, this is the reason why I comfort you ; if I give you a moment's sleep it is that when you are wakened out of it you may be the better qualified to prosecute your noble toil.

“Greater works than these” there are always to be done. Work begins on a small scale, enlarges, increases, develops, and you enlarge and consolidate along with your service, and thus you are proceeding upon an ever-enlarging line of service. There is no end to Christian culture ; there is no period in the literature of sacrifice ; whilst anything has been withheld nothing has been given ; whilst one pulse has been kept back from God's altar the whole life has also been kept back. Never believe any men who think their work is done ; even if they think their own personal work is done, the work is being carried on by braver men, keener minds, larger hearts, and more perfect fidelity. No man has ever imagined with any approach to completeness what God means humanity to be. This word must always resound in our soul, “Greater works than these.” What we do is nothing compared to what we shall yet do. Is there not need, then, after such a revelation of the future, of a word of special comfort and encouragement ? Trust the divine artist ; he knows where the light should be, and where the shadow should fall.

Having thus called his disciples to greater labour, Christ says:—

“And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it” (xiv. 13, 14).

They might well wonder how the greater works were to be done. Here is the answer. Ask, and ye shall receive. What a marvellous combination of limitation and illimitableness we find in these words! Never man spake like this man! “And whatsoever,”—that is bold, almost to recklessness. Who can tell what human fancy may crave, what human imagination may suggest? But the word does not end with “whatsoever,” but proceeds thus—“ye shall ask in my name.” Everything must be sanctified by the name, limited by the name, defined and designated by the spirit of Christ. Here, then, you have obedience, surrender to God, confidence in the divine wisdom, an asking that is not bold, but that is made humble and reverent by the completing expression—“Not my will, but thine, be done.”

Again the revelation comes. The disciples had to receive “the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.” They are to become new men, under new dominion, the subjects of new impulses; they are to be controlled, and yet to be emancipated; to have an enlarged liberty, and yet an ennobled discipline. Is not another word of comfort there specially needed? It is; and it is given—“I will not leave you comfortless.” This is an unfortunate translation, because it seems to connect the word “comfortless” with the word “Comforter”; whereas, there is no connection between them in the thought of Christ. The tenderer translation is this: “I will not leave you orphans.” In an ancient translation of the Bible into English the quaint translator says, “I will not leave you faderless”—without a father. This connects the thought of Christ with the words, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.” I will not leave you orphans or fatherless: I am your Father; but you did not know it. All definitions of family relationship are merged in the supreme relation fatherhood and sonship. I will not leave you fatherless—“I will come to you”; and when I come the Father

comes : "I and my Father are one ; in my Father's house are many mansions : I go to prepare a place for you " : I am always engaged upon your service ; wherever I am, I am doing something for the redeemed humanity : you shall never know the cold, the loneliness, the sorrow of orphanhood.

So Christ proceeds to speak to the heart, quietly, whisperingly, sympathetically, culminating in this benediction, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you : not as the world giveth, give I unto you"—an expression that is rarely properly understood. "Not as the world giveth" is not a reflection upon the manner in which the world gives, but a characteristic of the kind of things the world gives. "Not as the world giveth"—gold, and silver, and horses, and chariots, and estates, and social status ; in this line of bequest I do nothing ; I will not operate as the world operates ; I give what the world cannot give—heart-calm, the balm of tranquillity, the jewel of peace, the eternal Sabbath Day. Thus he always separates himself from the world, and from all rivalry, and all attempt to approach him along his own line ; whenever men think they are going to do what Christ does, he steps away to the invisible height, and leaves them grovelling in the valley of darkness below. He will have no rivalry ; he will not pluralise himself, and be like other redeemers and gods ; he is Christ by virtue of his uniqueness ; "only begotten" marks him off from all the tribes and families of men, but never prevents his coming down to them with fruit plucked from heaven's trees and water drawn from the river of God. When, therefore, we read about his not giving as the world giveth, we are to understand that he is speaking not of manner but of quality, not of limitation but of contrast : the world can give gold, but not wisdom ; the world can give estate, but not peace. The devoutest father that ever died never gave his son one atom of his reverence that could be accounted his in addition to those things which were comprehended within his own personal responsibility. Thus Christ gives as the world cannot give, and the world can never be a substitute for Christ ; and the things the world gives can never make up for the things which Christ gives. It is not in number to touch the region of quality. The worldling and the Christian live in different universes.

Drawing nearer to the disciples by way of figure and emblem—for they still needed the miracle of symbol in order to make them understand even in an approximate degree the deeper mysteries of this new life—he said,—

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman” (xv. 1).

Is it not important in all life to know who is the principal, the head man, the lord of the occasion? We make much of this in our business; why should we make little of it in our religion? Why should we be content to talk to a servant when we can talk to the Lord? We say in business, with some show of shrewdness, Let me see the chief man; I do not want to deal with intermediaries; I want to see the head of the firm. A man will say that with some pride of a commercial kind, as if he were not easily to be put off; yet that same man plays false with his own reasoning when he comes into the highest matters of all. The contention of the Christian teacher is this, that men ought to inquire who is the principal, who is Lord, where is the fountain, the origin, the secret spring of all vitality? Jesus Christ addresses himself to this question, and answers it by anticipation, “I am the true vine”; “I am the vine, ye are the branches.”

“If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you” (xv. 6, 7).

Is there anything unreasonable, then, in Christianity, when its principal quest is to know the head and origin, the fountain and spring, of things? This is indeed Christianity. It will not be content with minor explanations, with any work of men's hands; it cannot sit down at the outer line of phenomena and say, These will do: they are very wonderful! Christianity does not send us to create a museum of specimens of curiosities, oddities, and eccentricities; Christianity says, To the fountain, to the origin, to the all-supplying force of things—where is that? Having found that all the rest will come, by naturalness of development; but until you have found the well-head, the spring, and the fountain, you have found nothing that may not perish in your hand, and disappoint you even in the moment when you thought you had touched the height of victory. This is the supreme characteristic of the New Testament; this is the supreme

characteristic of Christianity. Christ reveals the Father: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." Jesus Christ proceeded forth, and came from God: hence the mysteriousness of his speech, hence the uniqueness of his personality, hence the unapproachableness of his morality. It is not an affair that springs out of the earth, and is to be tested by geometric appliances; it is a revelation from heaven, a descent of the Holy Ghost, and is only to be understood even in a partial degree by those who walk with God. Here, then, at once we find an encouragement and a standard.

What will be the reward of this, the faithful prosecution of Christ's commandment? The answer is given in verse 15—"Henceforth I call you not servants," but "friends." That is the line of promotion. We shall know when we are called friends by Christ; a new consciousness will dawn within, a larger sense of life will possess us; we shall know, when the lifetide rises, when a nobler enthusiasm inflames our nature, when mightier impulses stir within us,—we shall know that we have gone up in the grade of Christian relationship, and that we who began as slaves have been promoted to the rank of friends. In this school we must graduate. Herein we may all take the honours of the school, and the meekest will take the most. We have read in Isaiah that Abraham was called by Jehovah, "my friend." When Augustus called Virgil his friend it was thought he had conferred an honour upon the singer—as if an emperor could confer an honour on a poet! Jesus Christ calls us friends. Why does he change the designations—"for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth"—is not in the innermost secret of things; he only waits at the door, and beholds from afar—"but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." I have created you trustees, I have invested you with the dignity and the responsibility of stewards; you have in you, did you but know it, the manifold wisdom of God; so then, ye are no more your own souls. This is the reasoning of the Apostle Paul—"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature": he has not got some new faculties, aptitudes, opportunities, but he himself is a new man,



a new soul. "Old things have passed away, all things have become new," and amongst the new things are the new and abiding honours: the lesser name has been exchanged for the greater name; the servant has blossomed into the friend. This honour is open to all who love the Saviour. Say, is there any honour compared with that when a man can truly say to himself, I am the friend of Christ? Once I beheld him afar off; I was once in the infantile region of wonder, open-eyed amazement, uninstructed surprise and astonishment, always admiring him, but never really approaching him in any sense of kinship; but now I have laid my head upon his shoulder, and have wept myself into a new relationship. I understand things now I never understood before; I do not want to hear now about miracles, signs, tokens; I want nothing but to feel him breathe. This is the ecstasy so transcendent as to be calm; this is the peace of God.

Then Christ changes his tone, and begins to "command" the disciples and say,—

"Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you; . . . These things I command you, that ye love one another" (xv. 14, 17).

He is Lord as well as Paraclete; he is Sovereign, as well as Redeemer; he is Lord of all. Yet, who thinks of Jesus Christ giving commands? We often think of him as the Creator of the beatitudes, the Poet of benefaction, the Man who had fine fancy enough almost to invent characteristics for separate qualities; we read his beatitudes, and bless him for his gentle words; but the Author of the beatitudes is the Author of the Christian commandments: Follow me; believe God; believe me; love one another. These are not proposals that may be modified; these are not suggestions that are open to compromise; these are the living commandments of the living Christ. We bless this mighty speaker for his eloquence on the mountain which all men might hear, but with a tenderer praise we thank him for these other words, spoken in the privacy of love, uttered in the secrecy of heart-to-heart intercourse. We might know more of Christ if we loved him more. To love he will ever manifest himself—to criticism he will seldom speak. From love he will never withdraw.

## Chapter xiv. 2.

“I go to prepare a place for you.”

### THE PREPARED PLACE.

**T**H**ERE** are two remarkable things about this statement. First of all, that the master should prepare for the servant. This upsets the ordinary course of procedure. You are expecting to entertain some chosen friends. All your appointments are made; you have sent before your face servants in whom you have confidence, and have told them to do as you have commanded, that all things may be in readiness for the invited guests. This is customary; this is considered right. But Jesus Christ says to his servants—such poor, incomplete, and blundering servants too—“I, your Lord and Master, go to prepare a place for you.” This is quite in keeping with the method which Jesus Christ adopted in his ministry. This is no exceptional instance of condescension, self-ignoring, self-humiliation. “He took a towel, girded himself, and began to wash his disciples’ feet.” And having finished this lowly exhibition, he said, “If I, then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another’s feet. I have given you an example.” So his whole life was a humiliation. Wherever he was on earth he was, so to speak, out of place; if his method be measured by his original and essential dignity, his whole life was a stoop, his whole ministry a Godlike condescension. So, why did we begin our discourse by saying it was a remarkable thing that the servant should be prepared for by the Master? Only remarkable when looked at in the light of our little standards and false relations; but quite in keeping, perfectly and purely in harmony, with that divine condescension which marked, ruled, and glorified our dear Christ’s ministry.

The second remarkable thing about the text is,—That the

divine Being, God the Son, should ever have occasion to "prepare" anything. To prepare may signify to get ready, to put things in order, to look after arrangements, appointments, and the like, so as to have all things in due proportion and relation, that the eye may be pleased, that the ear may be satisfied, and that all our desires may be met and fulfilled. Why, Jesus Christ talks in the text as if there was a great deal of work for him to do somewhere, and he must make haste and get it done. Go to prepare? Can he who fills infinitude and breathes eternity have anything to do in the way of arranging and ordering and getting things ready for his servants? He accommodates himself to our modes of thinking. He does not always throw the infinite at us. He often steps out of his tabernacle of glory and talks our own speech,—makes a child of himself that he may be understood in this little rickety nursery of a world. He knows we are all in the cradle still; that the mightiest speaker amongst us is only a lisping babbler, and that he must continually break up his words and turn himself downwards, in order that he may convey the very dimmest hint of his unutterable meaning!

There are some things which the Master only can do. Will you go and prepare summer for us? You might try. You have seen half a hundred summers: now you go, and try to make the fifty-first! Come! You are an artificer; you have the organ of form largely developed; you have an eye for beauty; you can buy oils and paints and colours and canvas and brushes of all kinds. Why do you not go and prepare summer for us? The great Master, looking down upon this little under-world of his—this basement story of his great building—says, "I am going to prepare the summer for you." And he makes no noise, he makes no mistake in his colours, never gets things into discord. He continually renews the face of the earth, and not a man in all the busy boastful world can do it! If the servant cannot prepare the summer, how could he prepare heaven? If the saint exhausts himself when he lights a candle, how could he fill the great heavens with the morning that should never melt into sunset?

Observe, therefore, that always the servant has to wait for

the master. He can only go as he has example set before him. The servant has no original ideas. The servant is not a voice,—only an echo, muddled, indistinct. I would that we could reflect very deeply on that point,—that every now and then in life we have to stand back, and let the Master go out before us. We can do a hundred and fifty little things, and multiply the hundred and fifty by ten, and double that number, and we actually get into the notion at last that we can do anything. When you have made one little rosebud, advertise it, and we will come and look at it. When you have made one new plant, let us hear where it is to be seen, and we shall examine it. “Canst thou command the morning?” “Canst loose the bands of Orion?” Art thou known by the Pleiades? Canst thou open the gate of the Milky Way? What art thou?

This text gives three intensely gratifying, comforting, and inspiring views of the Christian believer’s position and destiny. The Christian believer is the object of Jesus Christ’s zealous and tender care. When Jesus Christ was going away he said to his wondering disciples, “It is expedient for you that I go.” When he addressed them on the occasion of the text he said, “I go to prepare a place for myself”? No! “For you.” And the Apostle Paul, catching his Master’s sublime tone, said, “All things are yours.” And Peter, thunder-tongued, cried out, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you!” Yet we hang our heads, and moan and cry and fret and chafe as if we had nothing, not knowing that a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

Wherever you find Jesus Christ you find him working for his people,—doing something for those who believe in him and love him. “He ever liveth to make intercession for us.” There is a beautiful necessity of love about this arrangement. For if he were to fail here,—fail in training, educating, sanctifying the Church,—he would fail altogether. What if he has made countless millions of stars: can the stars talk to him? Can he get

back the idea which he gave? Can he have sympathy with form, substance, glory, majesty, as found in mere matter? If he does not get us—poor, broken things—right into his blue, glad heaven, he has failed! That is the one work which he set himself to do. If he drops one poor little child out of his great arms because he has not capacity and strength, he could never be happy in his heaven. Think of this: Christ always thinking for us, caring for us, going out in all the passion of his love after us, and then say whether the Church ought always to have tears in her eyes and never to have peace in her heart?

Not only are Christian believers constant objects of Jesus Christ's most zealous and tender care, but they are to be eternally his joy. "I go to prepare a place for you." The plain meaning of that is,—Fellowship, residence together in common. He said afterwards, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also"—giving us the idea of permanence, continuity of residence, and fellowship. We do some things for the moment. It is enough for God if he limits April to thirty days; he does not want it on the thirty-first day; it ceases, and goes back into his great heaven, and May begins. He does not bring back any one year that has passed, and say, "There, I have brushed it up for you, and made the best of it I can: you must try it again." No. He takes the years, blows them away; creates new ones; never gives you an old leaf, or tells you to put a faded flower into water and try to restore its colours and its fragrance again. "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." "He fainteth not, neither is weary." As for these heavens, he will one day dismiss them. He will create a new heaven and a new earth. He will burn up and utterly destroy what he has made. He makes some things for the time being; but wherever we read of the place prepared for Christian believers, we have the idea of continuous, enduring time—never-ending fellowship. All true life is in the heart. Love alone is immortal. "God is love." We shall drop argument, logic, controversy, letters, technicalities, pedantries of all sorts, tongues, prophecies, hope, faith itself, and only Love shall live for ever!

The world is made poor whenever it loses pathos. Whenever the emotional goes down, man goes down. Logic is but intermediate help ; it is but a poor ladder compared to heart, love, pathos, sensibility. Love must endure as God endureth. This is it which binds Christ and Christians—love. Love is knowledge. Love hath the key of interpretation. Love can explain what learning can never fathom. Love knoweth the Lord afar off,—beyond the stormy deep, in the far-away desert, in the night-time dark and cold. Love can see the invisible, and touch the distant. Do we love Christ, or are we still in the beggarly region of mere controversy and cold intellectual inquiry ? If we love him we shall be with him for ever.

Seeing that Christ makes the Christian believer the object of his constant and zealous care, and that the Christian believer shall be for ever with his Lord, the Christian is entitled to look at the present through the medium of the future. The more we can bring the power of this love to bear upon the passing moments, we can look into the things which are seen and at the things which are not seen, and step out of eternity morning by morning, do our little paltry day's work, and go back again into God's pavilion. If in this life only we have hope, we are of all men most miserable. For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Moses endured as seeing the invisible. Jesus Christ teaches this most beautiful doctrine : That the Christian heart is not to be troubled, because in his Father's house are many mansions. So he brings down heaven to help up earth. He says, "When you are weary of the present, look forward to the future ; when the road is steep and difficult and tortuous, think of the end and be thankful and glad." It is by this power we draw ourselves onward. We lay the hands of our expectant love on the golden bars of heaven and draw ourselves forward thereby. Some will know what I mean by that expression. You who have been in sickness and sorrow and loss—you who have been tired of looking downwards, and feel the very heart dying within you, when you saw nothing but this earth's narrow circumference, and then have had sudden visions of God's eternity and Christ's

blessed immortality, you draw on yourself through all the care and sorrow and bitterness and unrest of time by loving, intelligent anticipation of eternity.

Now, if Christ has gone to prepare a place for the Christian believer—what then? The place will be worthy of himself. Send a poor creature to prepare a place for you against to-morrow, and the place will be prepared according to the capacity and resources of the messenger. It is a poor person who has gone to prepare a place for you, therefore you will not see gold and silver, you will not have a sumptuous reception; but if the poor person has done all that she could, it is enough. You will see the intent of the preparation everywhere; every speck of dust that has been removed means, "I would put down gold there if I could." Every little thing, even a wild flower out of the hedgerow, put into a little glass that can hardly stand, means, "I would give you paradise, if I could." Every little deed that is done ought to be amplified by your grateful love, because it means so much more than it looks. But Jesus Christ says, "I go to prepare a place for you. I have made worlds, stars, planets, comets; I have sent forth the lightning and uttered the thunder. Now I am going to do my greatest deed of all. I am going to get a place ready for those whom I have bought with my blood and glorified by my Spirit." What kind of place will he get ready for us, who has all things at command,—when the silver and the gold are his, when he can speak light and command worlds to fashion themselves and shine upon his children? What kind of place will he get ready? You like to be prepared for. If the person preparing for you is poor, you take every little deed as a great deed. If the person preparing for you has ample resources and receives you as if—"Really, well, you have come after all; but, at the same time, it would have been quite as well if you had lost your way,"—you naturally feel indignant, dissatisfied, resentful, because it might have been done nobly. Jesus Christ has gone to prepare a place. We judge men by the capacity of their resources. We have seen what he has done. If he has loved us with unutterable love, he will enrich us with inconceivable glory. The riches which he has are called "the unsearchable riches of Christ." "Eye hath not seen, ear

hath not heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, what God hath prepared." "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you."

Preparation implies an interest in us, an expectation of us. He is waiting for his guests; he will open the door presently, and we shall go straight in. God has prepared nothing for the bad man. There is a place,—the pit of damnation, the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched! But it was not prepared for him. It was prepared, Christ says, for "the devil and his angels." That is the only place he has for the bad man! He made no preparation for him,—thought, perhaps, that at the very last moment he might turn and say, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" Christ did not get anything ready for you! All that there is is the devil's pit—never, never got ready for man—man who was redeemed by the precious blood of Christ!



## Chapter xiv. 21.

“He that loveth me . . . . I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.”

### ON CHRIST MANIFESTING HIMSELF.

HERE is a promise of divine manifestation to the human mind, and of divine indwelling in the human heart. “He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father.” “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.” So, then, God need not be unto the human soul as a far-off and unapproachable King—he may be in the heart as a gracious Father; his presence need not be as a coldly glittering star away in the inaccessible heights, but as a summer filling the heart with fire, working in the life all the strange enchantments of intermingling colours, and covering the soul with abundant fruitfulness. Thus we have distinctly set before us the highest possibility in spiritual life—the possibility of being temples of the Holy Ghost, of having fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ, and of being made partakers of the divine nature. This thought should silence the clamour of all earthly appeal to our affections, and give us the true idea of our susceptibilities as children of God. We can do the daily business of life, yet through it all can have shining upon us the most holy and transfiguring image of the Son of man; we can be in the city of men, yet hidden in the sanctuary of God; our feet may be in the dust, but our heads among those who worship day and night; we may carry with us him whose name is Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God. So being and so doing we are no longer of the world; we are only waiting to pay it back the dust it lent us, and then we shall be free of it for ever; our true life is hidden; it is in God’s keeping; it is never seen drawing water from this world’s muddy wells, nor eating the base food of the beasts that

perish ; it lives on the living word, it draws water from the wells of salvation ; it has meat to eat that the world knoweth not of. " This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and his Church "—and I invite you to follow me, in a prayerful and quiet spirit, in an endeavour to show first the condition on which divine manifestation is granted ; and, secondly, some of the blessed evidences by which we may know that such manifestation has been realised in our own experience. O Spirit of Light, shine upon us, that we may see every step of the ascending and glorious way !

(1) The condition on which divine manifestation is granted to man.—That condition is distinctly asserted in the text, and in other Scriptures, to be love. " The Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me." " If any man love me, I will manifest myself unto him." Where love is wanting, all is wanting ; there may be rough interpretations of the divine presence as seen in the wonders of creation ; for he would be a fool who could mistake the sun as having been written by any other hand than God's ; he who reads only the writing on the face of nature is as the letter-carrier, who reads only the outward address, not the wise and tender words written for the heart. Love is, so to speak, the faculty by which we apprehend God, without which we can never know more of him than that he is a dread mystery. Love is the fulfilling of the law : thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy strength. Nor need it appear strange that love is the only interpreter of God. In all our education and intercourse we find again and again that love sees farthest, hears quickest, feels deepest. God has not set up an arbitrary test of manifestation, he has taken the common course of our life, and given it applications to himself. I might challenge the worshipper of Nature to say whether his god does not demand precisely the same condition of manifestation ? The mountain is saying, If any man love me, I will manifest myself unto him ; the sun holds the same language, so does the sea, so does every leaf of the forest. Two men shall walk along the same road ; the one shall see nothing of beauty, and hear nothing of music. When he reaches his journey's end he may, perhaps, have a dim impression that there was a hedge on one side of him and that there

was garden land on the other ; he may not be prepared absolutely to deny that a bird or two might have been singing in the air as he came along ; he may not be ready to take an oath that now and again he passed a wayside flower ; but he knows nothing, he is not in the slightest degree enriched by reason of his walk through the enchanting scenery. To such an eye as his Nature refuses to reveal herself in any but her most outward forms, and even they are misunderstood by so blind a reader. The companion who walked with him has, on the contrary, enriched his mind with many a picture ; he has heard voices which will linger in his ear for many a day ; the wayside flower has spoken to him some tender message, and the whole scene has been to him as the distinct handwriting of the great Creator. How are we to account for the difference ? The road was the same, the two men travelled the same path at the same moment ; yet the one was poor at his journey's end, and the other was filled with a sweet delight. The explanation is easy : the one loved Nature, and therefore Nature manifested herself to his admiring eye ; the other cared nothing for Nature, and Nature in return cared nothing for him. What I wish to insist upon is, that even in your sanctuary, O worshipper of Nature, the same law holds good as in the sanctuary of the living God ; in both we hear the words, " If any man love me, I will manifest myself unto him."

The same rule holds good with Art. Every great picture is saying to those who look upon it, *If any man love me, I will manifest myself unto him.* It is not every man who can read a picture. To some men a picture is only so much canvas and so much paint, without life, without idea, without poetry ; there the great work hangs, having no message to those who look upon it with unappreciative eyes. You have heard persons who knew nothing of works of art, who, in passing great pictures, have said, "That is not so bad," or, "What a glorious frame that is!" but into the soul of the painter they have not seen at all ; they have not appreciated the expenditure of mind which has been lavished on that costly work. On the other hand, there have been men who have stood before a great picture dumb with amazement, quivering with inexpressible delight, moved to the very depths of their being ! The picture is the same, the light

in which it is viewed by both parties is the same ; yet to the one mind the picture is representing truths too deep for utterance, and to the other nothing but the coarsest exterior. Here again, therefore, we are thrown back upon the law of the text, and are shown that it is no arbitrary law which Almighty God has set up. Art unites with Nature in saying in the most distinct manner, If any man love me, I will manifest myself unto him. Nor do we come to a change of this law if we enter into the circle in which human nature is most deeply studied. You can never know a man deeply until you love him. If you wish to know what is in your friend, sound his depths by entrusting him with more and more of your friendship. As flowers expand in the sunshine, so character discloses itself under the genial radiance of trustful affection. All character, indeed, does not reveal itself in the same way, but some men, and probably the grandest men, do not show themselves fully except under the influence of love. We may make many happy conjectures concerning the disposition of men. By putting one thing and another together which we may have seen in their character, we may come to some tolerably correct conclusion regarding the life of those whom we carefully study ; but to know a man deeply and truly, to know him as he knows himself, we must test him by our own love, we must develop him by the fulness and reality of our special trust. The mother often knows more about the child than the father does. You may remember that in your childish days you were able to go to your mother with a very broken story, and she was patient and wise enough to put it together for you and make something of it ; but you did not care to go to your father until you had a straightforward story to tell, and were prepared to stand a close cross-examination upon it. Perhaps some little girl may say that in her case it was precisely the contrary, for she could go to her father better than to her mother. I am glad to know it ; such an instance does not at all destroy the validity of my position ; it still remains true that where there is the most love there will be the highest power of interpretation, and that love will draw from its object most surely all that it requires. What we have found in Nature, in art, and in the family circle, we find in the whole course of our general study. The poet is saying, If any man love me,

I will manifest myself to him. He will not speak to the prosaic reader. His poem will be but so many lines to the man who has no poetic faculty. The poet will only speak to the poet. Two men shall read the same poem—one will feel it tedious and wearisome exceedingly; the other will feel as if it ended too soon, so rich, so inspiring, so grand he felt it to be. What is this but the application of the principle of the text? So with the musician: to some men (men, indeed, who are to be sincerely pitied) music is nothing; it does not come to them with interpretations which could never be expressed in common words; they are lost in what, to them, is a terrible discord—the clash of instruments, the throbbing of great drums, the roll of stupendous organs, the blending of many voices—to them it is all confusion, without spirit, without figure, without signification. To others, music is as a voice from heaven: in the grand compositions of the masters they see, as it were, the very spirit of music walking upon the wings of the tuneful wind, and beckoning them away to higher scenes and nobler delights than earth can afford. How is this? Music will not visit the silent chambers of the soul that gives it no loving invitation; music, on the contrary, will never cease to sound in the hearing of those who pray that her voice may continue to soothe and inspire them.

We come, therefore, again and again upon the principle of the text. Whatever be your god—be it Nature, be it Art, be it humanity—you will find in it the same law that you find in the text, namely, that without love there can be no true manifestation. It is the same with reading books. All authors are not the same to us; we must take something to an author before we can get from him all that he will give. The “Stones of Venice” must be hard reading to a man who cares nothing for Gothic, Byzantine, bases, jambs, and archivolts; Shakespeare is uninteresting to the man who brings nothing of the dramatic in his own nature to the interpretation of the great poet; such a man will flee to Euclid’s Geometry, as to an ark of refuge. Yes, even geometry itself insists upon the application of the law which we find in the text. Euclid is dull reading to the man who does not love mathematics; but to him who has, so to speak, a geometrical mind, even straight lines and circles are apt to become things of beauty. You will

not regard these illustrations as tedious if they help you in any degree to realise the principle, that love is the secret of manifestation. In setting up love as the condition of divine fellowship, God does not set up an arbitrary law. This, indeed, is the common law of the universe. Like ever goes to like. He who loves the devil most, knows most of the devil. To love vice is to be a learned scholar in the school of the infernal spirit; is to be really clever at wickedness, to be refined in iniquity, to be a genius in abomination. Some men are so little learned in the arts of the devil as to expose themselves to the interference of the policeman and the magistrate; they are such clumsy servants of their bad master as actually to be imprisoned, and to be otherwise punished by the laws of their country; others, again, are such adepts in the art of doing that which is forbidden, that they can manage to build up a reputation for respectability while they are actually engaged in practices which cannot bear the light of day,—so silent are they, so skilful, so deeply do they love the devil, that they receive from him the most secret manifestations, whilst they can look abroad upon the world with a face which simulates the appearance of innocence. The law is impartial. To love is to know; to love is to have; to love is strength; to love is life.

(2) I intended to say something about the blessed evidences that we have realised this divine manifestation; but why attempt to explain what must of necessity be too great for utterance in words? When God is showing himself in the heart, there are many signs of his presence. In our deepest intercourse with the Father our souls enter into an ecstasy in which language is felt to be powerless. You cannot have God in your heart without knowing that he is there. You cannot always explain, in common language, how it is that you are assured of his presence; yet there are flashes of light upon your mind, there are surgings of love in your heart, which tell you most unmistakably that you are enjoying immediate fellowship with the Father and his Christ. If I were to enter into an enumeration of the evidences by which any man can be assured that God is manifesting himself to the human heart, I should put, first and foremost, this—namely, where God dwells there will be increasing hatred of sin as sin.

I do not say that there will be mere dread of consequences ; I do not teach that men will avoid sin simply because they fear the terrible rod which never fails to follow the evil-doer. I insist rather, that where God is reigning in the heart there will be an ever-deepening detestation of sin on its own account ; of sin because it is sin, because it is so infinitely hateful to God himself. Where the spirit of order is in a man, he does not require to go with a square and compasses, and other mathematical instruments, in order to test whether this or that is out of order, or out of proportion ; he detects it instantly, by reason of the very spirit that is in him. Where the spirit of honesty is in a man, he does not retire in order to consult an Act of Parliament before he completes his transactions with those who have entered into business relations with him. He does not say, " If the Act will allow me to get off for elevenpence three-farthings, certainly I shall not pay one shilling." He is himself an Act of Parliament ; he is the incarnation of the spirit of honesty—he represents the great law of divine righteousness, and, because of the spirit of integrity which is in him, it is utterly impossible for him to go astray from the path of rectitude. And even thus it is with regard to the very highest attainments of the divine life. When the spirit of holiness is in a man, his whole life will be made holy thereby ; he will not care to consult rules and codes as determined by human critics ; the spirit of holiness that is in him will lead him into truth, into purity, into the very holiness of the all-holy God. Let us then put ourselves to the test on this point : if we would really know whether God is manifesting himself to us, let us each say, Do I hate sin as sin, or would I roll it under my tongue as a sweet morsel if I could do so without suffering evil consequences for it ? Do I abominate sin because it is opposed to the nature of God, or do I profess to hate it merely because such profession will secure for me a better standing in society ? Would I sin if I were left alone, or if the most perfect secrecy could be granted to me ? These are the piercing questions by which a man may test whether he is really enjoying divine manifestation, or is living a superficial and perhaps a hypocritical life.

Next to insisting upon this proof of divine manifestation to the

human heart, I should point out that where God really dwells with men there will be on the part of men supremacy of the spiritual over the material. The flesh will be servant, not master. Christianity indeed does not destroy human passions, but gives them a higher direction. Where God dwells in the soul, and fills the mind with heavenly light, and stirs the heart with blessed expectation, the passions will, of necessity, take their order from reason. As the material universe is under God's control, so will the human body be under the control of the human spirit, where God dwells in the heart. As in nature we find occasional outbreakings of storm—as the winds now and again threaten to rock the world and shake it out of its place—as the volcano bursts forth in devastating fire—as the sea roars tumultuously, so there may be in our bodily experiences proofs that we are yet in a region where the enemy has some power over us; yet as God sits above the floods, and controls all the forces of creation, so will he give our spirit ability to overmaster all the agitation and turbulence which show that even yet we are more or less strangers in a strange land. Out of this hatred of sin and this spiritual supremacy there will, of course, come perfect trust in God's government of the world. The world becomes quite a new study when the heart is renewed in Christ's love. The world is no longer a threatening mystery; it is still, indeed, a problem, but there is the most perfect assurance in the heart that the solution will bring nothing but glory to the divine name. When God manifests himself to man, man is delivered from the terrors of the present world; he ceases to see mere accident in the courses of daily life that perplex him and distress him. He says, I do but see part of the divine movement in this; so far as these events that appear to be disastrous are concerned, I see that which is fragmentary, and I must patiently and confidently wait until God has completed his whole purpose. This is a sure sign that God is in the heart, for the world is displaced, its power is thrown down, and, even in the most threatening circumstances, there is a calmness which was never wrought in the human mind by carnal philosophy or unassisted reasoning. The world becomes less and less to a man who enjoys divine fellowship. To some men the world is, of course, everything; they have but one little world in their tiny universe—of course



they are bound to make the most of it; to the man who is the temple of the Holy Ghost there is a great and indeed immeasurable universe, in view of which this speck of dust, on which some men would live for ever, dwindles into its proper insignificance. The Christian and the worldling are not, as they ought not to be, able to look upon the events of life with the same composure. The worldling must, of necessity, live in a constant state of alarm, because he is exposed to the mercy of what he calls accident, chance, misfortune. The Christian, on the other hand, by reason of taking wide views of things, by reason of associating himself with that which is infinite and absolute, enters into a profound and imperturbable peace. Yes, this peace is a sure sign that God is revealing himself to the heart. Where grace is, there will be the most blessed peace. "Great peace have they that love thy law." The Lord will bless his people with peace.

Is any man in search of the Holy Grail? Here it is. "If any man love me, I will manifest myself unto him." Hast thou been on the holy quest in many countries? Pause. The answer is here, "If any man love me, I will manifest myself unto him." After many heartaches, many blighting disappointments, many cruel mockings, art thou still sighing for the Holy Sangreal? I have the answer, "If any man love me, I will manifest myself unto him." We must begin with love, the love which comes of earnest desire to know that which is heavenly, and then, in due time, will come a still tenderer affection. We must get to the point of love. All our self-sufficiency, all our high notions, and mighty imaginings, must be cast away as things unclean and unsatisfying, and then we shall see the Father. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Love is the brightest purity. Purity is the divinest love. I cannot tell you how wondrously God reveals himself to love! He can never do enough for it. It moves him to lavish upon us unsearchable riches. Nor is love on our part a fixed quantity; we may grow in love for ever, constantly going out after God, never exhausting his grace, yet ever increasing in capacity to receive it. As for your god, O ye idolaters of Mammon, your love is a vanishing quantity, though it may appear to increase; you are daily

impairing your very power of love ; you are letting your greedy god eat up your hearts, and yet suffering him to delude you with the notion that you are independent and high-minded thinkers. Mammon ! accursed god ! never satisfied, never thankful, never beneficent, thou dost slay all to whom thou dost reveal thyself ! Men of business, let me warn you against this flattering and mocking money-god ; he will deceive you at last ; he will stir you with most exciting promises—he will show you the kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them ; he will throw open the doors of enchanting palaces, and give you visions of temples in which all is golden—but at last he will laugh you to scorn ! Yes ! he will surely reveal himself to you ; he will grin as devils only can grin ; and when you see him as he is you shall be like him. Blessed are they who have turned with loathing from his jewelled altars, and sought the Sangreal in the blessed Cross ! Blessed is their life—blessed is their peace—blessed is their hope. Daily they draw themselves through the discipline of earth, by the inspiring expectation of heaven, and by the sweetness of grace they overcome the bitterness of sin.

## Chapter xvi. 7.

"It is expedient for you that I go away."

### BLESSINGS IN UNEXPECTED WAYS.

THE text calls us to meditate upon some of the sudden and unexpected changes in divine movements. Sometimes heavenly blessings come to us, so to speak, by steps so clearly marked, so orderly, and so natural, that we can almost calculate how and in what measure they will descend upon us. Sometimes God gives us blessings to our reason; we have thought about them, prepared for them, felt assured that by a kind of gracious necessity they must be ours, and sometimes he has given us blessings in sudden and startling ways. We have been in a position, again and again, to expect our blessings. We have looked for them as for friends that were pledged to come; and we have been able to say, almost with positive certainty, when they would come, and how they would come, because God has appointed channels of communication with his creatures. There is, then, if I may say so, a division in the divine government about which men can calculate, and reason, and foretell with almost perfect certainty; and there is another division in the divine government about which we know nothing—sudden breakings out upon us, startling innovations upon our life, voices that we never heard before, and manifestations for which we were entirely unprepared. So I am not going to look at the commonplace and ordinary method of the divine movement, but to turn aside, and look at some of what are to us God's sudden, unexpected, mysterious visitations, in ways that we never thought of as being accessible, except in the way of judgment and retribution. Sometimes you can say in the morning that it will rain to-day. You say that the wind is in this quarter, or in that, and the clouds are gathering, and there are evident signs that we shall have rain; and sometimes we say, "Oh that rain would come!" "Oh that out of this great Arch of Summer a baptism

of rain would come !” but there is no sign of any such blessing. And perhaps quite suddenly, baffling all the speculations and calculations of the meteorologist, as if out of the very fire of the scorching summer, there has come down upon us an unexpected and gracious rain. So it is in the divine movement. Sometimes we are enabled to say, We shall have a blessing to-day. Such and such preparation has been made ; such and such endeavours have been maintained, and the natural result of this process is blessing, grace, peace, triumph. And then, again, on the other hand, we have said, “There shall be nothing to-day.” “The heart is barren, the inner voice is smitten with sudden dumbness ; there will be nothing for us to-day but stony silence. It will be a day of fasting and sorrow.” And, quite unexpectedly, God has sent his angel with blessings we had never thought of ; and when we looked for a dreary day, a day of fasting and gloom, God has opened the windows of heaven for us, and given us blessings that it had never entered into our calculations to imagine. It is so with many of the divine movements ; and yet we often vex God when he comes to us by unwonted ways. Though he has come to us through the pathway of a thousand storms, yet we still tremble before the gathering gloom, as if God had forgotten to be gracious. Though he has come to us with the wings of many a fire, we have still dreaded the flame, as if it tabernacled no God. Have you thought about that department of your sins I have thought of it many a time. We will not let God have any extraordinary methods of manifestation to us. We will have yesterday repeated to-day, and to-day is to be the image and prophecy of the morrow. And yet God will not have it so. He will come to us, not always by the great grand staircase of his daily providence, when we can see him as it were descending in all the pomp of his infiniteness ; but he will come to us along passages, and down by-lanes, and will start up before us suddenly and unexpectedly ; and it is then we become so weak as oftentimes to grieve him, as if he had not ten thousand ways into his universe beside the one way that we speak of as his peculiar path.

Now, here is one of the instances of unexpected blessing, of unexpected movements, of movements that escape all calculation,

and set aside all that the heart would have predicted. I propose, therefore, to look at this text in the first instance as reversing our own notions of the divine movement. "It is expedient for you that I go away." We cannot see that. It does not look so to us. Let us, therefore, be fair and candid with the spirit of the text. It looks to us exactly the contrary of that; and we should therefore say it is inexpedient for us that Christ should go away. It is the blackest and direst calamity that can befall us that Christ should go away; and yet he says expressly, in words that a little child may understand, It is expedient for you that I go away. Here, then, is an upset of our ordinary notions. We should have said this, viz., "Jesus Christ must remain upon the earth until the very last soul is saved. He must be the last to go away. He must stand by the grave until he sees every saint pass through it—until the last little child is winged as a cherub—and then, when he has seen all this done, let him go." That is how we should have talked; and not, I think, without common-sense, viewing the subject in a purely earthly light. Walking in the light of our own understanding—in the light of daily fears, in the light of what is called prudence and discretion—we should have said, Blessed Saviour, thou must remain until the very last gleam of day, and when thou hast seen the very last of thy recovered lambs enfolded in the high mountains of Israel, then thou must also come and complete the great assembly in heaven. Instead of that he says, I must go first; I must go now, and it is expedient for you that I go away. And so God is constantly, in all the processes of our daily life, upsetting our notions; this we do not like, and it takes a great deal of hard and terrible drill to bring a man to this point, viz., "God is King, let him do what seemeth good in his sight." It would appear that God will not have our calculations. It would appear as if he took special delight in proving our calculations to be mistakes. So we can never get on two days at a time. We say, To-morrow shall be as this day, and more abundant, and the third day we shall go into this and yonder city; and God says, No, I will break your days in two, and where you expect prosperity you shall find a grave. So God will not have our long-headed calculations, and he will not have our deluded predictions as to this event and that. It would seem, I repeat, as if he took special delight in

reversing all our ordinary methods, and training us to wisdom by first convicting us of folly. It is so, for example, in our social life. We should have said this, "God will never take away the head of a house until all the children have been trained, educated, and established in life. God will certainly see that the father of the family remain until his last little child leaves his roof a man, a woman." And yet God says, "No, the head of the family must go first;" and he says this also, "It is expedient for you that your father go;" and the heart cannot say, "It is well." No, that cannot be. But God is always doing that; always turning our ideas upside down, and appointing us blessings where we expected despair. We should have said that God will allow every man to bring his work to something like completion; he will never go and break the little bud off the stem; he will never allow a man to work up his column, and not to put the capital on; he will never allow an author to begin a volume without allowing him also to finish it, to revise it, to attach his signature to it by way of endorsement, and to hand it to society as a complete thing. And yet he is doing exactly the opposite of this. You say, Here is a beautiful little bud, and it shall be nourished with light and with dew, and become the best flower in the garden; and God comes in at night, and nips it off, and in the morning we have tears and sorrow. We begin to build our pillar, and it is growing under our touch, and we say, This shall be a beautiful column, a noble pillar; it shall be capped in the most elaborate style of sculpture; and God takes us away just as we are putting on the head, and our purposes are broken off. And as for the author, poor man! just as he dips his pen to finish a sentence, God says, That will do; and he punctuates the paragraph with Death. That is a fact; but this is what we are perplexed by, viz., when God takes away the little blushing bud, and breaks the column in twain, and arrests the hand of genius in its wondrous fabrications, and then says, It is expedient for you that it be so. And it is at this point that we either become strong men by the triumph of faith, or we succumb as the captives of unbelief.

Let us look at the text, then, in another light, viz., as showing the superiority of the spiritual over the material. It was a great

thing to have the visible Christ; it is a greater to have the spiritual Christ. This is a most difficult point in human education, viz., to proceed from the letter to the spirit—from the material to the immaterial. And this is the difference in scholarship—one man is learned in the letter, another is learned in the spirit; the one is a reader, the other is a genius. In proportion as we get spiritual power are we rich for ever. You lose your friend, but you never lose his friendship. Death breaks up the assembly, but he never impairs the fellowship. Death hushes the communications of the lips; he cannot silence the more eloquent interchanges of the heart. Those whom we truly love are always with us—not always audible, but always present. You have not lost that child of yours you buried years ago. The little creature is still with you. And oh, what talks you have together now! When you go out alone, the little one seems to know where you are and to come to you; and your face does so brighten, and your breast does so heave with unwonted and blessed emotion, as you talk over the days that are gone. And even that prodigal child of yours is with you to-day. You cannot see him—you may not, perhaps, know his address—you may be unable to write to him, yet the lad is close to your heart. You see him when you retire to rest; you look at him in the morning as he is standing by your bedside; and he is with you all the day, notwithstanding his sin, and perhaps (so wonderful are the mysteries of the heart) the nearer because of his sin. There seems to go out after him a realising love, deep and agonising; and if he would but come back again, there would be more joy in your heart over that recovered one than over all the family that never gave you a moment's pain. But I want to fix the mind upon this point, viz., the realising power of love. My friend has gone away from me over the sea and beyond the mountain, but I have him in my heart; his thoughts, his views of life, his behaviour under given circumstances, his noble impatience, magnanimous scorn of all that is low and mean, never leave me; they will mould my life, they will save me in many a temptation. He is with me always because of the realising power of love. And this that we know something about in friendship, in the family circle, in literature, reaches its highest consummation in Jesus Christ; for though he has gone away from us, he says, "I am

with you always, even unto the end of the world." Though we cannot see him, yet he says, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Though we would gladly lay hold of his wounded hand, he says it is better not. It is expedient for you that fleshly contact cease, and that you lay hold of him by the tendrils of your love. For what if we did grasp hands, Death would break up our union; but if we grasp hearts, we are one for ever.

Now, do not expect young Christian people at once to get up into that high line of Christian experience. I am not unwilling that you should continue the child's song,—

"I think, when I read that sweet story of old,  
When Jesus was here among men,  
How he called little children as lambs to his fold,  
I should like to have been with them then."

It is a poor prayer that you will come to dislike more and more the longer you live, though it is a beautiful song for children. You will come to know what it is to say you are glad that Christ is known to you no more after the flesh, but now is known to you through the hunger of eager love, through the thirst of your heart, through the desires of an unquenchable life.

Then let us look at this text in the third place, as conveying blessing to us through the medium of a trial. It must have been a trial for these simple, unlettered men to lose the presence of the visible, personal Jesus Christ. It could not have been an easy thing for such men. Try to realise their circumstances, if you would get really into the spirit of the text. It could not have been an easy thing for them to acquiesce in this bereavement, and yet Jesus Christ distinctly points out that he was going away for their sakes, and not for his own. He did not say, "My brethren, I am weary; this world is too heavy a load for me; I have seen you for a little while, and my heart is sickened and sore and weary, and I must go away again." He did not speak about himself at all. He said, "It is expedient for you that I go away." And do not let us think this strange, because we ourselves have had experience that may help to illuminate the mystery of this separation. For example, here is a mother who is teaching her little child to walk. You know what a



pleasure it is to see a little creature taking its first walk from one chair to another! I do not think I shall ever forget the first time I taught a little child to walk, and the joy I had in seeing the little toddling creature manage to go three steps without my help. There came to me a sense of triumph, a sense of something done. Well, here is a mother teaching her child to walk from one chair to another, and she begins by holding the child's waist gently with both hands, and as the little thing steadies itself, and seems to have found its feet, she just takes away her hands little by little. Why does she take away her hands? Does she say, "I am tired; I do not like this posture of embracing thee, or of holding thee"? No, but she says in effect, "It is expedient for thee, my little child, that I take away this motherly support; thou must learn to walk by thyself;" and so the hands go away, not because the mother is weary, but because the child must be taught, sooner or later, self-reliance.

Here is a father sending his boy to school, and there is such a dreary night before he must go. The father and the mother half think they may never see him again. He has never been out of their sight for twenty-four hours, and now they are going to send him away to a distant school, and the mother hardly sleeps all night, and the father gets up at an unusually early hour, and altogether there is a general sense of a sort of domestic earthquake in the house, because the youth is going to be sent to school. Now, why all this discomfort? Why do they not keep him at home? Why do they not keep him constantly in their sight? They say it is expedient for him that our presence be withdrawn; it is expedient that he escape the temptations of home; it is expedient for him that he undergo drill and discipline; it is expedient for him that he meet his equals in the great scholarly contest; it is expedient for him, and on that principle the father strengthens himself, and the mother makes herself a strong woman, and they bid him good-bye, not with delight, and yet with a secret comforting conviction that it is for the youth's good that he should undergo this separation. So then we know something of this—we know something of trial in this direction; and this kind of trial reaches the perfection of its meaning in Jesus Christ's bodily separation from his Church. He

says, It is expedient for you that I go away ; I shall always be with you, nevertheless ; yet by my bodily absence you will be trained to thought, you will be trained to spiritual realisation ; the highest faculties of your nature will be called into exercise ; and in order that this may be so, I shall no sooner go away than I shall send down upon you the Holy Ghost, for the Holy Ghost is better than the dying body ; the Holy Spirit of God better than these pierced feet and these wounded hands.

We shall have a poor notion of life if we regard it as being a blessing only in proportion as it is a succession of sunny scenes. That is not life ; it is but one aspect of it. No great life is made up of all sunshine ; we get strong by discipline, we grow by strife. The great storm rocks us into rugged power, and by this power of endurance we come into the grace of gentleness. Great sorrows make tender hearts. We are softened and refreshed by the dew of tears. When we are weak, then are we strong. You never can be great and reliable, full-grown men, till your hearts have been crushed within you, and God has taught you in the gloomy school of a thousand disappointments.

This leads me to say, no true manhood can be trained by a merely intellectual process. You cannot train men by the intellect alone ; you must train them by the heart ; and this shows the fundamental mistake which is being made by some modern teachers. You can never train a Church out of the head ; you may have a Church so-called, and you may open halls and bring to them the most scientific men in Europe, and you may lecture on all scientific topics, yet you can never make a Church out of the head. You must take hold of manhood by the heart, if you would train it into strength and dignity and usefulness. A Church, then, can only come out of the heart. So, if you have been training yourselves only by the intellect, I do not wonder at your being a poor and shrivelled Church. I never find a Church that takes hold of the head alone going forward, I find it progressing backwards ; and I thank God that I see it shrivelling out of existence. But in a Church whose fundamental principle is this, With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, I find humanity, tenderness, nobleness, benevolence, and divinity ; and

this is the secret of Christ's power over man. He does not come to discuss with them some empty conundrum, some wretched enigma, that challenges only the intellect; he sets himself down in the heart, and trains that, brings that, into the liberty of his blessed captivity, and out of the heart there comes his kingdom, which never can be moved. So I have no fear about people who are setting up Churches of Progress, and Churches of Science, and Churches of Literature; I have no fear of them emptying Christian sanctuaries, because a man is not all head. If he is, he is not all man. You must lay hold of his heart, and by his affections and by all his moral sympathies you must train him, and then he will be ready to receive all the light, all the knowledge you can possibly convey to him; but if you train only his intellect, you do but plant flowers upon a ghastly tomb.

One word, finally. The text may be regarded as giving the proper explanation of Jesus Christ's bodily absence—I go away. The words must be regarded as revealing part of a plan—I go away; I am not sent, I am not surprised away; I am moving according to a scheme, a plan. There are no unexpected thoughts in the mind of God. The changes that are strange and startling to us are links in the chain of God's own fashioning. Lay hold of this, and you escape the atheism of chance, and come into the peaceful region of familiar trust. Therefore, in proportion as I think of God's government as a plan am I at rest. In proportion as I take it to pieces and discuss it in detail am I vexed, and troubled, and disappointed. When I think of God building a great temple, I say, Give him time till he brings the topstone on, and says it is finished. And be careful, too, lest you mistake the scaffolding for the temple. God often requires, as it were, laborious scaffolding; and when I come to look at his unfinished temple and see nothing but these great beams, and posts, and planks, I say, "There is no temple here; there is nothing but confusion;" but God says to me "Wait, wait." And I come back and back; and when I return on the last day to look at it, all the scaffolding is gone. Then shall I find the floor laid with fine gold, and the roof lighted with such beauty as was never painted by the brush of the artist.

Some need this lesson. I speak in the presence of some among us who are mourners, and they need to be gently reminded that God is working out a plan—one thing belongs to another—that there is nothing fragmentary and detached and isolated in God's movement. Where we see confusion, he sees a plan, and he is working it out. You need that gentle hint. May it fall like morning-light on your troubled hearts!

Though the Saviour has gone away, he has made a path into the heavenly kingdom for us. He will not suffer us to rest short of his own Throne. "Where I am, there shall ye be also." Could we but see things as they are, we should see the whole Church all over the world move in one grand procession towards the gate of the Upper City, a band of freemen, an army of conquerors, having banners dipped in light, and singing of the Cross that gives them the right of way to their Father's house. We cannot see things as they are. This is the day of cloud and gloom; the full brightness is not yet.

## Chapter xvi. 8.

“And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin.”

### THE CONVICTION OF SIN.

WHEN he, that is the Spirit of truth, is come, he will reprove, he will convince the world of sin. He will show the sinfulness of sin ; he will work in every sinner's heart the torment of self-conviction. He will accuse the world of sin, and will prove the accusation. The work of the Holy Ghost, in reference to sin, is first a work of revelation and then a work of conviction. He will show sin to the sinner—show it until the sinner is startled, ashamed, self-pierced, self-condemned. The Holy Ghost will reveal the unholy man. The revelation of sin is distinctly and specially a spiritual act. It can be done completely, with all necessary clearness and terribleness, only by a Ghost, and only by a Ghost that is Holy, and only by a holiness that is perfect as God. The Ghost of God sees things as they are ; sees essences, realities, hidden tendencies, remote possibilities ; sees the soul in its nakedness, and knows the thought of man afar off. When that Ghost comes into any heart, he will reprove, convince that heart of sin.

Let us try to work our way to some approximate idea at least of the intensity and agony of that conviction. Take the case of a man who is reeling in the streets under the influence of strong drink. That man does not require the Holy Ghost to convince him of sin. There is no common man on the road side that would not instantly turn upon him and say, “That is a sinner.” No ghost is needed to make such a revelation. Every child, seeing the reeling man coming near, will instantly feel that he is in the presence of a sinner. God is not required to come down to the earth and say to the drunkard in his drunkenness, “You are a sinner ;” to the blasphemer in the madness of his

profanity, "You are a sinner;" to the adulterer in his uncleanness, "You are a sinner." All these things are known by the common morality, the non-christian instinct which is in every man, and which teaches him to distinguish—though not always minutely and spiritually—between right and wrong.

Let us dismiss all those foul and vicious characters whose moral nature is plainly written on their foreheads, and look in the next place at a person of the utmost social respectability. Examine his conduct from week to week in the market-place, and there is not a man who comes in contact with him who can justly bring any charge against his behaviour. The man is diligent in business, punctual in his appointments, straightforward in all his dealings; a man who, by the continuousness of his probity, has earned for himself a position of confidence in the commercial world; his speech is the speech of an honourable man, so far as all the affairs of this world are concerned, and so far as his intercourse on matters of business is concerned. He is a member of a Christian church; he sometimes engages in prayer; he contributes to charitable objects. Altogether, I repeat, he is a man of the utmost social respectability. What is required to convince that man of the real state of his heart? A ghost! If you and I were to speak to him, taking cognisance of his character, he might resent the intrusion, and dare comparison of our own life with his daily conduct and behaviour. The Holy Ghost enters him, and finds in him a faint trace of lust, evil desire, having reference to some forbidden object or other. The man never named it, never confessed it to himself, never ventured to whisper it in the most subdued breath; but there it is, in the depths of his nature; and the Ghost of God works upon that, reveals it, develops it, shows what it really is, expands it in all its horribleness—until the man whose outward character was irreproachable, whose behaviour could challenge comparison with the average behaviour of the world, trembles, burns under the influence of an internal fire, and dare hardly fall down upon his knees to ask God to forgive an enormity so great! He never would have known what that faint, hardly describable vein of evil desire was but for the ministry of the Holy Ghost. He would shrink from the presence of an unclean person; he would

denounce in the most emphatic terms the irregularities of the drunkard ; he would shudder when he heard the profanities of the blasphemer. But the Ghost of God cut him in twain, and pierced even to the dividing asunder of all within him that was secret and most compact, and took up this vein and said, "That is you!" until a speck became a mountain, until a single speck, an atomic, microscopic speck—nay, such a microscopic speck as the eye of God alone could discern—grew into proportions overshadowing and overwhelming. And the man, outwardly so respected, praying in prayer-meetings and giving to charities, cried out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" No man can come to that experience—can know anything at all about it in its torment, in its killing agony—until the Holy Ghost has been at work upon his heart.

Here is a man who is equally respectable—a man of excellent standing, a man against whom nobody can utter a single reproach justly, a man equally honourable and upright and straightforward with the man whom we have just delineated. The Holy Ghost comes into him and shows in him a secret, subtle, unexpressed selfishness, in ways that the world cannot take note of. Remote acts of selfishness? Nay, not acts; when it comes to acts then anybody can sit in judgment upon them. But thoughts of selfishness,—little, tormenting, urging, importuning dreams of selfishness,—something between a thought and a thing, trembling, hovering in that border-land,—sometimes almost personifying itself, then shrinking back again into impalpability! The Holy Ghost shows him what he would be under certain circumstances, if certain fears could be taken away, if certain possibilities could be set aside,—all that unspeakable atmospheric spiritual pressure which never can be defined and only can be felt. And when he sees the thing in its reality, as illuminated and expanded by God the Holy Ghost, all his cry is, "God be merciful to me a sinner! Nobody thinks me a sinner. I can walk up the main aisle of the church to-morrow and there would be subdued applause at my presence. Many a man would speak well of me if called to testify in open court concerning my standing. But oh! thou God the Holy Ghost—thou piercing,

cleaving Spirit—thou hast shown in me one hidden vein that I never knew of, and I see it in the blaze of thy fire! God be merciful to me a sinner!”

The great difficulty in conducting spiritual education in our own hearts, and in the hearts of those who wait upon our ministry, is this: To see the difference between sin and phases of sin; between wickedness in the heart, in the thought, unexpressed and unconfessed to ourselves, and the mere accidents of wickedness which relate to time, place, or form. There are many men to be found who would condemn worldliness of spirit, so-called; condemn, perhaps, certain amusements which other people accept with all innocence and with legitimate enjoyment. There are those who say the Church is fast becoming like the world; men who will not play at this game, or go to that amusement, or sit in this society, or identify themselves with yonder movement, because they suppose that all these things savour more or less of worldliness. Very well. One of these men who is so unworldly and so exemplary shall be heard in his tea-table talk. He says unkind words about his neighbour; slanders his minister, is a sneak when sneaking will win him what he calls success; he is a traitor when treachery will bring him thirty pieces of silver, more or less; there is no meanness he would not stoop to; there is no length of censure and censoriousness to which he will not go. Yet that man condemns another who rides on a fine horse and goes to find some of his amusement in a painted house! What is required to show the man what he really is? The Ghost of God, to show him that an unkind whisper may be murder; that a shrug of the shoulder may be incipient assassination; to take him by the hand, and condemn him in the sight of God, for a villainy too refined for common morality and too subtle to be taken note of by any of the magisterial tribunals of the land! Only the Holy Ghost can pierce a man with such reflections and convictions as these. It is not the profane oath, it is the profane heart; it is not the open, overt, deadly deed, it is the feeling of needless, exaggerated, unrighteous anger; it is not the hand wet with blood, it is the spirit that longs for some measure of revenge and some degree of retaliation. It is when we get into these essences of thought that the Holy Ghost alone can be our perfect



teacher, showing us what sin is without its accidents of time, place, and form,—the wickedness of sin in the sight of the holiness of God.

We have to guard against seeing the sinfulness of other people without seeing the beam that is in our own eye. We need the Holy Ghost to enlighten us on these matters. We are so sensitive in some particulars, we shudder so revoltingly in the presence of certain forms of sin, without perhaps feeling that sin, if it never took form at all, or was never heard in speech at all, is as hateful in the sight of God as if it came out in the blaze of day and defied the judgment of nations. The religion of Christ is spiritual, the religion of Christ is intense; the word of God searches the heart, and tries the reins of the children of men. Who then can be saved? If the blink of an eye may mean profanity, uncleanness, rebellion against law, determination of secret enjoyment of sin; if the holding up of a finger be in God's estimation, under some circumstances, terrible as the drawing out of a sword and the defiance of the Most High; if he searches our thoughts, if he reveals the secrets of our hearts,—who then can be saved? "I never oppressed the poor; but I once had a thought which must have broken the heart of God. I never uttered a profane word; but once I gave a look that was blasphemy! I have prayed long vehement prayers; in my heart I have had desires I dare not name to woman, priest, or God." If a man's experience be anything like that, and that experience be illuminated by the Holy Ghost, and forced back again upon the man,—oh! how terrible the accusation,—how heart-breaking! Who then can be saved?

Now, if this doctrine be laid down, and in the heart be deeply and intensely realised, four consequences will follow. All attempts to establish life upon a basis of mere morality will be abandoned. Morality is impossible apart from theology. Theology is impossible apart from the direct spiritual continuous teaching of God the Holy Ghost. You say, "I challenge you to criticise my deeds." I reply, "Sir, it is not first and last a question of deeds: it is a question of motive, intent, impulse, secret desire." "Have not I given fifty pounds to this charity?" You have

with your hand, but not a penny with your heart : it is what is given with the heart God accepts. "Have not I prayed often and long?" Yes ; but never a word went beyond the roof under which you uttered your empty mocking words, because whilst your lips were eloquent your heart was dumb. The Lord seeth not as man seeth. Man looketh on the outward appearance ; the Lord looketh on the heart. Where, then, is our morality ? which, being interpreted, is our system of manners, our way—often, indeed, a skilful and artistic way—of putting our life into certain angles and showing it under given lights. Morality is often but an effort of art. Morality is often a study of the way of putting things. But the sincere man—the man who lives in the tabernacle and sanctuary of God—never says, "How will this look?" His life gushes out of him into activity and form and service ; and knowing that his spirit and motive are right, he says, "It is a small thing to be judged of man's judgment."

Some of us have taken a long time to be persuaded that our morality is less than nothing and vanity,—our chief sin. Not until we get rid of our morality can we be made moral. It is that overweening conceit about our own nice way of doing things that keeps us back from the Cross of Christ, from the mystery of the Atonement. "If the light that is in us be darkness, how great is that darkness!" If our very morality be our curse, how ponderous is the millstone which will drag us into the depths of the sea! Not until a man comes without price in his hand, without self-hope in his heart, without self-praise in his mind and says, "God be merciful to me a sinner," can he ever know how worthless is his own morality, how despicable and vain are his noblest deeds.

"In my hand no price I bring,  
Simply to Thy Cross I cling."

The man confesses himself a sinner—not much of a sinner ; not a sinner in certain lights and in certain degrees ; not a sinner hardly so sinful as other people—but a sinner ! Vast in its concentration is that confession. Overwhelming is that utterance in its very simplicity. When men feel themselves to be what the Spirit of God describes them as being, they want no epithet, no qualifying adjective, to define their position. "A sinner"

expresses more in its simplicity and concentration than could be said by the minutest elaboration of speech.

Where the true idea of sin is realised under the ministry of God the Holy Ghost, the necessity of the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ will be understood, realised, and will form the one foundation of human hope. I have much to say on this point and I cannot say it. The idea has long been floating before my mind, and I have found no words to speak it to others; but it is the stay of my life, it is the strength of my ministry, it is the secret of any earnestness I may feel in preaching the everlasting gospel, namely this: The Atonement I do not receive merely as a grammarian, logician, metaphysician, theologian. I cannot understand that Cross—great, rugged, melancholy Cross—if I look at it only from the eminence occupied by the scholar, the philosopher, the theologian. But when I feel myself in my heart of hearts a sinner, a trespasser of God's law and God's love; when I feel that a thought may consign me to everlasting destruction, that a secret unexpressed desire may shut me out of heaven and make me glad to go to hell to be out of the way of God's shining face,—and some man tells me that Jesus Christ was wounded for my transgressions, bruised for my iniquities, that the chastisement of my peace was laid upon him; I press my way through all the grammarians, logicians, philosophers, theologians, saying, "If I perish I will pray, and perish only at the foot of the Cross; for if this be not sufficient, it hath not entered into the heart of man to solve the problem of human depravity and human consciousness of sin."

The sinner does not ask for explanation—minute, critical, and technical—when he comes into that state of heart before the dear bleeding Christ. He leaves all questions of criticism, technical and formal theology, to be settled by-and-by. In the meantime he feels this: That if the blood of the Son of God cannot reach those secret sins, those unexpressed desires, then no river that flows through the earth can wash him clean, no detergent discovered by industrious morality can ever take out of him the deep stain and taint! Sometimes we look at the work of the Lamb of God without feeling that we are sinners. Then we have a thousand difficult questions to put about it. At other

times the burden of our sin is so heavy upon us, we see the sinfulness of sin so clearly, we get away so entirely from all mere accident of time, place, and shape, so far as they relate to sin,—we see sin as God saw it and as God ever must see it, then we say, “O Lamb of God, thou didst not shed one drop too much of thy precious blood ; thou didst not endure one needless pang ! We see sin now in some measure as thou didst see it. We understand what thou meanest when thou didst say, ‘My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.’ We know what is meant by the glorious gospel that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners !”

If I might address brethren in the ministry, students of letters, grammars, philosophers, theorists, and speculators, I would venture to say, that there is much in such studies that may be fruitful of good ; they are not to be contemned and passed by as utterly valueless. At the same time we ourselves as preachers cannot understand the Cross of Christ till we understand ourselves as sinners. No man can be led to the Cross by the hand of mere philosophy. He must go up the dolorous way, with his eyes blinded with penitential tears, his heart choked and suffocated by inexpressible emotion, then there will be a writing above the superscription of Pilate ; “This is the Son of God. Whoso cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.”

Wherever this view of sin is truly realised and received in all its simplicity, an intense earnestness for the world’s salvation will be excited. Do you ask, “Are the Chinese not happy without your gospel ?” I say, Probably they are happy without the gospel, so far as they understand happiness. “Are the people of India not rich and prosperous without the gospel ?” Probably they are. Why should you go and break up households and separate the father from the son, and the mother from the daughter, and the daughter-in-law from the mother-in-law ? Why should you send fire upon the earth and a sword through the nations of mankind ? I tell you, because of what the Holy Ghost has taught us about sin. It is not a question of civilisation, of a gilded surface, of a material prosperity and of a so-called social happiness. If the Holy Ghost has correctly revealed to us the nature of sin, then I must go ; I cannot rest until I have

taught other people what has been communicated to me of the spiritual, not of a terrible enormity, not of a bloody deed, not of an outspoken blasphemer, but of secret thoughts and unexpressed desires which are foreign to the nature of God.

This is the secret of our missionary enterprise,—this is the inspiration of our moral service. If it were a question of this world only, let the Chinese alone! They enjoy themselves after a certain fashion; they have their own notions of civilisation and success. Do not trouble them. The same with Africa and India; the same with the most distant portions of the globe. Let them alone! But when we know, by the teaching of the Holy Ghost, what sin is, a responsibility comes along with the revelation; and in proportion as we realise it, that responsibility will never tire of breaking up households if need be, of sending a sword into families, and kindling fires upon the earth!

Then, last of all, if we had truly spiritual notions about sin, we should regard one another with a gentler charity. You do not sin as I sin. Shall I therefore vehemently condemn you, and seek a character for my own morality by the urgency and impetuosity of my condemnation of your particular sin? I do not do as you do when you criticise worldliness, but I may speak an unkind word about a brother minister. I will not speak an unkind word about a brother minister, but I may stoop to any ignoble deed in order to realise my own schemes. I will not stoop to any sneaking, underhand method of doing things; but I may never forgive an enemy; I may pursue him to the death, and half a century after the deed my anger shall burn as on the first day. Is it so with us? You would not go to a theatre, but you are vain as a peacock. I am not vain, but I will do things in secret that I would not like my dearest, truest earthly friend to know. So indeed it is. We must get to know what sin is, not the accident of sin! We must not be vehement about the accident when we are comparatively indifferent about the essence. When we feel sin to be what it is, our mouths will be shut; there will never be an hour of unkind judgment in our whole lives; we shall all be in the same condemnation. Who art thou that speakest against another man? will be a sore question

that will pierce us and cut us in two whenever words censorious and slanderous shall rise to our lips.

May God the Holy Ghost show us sin till we hate it,—show us the reality of sin until we feel our need of the Cross! May he show us the fulness of the love of Christ, until we know what is meant by Christ's ability to take up our sin, our secret sin,—take it up in his pierced bleeding hands and cast it away for ever, and present us unto himself a glorious Church! This is a great mystery, but in Christ all such mysteries are solved. He is, in very deed, the Light of the World!

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#### NOTE.

“The third example of our Lord's discourses is that which closes his ministry—‘Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him’ (John xiii. 31, 32). This great discourse, recorded only by St. John, extends from the thirteenth to the end of the seventeenth chapter. It hardly admits of analysis. It announces the Saviour's departure in the fulfilment of his mission; it imposes the new commandment on the disciples of a special love towards each other which should be the outward token to the world of their Christian profession; it consoles them with the promise of the Comforter who should be to them instead of the Saviour; it tells them all that he should do for them, teaching them, reminding them, reproofing the world, and guiding the disciples into all truth. It offers them, instead of the bodily presence of their beloved Master, free access to the throne of his Father, and spiritual blessings such as they had not known before. Finally, it culminates in that sublime prayer (ch. xvii.) by which the High Priest as it were consecrates himself the victim; and so doing, prays for those who shall hold fast and keep the benefits of that sacrifice, offered for the whole world, whether his disciples already, or to be brought to him thereafter by the ministry of apostles. He wills that they shall be with him and behold his glory. He recognises the righteousness of the Father in the plan of salvation, and in the result produced to the disciples; in whom that highest and purest love wherewith the Father loved the Son shall be present, and with and in that love the Son himself shall be present with them. ‘With this elevated thought,’ says Olshausen, ‘the Redeemer concludes his prayer for the disciples, and in them for the Church through all ages. He has compressed into the last moments given him for intercourse with his own the most sublime and glorious sentiments ever uttered by human lips. Hardly has the sound of the last word died away when Jesus passes with his disciples over the brook Kedron to Gethsemane; and the bitter conflict draws on. The seed of the new world must be sown in death, that thence life may spring up.’—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible*.

## Chapter xvi. 15-33.

### THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CHRIST AND CHRISTIANS.

“ALL things that the Father hath are mine.” We often speak of the union between Christ and his disciples, as if these terms were mutually equivalent. It may be well to look upon the distinctions which separate Christ from his disciples, in order that we may learn our true relation to the Son of God. This may turn out to be but another aspect of union, though at first sight the discourse will seem to be one upon the divisions and contrasts which separate so widely the Lord and his followers. We must not get into that easy way of thinking that Jesus Christ and his people are practically one, in any sense which denotes equality as between them; as if a Christian were a Christ, and as if Christ were but a Christian, differing in some sense in degree, it may be, but identical in quality. All that line of thought needs sifting, defining, and guarding, lest we lose reverence, and loyalty, and sense of what is due in worship, and trust, and sacrifice. Jesus Christ was very condescending, but in his condescension there was a majesty, unequalled and uncomprehended. The very stoop of Christ was more majestic than the enthroned attitude of any monarch. We should therefore dwell now and again, yea, frequently, upon the contrast which is established between Christ and his supreme apostle; we should, as it were, calculate the difference, which is really incalculable in degree and in quality, between the Son of God and those whom he has saved by the shedding of his blood. His words are full of significant accent and meaning when he dwells upon this subject. He, himself, is indeed now and again most frank about it; if he should appear to come near to us, and associate with us on terms of equality, he suddenly rises from the feast, and leaves us to feel for a moment what we should be were he to withdraw

altogether. We become so accustomed to the light that we take no heed of it: we expect it; we reckon upon it, as one of the certain quantities in the whole arithmetic of life; but the sun has only to hide himself for a few moments, and he stops the traffic of the world.

Let us hear some words of Jesus Christ bearing upon this matter, in which he will not allow any one to share his glory; in which his personality shall stand out in its singular and unapproachable solitude. We think so often of Jesus Christ as meek, and lowly, and condescending, that we are apt to forget his majesty. The sight of the noonday sun may be instructive and gladdening.

“I am the Vine, ye are the branches.” There is no identity there in the sense of equality. The vine can do without the branches, but the branches cannot do without the vine. “Without me ye can do nothing.” It is as if a unit were talking to all the ciphers in creation; the unit says to the assembly of ciphers, “Without me ye can do nothing”: you may put yourselves into a great line, and you will signify at the end what you signified at the beginning, and that is nothing; but when I stand at your head my relation to you fires you every one, gives you personality and value and meaning. This was the speech of the meek and lowly in heart, the poor in spirit, the Man of sorrows, the Man acquainted with grief. He would not have shed tears with us upon an equality, saying, Your sorrow is great, and so is mine, and we are found in a world of woe together, and therefore together we must mourn and weep. In his tears he was alone; when his soul was sorrowful he threw into nothingness the grief of all other life.

“I am the good Shepherd.” Is there only one? Jesus Christ assures us that there is only one Shepherd, and that he is the one himself. Then all the apostles and martyrs, apologists and missionaries, preachers, teachers, Christians—what are they? They are the flock, the sheep, under his care. Is the flock equal to the Shepherd? Can any sheep in all the flock say to the Shepherd, I will take thy place, and thou mayest rest awhile?



Is there a more pitiable spectacle upon the earth than sheep without a shepherd? Are not sheep chosen as the very image of silliness, helplessness, imbecility, when God describes his people after they have detached themselves from his government and shepherdliness? Observe always that this was the speech of him who was meek and lowly in heart. Yet never does he allow his singularity to be pluralised.

“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” There again Christ stands alone. There is none to divide his honour; there is none even to reflect his glory in some of these higher ranges of his personality and priesthood. Where now the thought of condescension, lowliness, abjectness, self-immolation, in the sense of putting away crown and sceptre and throne, and being only a man? These terms are not permissible in any one who is in any sense only equal to his brethren. They cannot be passed by without notice, or regarded as hyperbolic, or as being coloured with a poetical imagination; they are too distinct and graphic and practical. They are only to be accepted on one of two theories: either the man was mad, or he was God. When a man describes himself saying, “I am the Light of the World; I am the Vine; I am the good Shepherd; I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life,” he does not offend against modesty; he violates truth, and he violates the reverence which is due from the finite to the infinite. We ourselves have no difficulty about going up to him and saying, My Lord and my God, if I have any crown I will take it and cast it at thy feet, for thou only art worthy of the honours of infinite and eternal sovereignty.”

Hear, however, how he speaks: “All things that the Father hath are mine.” No man must be allowed to talk that language without rebuke. If there is some hidden sense in which it may be made to appear to be true, that hidden sense must be revealed and defined; otherwise we shall have spreading amongst us the very spirit of presumption, infallibility, and mock divinity. Who can claim to hold in his hands what God holds? Who dare say, “All things that the Father hath are mine,” without qualification, and yet only be meaning in some far-off and semi-spiritual sense that he is part-proprietor of the universe? There

is a morality of language. Men ought not to be allowed to speak hyperbole which is falsehood. Within the acknowledged limits of rhetoric, they may take what figures of speech they like, but they must declare them to be figures of speech, that we may distinguish between truth and falsehood. "Therefore said I, that he [the Paraclete] shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you." Even the Holy Spirit is here represented as the minister of Christ. Ask for the text upon which the Holy Spirit discourses, and the answer is, he speaks evermore upon one text, namely, Jesus Christ. When he speaks of doctrine, it is the doctrine of Christ; of righteousness, it is the righteousness of Christ; of sin, it is the sin for which Christ died. Ought we to allow a man to speak so, with no other than a merely rhetorical meaning? A book, part of a larger volume, containing such words ought to be torn out of the volume of which it is a part, and burned with unquenchable fire. If we admit a rhetorical criticism we may have to admit by-and-by a rhetorical Christianity, which means a rhetorical morality: words will be emptied of their meaning, and all speech will become but sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. According to the twenty-third verse, prayer is to be offered in Christ's name. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you."

Where is meekness and lowliness of heart in any sense which means simple equality with human nature? Observe what Jesus Christ does in these words: he pledges the Father. The words are most emphatic, "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you": I pledge his existence, and his honour, and his throne. Again and again we must remark, This is not the language which any man must be allowed to use unless he can vindicate its use by qualities so sublime as to make the use of that language obviously appropriate. The language must fit him like a robe; there must be no discrepancy between the word and the thing, the symbol and the substance; here and there in this life there must be an outshining of glory which justifies the use of language so sublime—nay more, which shows that even language so sublime pitifully fails of its object in expressing a dignity ineffable. Jesus Christ guarantees the

answer. He speaks as the inhabitant of eternity, as the custodian of the riches of the universe, as one who lays his hand familiarly upon everything and says, Ask for it, and the Father, through me, will give it; I will take it up with my own hand and pass it down until it reaches your hand. This is not the language of a mere man; it must not be admitted as such. We must not get into the frame of mind which will allow us to pass a man like this, saying, He does not mean what he says, or he has some signification far short of the obvious interpretation of the common language. Then we could only retain our religion at the expense of our morality; we could only cling to Christ by giving up the first principles of honesty.

Then, again, he declares a divine descent for himself. "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world." This cannot be a mere commonplace. If there is a sense in which every man may be said to have come from the Father, then the words of Jesus Christ lose all their special significance. He does not say, Brethren, we all came forth from the same Father, and we are all returning to him. He speaks in his own name, and speaks of a common human nature, and declares that he "came forth from the Father, and am come into the world"—implying a kind of accommodation to the smallness of the space, as if he should say, I have so related myself to the world that I can find room enough in it for the little time that I shall be here. Having built the world, I have built a door into it, through which I have passed through momentarily visible ministry, and presently I shall be gone again, and leave what little room there is to be occupied by yourselves. This is blasphemy if it is not divinity. This is rant if it is not infinite reason. The Church will lose all vigour when it comes to the paring down of words so as to rid them of their rhetoric, in order to give them commonplace meanings.

The weak-minded disciples thought their opportunity had come. They were but children—half-grown, untaught, inexperienced. What faces they wore when the Master talked to them! They wanted to appear to be intelligent when they were not fully comprehending the meaning of the speaker; they loved him with

strange admiration and passion; they were quite sure he was right, though they could not follow his high strain of thought and speech—looking as they might have looked upon an eagle gradually mounting into the dim air, keeping sight of him for awhile, and now the great black wings passing away from the visual line; they are quite sure he is flying, and the moment they see the reappearing wing they will exclaim as children utter their delight. So in this case. Jesus Christ has been taking a flight into the highest regions of spiritual thought, and his disciples have been looking on with awed amazement, and half-anticipation that they might never see him any more; but now he is coming within their horizon, and when he says, “I leave the world, and go to the Father,” they exclaim, “Lo, now thou speakest plainly”—now we know what thou dost mean; now we are quite sure about thee; now we feel as if upon a measured equality with thee: remain on that plane of thought, and never leave us alone any more. It was a momentary bubble on the river of their life. They looked at one another with a kind of vacant delight. They could only exclaim; they could not explain. Jesus—piteous, tender, compassionate—descended to their level, and said, “Do ye now believe?” You think you do: poor souls, you cannot understand a word I have spoken to you. God’s method is to lay up a great deal in the mind which history has to explain in due time; so that the Old Testament is searched by the New Testament, and is read in the illuminating glory of the latter days. You think you understand me, and I see your childish pleasure. Now listen, “The hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone.” You will know whether you understand me or not when you have to suffer for me. Do not imagine that heaven has begun; I observe your delight, I cannot but feel sympathetically with you. It is no pleasure of mine to rid you of your immediate joys, but as I look upon you I see you already being driven forth into desert places. I observe your condition, and it is that of sheep being pursued by wolves; in the dark night you must receive explanation of all this mystery.

So the contrast remains as broad at the end as at the beginning. Jesus Christ never mingles with others as an equal.

When he is counted one of a number, he is the one, the others are the unmeaning ciphers. This being the case, some practical questions immediately rush upon the mind, and some fears, indeed, threaten to leap upon the spirit and quench its trembling hope. There need not be any alarm of that kind. Though the difference between Christ and his disciples is **the** difference between infinity and infiniteness, there need be **no** hindrances to communion. The little earth communes with the great sun: the earth never found room for the sun, or hospitality, or entertainment, for one brief day. The difference between them is an abiding distinction which can never be lessened; they never change places. The earth is always little, and cold, and naked, and the sun is always what he is in the summer-time and in the winter, the origin of such heat as the earth receives and utilises, and such light as makes earth's poor little grey day. The earth might say, were we to personalise it and give it faculty, and reason, and speech, "I am so little and can do nothing. I will take myself away, and fall into the oblivion which best becomes my insignificance." But the earth makes no such speech; rather does it say, "I am little and the sun is great; the sun might do without me, but I cannot do without the sun. O thou great Light, let me see thee every morning; let me feel thee when I cannot see thee; warm me, cheer me, enlighten me, bless me, and make me fruitful, that I may grow all that is needful for the hunger of man and beast. I am but little, spurn me not, but rather fill me with thy light, and make me do my duty in my little sphere with gladness and music and gratitude." It has pleased Christ to make his people the light of the world, but only in some reflective sense. The moon is the light of the world, but only at night. She knows the time and the limit of her shining, and sweetly does she run the round of her gentle ministry. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

Not only is this distinction no hindrance to communion, it is a positive guarantee of blessing—"These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace." I have not shown you my majesty that I might dazzle you, but that I might comfort

you ; I have not blazed and burned upon you from heavenly heights that you might close your eyes and run away into the congenial and healing darkness, but to show you that whatever may come of you, in me ye shall have day and summer, and light and beauty, riches unsearchable. When the rich man displays his wealth to the poor man it may be to keep the poor man at arm's length, saying, Who are you ? for you have no wealth to compare with this. Be satisfied with your situation, and keep at the other end of the staff, nor venture to look upon me as an equal. But when Jesus Christ displays his riches he says, These are yours because ye are mine ; and because of your faith and love, your trust and service, my wealth shall be at your disposal, and you can never be really poor whilst I live. Some such word as this was needed at the end of such a discourse. Having companied with Christ so long, if we put ourselves into the place of the disciples, we may say we had become almost familiar with him : we have seen him when he was weary and weak ; we have seen the great tears standing unshed in his gentle eyes ; many a time we have helped him and done our best to comfort him amid the woes darkening upon his life, and so accustomed have we been to his coming and his going that we have looked upon ourselves as in some sense his equals and fellow-labourers. But now, suddenly, he has become a strange man to us ; he has changed the whole tone and scale of his speech ; he does not even use the common simple little words that used to pass between us as the currency of love. He seems to be seated upon a throne, and to be talking from heaven to earth, and gradually separating himself from us, and we cannot bear it. Whilst such hearing overpowers the listener, the great divine Speaker says, These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace, assurance of plenty, confidence of unexhausted spirit, and the tranquillity which arises from these profound assurances. Say now, Christ is mine, and I am his ; and because of the union between us, all that he has I have, and so long as he can lift an arm no foe shall overwhelm me. I have no confidence in myself, in my poor little strength, in my mean resources, but I live in Christ ; I am crucified with Christ ; nevertheless I live ; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me ; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son

of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. If we make that reply to the sermon which Christ delivered, we shall understand what he meant when he said, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace."

Then he concludes with an assurance that the conquest is already won. "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." Why should we be of good cheer on that account? Have we ourselves not yet to overcome the world? Why should we joy in another's gladness because he has triumphed when we ourselves are left in the thick of the fight? Therein we reason erroneously, and altogether mistake the real condition of the case. When Jesus Christ says that he has overcome the world, he means that his conquest is the pledge of ours. If he had failed we could not have succeeded. It is because he has succeeded that we cannot fail. These are Christian promises; these are Christian delights; these are the joys of the sanctuary. My soul, when thou art afraid because of the war, put thyself into the keeping of the all-conquering Lord; when the chariots against thee are a million, and are all made of iron, and when the horses are down upon thee like lightning, hide thyself in the Rock of Ages, draw upon the stock of the infinite store. "What time I am afraid I will trust in God." I know by this meditation how vast is the difference between Jesus Christ and myself. If I had been guilty of the presumption of thinking that he had made me an equal, I feel that the mistake has been entirely on my own side. He has not made me an equal, nor can omnipotence do so. There is but one infinity. The difference between the creature and the Creator can never be reduced to nothingness. But this can be made of it: a means of communion, a fountain of blessing, an assurance of protection. That is enough! Poor little earth, do not distract thyself because thou canst not be the great sun. Keep in thy place; roll on in thy peaceful course, and keep thyself open to receive morning messages of light and evening assurances of defence.

## Chapter xvii. 20-32.

“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word ; that they all may be one ; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us : that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them ; that they may be one, even as we are one : I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one ; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.”

### UNITY IN CHRIST.

**W**HAT is Christian unity ? Is it an affair of regulation, compromise, concession, toleration, for the sake of good neighbourhood, and easy social and ecclesiastical movement ? That view of Christian unity certainly receives no support from the Lord's intercessory prayer. The deepest meaning of Christian unity is union with Christ, oneness with the Son of God, identification with Christ in spirit, purpose, and labour ; and coming out of that, as a cause and an inspiration, union of Christians, genuine brotherly love and trust, a love that sees the Christian in the man and that sees Christ in the Christian. Christian unity is living sympathy with Christ ; it is being so like Christ as to be almost himself ; it is to be under the sweet dominion of passionate devotion to the blessed and all-blessing Cross of Christ. How strange it is that Christian unity should now need to be defined and to be guarded by most careful safeguard ! Has Christian unity been interfered with, simulated, perverted, tampered with ? Surely a relation so simple needs no definition, unless wicked hands have been laid upon it to force it into unholy and inadequate uses. In endeavouring to promote the cause of Christian unity, let us get rid of all the simulations and mockeries which have gathered around it ; let us go back to that which is fundamental and biblically authoritative, and take our quiet stand there, and judge everything by the standard of the written Word. Suppose any man, or any body of men, should attempt to set up



a doctrinal standard, saying, By this alone can unity be determined. Such men would assume a tremendous responsibility. Who are they? By what authority do they erect this standard? What are their credentials? How does it come that they claim to have a right to say for unborn generations, what is formally and dogmatically correct and orthodox? Are we quite sure that we do not inflict injustice upon such men by imagining that they would never have changed their view of things, and never have modernised their speech, and never have taken any account of progressive civilisation, science, and spiritual thought? Do we not ourselves overburden those whom we almost adore as fathers? Might not they in face of such a claim start up as schismatics, secessionists, protestants, saying that they never meant so to throw their thought over all the ages as to bind men; they merely adopted what, according to the light of their time, were the best definitions possible, and they only intended those definitions of doctrine to be accepted as the best expressions of the day? Suppose any man should now set up such a standard, he would make heretics; and no man has a right to make unbelievers. No man has a right to put up any such standard and claim for it finality. There can be but one final book, and that book is never final,—namely, the Book written by the finger of God; and it is never final, because it holds within itself the very seed of truth, and is always expressing itself in new leaf and bud and blossom, and gracious fruitfulness; the same, yet not the same; always in substance and in grace, and in eternal gift, immutable, but as to its forms, phases, revelations, always part of the very time we live in, part of the very breath we breathe. So it is the ancient of days, and it is the gospel of this very hour; old as God's eternity, new as our present progress and immediate necessity.

Suppose any man should erect an ecclesiastical standard, saying, This is the Church, and outside of it there is no Church. That man also would assume a very onerous responsibility—a responsibility which no man has the right to assume. A man should not attempt to go beyond his strength; his arm is so many inches long, and he must accept the length of it, and work accordingly. Who made us Church-makers? By what patent

or authority do we say, This is the Church, or that, and there is none other? That we are at liberty to organise ourselves into companies and fellowships for mutual edification, instruction, and comfort, is (I was about to say) more than true,—that is to say, it is a necessity of grace, the very sweetness of life, the gracious compulsion of sympathy and love; but having so gathered ourselves into companies of men who agree substantially, and see things from the same point of view, what right have we to say that we take in the whole horizon of truth, and that there is nothing hidden from us in all the counsel and way of God? We should hold a very different language. Our communion should be thankful for the truth which it believes itself to hold, and should always be on the outlook for more light, vision into further distances, and grasp of treasure hitherto unpossessed. What if it should take all Christian communions to constitute the Church? What if even some forms of superstition and even idolatry might claim a place just inside the boundary line? Who expects that we can all see everything in the same atmosphere, the same distance, in the same perspective, under the same colour, and can utter ourselves sufficiently and finally in one form of expression? There is no such monotony in God's kingdom. We have no right to create monotony, and call it peace; we have no right to create uniformity, and baptise it with the sacred name of union. Christian unity is broken by the very existence of such standards. In our attempt's to unite, we actually disintegrate. Our idea of union, if founded upon doctrinal standards and ecclesiastical standards, prevents union. It does not begin with a right conception of the human mind; it is psychologically wrong, though it may be mechanically not without some superficial beauty. Minds differ—differ in capacity, in temper, in training, in opportunity of development; and for all these psychological differences provision must be made; and they are made in the great prayer of Christ, in the sublime conception of the Son of God, when he founded the Church against which the gates of hell shall not prevail.

Christian unity, therefore, is not formal but spiritual. If we are looking for formal union we are looking in the wrong direction, and we are looking for the wrong thing. It is as if we should

ask the question, Are men alive? and should then determine the answer to the inquiry by stature, complexion, accent, or by any other accident attaching to the individual. Who would assent to the doctrine that it is right to determine living humanity by such incidents or accidents? We should protest against the judgment; we should say, We are looking in the wrong direction, we are in quest of the wrong test and standards: life is wholly different from stature, complexion, or local position and attitude. Human love is not formal, it is spiritual. What is its shape, what its colour, what its bulk in plain ounce weight? Where is it? Yet we all know it, we all feel it; life would be poor without it: yet it resists organisation beyond a given point; it believes in organisation also up to that point, and most fully and sacredly. Love claims united love; love is the genius that presides over household life; love will unite even national life when political instinct fails to touch the necessity of the hour. Still, love is more than organisation. Love is always surprising us with new revelations of its beauty and goodness; love is always revealing to us some hitherto unknown or unrealised aspect of God. Human life is not formal, it is spiritual. Who has seen life? Where does life reside in the body? Put a finger upon the residence of life, saying, Here you will find it, and nowhere else. No man has seen life. Yet life is organised; life has its body, its tabernacle, its system of nerves, and its wondrous incarnation; it presses itself against these forms in palpitation that means that it is greater than can be confined within physical boundaries. Life, like love, is always surprising us by new energy, new passion, new capacities. Who can throw a line upon life and say, We will keep thee here, and bind thee like a beast of burden? The very life that could purpose to deal so with other life gives itself the lie; its own energy, its own aspiration after primacy, declares that it has miscalculated the quality and the quantity of that supreme mystery which we call Life. So it is with the Church of Christ. It has organisation; without organisation it could not live: but it has more than organisation. Emerson speaks of some men who are blessed with "over-soul"—soul enough and to spare; soul that goes out in evangelistic yearning and solicitude after other souls less favoured, pining away in the desert or in the darkness. So

with the Church of Christ. Its organisations are valuable; up to a given point those organisations are sacred: but whose house has out-built all other houses and made them nothing but huts not worth living in? The house is sacred, yet there is a house next door, there is a house behind, there is a house opposite; the whole place is covered with joyous habitations lighted early in the winter-time, rich with flowers all the summer-time, and the children are so like one another in their laughter, in their innocent glee, that only their mothers can tell which is which. Is there not some analogy, or at least dim hint of meaning, as to ecclesiastical and religious life to be gathered from the life of the household and of the neighbourhood? When we lose the spiritual conception of unity, then the mechanical conception is exaggerated; it is set in false proportions and in misleading cross-lights; we have lost the meridian, and men are keeping their time by their own guesses and their own wild conjectures and speculations. The moment we lose hold, so to say, of Christ's hand, we are the prey of the enemy, we are lost; we are like planets loosed from their centres; we plunge where we ought to shine; we dash against other parts of the universe where we ought to revolve in silent rhythm around the governing Flame. Men become controversial when they become unspiritual. When men cease to pray, they begin to argue and to fight. How wonderful it is that men are usually one in prayer! but the moment they rise from their knees and begin to state their opinions, the Church becomes a battle: pray, then, without ceasing.

Spiritual unity is the only unity that can permit and control honest diversity. That is my fundamental point. Spiritual union is so large, so energetic, so divine, that it can permit, and in permitting control, the widest divergences—so wide as to amount to contradictions; yet they are all held in leash by a great spiritual ministry, and the men who are thus held say, One star differeth from another star in glory, but the heavens are one; no star holds any other star in contempt; differences in glory do not disturb the unity of the stellar Church. If we had more of the spirit of Christ we might even rejoice in the differences which prevail amongst us, saying, How large is the kingdom of heaven,

how wondrous is human nature in its possibility of development and spiritual action! Behold in this diversity another miracle of him who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working. All denominations may be right, and all denominations are right in the proportion in which they love and serve the Son of God. Why may not our creed be substantially reduced to one line—"I believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world"? After that we might welcome differences, we might be pleased to hear diversity of speech and accent; and things hitherto called heterodoxies, scepticisms, infidelities, might be brought within the great astronomic action and made parts of the redeemed universe. Philanthropy sees the man through all ethnic differences. Philanthropy is not a geographical term; it has nothing to do with lines of latitude and lines of longitude; it asks not upon what river the city is built; as philanthropy sees the man through all ethnic differences, so Christianity sees the Christ through all creeds and forms and organisations, if the Christ is there. Christianity goes in search of the Christ. Christianity does not start out saying, I will number all the infidels that live to-day. I am not aware that Christianity ever made itself the statistician of infidelity, or ever went out for the purpose of taking a census of non-believers. It takes account of excellences, virtues, aspirations, prayers, sacrifices, and it gives back the cup of cold water with all heaven added. So gracious, so divine, is the spirit that breathes and burns in Christian thought and love! The cure of disunion is not in the abolition of sects, but in the abolition of sectarianism. Every man has a right to choose his companions, his spiritual fellowships, to work where he can be most at home, where all his faculties can be best developed, where all his spiritual hunger can be most healthily satisfied; but having entered into such relations as are involved in these inquiries he is not to enclose himself within impenetrable walls, saying that he alone has the key of the door, and they who are outside his door are in outer darkness. Astronomic action, as we have just said, levels the mountains. They are very huge from a geographical point of view, great overshadowing hills and crags, habitations of eagles: how stupendous they look! But caught in the action of the astronomic movement, where are they, and where the seas so turbulent, so tempestuous, so

wrathful, so boundary-hating? where are they? The high places are low, and the tempestuous elements are quiet, and the great globe itself swings like a censer before the altar of God. Have we lost the astronomic action? Are we but geographers when we ought to be astronomers? Speaking of the Lord's Table, the late Dean Stanley has expressed the whole idea with his wonted sweetness and music,—

“When diverging creeds shall learn  
Towards their central source to turn,  
When contending churches tire  
Of the earthquake, wind, and fire,  
Here [the Lord's Table] let strife and clamour cease  
At that still small voice of peace—  
'May they all united be  
In the Father and in Me.'”

Whatever hinders or jeopardises Christian unity thus understood seems to me by so much to be condemned as wrong. Suppose it is an Act of Parliament that hinders unity. An Act of Parliament may be repealed in one of two ways. If we have thought that an Act of Parliament can only be repealed in one way, probably we may have been mistaken. An Act of Parliament may be repealed formally; we know what that is: or an Act of Parliament may be repealed by the growth of public opinion which makes the Act an anachronism, throws it behind, and leaves it there to find its way into still deeper obscurity and oblivion. An Act of Parliament may be obeyed in one of two ways. We speak much of law; but who distinguishes as to the scope and action of law? Is law but a solitary term? Is all law alike? Is all law of one value? Is there not a law which is simply measured by the word “regulation,” and is there not a law which is measured by the word “right”? The regulation may be modified, adapted, changed, abolished, but the right is as everlasting as God himself. When, therefore, men talk about “law,” I must know what they mean by law in the connection in which they use it. But a law may be obeyed in one of two ways: first, it may be obeyed sympathetically; then the man who obeys it will say, This is the law, I adopt it, I re-enact it, I assume the responsibility of its correctness and goodness. I obey it because I accept it, and honour it, and love it,—that is

one form of obedience : but a law may also be obeyed regretfully, as when a man shall say, This is the law, and I am sorry for it ; it is a very old law and not altogether a good law, but there it is, and I must now fulfil its letter, but believe me I do so with reluctance. I would it were out of the way as a thing too old for the present time, a thing too old for the progress which nineteen centuries of Christian civilisation have made. Understand, therefore, that a man in obeying a law is not shut up to one way of obeying it. He can obey it so as to modernise it and make it offensive : he can obey it so as to make it truly venerable and truly irksome. Everything, therefore, in my judgment, depends upon the way in which any law is obeyed. When Christians wish to come together, any man who hinders the approach on any plea or any ground whatever incurs a tremendous responsibility. Go and tell the Son of God that you wanted to come together, but were hindered by an Act of Parliament ; you longed to mingle your prayers and to unite in a common testimony in relation to the Cross and the salvation of the world, but you were obliged to speak to one another through the dividing wall of an Act of Parliament. I will not go with any deputation that proceeds to report so to Jesus Christ of his Church on the earth.

Christian unity is not a mere sentiment, it is a gracious and operative ministry. It tells the world that they may be one, all one,—“That the world may believe that thou hast sent me.” Union is not argumentative. Union is not sentimental ; it is practical. Who can answer a united Church ? When internecine war ceases, when all domestic troubles are calmed by the genius and spirit of love, when the Church presents a united front as to its real trust in Christ and therefore trust in one another, the voice of unbelief will not be heard. What can speak like love ? We have never yet heard the true music of love's voice, because the voice of love has been broken, strained, discordant ; the voices have been answering one another instead of blending into one harmonious tone charged with the deliverance of a gospel to a benighted world. If any man should ask which of the divided parties is to blame, I will answer him. That party is to blame which will not follow the spirit of union. When men have

asked me in family quarrels which of the two combatants is to begin the process of reconciliation, I have said—You! Were I asked who is to blame I should say, Is there any attempt whatever at intelligent, reasonable, and honest approach? If there is, the people who resist that approach are, in my judgment, wrong. These matters will never be settled until we have more of the spirit of Christ, more of the love of God. I do not ask for ecclesiastical uniformity, for we can never have it, though we may claim it. I would have many regiments, one army; many folds, one flock; many waves, one sea; many stars, one great radiant sky. He who would understand union must often read the Lord's intercessory prayer. He who would obey the spirit of that prayer must make many a personal sacrifice. Let there be no misunderstanding about unity meaning monotony. Union means diversity ruled by substantial unity of thought and feeling. Unity means many people, but one human family; many accents, but a common language; many ways of doing things, but only one motive—to serve God, to please the Lord Jesus Christ, and to answer the ministry of God the Holy Ghost.



## Chapter xviii. 36.

“My kingdom is not of this world.”

### THE TRUE KINGDOM.

JESUS CHRIST was now approaching the termination of his earthly ministry. He who came to bear witness of the truth was standing for judgment at a human tribunal: the Judge of universal man stood as a criminal before Caiaphas, Herod, and Pilate! Society had mistaken its best friend for an impostor—and had thrown out of its breast the Being who alone could ensure its purity and repose. But had he not disciples? Why did not these men take up arms in their Master's service? Would not steel do much towards a settlement of the controversy? Undoubtedly the peacefulness of Christ and his disciples excited the amazement of contemporaries, forasmuch as the sword has ever been called into requisition by the founders of empires, and yet here is a Being who attempts to establish a kingdom without shedding the blood of a single foe! To the perplexity of Pilate, Christ makes this reply: “My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.” Words indicative of so much spirituality could hardly be understood and appreciated by a man who knew nothing of any throne, or crown, or sceptre, except that which is “of the earth, earthy.” It will be necessary to guard this declaration from two misconstructions.

First: It does not imply indifference to the political government of this world. Society must have government, and government involves governors; but governors exist for the good of society, and not society for the benefit of governors. Christians must not imagine themselves exempt from responsibility in the matter of national condition and progress;—it is true that they may not

all be intellectually or constitutionally fitted to take any prominent position in the direction of political affairs, yet such may be intercessors at his throne before whom all kings must bow, and in that capacity may manifest the most vital interest in the temporary affairs of this fast-dissolving scene.

Secondly: It does not imply monastic seclusion from the engagements of the world. In becoming Christians we are not to betake ourselves to "a lodge in some vast wilderness." We become light for the express purpose of shining in a dark place—we are made free, to the end that we may proclaim the opening of prison doors to them that are bound—we are made children of God that we may teach the self-alienated the way of return to filial loyalty and service. Christ's own example is all-determining on this point: he sat with publicans and sinners that he might call them to repentance, and never sat at the board of hospitality without spreading the festival of sovereign grace and infinite love. I do not object to Christians going into "the world"—technically so called—provided they take their Christianity along with them; but I do, in the Saviour's name, protest against any disrobing, or any diminution of light—when you go, wear your beautiful garments, and "let your light so shine before men, that they, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father which is in heaven."

What, then, is the Saviour's meaning? I answer—Christ's kingdom is a purely spiritual constitution—he came not to found a physical empire, but to establish the sovereignty of great and holy principles—his mission was not to dispute the title of mere earthly governors to their several thrones, but to lay the foundation of a kingdom whose royalty will survive the splendour of material pomp. He unsheathed no sword but the "sword of the Spirit."—He marshalled no army except the army of divine doctrines and precepts.—He created no treason against political monarchs.—He breathed no inflammatory speeches against governments, as such. When he spoke, as in syllables of lightning, it was against the monarchy of hell—when he sought the overthrow of a sovereign, it was the prince of the power of the air whose throne he shook. When, therefore, Christ declares that his

“kingdom is not of this world,” we are to infer the pure spirituality of the Christian Church. My special purpose is not so much to follow out this declaration in its special relation to Christ, as in its applicability to man. The first question, therefore, which I propose is—When may it be justly said that a man’s kingdom is of this world? I answer—

(1) When man’s energies are exclusively devoted to the accumulation of earthly treasure.—There are men whose creed may be condensed into one word—Gold! Such men invariably prove their faith by their works—their creed controls and sustains their life. Their motto is, “With all thy gettings, get gold”—their business is with “getting”—they have a certain goal to attain, and no matter how filthy or dangerous may be the road, they start on their journey, animated with the hope of securing the golden prize. Such men’s kingdom is of this world—these men look at all nature and institutions through this medium—Gold. When they gaze upon the landscape, it is not to admire the undulation of hill and dale, the stately wood or swelling river, but to speculate upon its properties as a farm; when they turn their cold eye to the nocturnal fires kindled by the hand of Deity, it is not to praise the wisdom and power to which they unceasingly testify, but rather to speculate as to the probability of having fine weather on which to prosecute their business-journey. Such men’s kingdom is of this world. When they rise from their bed, they have no time to consult him to whom the silver and gold belong; they are in too eager haste to join the race—when they retire to rest they are too weary to acknowledge the dread Power that has given them “life and breath.” Their laugh is merry in proportion as their gains are heavy. Their face is a commercial barometer; by appealing to it you may learn the condition of the business-atmosphere. When they use the words “all right,” they mean that their coffers are healthy, and their highest idea of happiness is to receive a smile from the fickle goddess of Fortune! Such men’s kingdom is of this world. We cannot, surely, be told that such men do not exist. When we see men too miserly to give their children a good education—so miserly as to begrudge even medical aid to those whom they profess to love—ever ready to take advantage of the ignorance of

the novice—stealing a portion of God's sacred day on which to examine their accounts, or write their letters of business—when such things confront us, it is too late to deny the truthfulness of the portraits now delineated. I may not now address such men as are under review, but knowing that prevention is better than cure, I may appeal to the young to beware lest they should become so wedded to the temporal as to forget the eternal. Man! created originally in the image of God, let me reason with thee by the way: Is it right that powers so noble—that faculties so divine, should be exclusively devoted to the piling of dust? Is it even good policy to spend your energies on the accumulation of that which can be of no service in any other world than the present? We know it is quite possible for men who set their hearts on accumulation to amass immense sums, but when their accretive work is accomplished how much that is really noble has been done? Look at the picture until your eye affects your heart: every energy has been consecrated to the service of self—all the pages of time have been stitched into a ledger—all that wit could suggest, or fancy contrive, or muscle perform, has been pressed into the service, and now that the labour is finished, and the labourer dead, what epitaph shall we inscribe on the stone which marks his resting-place? Ask justice to dictate the inscription, and words of the severest condemnation will be furnished; and even if gentle charity herself be consulted, she would say, write—"He had his kingdom of this world."

(2) When man fails to exert any effort for the moral elevation of his race.—Some men profess that their benefactions are known to none but God and the recipients. Others determine not to let the left hand know what the right hand doeth; and this is by no means an unwise policy where the right hand is doing nothing, and therefore has no tidings to communicate. What fearful disclosures will that text make in the great audit day! Thousands of do-nothings have hidden themselves behind that divinely-woven veil, and have thus evaded the powerful appeals of religion and general benevolence; but a day is approaching on which the veil will be uplifted, and then the universe will know how far it has been abused by the hypocritical and ungenerous. It is an appalling fact that the vast preponderance of effort made for the

moral elevation of the race represents a small section of professing Christians. To some men all appeal for moral labour is entirely in vain. Ask them to contribute to the missionary fund, and they will instantly become so sensitively patriotic as to demand that more should be done for the benefit of our own country. They blunt every appeal—they would fail to shed a tear on the corpse of the Saviour, or to feel a single pang were all moral instrumentality paralysed beyond resuscitation! But such conduct is strictly consistent with their creed—their kingdom is of this world, hence they practically ignore every movement which contemplates the unalterable destiny of the soul. Show me a man destitute of sympathy with moral movements—a man who has consciously done nothing to lessen the sum of human misery, or to swell the currents of human joy—a man whom every supporter of gospel institutions shuns—and you have shown a man whose kingdom is built upon the sand, and which the boisterous storm shall shiver into irreparable ruin!

(3) When man draws his highest joys from the fascinations of this life.—The carnal mind knows nothing of any joy but that which flows through earthly channels. His highest study is the promotion of self-comfort. He has no internal sources of pleasure; while “the good man is satisfied from himself,” the wicked is as a fountain dried up. The thorough worldling is ever dependent on excitement. The ball-room, the theatre, the gay saloon, have irresistible charms for him. The word of God or the sober treatise are to him intolerably dull—he is happy only amid the “voluptuous swell” of music and the incessant stream of sensuous amusements. Such a man’s kingdom is emphatically and exclusively of this world. Can you imagine degradation more abject than that of an intellectual being seeking his joys amid the purely material? A being capable of holding fellowship with Godhead, enslaved to the charms of earth! A being to whom the fountains of most exquisite joy are accessible, crawling to the broken cisterns that can hold no water! A being that might eat the richest viands which the universe can supply, directing a hungry look to the table of ragged and shivering beggary! I ask in all solemnity whether you know of any degradation more pitiable and appalling? You mourn the broken

fortunes of the aristocrat who has been driven from the ancestral hall into some lowly and obscure home, but that man may be pure and happy in his poverty—his conscience may kindle glory in his humble hut; but what say ye to a man who is self-expelled from the holiest and loftiest society, and who prefers the gross enjoyments of animal existence to the inexhaustible pleasures of spiritual life! Take from such men the toys with which their fancy is dazzled—deprive them of the glittering dust which is the only object of their worship—stand at the threshold of their dwelling and forbid pollution again to enter—and by so doing you visit them with the most afflictive bereavement which can wither the human heart! You have shaken their kingdom to its foundation—you have burnt their monarchy to ashes!

We need not roam far in search of the men now under description. In our midst there are men who are immeasurably more interested in securing for a county an additional member of parliament than in sending forth the messengers of salvation into the midst of domestic or foreign heathenism! There are many more who may possibly be more anxious to promote universal suffrage than universal salvation; and thousands there may be who have been more agitated and sorrowful at having been out-voted at a political meeting than ever they were at the untold and inconceivable sufferings of the Redeemer. Such men's kingdom is of this world. To them everything is little in comparison with political reform; the greatest of achievements is the passing of their resolutions, and the defeat of an opposing ministry is to them a greater historical fact than that uttered by the Saviour, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." Let me be clearly understood on this point: let no man misquote or distort my language: I confess the great importance of political purity and freedom;—the desirableness of every intelligent man being fully represented;—the necessity of out-rooting parliamentary corruption, and promoting merit to its rightful supremacy: but while attaching due weight to all such reforms, my spirit cannot be content with them as a "kingdom"—my spirit aspires to a loftier and a sublimer royalty! I would remind the enthusiastic politician of the possibility of making a kingdom of

politics—of mistaking the triumph of an hour as the source of enduring satisfaction—and of building a mansion which the first moral tempest will utterly destroy.

Having thus endeavoured to answer the inquiry, when may it be justly said that a man's kingdom is of this world? Let us proceed to the discussion of a question of equal importance, namely, when can it be truly affirmed that a man's kingdom is not of this world? I answer—

(1) When man regards the world as a means rather than as an end.—The watchword of the Christian is, "Here we have no continuing city." He uses this world as the builder uses scaffolding, merely for temporary purposes—or as a waiting-room in which he tarries till the chariot of death shall bear him home—or as a school in which he prosecutes his rudimentary studies, with a view to the engagements of a higher academy—he never looks upon this world as a final resting-place. If he has wealth, it is to him a means of usefulness; if he has influence, he employs it in the promotion of the highest good: he is too wise to expect satisfaction in the merely temporal—things are great to him just in proportion as they rightly affect his eternal well-being. Assure me beyond all doubt that there is no world but this; satisfy my judgment and appease my conscience beyond the remotest possibility of reversal; convince me that my duty is to abandon the holy Book; outroot all instincts and longings for immortality; thrust forth your hand and convince me that you touch the very extremity of being; tear asunder the veil beyond which I am imagining there is a glorious heaven or a terrible hell, and prove to me that all beyond is an infinite blank—and then I may be glad to find a kingdom in this world—my affections will entwine around the charms of the present—and though I may bitterly weep over the grave of my hopes, I shall honestly toil in the perishing vineyard of earth! But, while I am persuaded that we are but in the porch of a palace, vast as infinitude—while my spirit is satisfied of being an heir of immortality, it is impossible to engage in the service of the transient hour with all the earnestness that is due to the claims of eternity!

(2) When man regards the evangelisation of the world as of supreme importance.—In proportion as man attains this spirit does he approach the likeness of Christ. Christ came for the express purpose of seeking and saving the lost. He only sought political reform in so far as the greater comprehends the less. His method of cleansing the stream was by purifying the fountain—he healed the leprosy of governments by curing the moral diseases of individuals. This is the philosophy of permanent cure. When men understand and discharge their duty towards God, they will not be slow in adjusting their relationships to each other. The Christian's highest ambition should be the enlightenment and salvation of souls. In bringing men to the Cross, we are indirectly aiding the true progress of nations; principles are there imbibed which sanctify social bonds and consolidate social interests. While, therefore, the Christian's kingdom is not of this world, yet this world is unspeakably benefited by the Christian's kingdom. As the sun is not of this world yet sheds upon it life-giving light and heat, so the Christian's kingdom is infinitely higher than the monarchies of earth, yet exerts upon them the most inspiring and sublimating influence.

The history of martyrdom is a glorious illustration of the text. The martyrs were men of whom the world was not worthy. Through the force of their loyalty to a spiritual king they forfeited the smile of their earthly sovereign; they endured as seeing the invisible; the sensual and the grovelling failed to understand their spirituality, and laughed to scorn their dreamy visions of a distant but imperishable kingdom. Every man as he was bound to the stake practically exclaimed, "My kingdom is not of this world." Every man as he ascended the scaffold practically averred that the day of his murder was the day of his moral majority, on which he entered into the inheritance of divine sonship. The day of martyrdom was the day of coronation, the day on which the temporary hut was exchanged for the mansion of light.

The history of foreign missions, too, affords a brilliant exemplification of the text. However much some evil-disposed persons may question the motives of the missionary, there is a nobility



about his work which distinguishes its celestial nativity. You have seen a young man whose spirit yearns for the salvation of his race: he is educated and mentally strong; his home is a scene of happiness, parents and relatives hold him in highest regard; were he to employ his talents in his fatherland they might ensure him competence, and perhaps renown; but he is determined to realise his convictions of duty; he is ready to sever the strong attachments which bind him to the land of his birth, and brave the innumerable perils which may beset his enterprise—forasmuch as his kingdom is not of this world. You find in such a youth an illustration of a principle already enunciated; he is not destitute of interest in the political progress of his nation, far less is he wanting in affection to those who gave him life—but he cannot make a kingdom of such considerations; he renders to them the attention due to their respective merits, but in his estimation there are claims whose importance is infinitely greater. His life-cry is, “For me to live is Christ, everything must subordinate itself to Christ. Christ is the fairest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely; he redeemed me with his blood, and shall be served with undivided energy, for, in serving him, I am most effectually promoting the well-being of all the objects of my love.”

(3) When man can cheerfully relinquish his earthly possessions.—It is hard work for a monarch to abandon his kingdom. Into whatever region he may pass he feels himself an exile; however far into distant realms he may travel, he can never find a throne; his kingdom is behind him, and must remain there for ever. Not so with the Christian. He has not entered upon his kingdom yet; he is born to it, but at present is journeying towards the land in which he shall reign as king and serve as son. Under these circumstances he cannot feel the strong attachment to the charms of this world which binds the hearts of those who are without hope as to the mysterious future. The man whose kingdom is of this world is sorely tried when death demands a separation. You must observe that such a man is actually leaving his kingdom; and if he is leaving his kingdom, to what is death about to hasten him? Death makes his unwelcome appearance at the worldling's throne, and asserts his determina-

tion to overthrow it, and conduct its occupant into scenes unlighted by a solitary ray. The occupant protests his unwillingness to forego his kingdom, but death is stern and cruel, and interrupts the protestation by thrusting his dart into the heaving breast. There is no appeal—the earthly king dies, and dies without a title to a throne anywhere in the boundless universe. Your imagination may follow the departed spirit—that spirit is now an exile, mark its horrors—its subjects of conversation are gone; once it expatiated with ardour on its possessions, its vast estates, its countless luxuries, its prolific soil, its social influence, but now it gazes on a dreary blank, and a voice, sounding from an inaccessible region, deepens its already insufferable horror by these simple words, “Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things.”

Behold, in glorious contrast, the condition of the Christian. Though surrounded with many comforts, and it may be not a few luxuries, yet he is their master not their serf. He can look upon the splendid mass, and truly aver his independence of its enslaving power! Death sounds his warning, and the good man is ready! He has been awaiting the final message—sometimes, indeed, he has even had a “desire to depart and be with Christ,”—so that when death demands a pause in the throbbings of his heart, he knows that the time of coronation is at hand! As a child rejoices to return to its paternal home after a prolonged absence, so the soul of the Christian rises into rapture as he steps into the valley of the shadow of death! Your imagination may follow this departed spirit, too. He has not gone from a kingdom, but to a kingdom; his subjects of conversation are not exhausted—he spoke of God while on earth, now he gazes on the splendours of Deity; those who remember his conversation know that the name of Jesus was often on his tongue; now he sings, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain”—he was wont to declare that he sought a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God, now he walks its golden streets, and breathes its untainted air!

Distinguish, then, I beseech you, between having your kingdom in this world and having it in that which is to come. Far be it

from any minister of the gospel to contend that the very highest state of secular comfort and elegance is incompatible with the spirit of Christianity: were any bold enough to make the assertion, thousands of brilliant instances would rebuke and disprove the allegation. Let it, therefore, be clearly understood that all my argument has been directed against the iniquity of making your kingdom in this world. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Amidst all your accumulations, I entreat you to "lay up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal;" amid all your endeavours to prepare for the day of commercial panic or physical decrepitude, I entreat you to anticipate the day of death, and make provision for the well-being of your undying spirits.

Young man! that which engages most of your affections is your kingdom. The question, therefore, must be entirely determined by yourself. You may, to a large extent, discard all gross and debasing pursuits, and yet your kingdom may be of this world; you may take little or no interest in political agitation, and yet your kingdom may be of this world; you may despise the miser who hoards his dust with an energy that never tires, and yet your kingdom may be of this world! I repeat, therefore, that in order to ascertain what your kingdom is, you must analyse your affections—you must track their course, and mark where they rest. One young man is an eager devotee at the shrine of fashion; another is ambitiously aiming at fame; a third is unceasing in his merely intellectual pursuits; a fourth is totally indifferent to the appeals and claims of religion: yet all agree in having their kingdom of this world! I would to God that all young men could be driven to earnest self-scrutiny, that thus they might determine whether their kingdom be present or to come. The young man described in the gospel had reached a high standard of character by keeping all the commandments from his youth; yet he lacked one thing, and that solitary deficiency was as a gulf separating the dominion of earth from the kingdom of heaven!

I have only a word of pity for you who confess that your

kingdom is of this world. Every night that draws its sable curtain silently attests the shortness of your reign ; every grey hair and incipient wrinkle or deep furrow indicate that your monarchy is perishing ; every storm that rages threatens to destroy some portion of your territory. Time is eating into your crown ; the moth is doing its deadly work on your throne, and you who are known as kings on earth will be branded as paupers throughout eternity ! You have made a fearful miscalculation—you are involved in a terrible embarrassment, and standing at the mouth of the pit into which you have fallen, I proclaim not your degradation only, but the infallible method of restoration ! Blessed be God ! you may now become sovereigns of a moral kingdom. Jesus Christ lived a life and died a death, the object of which was that men might be made kings and priests unto God ! You, O sinner, are not ignorant of his beneficent life, of his atoning death ; nor are you ignorant of the terms on which you may appropriate all the blessings which he purchased by his blood. If you pursue the wrong, it is not because you are ignorant of the right ; if you imagine that your possessions are the true gold of heaven, it is in spite of ten thousand demonstrations that they are lies and vanity ! We have walked through your kingdom and exposed its corruptions ; we have handled your treasures and shown you their rottenness ; you yourselves have even confessed their ephemeral nature, so that if you longer attempt to solace yourselves with a known poison, be prepared for a holy universe to shudder as it pronounces you a desperate suicide !

You will never make a proper use of the life that now is until you regard it in connection with that which is to come. Standing at the Saviour's Cross you will be able to take a right view of both worlds. You will see earth in all its littleness and tumult, and heaven in all its magnitude and peacefulness ; and, while rendering to the one the attention which its transient importance demands, you will reserve the fulness of your energy for the momentous claims of the other. I make no apology for asking whether you are making a kingdom of your politics, and whether you have begun at the true source of all genuine and permanent reformation ? My firm conviction being that Christianity will

adjust the relationships of individuals, and consolidate the liberty of empires, my life is consecrated to its explanation and enforcement. When the heart is right with God there will be little difficulty in arranging political details; but while the heart is swollen with passion—while selfishness holds out her greedy hand, and party spirit rends the air with her clamorous cry—while Pride looks disdainfully on the poor, and Rank draws its invidious boundaries—while Capital is regardless of the true interests of Labour, and Merit must give place to Patronage, there can be no lasting reformation. We must strike the Upas at its roots. If you, as political reformers, can amputate any of the deadly branches, you will indeed earn the gratitude of your race—far be it from me to question the utility of your labour; but, again I tell you we must strike the Upas at its root! Church of the living God, this is your business! It is for you to lift the axe and smite the deadly tree! You have a tremendous power which you can bring to bear, not only on the spiritual, but on the civil interests of man; every prayer you breathe may exert influence on the political destiny of the nation! I call upon you, therefore, to do your utmost in the propagation of the Christian faith; in the name of God I forbid you to relax any spiritual effort. Toil on, and in due time there shall be but one kingdom and one King; he shall come, whose right is to reign—on his head shall the crown flourish. Freedom and Peace shall unfurl their banners; Brotherhood and Charity shall wake their sweetest music: then shall a cry be heard, loud as the roar of the thunder, the rush of the whirlwind, and the anthem of the sea—Alleluia! the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ.

## Chapter xix. 1.

“Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him.”

### SCOURGING JESUS.

**W**E know this to be historical. We read of this in other books than the New Testament. Some of us, therefore, who are so much afraid of superstition as to look with some wonder if not doubt upon lines that are found in the New Testament, or Old Testament alone, may feel ourselves to be upon solid ground. Jesus loved, taught, was scourged, crowned with thorns, clothed with purple, killed. For this information we are not dependent upon evangelists; for this assurance we have the authority of men who never prayed,—who, therefore, can doubt their word?

“Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him,”—literally, flagellated him. We cannot tell what that Roman punishment was. We read about it in the olden books, but men do not understand what they read so much as what they feel. The victim was tied by the hands to a post or standard; he was compelled to assume a stooping position; the knotted thong was in the hands of a Roman executioner, and he administered the punishment largely according to his own will or passion. It was not so in the Jewish law. Always have we found some touch of grace, some hint of gospel, even in Jewish sternness. In the law there is a shadow of good things to come. The Jewish law was that “forty stripes, save one” should be administered. There was no corresponding reservation in the Roman law; the judge or the executioner might administer punishment according to personal disposition; there was no restraint as to the number of the stripes. We have heard of the knout in Russia; in our own land we have the “cat,” so feared by felons; in the Roman law there was this arrangement for scourging, that men might be

humbled as well as punished, that the truth might be extorted from them as well as a penalty inflicted, that they might be brought into lowness of mind and submissiveness of temper, so that the judge could do with them what he pleased. The hands of Christ were tied to the stake, the flagellum was used upon his naked back; he was scourged by Roman hands.

“Pilate therefore.” That word “therefore” has a wondrous surrounding. It is a logical term, and it is a term that expresses a force more than logical, for pressure was put upon Pilate. To find the full force of this “therefore” we must go back to the other gospels, called the synoptic gospels, where more detail is given, and there we shall find the people pressing upon Pilate, insisting that such and such a course be taken, driving him to his wits’ ends, not allowing him to hesitate more than a moment, bearing away all his protestation in a storm of anger. “Pilate therefore”: the storm was upon him, the tempest was beating upon his head; all the ministries that made up the momentary experience were ministries of anger, and Pilate was the victim of popular clamour. He did not know what to do. He knew what he wanted to do. A wonderful face had Pilate—rocky, rugged, cavernous face, but a whole fountain of tenderness behind it all; he could have cried like a woman. He was overborne; crosslights perplexed his vision: it was right,—it was wrong; he would be tender,—he must not be disloyal; he would be gracious,—he must not be treasonable:—“Pilate therefore.” In some senses a lame and impotent “therefore,” but not an inhuman one, not out of keeping with the proportion of our own action, the mystery of our own policy. We are often glad of any “therefore” that will help us not to inflict punishment but to escape perplexity. Many men are more afraid of perplexity than they are of an army. Courage often breaks down at unexpected places: who would be afraid of mental bewilderment, of ambiguous thinking, of the double intentions and purposes of life? Yet some men are so constituted that a perplexity has frightened them more than a lion would. “Pilate therefore.” Where is there a man who has not his reason for action? Because they are reasons they are not necessarily valid; they may belong to that multitudinous array

of reasons which may be safely denominated excuses. Still, where is there a drunkard, foul-mouthed liar, thief with a hundred stealing hands, that has not his miserable "therefore" out of which to extract illicit but transitory comfort?

Let us meditate now rather than analyse. "Pilate took Jesus, and scourged him." Let us lay the emphasis upon the supplied word "him." The word is not in the original; yet there could be no sense in the history without it. Sometimes an element is present without being avowedly and nominally present; it is there in all the ghostliness of suggestion and necessity; it may not stoop to adopt the costume of grammar, but it is there, pulsing, throbbing, palpitating with infiniteness of energy. Let us dwell upon that sublime word—and verily write it in italics. Written in italic because it is not there,—now let us write it in italic because there is nothing else there. "Scourged him"—who spoke the beatitudes! It is impossible! Surely a mistake has been made in the writing. The man who is now bent, and on whose bared back the knout falls, said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." Can he now extract any comfort from these words? Has this preacher to live his own sermon? Is his unfathomable and ineffable eloquence to be applied to and by himself? Did he see further than all these beautiful flowers? So far we might accompany him, saying, This is poetical, most rhythmical, wondrously complete and morally harmonious. Can he go further? Beatitudes could not end with peacemakers. There would have been a great omission if only the poor in spirit, the mourning, the meek, the righteous, the merciful, the pure in heart, and the peacemaking had been included; verily a hiatus all but infinite in human history would have been left if the beatitudes had ended there. But they do not there terminate. Hear what Jesus said, "Blessed are they which are persecuted



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for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." A beatitude like that might sing to a man when he was bound to the standard, the stake. "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." Now what omission is there? None. No flower is unblessed by this gracious dew; not one could lift up its drooping, fainting head and say, The Lord hath forgotten to be gracious to me. Every flower-cup is filled with this wine of blessing. But do men who speak beatitudes come to flagellation? They do, if they speak beatitudes with the right scope. If they limit their beatifications to certain negative qualities, and certain pointless amiabilities, they may escape scourging; but if they reserve their blessing for virtue as well as grace, for energy as well as patience, for the reforming spirit as well as for the acquiescing temper, then they may come to find their way to heaven through much tribulation.

"Took Jesus and scourged him"—scourged him who blessed little children! This is impossible! But the Latin historians say it was real. The disciples did not dream this. This is written in Latin as well as in Greek, and is written in common Greek as well as in scriptural Greek. There is no doubt about it. We are now on flatly historical ground. You remember the incident? Mothers brought their children to Jesus that he would bless them; the disciples drove them away; but the Master said, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." What a kingdom he made! There was not a king in it; there was no decorated person in all the empire, there were no so-called "solid corner stones" about it; the kingdom was made up of little children, of men who had the child-spirit; made up of pureness, meekness, tenderness. These are moral qualities that the wind cannot blow down nor the tempest shake, and the lightning plays on them like any other blessing. Jesus took little children into his arms and blessed them. To have been in those arms—what a heaven was that: what a caress! A caress which only a child could feel; and this was the Man—

speaker of the beatitudes and lover of little children—who was scourged, flagellated and lacerated, till the thick seams rose on his quivering back! If the apostles had said this we might have doubted it, but it is declared as if on oath by men who never cared for the God of heaven.

“Then Pilate took Jesus, and scourged him”—him who had fed the multitude, and not only fed the multitude as a necessity, but fed the multitude as a prevention. Here was the statesman’s act as well as the redeemer’s pity. Said Christ, “They have been with me now three days; I will not send them away hungry, lest”—in that lest you find his deity. Many a man will give bread when dead, grim, ghastly hunger is looking at him; he pays to get rid of the ghost. But here is a man who says, “I will not send them away empty, lest”—lest what? “Lest they should die by the way.” Though they were out of sight they would still be fainting, and blessed be his name—oh, blessed be his heart!—no man faints without his beholding it.

Let us dwell upon these points, because they all help us to understand the scourging. What a pain it must have been to such a nature! “Pilate took Jesus, and scourged him”—scourged him who spake parables!—the Parable of the Prodigal Son that set the home-door open and kept it open all night, because the fool might return at any moment ragged and hunger-bitten; spake the Parable of the Good Samaritan, wherein, though Jews were looking at him angrily, he painted the Samaritan as the true redeemer of that man,—a parable that had in it poetry and judgment. Only he dare have set up a Samaritan in that position. Now he was scourged!

Does the whole truth lie within the limits of a local incident? No. There is an Old Testament as well as a New, and in a scourging of this kind the Old Testament becomes alive again; it is no longer archaic but modern; it brings up its prophecies and says, Seal us, for now we are fulfilled; subscribe this prophecy with your hand, and let it pass as a letter that has been glorified. All this was foretold. The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah would make an excellent introduction to these closing

chapters of the evangelic story. Jesus gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair, in the Old Testament—the same Jesus, not then manifest in the flesh, but still there. He has never been out of the world; he made it. He did not come into the world in any sense that indicates his ever having been separated from it; he came into it by vividness of manifestation, by showing himself. Historically, there was birth, there was circumcision, there was baptism; but morally, spiritually, there was a personal presence in the world that only needed disclosure. He was in the world, and the world knew him not. Not only was all this foretold, it was voluntarily accepted. No word does Jesus utter, no protest; he does not argue with Roman procurator, or with Jewish rabble. He speaks mysterious words; he evidently supports himself by eternity. He is well-backed; it is an invisible support, because so great. Had it been less, say a pair of human hands, the support might have been seen. But who has eyes to see eternity? He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth; when he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he was insulted, he threatened not. Why that peace? It is not indifference, it is not even resignation, it is not an acceptance of grim fatality; it is a peace that shines, it is peace with radiance, it is peace with subdued joy. The explanation is, "I lay down my life; no man taketh it from me; I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." When did Jesus Christ take a low and narrow view of any case or any situation? He did not feel himself to be murdered; he accepted the act as a sacrifice. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes"—a still larger flagellation—"we are healed." What do these words mean? We cannot tell. Whoever took the sun into his own little house to examine it and tell what it was made of? We can only say that the sun gives light, and we can only say that Jesus makes us see, gives us life and hope and immortality, and has so wrought upon us that we can say to death, "Where is thy sting? and grave—black, grim, tremendous grave—where is thy victory?" Any man that has wrought this miracle in us is worthy of all the

crowns that make heaven royal. We stand to say that Jesus has done this for us.

May we change the tone of the meditation? Shall we be no longer quiet, almost silent,—shall we accept another spirit, and giving way to its inspiration shall we become violent in denunciation? We might, and still be in harmony with the spirit of the text. Let us beware lest we waste our sentiment on historical humiliation. It is not enough to weep because a Man was flagellated twenty centuries ago. That Man is flagellated to-day; the knout still seams his quivering flesh, still makes it start up in red scars; he is still tied to the scourging post. That is the terrible truth; but for that we might paint the picture, and sell it; but *it* is too modern to trifle with. How is the process of scourging still going on? Pilate is dead. Certainly: the Roman Pilate is dead; but they scourge Jesus who nominally profess to serve him, and do not serve him with all their mind, and heart, and soul, and strength. That is a flagellation which is terrible to him. He was no coward under the knout, but he quails with anger-grief when he is used as a mere decoration, when his Cross is worn as an ornament and not felt as a burden. They scourge Christ who are silent when hostile attacks are made upon him. He feels our silence more than he feels the attack. Where does he suffer—in the flesh? No more. What is a flesh wound, a flesh sorrow? Flesh and sorrow of that kind are but for a moment. He now feels everything upon his naked heart. The slightest puncture is as a great wound. Who has not stood back and heard Jesus attacked and reviled and dishonoured, and never spoken a word for his Friend? In that case what did Jesus Christ feel? Not the attack at all; but how his eyes reddened with tears when he marked the silence! What, said he, will ye also go away? have you nothing to say? does no holy memory awaken within? does no tender association enlarge your love and stimulate your courage with a noble inspiration? have I not visited you in sorrow, in contrition, at home, at midnight, when the child lay ill, when the new grave was dug, when all life darkened into a frown and threatened you as with a tempest of thunderbolts? What do we ourselves feel? Some men feel an insult more than a wound. In proportion to the spirituality

of the relation is the sensitiveness as between the parties, as between the disciple and the Lord. Our relation to Christ is nothing if it be not one of love. It is not an intellectual relation, as who should say,—Lord, I had mind enough to understand all about thy kingdom; dolts and dunces I have left behind,—I had the genius that caught thy meaning; I am the clever member of the household. There is no such relation with Christ. He does not acknowledge it. He knows nothing about cleverness, except to condemn it. He puts cleverness under his feet as an enemy. It is simplicity, docility, felt necessity, rising love, answering sympathy, the intuition that will never allow itself to be iron-bound by empiricism or logic in any form. There the relation begins and operates. He feels it, therefore, when any man who has been healed by him dare not say to hissing and mocking Pharisees, “Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see.” If every cured blind man would speak there would be eloquence enough.

They scourge Jesus who use his name for unworthy purposes, as a social key, as an answer to many inquiries. There are men who pay more for their atheism than others pay for their Christianity. There are atheists who if they were not honest could not be in society to-day. There are nominally professing Christians who because they are dishonest have the *entrée* to all saloons and gathering-places, and the rendezvous of the great and empurpled and titled. Better be an honest atheist than a dishonest professor of Christianity. The atheist will have more chance at the last; in fact, he only will have a chance as compared with those who dishonestly or only nominally profess Christ. It is quite imaginable that at the last some poor blind atheist may have his eyes opened and may begin to pray, and may pray more in one cry than many nominal Christians have prayed in a lifetime. It is not for us to limit the kingdom, nor is it for us with licentiousness of sentiment to proclaim that they may disobey Christ, and yet be found at last in the company of those who loved him. Let every statement be made clear, definite, simple, and let the maker of the statement feel that he himself will have to answer for it at the last; then let him leave heaven to make what margin can be made by love.

They scourge Jesus who think more of bodily pain than of spiritual cruelty. There are men who would have released Jesus from the bodily pain, and yet never have taken notice of his heart wound. We are of course limited by our senses, and with a meaning that is obvious we are the victims of our senses. A blow to some people would seem to be more than neglect. There are houses of baptised people in which there is more suffering by neglect than there is by violence; indeed, violence there is none. Violence would give hope, because wherever there is passion there may by-and-by be devotion. The man who curses and swears and denies with oaths that he never knew Christ will be found in a day or two breaking his heart and calling back all his oaths and curses, and burning himself with them. But neglect, coldness, studied respectability, calculated forbearance and gentility,—coldness that freezes love,—these are the deadly enemies of household trust and progress; so they are the deadly enemies of ecclesiastical brotherhood and advancement. We must account the body nothing, and the soul everything; we must feel neglect more than we feel a sword-cut; we must feel the oozing of the heart's love more than the out-bursting of the heart's blood. Jews were guiltless as compared with Christians. Jesus Christ said so; he said in his last prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." We know what we do. We do it on purpose; we do it by calculation; we make a study of it. They crown Jesus who obey him. Do not let us imagine that by singing about crowning Jesus we are going to do some wonderful work in coronation. We could crown him now. We speak of by-and-by casting our crowns before him, being lost in wonder, love, and praise. That is perfectly right; there is a holy meaning attached to such sacred words. But all who would crown Jesus now may do so by saying, and meaning, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"



## Chapter xix. 4.

“Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him.”

### NO FAULT FOUND.

[AN OUTLINE.]

PROBABLY there is not, in the whole compass of history, a more vivid illustration of hesitancy and instability than that afforded by the conduct of Pilate immediately prior to the crucifixion. In the outset Pilate was reluctant to undertake the judgment of the case; hence he said to the Jews, “Take ye him, and judge him according to your law.” Being compelled to ascend the judgment-seat, he held a private interview with Jesus, and then uttered the memorable declaration, “I find in him no fault at all.” Again did the implacable Jews treat the Saviour with the most studied indignity, crowning him with thorns, and putting on him a purple robe, exclaiming, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and smiting him with their hands. Pilate again protested, saying, “Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him.” Hardly had the utterance fallen, when the rabble thundered out, “Crucify him, crucify him!” The hesitant judge interposed, saying, “Take ye him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him,”—the savage reply was instantaneous, “We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God.” This was as an arrow shot into the heart of Pilate, for “when Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid.” Again did he confer with Jesus, and again was he impressed with the Saviour’s innocence; for, according to John, “from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him.” Vainly, however, did he plead; the omnipotent appeal now rang from the maddened mob, “If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar’s friend: whosoever

maketh himself a king, speaketh against Cæsar." 'Twas enough ; Pilate could stand no longer : " Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led him away."

Such are the circumstances. Pilate was destitute of strong conviction, and was consequently weak in the presence of a determined opposition. Pilate had not learned the majesty of that most majestic word—ought ! That word is as a consuming fire, devouring all pleas and subterfuges : it is the watchword of the absolute in truth, purity, and freedom ; it is the embodiment of God ; it is the summary of the universe ; it is the sentinel of heaven ; it is the summary and memorial of Sinai ; it is the immutable standard to which all loyal spirits will eternally aspire. Men are nothing if devoid of intelligent and all-daring convictions. Such convictions will infallibly insure three results:—

First. Such convictions will deliver men from the despotism of popular fury.—Is any position more unenviable than that of a Pilate between two great billows of passion ? See an undecided official in church or senate called upon to determine a disputed question ! He is the butt of every witling : he would vote on both sides ; if his opinions venture the slightest disclosure, he trembles when the storm utters its voice ; he is as helpless as the *débris* on the impetuous river, or the dust scattered by the whirlwind. A man of strong conviction in such a position would abide in perfect calm until the storm cried itself to sleep ; then would he ascend the throne, and show that Right has patience to wait and power to conquer.

Second. Such convictions enable men to sacrifice the highest human patronage.—To be " Cæsar's friend " is an object in whose attainment the sublimest principles are often trodden in the dust. There are men who can see no higher than Cæsar. Their feeble vision is so dazzled by the light of earthly pomp that they cannot see the "glory which excelleth." The true-born son of thought and feeling looks through the mock-splendour of earthly jets to the palace where reigns the King Eternal, whose garment is light, and whose throne is built of the riches of the universe ;

and beholding the Majesty of heaven, he scorns the patronage of any Cæsar for which he must pay his blood or mortgage his eternity!

Third. Such convictions enable men to serve the truth in the most perilous circumstances.—“Perfect love” of principle will “cast out fear” of personal injury. He is the truly royal man who, in divine strength, “plants his footsteps on the sea, and rides upon the storm.” Ornamental men may be applauded in seasons of calm, but they are useless when fire-bolts are flying, and foundations shaking, and thunders rolling; then we require men who can front frowning senates, and abash them with the regal decree, “We ought to obey God rather than men!”

Let us be strong,—“strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” Being found mighty in faith, “rooted and grounded in love,” invincible in argument, and unimpeachable in life, we shall be the faithful servants of all the principles which can inspire and ennoble the race. We shall be firm as the eternal granite, and gentle as the harmless dove. When the enemy demands our crucifixion of the truth, instead of being Pilate-like, we shall reply by a louder utterance of its praise, and a pro-founder reverence at its throne!

## Chapter xix. 37.

“Again another Scripture saith.”

### WHAT SCRIPTURE SAITH.

YOU will infer from the text that I want to insist upon a right way of reading the Bible. Our prayer, therefore, has been, Open thou our eyes, that we may behold wondrous things out of thy law; open thou our understanding, that we may understand the Scriptures! In my judgment, I know of hardly anything that has been so mischievous in what is termed Christian education as the tearing away of little pieces of Scripture under the name of texts. Portions of Scripture so treated have been made to represent false meanings, and have gone up and down the ages of the Church doing all sorts of spiritual harm. There ought to be no texts in any partial sense, or in any sense which mangles and mutilates the integrity of Holy Writ. The subject is never in the text, it is always in the context. If any man take a text, he should take all the texts bearing upon the subject, so that we may know the exact evidence of Scripture in its volume and weight and applicableness. An error may be sealed by a text; a denomination may be falsely based upon a portion of Scripture torn from the current in which it is found. We ought not to want little mottoes and short maxims; we ought to have grown out of the childishness of wanting a text; we should now want the Scriptures, a thousand texts, or all the texts that can be found bearing upon the subject that is to be elucidated. But herein the pulpit is dragged down. There are persons who will always insist upon having a text, one text, a little verse; they like to be surprised by it. They are not students of the divine word; they are the victims of their own foolish curiosity. We ought to say, What does the whole Bible declare upon a given subject? Let us have all the evidence carefully and luminously put before us, then by the aid of the Spirit of God who wrote the testimony

we may be able to come to broad and intelligible and useful conclusions.

Consider how far this involves your own spiritual misadventures. How many little torn texts have you in your memory? What do you know about the Book as a structure, a unity, a complete figure and integer? Have you ever really read the Bible? I know you have read the Gospels, you have also perused many of the Psalms; what do you know about the Book of Numbers, Deuteronomy, the Judges, the Chronicles? If you do not know them all, almost by heart, how can ye understand the Scriptures? A few instances will show more precisely the meaning of the expression "Again another Scripture saith." It is that "other Scripture" we want, that supplementing, completing, and illuminating Scripture. Many of us have the one text but not the other. The devil had a set of texts. The devil saith unto him, "It is written"; and Christ answered, "Yes, and it is written again." It is that "again" that explains the quotation. We must therefore have regard to the proportion of faith, or the analogy of faith, or the general balance and drift of scriptural testimony; in this way we shall clear out many denominations, sects, eccentric communions of people who build themselves on rags and patches of divine testimony.

How many persons there are who say, when they are asked to join some great philanthropic or benevolent movement, that they prefer to work secretly, and not to let the left hand know what the right hand doeth. They justify themselves by a text; they forget that "another Scripture saith," "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." How now? Why do you not quote the "other Scripture"? Why do you not say with Jesus Christ in the time of temptation, "It is written again"? What becomes now of your little selfish secrecy? You might say, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven," and then having accomplished that good, you might go out and do no end of useful service, and say nothing about it. The first text would come in admirably after you had attended to the duty or fulfilled

the opportunity created by the second. Is it true what I hear that you never allow the right hand to speak to the left, because the right hand has nothing to report ?

How many persons excuse themselves from public worship on the ground of a text ! They say, in a tone that is itself not only weak but impious, "Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and pray to thy Father which is in secret." That is beautiful, that is perfectly right ; but "again another Scripture saith," "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is." Now how long will you remain in cold and isolated secrecy ? Not only are we to attend to God in the closet, we are to worship him in the public assembly ; we can get something in the assembly we cannot get in the closet, as truly as we can get something in the closet that we cannot get in the public assembly. Public worship ought to be a grand opportunity for the highest education and stimulus of our minds and hearts. We complete each other ; we get in the commonwealth what we cannot get in the individual. We should hear each other's voices, study each other's method, commingle with each other's aspirations, and enter into all the mystery so far as is practicable of one another's agonies and burdens and miseries. We were not made to live alone, we were made for society. On the other hand, if any man shall say, "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together," and be always in the public thoroughfare or always in the huge assembly, then he should remember that "another Scripture saith," "Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet." Thus the one Scripture supplements the other, completes it, or explains it. If any man shall vaingloriously go about saying, "I have been doing good all day long ; I am weary in the service of humanity ; if any man has seen me to-day he has seen a very busy man in the cause of Christ,"—then he should remember that "another Scripture saith," "Let not your left hand know what your right hand doeth." Remember always that "other Scripture."

How often we hear persons delight in calling Christ, in the words of the prophet, "The Prince of Peace." They stand upon that text, they seem to know no other. That expression exactly

represents the purpose of Christ's advent and priesthood in the universe. He is the Prince of Peace ; when he was born the angels said, "Peace on earth and goodwill toward men." So they did ; Isaiah did call the coming One the Prince of Peace. We would not detract from the glory of that light ; not one tiniest jewel would we take out of that diadem. But "another Scripture saith," "I have come to send a sword upon the earth." Jesus Christ was the greatest fighter ; no warrior was ever so deeply engaged in battle as was the Prince of Peace. He had not a day's rest in all his brief ministry. By reason of his strenuous efforts, his continued controversies, his unceasing conflicts, his three years were three generations,—the longest ministry ever exercised by man. Yet how prone are we to forget the sword element ! We conceal from ourselves the sterner and severer aspects of Christ's ministry. No man can know what peace is who does not know the meaning of the sword. There can be no peace until there is righteousness ; and righteousness comes by many a conflict, many a fierce—thank God, by many a bloodless!—controversy. Have you ever fought for the Master ? not querulously, or resentfully, sharply ; but enduringly, patiently, argumentatively, and, above all, by that great logic and eloquence of exemplification ? A Christian man cannot be silent in the presence of wrong. When the Church becomes dumb in the sight of oppression and injustice, the Church is no other than a dumb dog that cannot even bark. So let us always balance one text with another. If any man shall be furiously controversial, needlessly combative, if he be always fighting the wind and raising up little figures that he may break them down again, then let him remember that "another Scripture saith," "The name of your Master is Prince of Peace." Thus we find in Scripture a self-emendation or a self-completion, and unless we get into the rhythm of this music we shall, even as preachers, totally misrepresent the testimony of divine revelation. The text has ruined many a preacher ; it has actually made a fool of him, has almost lured him into blasphemy, for he has been building upon a point when he ought to have been building upon a line ; he has been endeavouring to set a kingdom upon an apothegm, instead of on a wide and immovable philosophy.

A poor soul is fond of quoting, "Bear ye one another's

burdens." Is that a text? Yes, it is. He says, I am burdened, help me to carry my load. Every charitable institution borrows the motto; every begging letter is full of it; every complaint suggests it. It is a sweet Scripture; there is no denying its divine authority; without it the Bible would be incomplete. Yet "another Scripture saith," "Every man shall bear his own burden." We must have no burden-bearing that means a premium upon incapacity or laziness. There is only one way of teaching the indolent man, and that is by letting him hunger. "If a man will not work," saith the apostle, "he ought not to eat." That may bring him to his senses. Has every man to fight his own battles? Yes, certainly. Have we to bear one another's burdens? Yes, undoubtedly. It is for wisdom to reconcile the paradox, if it need reconciliation. There are persons carrying burdens who ought not to carry them one inch farther—honest, noble, good souls that in human estimation have never done anything really wrong or vicious. They are overburdened, and it becomes us well to help them at least one finger, if not a whole hand, in bearing the burden; they would assist if they could, and we must assist them because we can. On the other hand, there are persons who will never let you alone; they have always a new request, a new necessity, and they are always proving their own incapacity and worthlessness. If you give them money they put it into bags, as Haggai says, that have holes in them; you are endeavouring to give them water in a sieve, and you cannot do so, because the water runs away. I do not know why such people were created, unless it be to try the patience and perfect the temper of other people. To such we must preach a rather stern doctrine—every man must bear his own burden. How to carry both these great principles is often a great difficulty. Better to err a little in helping than in not helping. Adam Clarke said, if in a hundred cases that came before him there were ninety-nine impostures, he would rather reply to the whole hundred and be imposed upon ninety-nine times than reject the one really genuine case. Believe me, you will be forgiven if you do more good. I think I am entitled now to write you a certificate and sign it, which you can show anywhere, to the effect that if you will go on doubling all your good, no ill will befall you at the last. The angels will not spite you by saying that you



have been doing far too much good. They will not say to you, Poor soul, you have been working too hard down in the little dark earth; you should not have done one tenth of what you have done. Why, you have quite exhausted yourself in the service of charity; you have ceased to win our respect because you have been so easily imposed upon. There are no idiot angels. You go on doing the good, and I will answer for the consequences.

We come now to the most sacred ground of all—to the great mystery of the universe. Read the text; these are the pathetic words—“They led him away to a place called Calvary.” *They* did it? Yes: they led him away, arrestingly; they took him into custody, they laid strong hands upon him and led him away? So the text says. But “another Scripture saith,” “I lay down my life: no man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself.” Then he led them away? Yes; that is the higher meaning. Viewed within the darkness of this twilight world, Christ was led like a lamb to the slaughter, Christ was led away; but read in the light of heaven’s eternal noon, it was the Saviour who led *them* away, that they might witness the tragedy and the mystery of his self-sacrifice. Thus it is written, man murdered the Son of God; the apostle said, and said truly, in his great speech, “Ye killed the Prince of life; him have ye taken and by wicked hands have crucified.” That is right, within its own limits; yet Jesus Christ himself rises and says, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all the deeper meaning of my history and revelation to mankind! You are right in the letter, they did lead me away, and yet I led myself away. I went voluntarily to the Cross. This commandment did I receive of my Father, that I might lay down my life and take it again; I was not killed in the higher sense, I gave my life for every man.

Thus we bring within our purview this Scripture and that, the first text and the second, the devil’s quotation and Christ’s, “It is written again.” John’s first text, and John’s second, wherein he says, “And again another Scripture saith.” Why not read this book in all its parts? Why not bring those parts together, and constitute the radiant and glorious unity of the divine thought? When will men read the Bible—lovingly, sympathetically, spiritually?

They would then see that those men who are said to spiritualise Scripture are not often so far wrong as they appear to be. There is a spiritualisation that is objectionable ; but there is a materialisation which is more objectionable still, a literalisation that tends to weakness and poverty and nothingness. When I read, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," and preach a gospel sermon from it, I am not so far wrong as I at first sight may appear, for, "another Scripture saith," "Without him [that is, without Christ] was not anything made that was made." So in Genesis we find John, in Leviticus we find Calvary, in Creation we find the Saviour, in Providence we find the Cross. O remember, lest you get wrong by taking out some little line and saying, This is God's book, and this is God's testimony. Say, I will find out what the other Scripture saith ; I will compare Scripture with Scripture. I will go a second time to the Book as Christ went a second time to the altar, and in going the second time I may find the completing text, I may bring on the topstone with shoutings of "Grace, grace unto it!" for the building is beauteous ; it is of fair aspect, it is hospitably roomy ; it is the home of the soul.

## John xx. 1-18.

1. The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. ["First," and "early," and "dark," and "sepulchre,"—what a crowd of terms! Out of this warp and woof comes life's mixed and tangled web. There is a solitary woman in this verse.]

2. Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved [With what frank delicacy he indicates himself!], and saith unto them [Breathlessly; she had been running. How quickly bad news flies! they run to tell it], They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him. [Where they have laid him is heaven, if we could but find out the place. The sepulchre without the Lord chills those who go near it.]

3. Peter therefore went forth [A quick and ardent logic is involved in that *therefore*], and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre.

4. So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter [How he sustains the delicateness of his own references!], and came first to the sepulchre.

5. And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. [He had his first place. Every man has his unique position in the Church, if he could discover it; he may not have been first called, he may not be senior in time, prior chronologically; yet at some point he was first: let no man take his crown.]

6. Then cometh Simon Peter following him [Was it a calculated second place? Was he a coward still? Did he allow himself to be beaten? how could he? when it is said], and went into the sepulchre [The one *looked* and the other *went in*: that is the difference of men to the end of time], and seeth the linen clothes lie,

7. And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. [He was self-possessed; he had the full use of all his faculties, he noted and remembered.]

8. Then [Some emphasis should be laid on that word, as indicating a peculiar moment in time] went in also that other disciple, who came first to the sepulchre [came first, went in second], and he saw, and [here he recovers priority] believed. [Some men seem to have only to open their

eyes to believe—to go one step further, and to be in heaven; and other men have to be scourged into a kind of barren belief.]

9. For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. [And yet they did know it: it had been spoken to them often enough; it was the one thing Christ dwelt upon in his later ministry. Again and again he told them that the Son of man should be raised from the dead: they knew it in the letter, they knew it in the ear of the body, but the music never got down into the ear of the soul. We know things variously—we know, and do not know; we do not know, and yet we know: for want of right definitions of the word “know” we flounder and blunder in our highest thinking.]

10. Then the disciples went away again unto their own home. [They were soon thrust back; they accepted the intermediate for the final.]

11. But [Indicating a difference of character] Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping [That was her home; the men could find a home without Christ, but she could not: where the love is, the home is]: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre [through the telescope of tears],

12. And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. [If the men had wept they would have seen the angels. You see nothing with dry eyes: the naked eye has but a sky of gilded points; the clothed and assisted eye rolls through all the universe of suns. The New Testament should be read through tears, then Jesus would be seen everywhere; and if the Old Testament could be read with the same help, he would be found in Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms.]

13. And they say unto her [for they speak all languages], Woman [Not a harsh term, but full of gentleness as spoken by angels' lips], why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. [Her tears were rational: like all Christian sentiment, they could be vindicated by reason.]

14. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. [This is a mystery in divine providence. God concealeth himself, but he is not the less there: he conceals himself for a purpose; he thus educates men.]

15. Jesus saith unto her, Woman [How strange he can be, how like a foreigner he can look! How he can put a space between himself and his dearest ones,—always for a purpose, and always that he may come the nearer], why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? [What is wanting in thy life? where is the circle broken?] She, supposing him to be the gardener [and to be inspired merely by a spirit of civility], saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence [Did she whisper this, as if she would

extract a secret from him under seal of confidence ?], tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. [I will play the honest thief. I am but a woman, but I can carry him : the spirit is strength : we can carry what we like.]

16. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. [We live in tones, in glances, in touches, in little things.] She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni ; which is to say, Master. [If there was the faintest incredulity in her tone, the incredulity was but momentary : she would have sprung upon him, but]

17. Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not ; for I am not yet ascended to my Father [I am on my way : there is a time for everything : touching would mean arresting, detention upon the earth, interruption of a great purpose] : but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father ; and to my God, and your God. [And I make the worlds one, the family complete : I set up the magnetic communication, and none can destroy it ; henceforth earth is hardly distinguishable from heaven.]

18. Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord [That is the only gospel worth preaching], and that he had spoken these things unto her. [That is the true proof of what is said : if we had not seen the Lord we should not talk about him, and if he has not spoken to us we should not speak to others. Tell what he has given in thine heart.]

## PRAYER.

**ALMIGHTY GOD**, may a man speak unto thee face to face, uttering the thanksgivings of many hearts, the confessions of the sins of the people, and a cry for thy pardoning mercy, without which we cannot live? Wilt thou so reveal thyself unto us as to leave no doubt of thy presence, giving us such drawing, such enlightening of mind, such enlargement and quickening of our affections, as shall constrain us to say, This is the Lord's doing, this is the Lord's house, and this is the gate of heaven? We have had familiar intercourse with our Father; we have felt his nearness; our hearts have leaped for joy at his drawing nigh. Why not repeat the visit of thy grace, now that on the morning of thy holy day, in the midst of the great city, we may feel that thou art near our hearts with infinite blessing and love? We praise thee for thy marvellous works towards us as creatures of thine hand. Thou hast preserved our life, and given us in continuance of days a new song. Thou hast spread our table in the wilderness, in the presence of our enemies, and so thou hast given us renewed cause to adore thy goodness and trust thy power. Thou hast sent a plentiful rain upon thine inheritance, and caused us to enjoy the odours of the garden of the Lord. Thou hast given us an interest in things not seen. Thou hast called us unto eternal life. Thou hast put death under our feet. Thou hast come to us in unexpected ways; not always along the highroad of thy daily providence, where we have expected to meet thee—where we have prepared for thy coming, and waited confidently for thine appearing. Thou hast come to us in many of the incidents of life, when we did not expect thee. Thou hast given us blessings out of the cloud. Thou hast turned the darkness into sudden light. Thou hast given us a goodly heritage in places where we expected to mourn and die. So that, altogether, thou hast been gracious unto us with exceeding favour. Thy great daily gifts have not been withheld, and other gifts thou hast given with them, so that our cup runneth over. Our hands are full of the blessings of the Lord, and our hearts have been made as the treasure-house of his grace. We live in God. We have no life but in thy light. It is enough. We are immortal in our God; we are everlasting in the everlasting Father. We beseech thee, therefore, that we may be enabled to bring the power of an endless life to bear upon the concerns of the present time. May we deal with the affairs of earth as those whose conversation is in heaven. May we descend upon the concerns of time with the lofty dignity and the impatient urgency of those who would quickly return unto the higher places, in which their souls delight. Keep us from long-tarrying in the market-places of the world. Keep us from long-lingering in the highways and streets of commerce and pleasure and self-

promotion. While we are there, may we ever be in haste. May we ever be looking forward and aspiring towards the highest service and joy of thy children. May men take knowledge of our impatience. May men wonder concerning our hurry in the world, and be led to know that our citizenship is in heaven, that here we have no continuing city, and that, by our impatient haste, we are declaring plainly that we seek a country. Oh that we may so live as to think of death only as a step over a shadow into the infinite brightness and the unending peace! We bless thee, that we have known distaste for the things of the world. We have seen their vanity, we have sounded their hollowness. We have left the altar of the world with a sickened heart, and thou hast drawn us into the sanctuary, and thrown before our wondering vision the things that are not seen and eternal, and filled us with a holy desire to go and be for ever with thee. And yet thou hast enabled us to do what we have had to do upon the earth with fidelity and earnestness and success. Such is the mystery of thy government; for when we are most heavenly, then do we triumph most entirely over the trifles of time; when we are most in the sanctuary of the skies, we are most masters of the things that lie round about us in this poor, gloomy, dying scene. Hence have we known that "godliness is profitable unto all things"; and when we have been seeking first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, thou hast added unto us all other things. We have sinned before the Lord. God be merciful unto us sinners. If we have escaped public accusation, yet do our own hearts convict us of a thousand transgressions. If our hand cannot be impeached by the social justice of the world, yet in our spirit have we hidden sin. We have gone astray from God in our hearts; our motives have often been mixed, and often impure. And if thou wert strict to mark it, if thou didst take hold of thy sword when we gave the occasion for judgment, behold we had not lived in thy sight to-day. But thou art merciful; thou hast sent thy Son Jesus Christ, equal with thyself in Godhead, to be our Saviour, to offer a sacrifice for sins, and because of his work we have hope in God that our sins shall be remembered no more. Lord, help us, in the delight of pardon, to triumph over the tormenting memory of our conscience, and to have peace through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### Chapter xx. 13.

"They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him."

#### MARY: NEEDLESS TROUBLE.

THIS weeping woman, standing beside the empty tomb of Jesus Christ, is a typical rather than a unique character in human history. Specially is she typical of those people who are always missing the point in Christian narrative and Christian doctrine. They are faithful, kind, intelligent, deeply and richly sympathetic, but they miss the point. They go long journeys

in order to get wisdom, but they always leave the principal thing behind them; they put away the key so carefully that they never know where to find it again, and their minds, though filled with conflicting thoughts, have lost all power of grouping events and shaping them into order and meaning. Mary rushed into the details of a controversy instead of standing a little way from it and catching its outlines and its general bearings. There is very much practical atheism in this devoted woman's talk. Though she is speaking to angels, she has left God out of her sobbing and tearful speech, and consequently the words which ought to have glowed with a sublime faith are only feverish with personal disappointment, and more or less of peevish complaint. She speaks as if the whole question lay between certain other people and herself; thus, "They have taken" and "I know not." She is lost where millions of other people have been lost; that is to say, in the murky and noisy region of second causes. She was calculating time by her own ill-going clock, and not taking the hour from the unchanging and truth-telling sun; just what we are all doing—and in the doing of which we bring ourselves to disappointment and tears.

Many of us ought to take our stand beside Mary. Those, for example, who are unable to see the divine hand far above all human meddling and strife. To many of us human history is but a disorderly and haphazard movement, an undisciplined and scrambling race, a neck-or-nothing race, enlivened with rude wit or degraded by ruder pleasures. Where is the religious eye that sees God above it all, and that can trace his hand in all the grotesque and riotous features of the course? Mary said that somebody had done mischief—had taken away her Lord; the idea never occurring to her that her Lord might have taken himself away; and thus she missed the point. She saw the Jews, the Romans, the mad rabble, the cruel and hilarious executors, clearly enough; but the divine hand was hidden from her eyes. And what is human history without that hand? A piece of mischief, truly—a gambling speculation or a murderous fight; but when that hand is seen the whole spectacle is changed—it is a chaos out of which order will come, and music and peace that will last for ever. In the meantime we are victimised



by our own senses ; our eyes deceive us, and our ears and our hearts have lost the power of completely trusting God ; and so life has become an enigma without an answer, and a fight in which the strong man wins all, and that all is less than nothing and vanity. That heart-broken, crying woman is this day the centre of a vast multitude of people, all of whom are equally blind to the supreme Presence, though but few of them express their deprivation in tears of helplessness and sorrow.

The great company thus gathered around Mary may be increased by the addition of the innumerable host who in all ages have given themselves up to unnecessary grief. Truly there was no occasion for Mary's tears. The angels said unto her, "Woman, why weepest thou?" Mary had her answer ready, but it was an answer founded upon a mistake. So we, too, have doubtless some explanation of our grief, but our explanation may be but a fool's answer, or a blind man's guess as to the things that are round about him. Are not God's angels often asking why men weep and mourn and pine in heaviness of heart? The angels see the things that are hidden from us. In the dead seed they see the coming harvest. Behind the bleak east wind they see the fair spring ready to spread her flowers at our feet when the unbidden and unwelcome visitor is gone. We see the underside of the pattern which God is weaving ; they see the upper side in all the charm of its celestial colour and all the beauty of its infinite perfection. Over sin we may weep night and day, but over God's providence no tear of grief is either pious or reasonable. No doubt it is a providence full of mystery, a road of deep declivities and sharp curves, with many a jungle and many a den where beasts may lurk in cruel patience for their prey ; yet there is a foot-track through it all onward to the summer landscape and the harvest plain. Why weepest thou? Surely not over the child who has gone to the care of the angels and the sweet rest of the pure skies? Surely not over the disappointment whose sharpness has taught thee thy best prayers and mellowed thy voice to the tenderest music? Why weepest thou? If for sin, weep on ; if for God, your tears are not vain only, but unnatural and impious. When Mary knew but part of the case, she wept over it ; when she knew it all, her joy became almost a pain by

its very keenness. So shall it be with ourselves in the revelations which are to come. We cannot stop the tears now—they will come—they must come ; but out of every tear shed over the unknown or misknown way of God there will come a new and surprising joy.

The company round about Mary may be increased by another large accession ; those, namely, who can only recognise Christ under certain forms and in certain places. If Mary had seen the dead Christ in the grave, probably she would have felt a sad satisfaction ; to look at the face cold and pain-stricken, but still sweet with ineffable tenderness, would have brought a comfort welcome to the bereaved heart. But the idea of death having been turned to life never occurred to her. She little thought that this water could be turned into wine, and that all the signs and wonders of Christ's ministry could culminate and be repeated in the magnificent miracle of his resurrection. Christ was infinitely larger in spiritual influence than Mary had imagined, and he is infinitely larger and grander than any Church has conceived him to be. I would to God I could adequately rebuke all theological and ecclesiastical narrowness. There are people who would rather have a dead Christ in their own sect and ritual than a living Saviour outside of their own approved boundaries. There are others who care more for their own idealised pictures of Christ than they would for the living man himself, were he to look upon them face to face. Now, upon this matter we may all have much to learn. For my own part, I find Christ in all Churches where the Christly spirit is. Christ is not a theory ; he is a divine and infinite life, infusing himself into our spirit and history in innumerable and unnamable ways, covering and absorbing all theories, and honouring all honest thought, and reverent doubt, and pure aspiration. The people who mistake a crucifix for a cross are not unlikely to mistake a dead dogma for a living faith. Christ lives in Unitarianism and in Trinitarianism, in the expiatory atonement and in the sympathetic reconciliation, in the resonant Christian anthem and in the sweet children's song ; and until this fact is recognised, and not merely recognised but illuminated and glorified, Christendom will be rather a congeries of squabbling sects than a living and indissoluble

Church. But the devil of sectarianism can only be expelled by prayer and fasting. As a Protestant, I wish I loved Christ as some Papists have loved him. As a deeply convinced believer in the Godhead of Jesus Christ, I wish I could know him, and preach him as some believers in his simple humanity have done ; and as one who subscribes with his whole heart the evangelical creed, I wish I could get views of truth which have opened upon men who have stood on the bare rocks and slippery places of speculative doubt, or even of intellectual antagonism. What man has seen all the truth of God ? In what single pulse throbs the solemn eternity ? Into what sectarian hut has God crowded all the riches of heaven ? You may find Christ everywhere if you seek him with a true heart ; not, perhaps, just in the way you expected, not nominally, not formally, but in all the subtlety of his spiritual power, and all the tenderness of his recovering and comforting grace. You will not suppose that we are to be blind to each other's errors, real or fancied ; on the contrary, we are bound to detect and expose those errors, but we are to look for them with the eye of love, and to refute them with the tongue of charity. Controversy may be elevated into an instrument of high spiritual education, or it may be degraded into a weapon for fighting rude and godless battles.

Another addition may be made to the great crowd already gathered around Mary ; those, namely, who are always talking about Christ as if he were absent : it is a historical Christ they refer to—a Christ that once was, but no longer is—a Christ taken away, hidden, or otherwise lost. Now, at the very moment of Mary's complaint, the Lord was looking at her and listening to her ! She thought he was the gardener ! How clearly this shows that though we may think we know Christ, yet we know him only in one aspect, and if we happen to see him in any other we actually know nothing about him. This selfsame thing is occurring every day, infinitely to the disadvantage of our Christian education and to the sad disproof of our supposed growth in spiritual perception and sympathy. We only know Christ in one place, in one ritual, in one theology, in one Church. Take him out of these, and he becomes a common man, unknown, and suspected of stealing Christ, stealing himself ! Lord, pity

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our ignorance, and save it from becoming sin, and save thy preachers from the infinite disgrace of speaking to their Lord as a suspected stranger! Probably there is not in all history so striking an illustration of not knowing Christ except in one particular form and guise. Some persons do not know Christ except from the lips of their favourite preachers. Others do not think they have kept Sunday properly unless they have attended a particular place of worship. Some people can only see Christ in church. I would see him and hear him everywhere: in all history, in all communions, in commerce, in art, in all the endeavours and enterprises of civilisation. Ye fools and blind, ye can read the face of the sky—can you not discern the signs of the times?

## Chapter xx. 21-23.

“Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you : as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost : whose soever sins ye remit they are remitted unto them ; and whose soever sins ye retain they are retained.”

### THE CONFESSION AND REMISSION OF SINS.

THE time at which these words were spoken should be considered in attempting to estimate their meaning and their value. Jesus Christ had risen from the dead, and was rapidly drawing to a close his personal ministry upon earth. It was consequently time to disclose the very highest phases of the great work which he came to accomplish. The relations subsisting between the Father and himself, and between himself and the disciples, were now formally specified ; the method by which the Christian economy was to be extended was particularly declared ; and the divine Agent under whose direction that method was to be carried out was directly given by Jesus Christ himself. Now that their Lord was about to ascend to the Father, it was natural that the disciples should wish to be instructed and empowered as to the future. Jesus Christ's personal ministry had been brief ; viewed within a limited range, it had been marked by much failure ; his miracles had been traced to the devil ; his doctrines had been pronounced heretical and blasphemous ; his Cross had been the laughing-stock of a ribald mob. What, then, was the future to be ? Was the future to be a repetition of the past, or by a transition from the bodily to the spiritual was truth to find its way to the innermost heart of man, until that derided Cross should be everywhere confessed as the only way to heaven ? On the termination of his personal ministry Jesus Christ had to provide for the future. He had cast the grain of corn into the ground : how was it to germinate and fructify until the whole world should be covered with

the fruitfulness of harvest? The answer to all such inquiries will be found in the last addresses which Jesus Christ delivered to his disciples. One of those addresses is before us, and we can reach its deep meaning only by the aid of that spirit which it bestows. Holy Spirit, commune with us and teach us all we ought to know!

This address, it must be borne in mind, was delivered to the disciples in their corporate capacity. The disciples, with the exception of Thomas, were assembled on the first day of the week, with closed doors for fear of the Jews, when Jesus presented himself amongst them, and spake the words which are before us. They were not spoken to one disciple, but to all; we have no reason to infer that any one of the disciples received a larger measure of the Holy Spirit than his brethren. It may be assumed, then, that the Holy Ghost was given to the disciples as a body, and to each of them according to his capacity. They were sent forth by Jesus Christ, as Jesus Christ had been sent by the Father. Here is the divine commission of the Church. The Church is of God, not remotely or collaterally, but immediately and positively. The terms of the commission are most precise and emphatic—"As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." The question then arises, How did the Father send Jesus Christ? He himself says, "I came down from heaven not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." This answer comprehends all details; the Church is sent to do God's will, not its own; the Church is not upon its own errand, it is upon God's; it is God's servant, God's representative, God's light in a dark world. If it has proceeded upon the divine law, it is all this to-day; for it will be observed that Jesus Christ lays down the principle of transmission of authority—the Father hath sent me, I send you, and you must send others. If we have any doubt as to the propriety of this enlargement of Jesus Christ's commission, it will be removed by Paul's words to Timothy—"The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." It will be seen that the transmission is not one of doctrine, but that it proceeds upon personal qualification; the men to whom the doctrine is committed are to be "faithful" and "able," and their faithfulness and ability can be

known truly only by the spirit which God has committed to his people. Keeping, however, on the main line laid down by Jesus Christ himself, it appears perfectly plain that the disciples were divinely commissioned; that they were something more than zealous propagandists; that, in short, they held their authority from God. This would be evident even if the commission ended with the words—"As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." To these words, however, is added a special gift—"Receive ye the Holy Ghost." The possession of the Holy Ghost separated and contra-distinguished the disciples from all other men. It was distinctively a Christian gift; it was given to all who received the faith of Jesus Christ,—not confined to an official body, but conferred upon all believers. Events recorded in the Acts of the Apostles leave no doubt upon this point. For example, on the day of Pentecost "the disciples were all with one accord in one place, and were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance." While Peter addresses Cornelius and his household, "The Holy Ghost fell on all them that heard the word," and Peter asked, "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" No words can more clearly show that the gift of the Holy Ghost was not confined to the apostles. Afterwards, when "the apostles and brethren that were in Judæa" contended with Peter about his going to the Gentiles, he answered, "Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?" And on the same subject he afterwards said,—"God which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us, and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith." These passages are enough to show that the Holy Ghost was not confined to the apostles, nor do we anywhere find a hint that the apostles claim to have the Holy Spirit in any degree superior to all believers in Jesus Christ.

So far, there can be no doubt of two things: first, that the Church is divinely commissioned, and second, that its divine commission is attested by the personal presence and power of

the Holy Ghost. We now come to a third point,—“Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.” This power, it would appear, is not separate from the Holy Ghost, but identical with it; apart from the Holy Ghost, it could not have any existence. It was given to the disciples as a body; and though the disciples of course received it as individuals, yet there is no hint that it was to be exercised by particular individuals in any secret or confidential manner; on the other hand, the terms are open, general, ecclesiastical, addressed to the disciples in their plurality. So far as the practice of confession of sin can be ascertained from the inspired writings, it was public, never confidential, except where the sin lay strictly between two individuals. In ancient Israel, for example, confession was made publicly. In the fourth chapter of Leviticus we find the elaborate law respecting sins of ignorance; and all that was to be done by the priest, the congregation, the ruler, or the common people, was to be done openly. In subsequent chapters we find confession and restitution referred to, but not in a single instance is there any trace of secret confidential confession. Even where special cases arose, as between a man and his wife, the priest was referred to by the party who had been aggrieved, not by the party who had done the wrong, and then not for confession, but for the administration of such tests as God himself had provided. Leaving the Old Testament and coming to the baptism of John, we find this statement—“Then went out to him Jerusalem and all Judæa, and all the region round about Jordan, confessing their sins,”—the baptism and the confession being spoken of as equally public. It is not necessary to the elucidation of the text to enter upon a minute discussion of the particular manner of the confession made by the Jews; the point to be noted is that nowhere is secret or confidential confession referred to, or secret absolution permitted. We do find open confession, open penitence, open sacrifice, together with a continual illustration of the principle laid down in the Book of Proverbs—“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.”

The principle of confession is implied in the very terms of the commission. Sins cannot be remitted unless they are known,



and they cannot be known except they are confessed. It will be found, too, in the teaching of Christ and the apostles that confession is always made an indispensable condition of forgiveness. It is so spiritually, it is so individually, it is so ecclesiastically. One passage will show that it is so spiritually: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Observe that the forgiveness depends upon the confession, for "if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Jesus Christ lays down the law of confession between individual and individual most explicitly. He says, "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him." There can be no forgiveness where there is no repentance; and where repentance is expressed, confession is made. Jesus Christ adds, "And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him." Still, repentance, or confession, precedes forgiveness. On another occasion, also, Jesus Christ provided for the treatment of individual offences. He said, "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother." Here the offended party is to give an opportunity of confession,—if he shall hear thee, shall accept thy arguments, respond to thy entreaties, confess his offence, thou hast gained him. These instances elucidate the law which is to govern individual confession and forgiveness. The text now before us relates to a case not provided for in the law relating to spiritual offences or individual trespasses. The disciples were addressed as a body. Jesus Christ distinctly recognised the power of the Church when he made it the ultimate appeal in individual cases: "Tell it unto the Church, but if he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." Paul recognised the same authority; for when a case of discipline arose in the Church at Corinth, he wrote, "For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in

the day of the Lord Jesus." The Church in its corporate capacity ("when ye are gathered together") is here called to the exercise of extreme discipline. Addressing the same Church, the apostle gives, in a subsequent portion of the epistle, another view of Church discipline. "Sufficient to such a man is this punishment which was inflicted of many; so that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him and comfort him, lest perhaps such an one should be swallowed up with over much sorrow," the "sorrow" showing that the man was in a fit spiritual state (amounting to confession) to receive the forgiveness and comfort of the Church.

From the structure of the passage more immediately under consideration, it is inferred that as the commission respecting the remission and retaining of sin was given to the disciples in their public and corporate capacity, so it refers only to sins which relate to the corporate and public aspect and jurisdiction of the Church. This inference is confirmed by passages already cited which provide for individual trespasses, and purely spiritual offences against God.

This construction of the passage illustrates the deeply spiritual nature of the Christian Church. That Church is not a miscellaneous gathering of people; it is a confraternity of souls under the dominion of him who bought them with his blood, and under the personal guidance of the Holy Ghost. No man is truly identified with the Church who is not first identified in all his deepest affections and sympathies with Jesus Christ. He who is so identified with Jesus Christ has received the Holy Ghost; "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" "Ye are the temple of the living God, as God hath said, I will dwell in them and walk in them." He is no longer a common man; he is a new creature; the spirit of wisdom and of a sound mind is put within him. It is true, indeed, that he may grieve or even quench the Holy Spirit, but "if any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy."

Not only does the passage illustrate the deeply spiritual character of the Christian Church, it invests the Church with high spiritual authority. Members of the Church are keepers of

one another; they are called to a common sympathy alike in sorrow and in joy; they are bound to deliver some men to Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme; they are called upon to note others and to have no company with them, that offenders may be ashamed; and they are authorised to reject the man who is "an heretic after the first and second admonition." And Jesus Christ, who in the gift of the Holy Ghost gave them this authority, says that he will ratify their decisions. The Apostle Paul claimed that cases of dispute should be settled "before the saints," and asks, "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?" Let the Church take heed lest its heavenly vocation be exchanged for a technical and worthless formalism. If it is to realise Jesus Christ's idea of being the light of the world, the salt of the earth, and the city on a hill, it must claim all the powers and privileges which its Founder put within its reach.

Let us now look at a few inquiries and objections.

First of all, it may be asked, Where is the Church? The Church is where two or three are gathered together in Christ's name. They indeed are not the whole Church; but in a mystical sense, which unregenerated men cannot appreciate, they are the Church. Where is the sunlight? Is any man at liberty to confine himself in darkness because he cannot admit all the sunlight? The whole earth itself on the longest summer day receives but a small portion of that light; rays of the great glory strike other worlds, and carry morning and noon and summer to distant spheres; what then? The child can still play in the sunshine, and the weakest floweret claim to have been painted by the sun. So the Church is not wholly to be found in this place or in that; there may be a Church at Philadelphia, a Church at Smyrna, a Church at Thyatira, and at Jerusalem, at Antioch, at Laodicea, at Pergamos, at Rome: where two or three are gathered together in Christ's name, Christ himself is, and that union makes the Church.

It may be objected that the Church is fallible, and consequently

its remissions and retentions of sin may be mistaken. True, the Church is fallible; but the Holy Ghost is infallible, and it is the Holy Ghost who directs the Church to remit or retain sins. It is impossible for a man to sin against his neighbour or against the Church without at the same time sinning against God. The true confession, either to the individual or to the Church, is that which comes after confession to God; the truly penitent offender does not come first to the human side of his offence but to the divine side, and having poured out his contrition before God he is impelled to abase himself before the offended individual or the dishonoured Church. But may not an offender make an insincere confession of sin? True; but rules cannot be made for hypocrites, the gracious provision can be made only for sincere men. The Church is bound to deal with each case upon its merits; to make the most searching inquiry; to put all doubtful men to the most exacting tests; and, having satisfied the spirit of wisdom, it must exercise the spirit of righteousness and charity. Jesus Christ says, "Whosoever believeth shall be saved." An insincere man may profess belief,—will he therefore be saved? In all such cases (and they are many in spiritual life) there is necessarily an assumption of conditions. When Jesus Christ says, "Ask and ye shall receive," the implied condition is that he who asks is sincere, and that his petitions are confined within a legitimate bound; when he says, "He that believeth shall be saved," the implied condition is that the man believes with his heart; so when he says, "Whose soever sins ye remit they are remitted," the implied condition is that the offending man has made a candid and contrite confession of his guilt.

"But," it may be urged, "the apostles had the power of discerning spirits; we have not this power." We may exaggerate the gift of discerning spirits as possessed by the apostles. For example, when they wished to ordain one to be a witness with them of the resurrection, they did not discern between Joseph and Matthias; on the contrary, "They prayed and said, Thou Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two thou hast chosen." Will the Church proceed either to remission or retention of sins without prayer? Will it be an

off-handed exercise, making no demand upon the highest sensibilities, no strain upon the very heart of hearts? Will it not, on the contrary, lead the Church to a deeper spiritual abasement, bring it into the most entire sympathy with the pure and merciful spirit of Jesus Christ? and if it must needs fast and pray, even through many days, who dare say that God will not openly smite the liar with vengeance, and give the true penitent a new hope in life?

And even with regard to discerning spirits, dare we say that we have exhausted the measure of the Holy Ghost which Jesus Christ intended his Church to receive? If we surrendered ourselves entirely to God's will; if we knew nothing among men but Jesus Christ and him crucified; if by giving our days to study and our nights to prayer we did really and truly "prove" the God of heaven, who dare say that he would not open the windows of heaven and pour out his Spirit upon all flesh, that their sons and their daughters should prophesy, their old men dream dreams, and their young men see visions? If we were charged with presumption or blasphemy we could answer with Jesus Christ who sent us as he himself was sent of the Father,— "The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works."

No doubt that in the application of these principles some practical difficulties will arise, but not one that cannot be overcome by ordinary sagacity and care. When is it that we pronounce the application of such principles impracticable? Is it when we have been living a most worldly life, or when we have spent much time in fellowship with God? Everything, so far as difficulty is concerned, depends upon the spiritual mood in which we consider the question. When the heart is most deeply conscious of Jesus Christ's excellence; when it gets farthest away from the debasing influences of its worldly associations, and by so much nearer to the great light which spreads eternal morning upon the sphere into which Jesus Christ has entered, then all difficulty is scattered, all doubt is cleared off. This, I am persuaded, is one of the truths which can be apprehended only when the soul is in its very highest moods. It belongs emphatically to

the sphere of inspiration. Jesus Christ placed it there; he breathed, or, as Tyndale translates it, he blew, upon the disciples,—he inspired them, that they might accept and adopt an inspired truth.

There is a touching incident in ancient history which throws light upon several points of this argument. The incident will be found in the first book of the *Anabasis* of Xenophon. Cyrus summoned a council of his fellow-soldiers and friends to confer with them as to a just sentence to be pronounced upon the arch-traitor Orontas. Cyrus told the court-martial that his father had placed Orontas under his command, yet that the traitor had made war upon him but was compelled to succumb, and then he took the hand which Cyrus generously offered him. In the presence of the court-martial, under the cross-examination of Cyrus, Orontas confessed that Cyrus had done him no injury; he further confessed that after this he went over, without any provocation, to the Mysians and depopulated the lands of Cyrus. Orontas further confessed that as soon as he found his own weakness he fled to the altar of Diana, professed repentance, induced Cyrus to think him sincere, and once more succeeded in receiving the confidence of the magnanimous soldier. "What injury, then," said Cyrus, "have I done you, that you should have been induced the third time to betray my confidence?" Orontas denied that Cyrus had done him any injury. "Then," said Cyrus, "you admit that you have done me an unprovoked injury?" "That," said Orontas, "I am under the necessity of confessing." Then the noble Cyrus, with more than soldierly grace, with a dignity indeed that would adorn a Christian, asked him, "Can you, O Orontas, on my forgiving you, be an enemy to my brother and a friend to me?" To which the wretched man, stung by the recollections of his repeated treachery, answered, "Were I to say so, O Cyrus, neither you nor any other person would believe me." Cyrus then put the case to Clearchus, his first general, who gave a verdict of condemnation; the whole camp coincided, even the traitor's relations united in the opinion, and the oft-forgiven but incurable traitor was led forth to death. Truly there is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding. In this narrative we have

a sin committed against the individual, and condoned, upon confession, by the individual; we have also a sin against the army, tried and condemned by the army; and we have an appeal to the deep moral sense that is in all human hearts; and we have that outraged moral sense justly demanding the life of a man who employed repentance as an ally of villainy, and made confession the password to a confidence which he plotted to betray.

It is upon this moral sense that the Holy Ghost descends in all-quickening, enlightening, and sanctifying power. The Church should present the only true example of a refined and thoroughly educated moral sense. Its spirit should be quick in judgment. By profound study of Jesus Christ it should come to hate sin, to know it afar off, yet to have all the pity of the heart turned upon the repentant sinner. It may be, and do, all this! Why does it tarry behind, when it might be the terror of all evil, and the refuge and joy of everything that is good in heaven and on earth?

The result of a careful examination into biblical teaching upon this subject is the acceptance of the following propositions:—

(1) That the power of forgiving sins is divinely bestowed upon the disciples of Jesus Christ in their corporate capacity, and that such power is in harmony with the purpose of Jesus Christ's mediation and the genius of the religious epoch in which we live.

(2) That Jesus Christ taught the doctrine of individual confession to the offended individual, and called upon the offended individual to forgive the offender upon receiving such confession.

(3) That nowhere in the sacred Scriptures is forgiveness promised apart from confession and restitution,—whether the sin lie between man and man, or between man and God.

(4) That nowhere in the sacred Scriptures is there any authority given to any official person, bishop, priest, minister, or deacon, to receive secretly and confidentially a confession of sins.

(5) That the confession of sins is too sacred a duty, involving consequences too many and important, to be reduced to a system and presided over by any single human being.

(6) That all overt sin has a human as well as a divine aspect,

and that the Church, inspired and sanctified by the Holy Ghost, has power to deal with the human aspect, according to the nature of the confession which the sinner may make.

(7) That to shrink from receiving confession of sin, and dealing with it according to its merits, may have the appearance of great reverence and humility, without the reality,—may show that the Church has part in the first baptism only, and not in the baptism of fire.

(8) That to avoid all priestly pretension and destroy the confessional, that infinitely hateful institution which has degraded and oppressed every nation in which it has found an existence, and further to show that all who have the Holy Ghost are kings and priests unto God, the sinner should openly confess his overt sins in the presence of the Church (which could be done by writing, or before such a number of witnesses as the Church itself might appoint), and receive from the Church such comfort as can never be refused to those who truly confess and heartily repent their sins.

We cannot be unaware that other interpretations than that which is now before us have been given, nor should we deny that much deference is due to those who with patient devotion have endeavoured to discover the mind of the Spirit. The most generally received interpretation is, that in preaching the gospel the disciples declared the principles upon which sins were either remitted or retained,—he that believeth shall be saved, he that believeth not shall be damned. This interpretation appears to me to be utterly inadequate; entirely opposed to the grammatical construction of the text; and a weak dilution of the wholesome spirit of its doctrine. Such an interpretation limits the function of the Church to a mere preaching ministry. One of the principal objections urged against the view presented in this discourse may be urged against this interpretation. There may be insincere believers as well as insincere confessors; if you tell a man who insincerely believes the gospel that his sins are remitted, are they therefore remitted? The commission merely says, "he that believeth," not he that truly believeth; yet who would found any argument upon that? It is enough to repeat that terms can be offered only to sincere men; hypocrites can evade or resist



anything. The view suggested in this discourse honours the Church by honouring the Holy Ghost, and gives the sinner to feel the moral influence of men who live constantly in the fellowship of Christ. Of course the Church upon earth has its imperfections; but the imperfections are felt in the preaching of the gospel as much as in any other department of Christian service, so that if they invalidate confession they invalidate the whole ministry. Bad men preach the gospel; is the preaching of the gospel therefore opposed to the will of God? Imperfect men preach the gospel; is there therefore no Christian truth?

Believing that God's gifts increase rather than decrease, that his plan is progressive not retrogressive, I see no reason why the first disciples of the Lord should have greater spiritual privileges than those of the present age; but I do see that if the Church will magnify its office, and show a disposition to possess the best gifts,—if it will seek to know more thoroughly the will of Jesus Christ, it will attain an exaltation compared with which all its former eminence shall be unworthy of remembrance.

## PRAYER.

**ALMIGHTY** God, thou hast surrounded us with mercy upon mercy, countless and precious. What shall we render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards us? Receive our thanksgiving, so far as words can express our gratitude, and cause us to feel the inexpressible thankfulness which never can be uttered in mortal speech,—the thankfulness of our whole heart, expressed in the consecration of our whole life. We are sinners. God be merciful unto us! We come to the Saviour's Cross; we look unto the Lamb of God; we lay our hand upon the one Sacrifice. God be merciful unto us! We cannot justify our ways before God. We have no reasons to set in order before thee to vindicate our conduct wherein it has been contrary to thy most holy Word. We shut our mouth, we lay our hand upon it, we bow ourselves down into the dust. If we might say ought before thee, we would say, Unclean, unclean! But if we confess our sins, thou art faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Undertake that work. Sanctify us, body, soul, and spirit. May our whole nature be pure. May every aspiration, affection, desire, be sanctified by the Holy Ghost. May our whole strength be an offering unto the Lord's service, accepted because offered on the Cross of the Lord Jesus. Thou hast added another week unto our years; thou hast taken another week from our life upon the earth. Help us to live in Christ, then our life cannot be measured by time. May our heart be in Christ's keeping. May our whole life be hidden with Christ in God, then eternity itself can never waste our energy or impair our perfect beauty. Come to us now according to our want. To the hunger of our soul do thou apply the bread of heaven. To the burning, consuming thirst of our love and highest nature do thou apply the water of the river of life. Revive the drooping. May they look up where they cannot stand up. May they feel thy presence and submit to thy rule. Dry the tears of our sorrow. Explain thou to us, if so be we may thereby be stronger in the Lord and in the power of his might; if not, help us to believe in the future, where there is no sorrow because no sin, where there is complete ever-enduring rest. Look upon thy servants who have to face the world day by day,—whose life is often a battle; whose battle is often a failing strife; whose hearts are discouraged, and whose strength is wasted. Give them thy grace, work in them thy peace, and give them hope. Look upon thy servants who seem to carry everything before them; who speak, and it is done; who command, and it stands fast; who dream themselves into success; who put forth the finger, and carry all things as they will. This is a great temptation: who can bear it? Our

success endangers us, if our roots be not fixed in God, if our love and our faith be not established in Jesus Christ. Teach thy servants that all this world can give is but a splendid nothing. Show them that if the whole world were at their feet it would ultimately fall away and leave them without possession and without rest. May we set our affections on things above. May we look at things not seen. May we dominate over time and sense, and even now sit down in the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Amen.

### Chapter xx. 25.

“Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

### DOUBTING THOMAS.

WE call this man “Doubting Thomas”—as if there were only one man who had ever doubted. He does not deserve this speciality of distinction. It is possible that there may be some Christians who think they advance themselves a step in their reputation with God in talking about an old disciple as “Doubting Thomas.” The actual Thomas has become a kind of proverb in the English tongue. There is nothing so remarkable or special about Thomas’s doubt. What did Thomas want? He wanted simply to be put upon a level with the other disciples. And imagine the other disciples getting around this unhappy man and pointing him out as “Doubting Thomas.” They had forgotten all the circumstances of their own experience. That is just what men always do: they forget their own spiritual history, and then they begin to wonder at the doubts and difficulties, the troubles and the conflicts, which gather themselves up in the experience of other men. Jesus came into the midst of the disciples, and “showed unto them his hands and his side.” We do not know whether they made any demand in that direction; the gospel history is elliptical, and it is often wanting in those parentheses which would explain circumstances. Here may be an ellipsis which leaves us in ignorance whether the disciples said, “Show us thy hands and thy feet, and then we will believe.” As a matter of fact, Jesus Christ did show them his hands and his feet; and how do we know but that they had told Thomas, and Thomas may have said, Very well; you say it is thus and so: now, except I do just what you have done, I will not believe. I must put my finger upon the print of the nails, and thrust my

own hand into the side, then I will believe; if I cannot do that I will not believe. What right, then, had these disciples to gather around this one brother, and describe him as "Doubting Thomas"? They themselves had been satisfied by the very thing that he wanted done; they therefore had no right to look upon Thomas as if he were hardhearted or criminally obstinate.

Yet Thomas made a vital mistake. What was the mistake made by this man? It is the mistake of the world. Everybody is making it. The mistake which Thomas made was to lay down the one and only way in which Christ should come to him: "Except . . . I will not believe." That is to say, I must have it my way, not God's way; I must appoint the gate through which the Lord must come into my life, and if he attempt to come by any other way, I will not receive him. If I may stand at that gate and watch it, and keep the key of it, and see the Lord when he comes, and open the gate for him, then I will believe. That is the mistake of the world. We do not allow room for God; we watch him as if he were an enemy; we never allow Providence scope enough. We might be saved in the wildest seas if we would let the ship alone, but we cannot keep our meddling fingers still. We must help; we must eke out Omnipotence. The sea would rock you and nurse you with musical undulation, only you will plunge, you will not lie still. We who were born yesterday, and know nothing, say that the Bible ought to consist of so many books, written at such and such times and by such and such men, and all the pieces should dovetail into one another in such and such a way, or we will not believe. And what does our not believing amount to? Is our infidelity a fist that can smite God's face? Is our infidelity a circumstance worth noting in the development of the universe? A man will say, Except every comma and semicolon written in the Bible be inspired, I will give up the whole thing. What will happen if he gives up the whole thing? Nothing. But thus we magnify ourselves, thus we make a great figure of "I will not believe": there shall be one infidel in the universe unless I can have my own way. This is what men are doing to-day, and are always doing, and this is how they shut out God from their lives; whereas we ought to say, Lord, come in any way thou wilt, all the ways are

thine; come to us through sweet blossoming vernal nature, just opening its young heart to tell us secrets of beauty and secrets of growth and strength; come to us through what is called by man natural theology—forgive the offensive term, for we map thee out into little sections; or come to us through whispered love, or deep conviction, or strange stirring of the soul, or weird figures at midnight, or through a mother's lullaby, or some great song of victory, or through conspicuous events in daily story:—come in thine own way, and may we be found ready when thou dost stand at the door and knock. Men cannot grow up into this great all-conquering faith at once. Pity, therefore, rather than scorn, the men who want God to come along little private roads. It is natural. There is about it a selfishness that may be chastened and sanctified; it is not the worst kind of selfishness: yet there are souls that would like to entertain God with private hospitality, and would not allow others to come and join the banqueting-board but by special invitation or permission. There are those who would keep the Atlantic in their back-garden if they could, just that they might have a sea breeze all to themselves; but the Atlantic is a little too large for that species of accommodation. There are those who would like to lock up theology, keeping it as a private interpretation and a personal possession, and measuring all other people by standards which these private custodians have elected and pronounced authoritative; but theology cannot find room enough for itself in heaven, much less in our strong-boxes of which we keep the keys. Theology fills heaven and the heaven of heavens, and asks, Where is the trust deed that ye have written out at so many pence per folio? Theology is God struggling into words, and the struggle never comes to anything but a struggle.

This would be the one error, then, that Thomas fell into, namely, establishing a private road by which the Lord is to come, and an apparent determination not to see the Lord except he come along that private path. Take care that ye limit not the Holy One of Israel! There are men who come to pastors and say, We do not belong to the Church, we belong to Nature. Should the pastor stand up and rebuke such, as if they had no relation to the kingdom of God? Verily no: say, Who made

Nature? whence did Nature come? what does Nature mean? what is the signification of all its parabolism, its wizardry of flower and bird and song and star and morning and summer? What is the meaning of this eternal procession that has about it the completeness of a circle, and the dignity and weirdness of an uncontrollable and inexplicable miracle? You cannot get out of your Father's grounds. What of the young man who lives always in the garden, and will never come in to the fireside? What of the youth who will always hold confidential intercourse with the gardener but never speak to his father? The fact that there is a house might suggest a tenant; the fact that there is such a house might suggest a God. There are persons who do not delight in our ordinances and institutions, in our rites and ceremonies, and therefore they think themselves exiled from God's great home. Nothing of the kind. Do you really and truly love music? You are not far from the kingdom of God. Would you stop to talk to a flower, to wonder about it, to pat it with the finger of love, to ask it questions addressed to its innermost heart? you are not an infidel. Wherever there is any longing for fuller light, more exquisite beauty, grandeur, profounder harmony amid all the relations of life and duty, there should be a consciousness on the part of others that they who so struggle and wonder, and almost pray, will one day find that the thing they have been really looking for but they did not know it was the Cross. Let us have no more excommunication than can possibly be helped; let the priest choke himself so that he cannot pronounce the words of excommunication; let him strain himself to find redeeming points, and not endeavour to show his priestly cleverness by finding out reasons why men should be exiled and damned.

There are points at which men may demand, legitimately, certain kinds of evidence. For example, it would be legitimate to say, Except I see that Christ can do more than any other man can do, I will not believe. There you assign breadth, you create an occasion worthy the event which you seek to establish. Can Christ do more for men than any other man ever did? If so, is not this man the Son of God? How long will he stay with a man? When does Jesus Christ turn round, saying,

I cannot go any farther with you? When does Jesus Christ say, If you commit one more sin, I will leave you? When does Jesus Christ say, This soul-leprosy is too inveterate for my touch: I can cure very much leprosy, but not of this kind; this is a disease that goes through and through the soul, and I cannot do anything with it, I cannot relieve the sufferer? When? Never! I think men are entitled to say, Except I see that—Christianity produces a higher quality of character than any other religion, I will not believe it. Men have a right to insist upon character being of the very highest quality. Here is the responsibility of Christians; here is the terrible impossible task of representing Christ to other people. Yet people have a right to expect that if Christ be in us there shall be about our character a bloom, a fine quality that cannot be found under any other circumstances. There we all fail, the preacher more than any. What should be the quality of that man who professes to be a temple of the Holy Ghost, and to have Christ dwelling in him? what his temper, his chivalry, his love, his self-sacrifice, his nobleness? There "I the chief of sinners am" each may say. Yet even along that line there is some encouragement, for Christ says if we want to love him; we do love him; if we want to be like him we are like him; if we are struggling we are succeeding; if we are fighting we are winning. It pleaseth the Lord thus by his redeeming love to multiply our little struggles and deeds and purposes into great realities, and to regard beginnings as consummations; such is his love. Were we to be judged by our own character there is no pit deep enough for the best of us, but if we are to be judged by what Christ sees in us, motive within motive, purpose higher than purpose expressed in words, who can tell what his eye sees in our poor souls? By what he sees he judges.

What did Thomas want really and truly? He wanted what everybody must have: Thomas wanted personal contact. Of course he happened to take the very lowest point; the contact which Thomas desired was physical or bodily. But personal contact is larger than can be defined by any one instance. Thomas wanted what we need, I repeat, namely, personal touch. The youngest must know what "contact" means—*con*, together;

*tact*, touching, together. A great grasp is contact; so is a gentle touch, as of the finger-tips, a touch that dare not attempt the larger contact of hug and grasp and assured possession. This we must have in some form. If any have this in a low form, so be it; that is all they can do at present; they may believe in the letter, especially in the letter when it is a capital letter, and almost forces itself upon the dull vision. Some people can believe in the nouns or substantives, and the more striking and aggressive verbs, who cannot read all the little words in between. Let them read what they can; you may be saved by a very few letters, if you get the right hold of them. There is, however, this larger truth that there may be contact of spirit with spirit, soul with soul. Speculation is worthless, historical certainty is worthless, negative opinion is worthless; the only thing that has any value in it is the consciousness of contact with God, with the spirit-world, with the ghostly awful realities of the universe. There be those who have no Bible except the Bible they can carry in their hands; that will do them no good. By-and-by they will want a Bible that their souls will be too small and too weak to carry; meanwhile do not rebuke them, they want the revelation in ink, in visible letter, and they must have it so because it is adapted to their age and to their capacity. By-and-by they will read without reading, they will have a revelation larger than any book can ever be, they will have a consciousness from which God can never be excluded, they will live and move and have their being in God; now they must pray morning, noon, and night; now they cannot pray except they be on their bended knees, and except they close their eyes and fold their hands, and fall into a child's attitude of prayer. So be it; the time will come when they will pray all the day. Have they therefore abandoned form, and scorned rite and ceremony, and poured contempt upon their weaker brethren? Nothing of the kind; they have grown into a larger manhood, they have by the spirit of the indwelling God developed a more sensitive and responsive consciousness.

Christ himself believed in touch. He touched the blind man's eyes. Oh, it was worth being blind to feel that touch! The blind man had the advantage over us in his very blindness. Nor can



we tell whether all infirmity shall not prove to be an advantage by-and-by. We can never know health as the leper knew it; he was cleansed, and his flesh became as the flesh of a little child. We accept our health as a commonplace, but to be redeemed from the very grave and made to feel all nature in every pulse, who can describe the very passion of such health? And so the blind man has been going through the earth without ever seeing it, and the first object he beholds is God. What a contrast is that! What a vision of glory! In that revealed beauty the blankness of a lifetime is forgotten. We, too, believe in touch. The poor woman said—and she spoke for us all—“I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole.”

Sometimes we have personal contact with God without that contact assuming what may be called a theological form. Sometimes it comes to us through great emotions, through new solitudes, through pantings and yearnings we cannot express in words. Why this concern for others? why this pity for those who are in great sorrow? why this sense of victory, this mounting above death and the grave, this shouting of conscious triumph, this almost heaven? What is the meaning of it? It may be the action of God in the soul. Why this holy peace, this deep tranquillity, this profound calm that nothing can ruffle, and which when it speaks says, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea”? The swelling of the ocean shall not cause tumult in our soul, if we live and move and have our being in God.

We cannot have personal contact with Christ without other people knowing it. Once there were some very poor crude unlettered men—men that might have been taken from the fishing boat or even from the plough or from some ordinary avocation of life, and they went before very great magistrates whose fingers were unsullied with labour, and these magistrates looked at them and said, How singular these men are! how rude in outline! what disadvantages they must have undergone! and yet what is

that about them that makes them singular? There is a kind of radiance on all that roughness of exterior: what is it?—“And they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.” To be with Jesus is an education; to be closeted with Christ is a refining process. When Moses came down from the mountain his face was like a sun; he had been with God: and the rude fishermen, with all their roughness, clumsiness, with all their want of pomp and form, had something about them that impressed the magistracy of the day, and the great priests took knowledge of them that there was a refinement not taught in the schools, a singular beauty, a fascination suggestive of the highest spiritual culture. We ask no other distinction, we pant for no greater fame than to be taken knowledge of that we have been with Jesus.

## PRAYER.

OH, thou who art merciful and gracious, full of compassion and long-suffering and tenderness; thou art kind to the unthankful and to the evil! We hasten to thee with our offering of praise, inasmuch as thou hast crowned our life with lovingkindness and tender mercy, and made it beautiful with continual love. We praise thee; we magnify thee; we offer thee the whole strength of our heart. We hasten to thee as men who have been mocked by the promises of the world, and who long to find satisfaction in thine infinite and unspeakable peace. We have been disappointed. The staff has been broken in our hand and pierced us. We mistook the scorpion for an egg. We have hewn unto ourselves cisterns; they are broken cisterns, which can hold no water. Foiled, smitten, wounded, humiliated, and disgraced we come into thy presence, knowing that in God, as revealed in the person and doctrine of Jesus Christ, and made known unto us by the ministry of the Holy Ghost, we can find rest which our souls could not find elsewhere. All our springs are in thee. Thou givest us what we need. They who are in thy presence, who live in thy light and thy love, hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither are subjected to weariness or decay. We would live in God. We would have our being in the Eternal. We would know nothing among men but Jesus, and him crucified; and by the mystery of pain and the mystery of love, symbolised by Christ's Cross, we would endure the trials of the world, and discharge the whole service of life. Meet us as sinners, and pardon us. The blood of Jesus Christ, thy Son, cleanseth from all sin. May we know its cleansing, healing power. We have done the things we ought not to have done; we have withheld the testimony which it became us to deliver; we have often been timid and unfaithful; we have hesitated when we ought to have gone forward; we have compromised where we ought to have died; we have become self-seekers where we ought to have sought the crown of martyrdom; we have kept an unjust balance and an untrue weight; our measure has been false; our word has been untrue; our spirit has been worldly; our very prayers have been selfish. All this we say when we truly know ourselves, as we are revealed to ourselves by the in-dwelling, all-disclosing Spirit. God be merciful unto us sinners, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness! Give us the hearing ear and the understanding heart, the obedient will, the ever-industrious hand in the service of Jesus Christ. When we have done our best to serve our day and generation, and the time of reckoning has come, may we find all our worth in the worthiness of the Lamb, and be accounted fit to sit with him on his throne, because in our degree we have shared the pain and shame of his crucifixion. Amen.

**Chapter xxi. 10-25.**

“Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught. Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken. Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead. So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me. Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me. Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? This is the disciple which testified of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen.”

**A PATHETIC INTERVIEW.**

WE cannot tell what happened at the interview between Jesus Christ and his penitent disciple. We remember how Peter denied his Lord: we have rejoiced to find him reappearing in the sacred story, and we have been made aware that when Peter was given to understand that Jesus was standing upon the shore, he went out to him—he “did cast himself into the sea,” and he was the first to see Jesus, and he saw the Saviour alone. What happened at that interview we shall never know. We do not know the secret interviews which men have with their Lord;

we hear somewhat of their public prayer, but what they say when they are quite alone we may never understand. Blessed be God, there are such interviews, occurring daily, and feeding the soul with grace most secretly; and all that aspect of worship must for ever remain known only to those who take part in the sacred exercise. Yet we have opportunity of drawing inferences so far as this narrative is concerned. One word is uttered by Peter which enables us to penetrate in some permissible degree the interview between Jesus and Simon. That explanatory or suggestive word is "knowest." In the first answer we find this—"Yea, Lord; thou knowest"; in the second answer it returns—"Yea, Lord; thou knowest"; in the third answer it appears again—"Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest." How did Jesus know that Peter loved him? So far as the open history is concerned, the last incident points to Peter's denial of Jesus Christ; but we have not to deal with the open history alone, but with the secret and unreported interview: in that solemn colloquy it was made clear to Jesus Christ that under all the blasphemy there lay an affectionate heart, under all the lapse, and shame, and treason there throbbed an immortal love. So in the speech of men we hear words now and then full of significance; they are to be interpreted in their larger relations. We are surprised when we hear such words, and we try to fit them into the current and open story of the lives of the speakers, and we cannot do so; and then the mind is thrown back upon the fact that the minutest history contains only occasional references, points here and there; the line as it is written is full of lacunæ, great open gaps which we cannot supply: but the words which have surprised us and affected us enable the reader to fill up these vacancies with some degree of intelligibility and adequacy.

How wise was Jesus, Son of man, Son of God! He instantly set the disciples to work: "Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught. Simon Peter went up." It was the very word he wanted. Contemplation was not his forte; to sit still and engage in an exercise of self-introspection—to read the black book of his heart—was not Peter's delight; but to be called to activity, to have something to do, to have all his faculties called into exercise,—that was the medicine he needed for his

heart's healing in that hour of poignant and humiliating memory. We have been in the same condition,—oh for something to do! This perpetual contemplation of life, this looking into it with an analytical vision, this taking it to pieces in order that we may examine its motive and the quality of its fibre, this we cannot endure. Oh that God would call upon us to plunge into the sea, to run across a continent, to carry a message for him to persons thousands of miles away—anything to awaken us out of this contemplative mood; because in service, in energy, we should find healing and comfort, and in the open air we should throw off much of that which now oppresses us with the burden of a mystery.

This work having been done, a very singular incident occurred—“None of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou?” If we may invent a word, we should say there are unaskable questions in human life—questions we dare not ask, and other questions we may not ask, and burning questions to which we know the answer without putting the inquiry; so that the heart is full of dumb questioning. A sacred fear kept the disciples quiet: they knew, and yet they did not know; they were perfectly assured, and yet far away; almost beneath their consciousness there lay a wonder as to the personality of this most distinguished presence. Do we not all know what it is to want to ask a question, and yet to feel the needlessness of asking it because there can be only one answer to the inquiry? We dare not ask, Who made the world? knowing that it was the Lord: it looks so like him; it is as to bulk and range and lustre worthy of him. Even if we dissect it and take up one speck of it we know that only the Lord could have made the microscopic atom, for it is as beautiful as ever the great sun could be, and, indeed, the sun himself only exceeds the atom in mere bulk and size and weight; the atom and the sun are one in quality, in make, in insignificance, in suggestiveness. Sometimes we do ask the question; but why we ask it we cannot explain, because we know all the time that it was the Lord who made it. We dare not ask, Who made man? knowing that it was the Lord. Verily, he looks as if he were God-made! Sometimes he is common enough in his aspect; sometimes he shows that he was **made** of the dust of the ground; but now and again there flames

within him a fire which has never been found in the dust ; now and again there issues from him a tone of which it might be said that it came from heaven. Man is so mysterious, so complicated, altogether so marvellous in his constitution, structure, energy, inspiration, that we feel that it was the Lord that made him. We durst not ask, Who made history ? knowing that it was the Lord. The workers never saw one another ; they were, so to say, carrying on their manufactures in different factories or places of work : one was making part of the machine, and another was making another part of the same machine, and not until long years transpired did the parts come together and begin to show their relation one to another, and to something yet larger than themselves. Were any man to ask for a proof of God's existence, I should refer him to human history. Some one was asked to give a concise proof of the inspiration of the Bible, and he answered, "The Jews." It was a full reply. Who has read the history of the Jews ? So, were any now to ask, "Give us a concise proof of the existence of God," the answer might well be—Human history, not of to-day, or yesterday, or any one day or decade or century, but the whole quantity comprised by the human story, in all its varieties, undulations, in all its transitory aspects and flashing phases, in all its rises, lapses, recoveries. Understand that, then no man durst ask, Who made human history ? knowing that it was the Lord. There is a half-concealed God ; there is a half-disclosed Omnipotence, bright to dazzling at points here and there, and quite clouded almost to concealment in vast sections of its infinity.

How shall we know that it was the Lord ? The answer is in the 13th verse, "Jesus then cometh . . . and giveth." That is the proof. It is an eternal proof. When did Jesus do otherwise than give ? He said of his Father in this very Gospel, "God so loved the world, that he gave." This is the proof of Christ's deity. He is the eternal Giver. He "giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not." He giveth to men in their need ; when the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, he hears them, and he opens a fountain in the sand, or makes the rocks pour water upon the parched ones. Read the history of the blessed Christ of God,

and you will find it is a history of Giving. What did Jesus do in this instance? He performed a miracle of healing. How do we know that it was a miracle of healing that he performed? What was the disease? The disease was the double disease of fatigue and hunger. Why talk of disease as if it were limited to only one manifestation or form of suffering? Disease is a large term; it includes weariness. What ails thee, O thou throbbing, energetic life? and the answer is, Nothing positive, but I am weary. Thy Lord will heal thee. Hunger is a disease. Only Christ can appease it. This is the daily miracle of the world. We look for miracles amongst the diseases which are familiar to us by ghastly names; we speak of "all the ills that flesh is heir to"; and probably there is hardly a man who could not write out a list of ailments or diseases,—but who would put into that list, sorrow of heart, tears unseen, hunger, thirst? Yet it is in that region that Christ performs his most gracious wonders. He heals the hunger that kills, and the weariness that gives sense of exhaustion even in the presence of the tempting and exciting universe. We should need no proofs of Providence if we opened our eyes. Men are always looking in the distance for proofs of God. We have already seen that about the time of our Lord's coming, when it was already announced in the land, people looked far away, as if they were searching the horizon for his figure; and behold a voice was heard saying, "There standeth one among you." Why do we omit the God that is near and distract ourselves by seeking for a God afar off? He is nigh thee, in thee, nearer than ever thy dearest friend could be to thee; he burns in thy life-blood, he glows within thy garments. Find the sacramental bread upon your table; find the wine of God's love in all the succour of daily life.

How wise is Christ, we have said: and is there not a proof of his wisdom in that he first healed the fatigue and hunger of his disciples, and then began the spiritual examinations? "When they had dined, Jesus saith." That is his plan on earth: first heal the hunger of the hearer, then ask him spiritual questions; first show your beneficent regard for his bodily needs, and then begin to address his higher nature. "So when they had dined." The dinner should never end in itself; the meal should open the



way for the Sacrament. After supper he took the same bread and made new meanings of it. So when our daily meal is ended are we to end our thought concerning it, as if we were but animals made to consume? Shall we not after dinner think and inquire, and wonder and pray, and pour out the heart in acknowledgment and love and thankfulness? What questions Christ might have asked! Simon Peter, hast thou repented? Simon Peter, hast thou humbled thyself? Simon Peter, hast thou told the disciples whom thou didst desert that thou art a wicked man? Nothing of that kind was said by the gentle Jesus; he uses the word which is chief in that Christian vocabulary,—“Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?”—a question you might put to a child; the deepest question of all. This was profound, because love carries everything; it is a fire that burns up all the roots; it is a furnace that purges the gold of all its dross; it is an enthusiasm which means prophetic insight, and sympathetic identification with all things pure, true, and lovely. This is the question which ought to be put to men in connection with Church life—*Lovest thou the Son of God?* We are not made theologians. The theologians can be but few in number, as the poets are, and the philosophers, but we can answer the question as to our love. Where there is love there will be no difficulty in the progress of the Christian life: love sees in the darkness, walks on the water, turns the wilderness into a glowing garden burning with flowers that are not consumed; love is cast down, but not destroyed, persecuted but not forsaken, in continual peril and yet in continual security. When there is more love there will be more progress. Love opens the door of every difficulty, and love makes Christian education a daily delight.

This was gracious as well as profound, because it excited hope. We sometimes ask a question, and convey the answer in the very tone of the inquiry, so that the interrogation becomes its own affirmative. Everything depends upon the tone in which a question is asked. Who can tell the music of the inquiry as addressed to Peter, “*Lovest thou me?*” Hidden in that inquiry was the answer—I know what the reply will be, for thy great heart is just a child’s simple honest love. To say to a man, “*Understandest thou what thou readest?*” is to excite the hope

that he may possibly understand it. Lovest thou the Church of the living God? I have seen thee in the sanctuary sometimes: did thy being there signify that in thy poor heart there is some flame of love towards the Father? The very inquiry stirred the spirit into hopefulness. Give a man to understand that you despair of him, and he may despair of himself; but ask him a question which has the effect of opening a door, and he might rise to the inquiry with a new energy and a new confidence.

This was practical as well as gracious and profound, because love is the true qualification for labour. A man cannot labour for Christ if he does not love Christ. It is love that fails, and therefore service goes down. But the heart will not confess this; the heart is fertile in inventions and excuses for the lapses of life. Why do you forsake the sanctuary now? Then will come a list of lies—accursed, unpardonable lies. Why do you not give so liberally now as you used to give? Then will come anything but a confession of the truth. What is the truth?—that love has gone down, the temperature of affection has rushed on its zero way. When we fail in love we cannot attain to service; we cannot reply to Christian appeals; we cannot co-operate with energetic men,—we complain that they are too enthusiastic, and wish to go too quickly for us, and we begin to think that something of another kind is needed: and thus we lie, not unto man, but unto God. Could we say, “Our love has changed: we do not love the Cross as we did, we are not drawn towards the Son of God as we once were,” we should have at least a statement made credible by its obvious truth. Peter gave a great heart-answer at the last, “Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee,” and his voice trembled when he said this. It was a noble voice, was Peter’s, accustomed to speak out in the open sea, and to give orders whilst the wind was raging; but when this inquiry touched his heart all that great voice shrank into a tearful whisper, and he said, “Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.” Right away down in the soul there is a true affection for thee; outwardly there are many things to disprove my affection, but in the centre and the heart of things there is a real loyalty to thee which I never felt to another. Christ, I love thee! Until we get a heart-testimony

like that, the Church will hesitate and flounder, will aim at nothing, and will beat the air.

Now then, said Christ, If you love me "feed my lambs," "feed my sheep," and again, "feed my sheep." They were all, too, the little sheep; even the sheep were lambs, and the lambs were lambkins; the terms are diminutive, so that we are taken down to the very first germs of love as well as of life. We need the love if we have to do the work; we cannot keep up the process of feeding, or succour, or education, or consolation, unless the love is in excess of the service. A man cannot go beyond his inspiration. He may attempt to do so, he may appear to do so; but by his languor, his reluctance, his half-heartedness, we should know that the life has gone out of him and all that is left is the flutter of an expiring pulse. And Jesus said, This feeding of the lambs, O Simon Peter, is only preparation for another form of service—thou shalt have thy love tested. There is a cross in every life, a place of crucifixion on every path: our love shall not be allowed to go forth merely as a verbal testimony, it shall be crucified, head downwards; it shall be tried as by fire.

John drops his pen here; he says, Many other things did Jesus do, but these can never be told—"If they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written." What a beautiful climax! Yet without any rhetorical artifice. What is the climax?—An *et cetera*. No artist could have ended with more consummate skill. We expect the rhetorician to climb the lofty steep and wave his triumphant flag upon the summit. But John, whose rhetoric was one of love, said, Now that I read what I have written I feel that I have written nothing worthy of the occasion; as I begin to think, the vision begins to grow. Miracle upon miracle did Jesus do of which no record is to be found; yea, if all he did were written the world itself could hardly contain the literature. That is true, because the world could not contain himself; he overflowed the empty space. It is the experience of all who follow Jesus that he never can be fully told. A man shall undertake to read the Bible through from end to end, and in proportion as he reads it minutely, will he say at the close, Let us begin again, for we have not begun at all.

## INDEX.

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- ABRAHAM**, the children of, 160; abuse of the name of, 161; the God of, 195.
- Adam**, fashioned out of the dust, 169.
- Affliction**, the darkness of, 261.
- Afterwards**, a mocking word, 311; disliked by children, *ib.*; greater than now, 312.
- Ambition**, what should be the Christian's, 391.
- Annotated chapters** (xiii. 18-35), 290; (xx. 1-18), 416.
- Astronomer**, speech of the, 135.
- Atonement**, the need of the, 313; cannot be explained, *ib.*
- BARNABAS**, a rousing preacher, 322.
- Baxter**, Richard, affliction of, 63.
- Beatitudes**, the, spoken by Jesus Christ, 399.
- Bethesda**, the porches at, 58; a diseased folk at, 59.
- Bible**, assailants of the, 50; how to be read, 51; its own vindicator, 90; the declarations of the, 409.
- Bitterness**, a tale of, 67.
- Blasphemy**, the highest point of, 9; an impertinent, 80.
- Blessings**, possibility of forgetting, 74; in unexpected ways, 346.
- Blind man**, declaration of the, 98; cure of the, 204.
- Blindness**, instances recorded in the New Testament, 208.
- Bread**, need of intellectual, 121.
- Bread and water**, excellence of, 119.
- Broken heart**, knowledge of the, 148.
- CALVARY**, Christ seen only on, 256; a place called, 414; in Leviticus, 415.
- Cana**, miracle at, 55.
- Certain Greeks**, 249; their interview with Philip, 250.
- Children**, little, how treated by Jesus Christ, 116; great theologians, 151; the type of heaven, 270.
- Christ**, how he may be lifted up, 115; the bread, 119; the water given by, *ib.*; the morning star, 140; sympathy of, 144; doctrine of, 149; a call to, 189; the sayings of, 191; the Three in One, 222; the Healer and Friend, 227; the infinite embrace of, 233; courage of, 246; the Light of the world, 263; why men do not confess him, 267; the example of, 274; washes his disciples' feet, 276, *et seq.*; the peace of, 325; the gifts of, *ib.*; the commands of, 328; unity in, 375; the touch of, 445. *See* JESUS CHRIST.
- Christ and Christians**, the difference between, 366.
- Christian believer**, position and destiny of the, 331.
- Christian culture**, no end to, 323.
- Christian students**, encouragement to, 27.
- Christianity**, what is, 287.
- Christians**, the engagements of, 143; the light of the world, 262.
- Church**, the weakness and vanity of the, 139; programme of the, 211 transformed by Christ, 247.
- Churches**, Christ to be found in all, 423.

- Cleanliness, a religious duty, 73.  
 Confession of sin, the doctrine discussed, 426.  
 Come, meaning of the word, 81.  
 Comets, divine messengers, 136.  
 Comfortless, the proper translation of the word, 324.  
 Committees, often cowards, 244.  
 Controversy, a means of education, 422.  
 Conversion, need of, 32.  
 Cooks, their arts and tricks, 120.  
 Covenanters, convictions of, 162.  
 Crucify, the cry of the rabble, 406.  
 Crumbs, no need for wasting, 103.  
 Cures, indisputable, 207.
- DARKNESS, the love of, 239; a, which may be feared, 265.  
 Death, not to be feared, 53; the servant of heaven, 241; the darkness of, 263; preparation for, 263.  
 Disbelief, difficulties of, 127.  
 Distress, a family in, 227.  
 Drink, the result of, 157.
- ENGLISH language, beautiful things in the, 98.  
 Evil, origin of, cannot be explained, 209.  
 Experience, a costly teacher, 147.
- FALCONS, a fable concerning, 198.  
 Fatherhood, narrow conceptions of, 169.  
 Flesh, who are the children of the, 172.  
 Force, its place in the gospel, 110; Christ not a King by, *ib.*; its powerlessness in high matters, 112.  
 Foreign missions, the history of, 391.  
 Fragments, gathering of the, 101.  
 Friend of Christ, the honour of being the, 328.
- God, within whisper-reach, 11; cannot be outwitted, 106; not seen by man, 318; revealed by Jesus Christ, *ib.*; nearness of, 336.  
 Gospel, private ministry of the, 16.
- HELPLESSNESS, a state of, 66.  
 Holy Ghost, the ministry of, 27; Christ's promise of the, 353; ministry of the, 357; need of the enlightenment of, 360; the revealer of sin, 363; the minister of Christ, 369; the guide of the church, 431.  
 Holy Grail, the quest of the, 344.  
 Human society, God's view of, 156.  
 Hypocrisy, how made, 213.
- I AM THAT I AM, the mysterious name, 182.  
 "If," the frequency of the word in chapter ix.; the, of human hope, 239.  
 Innocent blood, the betrayal of, 303.  
 Interview, a pathetic, 449.  
 Iscariot. *See* JUDAS ISCARIOT.  
 Israel, a master of, 46. *See* NICODEMUS.
- JESUS CHRIST, an all-sufficient teacher, 24; went about doing good, 69, 73; the hope of the lost man, 71; the Light of the world, 77; his appeal on his own behalf, 89; not a popular preacher, 165; claims of, 175; the works of, 178; the dominant feeling of, 180; the teaching of, 187; working on the Sabbath, 202; authority of, 210; his interview with certain Greeks, 253; where he can be seen, 256; the practice and doctrine of, 259; God manifest in the flesh, 299; betrayed daily, 301; the revealer of the Father, 318; the sufferings of, 319; the pastoral speech of, 321; the discourses of, 365 *n.*; the sublime prayer of, *ib.*; his divine descent, 370; the scourging of, 397; flagellated to-day, 403. *See* CHRIST.
- Jews, the cruel purpose of the, 138; how they marvelled at Jesus, 146; Pilate's words to the, 406.  
 John, the apostle, his parentage, 1 *n.*  
 John the Baptist, his record, 6; his preaching, 7, 13; what he said of himself, 9; a burning and a shining

- light, 78, 86; no miracles done by, 225.
- Judas Iscariot, the apostle and betrayer, 292; his repentance, 302; suicide of, 304; the fate of, 305; lessons from the life of, 307.
- Judas, many forms of, 142.
- LAZARUS, sickness of, 228.
- Letters, religion not learned by, 148.
- Life of Christ, necessity for such a work, 175.
- Light, walking in the, 257.
- Loneliness, much of, in society, 66; sadness of, 71.
- Lord's Table, Dean Stanley quoted, as to the, 381.
- Love, the only interpreter of God, 337; the realising power of, 350.
- MARTHA, characteristics of, 233, 235.
- Mary, the speech of, 236.
- Mary and Martha, their love to the Saviour, 235.
- Memory, the failure of, 260.
- Methodists, the work of, 163.
- Ministers, the joy of, 23; the divine call of, 30; qualifications of, 88.
- Miracles, a subject of indifference to Jesus Christ, 33; the value of, 199; life without, 225; none done by John the Baptist, *ib.*
- Missionary, noble work of the, 392.
- Moderation, a command of God, 73.
- Mourners, a word to, 355.
- NATHANAEL, his speech to Philip, 18; his decision concerning Jesus Christ, 23.
- New Testament, the supreme characteristic of the, 326.
- Nicodemus, his interview with Jesus Christ, 29; admission of, 33, 37; his difficulties, 36; a master of Israel, 46; speech of, 93.
- Night, Nicodemus went to Jesus by, 44.
- Nobleman's son, healing of the, 55.
- OPINION, a division of, 217.
- Opponents of Christianity, what they have to overthrow, 97.
- Overcome, meaning of the word, 258.
- PAIN, selfishness of, 63.
- Peter, the impatience of, 312; a child-man, *ib.*; at the Last Supper, 317 *n.*; the denials of, 317 *n.*; the repentance of, *ib.*
- Picture, a vivid, 101.
- Pilate, the perplexity of, 384; the victim of popular clamour, 398; his hesitancy and instability, 406.
- Policy, a shortsighted, 268.
- Political reforms, need of, 389, 396.
- Politicians, a word to, 389.
- Popularity, the right sort of, 220.
- Prayers, 45, 54, 65, 83, 91, 101, 108, 118, 138, 153, 168, 175, 207, 216, 248, 257, 266, 282, 289, 310, 419, 439, 448.
- Prejudice, a caution concerning, 19.
- Prepared place, the, 329.
- Public worship, excuses for neglecting, 411.
- Pulpit, dangers of the, 126.
- QUINTILIAN, the rules of, 88.
- REGENERATION, the work of God, 4; mystery of, 40, 44; signs of, 42; the compliment of, 43.
- Religion, a definition of, 129.
- Remission of sin, the doctrine of, 426.
- Riches, the uncertainty of, 261.
- Roman law, punishment under the, 397.
- SABBATH, Jesus working on the, 202.
- Sacrifice, the eloquence of, 144.
- Scourgers of Jesus, who are the, 403.
- Scourging Jesus. *See* JESUS CHRIST.
- Scripture, what it saith, 409.
- Scriptures, erring for want of knowledge of, 161.
- Second birth, doctrine of, 36; how the subject should be approached, 39.

- Selfishness, its influence in the world, 68.
- Servants and friends of Christ, the relationship of, 327.
- Shepherd, Jesus, the good, 218; the only true, 367.
- Simon Peter. *See* PETER.
- Simplicity, a picture of, 232.
- Sin, the subtle work of, 64; conviction of, 356; confession of, 361; the burden of, 363.
- Sinner or Saviour? 199.
- Sins, confession and remission of, 426.
- Smyrna, the church at, 432.
- Spiders, the barricades of, 137.
- Spiritual, the, superior to the material, 349.
- Spiritual education, the difficulty of conducting, 359.
- Spiritual insight, necessity of, 34.
- Spiritual life, the high possibilities of the, 336.
- Syrophœnician woman, her interview with Jesus, 255.
- TEMPTER, how to meet the, 131.
- Testimonials, their use and value, 85.
- Thomas, the doubting apostle, 440.
- Trials, blessings through the medium of, 351.
- UNFATHERLY, possibility of being, 170
- Unity in Christ, 375.
- VINE, Christ the true, 183, 326.
- WASHING disciples' feet, 276, 283, 317 *u.*, 329.
- "Waste not, want not," the proverb of the economist, 102.
- Water of life, Christ the, 184.
- Waters, waiting for the moving of the, 60.
- Widow, the two mites of the, 271.
- Wild waves, what they say, 100.
- Wine at Cana, miracle of the, 105.
- Woman, the convicted, 154.
- Works, an appeal to, 86.
- World, the many kingdoms of the, 386.

END OF VOL. XXII

*John 1:1*