

# THE PEOPLE'S BIBLE:

*DISCOURSES UPON HOLY SCRIPTURE.*

[v. 23]



BY

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APOSTOLIC LIFE,

*AS REVEALED IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.*

VOLUME I.

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TO WHOM

MY MINISTRY OWES SO MUCH OF ITS

BEST INFLUENCE.

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## P R E F A C E.

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**T**HIS study of *Apostolic Life* is intended as a sequel to the author's *Inner Life of Christ*, as revealed in the Gospel of Matthew.

A wonderful record, truly, is the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles. Here, all is movement, progress, controversy, and spiritual conquest; the church rears its marvellous form amidst the tumults of the world's most exciting history; and names rise almost visibly out of social obscurity into the noblest fame known to human society. The book may be compared very variously, but not the least pertinently to a battle-field, in which the contest lies between a feebleness socially contemptible, and a strength socially imperial and invincible. How the battle proceeds, the book itself must tell. This is the book which modern church-builders should specially and profoundly study, if they would work in harmony with the purpose of Him who is the sure and only Corner-stone. By such study they will come back to the truth that the Christian Church is not a man-built castle, grand with the petty vanity of mortal ambition, and resonant with the discord of rival successes, but a house not made with hands, a temple set up in quietness, but so set up that it can never be thrown down. Men may build their showy ecclesiasticisms and boast loudly of statistical position, and in the very act of apparent worship may profane the sanctuary of God. That the church must have a visible representation no student of the Acts of the Apostles can deny; neither



can it be denied, that visibleness, however broad and lustrous, cannot represent the whole secret—the inner and infinite life—of Christ's blood-bought and inspired church. That church must always be the mystery of human association, and the truest seal of human brotherhood. The church is, in my view, much larger than many persons seem to suppose. In this respect, as in all others, God's thought is higher than ours, so high that no wordy argument can persuade the minds that doubt it, yet so certain that the issue, with all its glory, must be left to the Providence which we conceal by the name of *Time*.

I cannot be too thankful that in working out my ministry I was led to undertake this sacred study, for here I have found all the excitement of historic action combined with all the solemn revelation of spiritual doctrine, and have thus been enabled to awaken and gratify the attention of many who could not have been reached by one or other of these characteristics alone. The popular mind is not strongly disposed towards doctrinal study, and is perhaps less so to-day than ever, hence the supreme advantage of introducing it in connexion with the development of a history often rising into the sublimest passion in its heroism and sacrifice. Whilst thus endeavoring to awaken interest in Christian doctrine, I have made no attempt to find a formal theology in apostolic preaching. No such theology is there to be found. The supposed finding of it *anywhere* has been the heaviest Cross which the Risen Christ has had to carry, and the greatest hindrance to the extension of His reign. Theology is as indefinable as *Life*. It admits of multitudinous expression, and like *Inspiration* itself must take the colour of the individual soul that receives it. As Theology deals with the *Infinite* it cannot admit of complete and final statement in *words*. There is always a nameless quantity *beyond*. An infinite theology should create an infinite *charity*, yet probably there is less charity in theology than in any other subject of human thought,

a fact which involves the greatest contradiction possible in human action. It appears to me, with increasing distinctness, that the only radical cure for this mischief is a close study of Apostolic methods and a zealous return to their practice. The Apostles preached Jesus and the Resurrection. What need have we to preach more? What more, indeed, is it possible for any man to preach? Closely considered, all that is noblest in prophecy, all that is deepest in history, all that is purest in morals, is involved in the topic—JESUS AND THE RESURRECTION! By these facts *themselves*, and not by any *interpretation* of them are the souls of men to be saved. We are bewildered by interpretations. The reason is that interpretations return upon themselves, and by a kind of self-consciousness are always seeking to amend and refine their own expression. The sophism which underlies all this formal and standard theology is—*Surely it is possible to say in words what we believe in thought.* No! Not where the subject thought about is itself *infinite*. We can offer *suggestions*; we can point out *beginnings*; we can compare one aspect of human consciousness with another; but beyond this we cannot move, because as no arm can reach the horizon, so no word can embrace and symbolize the immeasurable circumference of Truth. Are we to be left then, so to say, at the mercy of “suggestions” and “beginnings”? Certainly not. “Jesus and the Resurrection” are not suggestions, they are *Facts*, and on those facts the church stands as upon a foundation of imperishable rock. Of course, there are minds so constituted as to find themselves unable to resist such inquiries, as *What do you believe about Jesus? What do you believe about the Resurrection?* Such inquiries are supposed to lead to an *enlightened* theology and an *intelligent* faith. Let us take care lest an “intelligent faith” become the worst type of self-trustful rationalism, by drawing the whole emphasis into the word “intelligent” and depleting the word “faith” of its grace and force. To be saved by *intelligent* faith, is to be saved by *works*.

Why should not intelligence stop at the *facts*, and faith go forward, as it alone can go, into mysterious and inspiring communion with God? JESUS is a greater term than any *definition* of Jesus ; so with Resurrection, so with Atonement, so with Faith, so with every word that points towards the secret of God. When this truth is recognized there will be a great coming together of Christian thinkers, and a general lowering of standards which human hands have impiously erected.

A writer, now deceased, held in the highest reputation by all sections of the Evangelical Church, said to me, "How do you account for it that whilst the age is insisting upon the greatest definiteness and precision in science, it is becoming more and more indefinite in theology?" I did not feel the difficulty of the question then, nor do I feel it now. The two things are not to be compared. The universe is measurable,—its Creator is immeasurable : *that* is the reason of the supposed indefiniteness of theological thought and expression. I say *supposed* indefiniteness, for it may not be real. It is the indefiniteness of amazement, not the indefiniteness of doubt. The thing thought about is so much larger than was at first suspected, that words are felt to be unequal to the task of definition. The man who receives a legacy of ten pounds without doubt or misgiving, might hesitate to believe that a million pounds had been bequeathed to him. The magnificence of the bequest almost paralyzes his faith. What wonder? Is it not also the same with divine things? Divine revelation may be the measure of human indefiniteness, and that indefiniteness may bring with it the greatest of all prayers—"Lord increase our FAITH,"—that is to say, "Thy revelation is so much larger than our capacity, it shines upon us like heaven above heaven, radiant with glory unimagined, rising to intolerableness of burning splendour, that we can bear it only in proportion to the enlargement of our faith : Lord, we believe, help Thou our unbelief : Lord,

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increase our faith!" It is no mean gift that is offered. It is INCARNATION, God with us: RESURRECTION, Life abounding over death: ATONEMENT, Forgiveness made possible: INSPIRATION, Material words turned to spiritual uses: IMMORTALITY, The completion of the divine purpose! Let us now turn to the *Acts of the Apostles*, and see whether it be not so.

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THE CITY TEMPLE,  
Nov. 1st, 1882.

## THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

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1. In the title the Greek MSS. present considerable variations, as for example—"Acts of the Apostles;" "Acts of all the Apostles;" "Acts of the Holy Apostles;" sometimes the author's name is given, in one instance thus—"Written by the Holy and Illustrious Luke, Apostle and Evangelist." Chrysostom called it "The Book, the Demonstration of the Resurrection."

2. The book is in no sense a history of the Apostles *as a body*. The names of the eleven occur but once. They are mentioned collectively eight times. St. John appears in three instances only.

3. The history begins at Jerusalem and ends at Rome. At the beginning the Church was but a Jewish sect, numbering 120 persons; it ends by breaking down every barrier, and including every nation.

4. The writing of the book may be referred to the 70th or 80th year of the first Christian century.

5. In the book there are seven parts:—

(a) Pentecost, with the events preceding it	Ch. i., ii.
(b) The acts in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, among the CIRCUMCISED . . . . .	" iii.—ix., xii.
(c) The acts in Cæsarea, and the admission of the Gentiles . . . . .	" x., xi.
(d) The first journey of Barnabas and Saul among the Gentiles . . . . .	" xiii., xiv.
(e) The deputation sent, and the council of Jerusalem as to the Jews and Gentiles being on the same footing . . . . .	" xv.
(f) The second journey of Paul . . . . .	" xvi.—xix.
(g) The third journey as far as to Rome . . . . .	" xix.—xxviii.

# APOSTOLIC LIFE;

*AS DELINEATED IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.*

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## I.

### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou hast great charges against us, and we have no answer to the accusation which thou dost make. We are rebels and hard of heart. Though thou hast left our Zion desolate, and burned our cities with fire, the spirit of unbelief is still triumphant within us. Behold it is not in thy thunder and lightning to touch this inner mischief: thou canst not bring us to thyself by punishment: hell saith "It is not in me to save." Therefore hast thou come to us by another and better way, even by the way of redeeming love, by the sacred way of the cross, and of the blood of Jesus Christ, thy Son, and of all the ministry which is embodied in his sweet name.

Thou dost love the world: the world is baptized with tears from heaven, thine heart doth go out after the world, and thou dost yearn to find it. It is thy world, thou dost not cast it off because of its sins, thou dost the rather draw nearer to it with some fonder love. There is joy in the presence of thine angels over a repentant world more than over all the firmament of the unfallen stars. Thou dost cause all wrath to praise thee, and out of sin, as out of a root, wilt thou bring some good that we cannot now foretell. God is all in all—to thy power there is no limit, thy mercy endureth for ever, thy compassions are newer than the morning, softer and brighter than the dew. Thy mercies fail not, and the night is written all over with the stars of thy promises. Thou art a great God and righteous and in thee is no love of sin—thou dost hate it with a perfect hatred, and yet toward the sinner thou dost come out of thy pavilion of eternity with all utterances of love and proofs of mercy, and thy cry is towards the children of men.

Give us understanding of these things, we humbly pray thee, that we may thus be led up to the mystery of the cross. In the cross thou hast given thy last and highest proof of love. Last of all thou didst send thy Son: thou hast none other now to send, all other messengers are dumb

after the utterance of the eloquence of his love. May we know that the cross was set up for sin, not for our sin only, but for the sin of the whole world, and therefore is as manifold in its mystery as is the sin of all the ages. We rejoice that the way to the cross is open : thou hast set back the gate, thou hast written thy welcomes upon the cross itself, and thou wilt forgive all who pray for pardon. For that sweet word we bless thee : it conquers death, it fills up the void of the grave, it brings the light about us when sevenfold night would distress us with its darkness. Open thou the gate of heaven daily, and say unto each of us, " Thy sins, which are many, are all forgiven thee." This forgiveness we have in Christ, and through Christ and for Christ's sake alone, and because he ever liveth to make intercession for us, we shall be saved to the uttermost.

Thou knowest our heart's complaint, the distress of our life is not hidden from thee, the sighing of our spirit is heard in heaven : have mercy upon us, O God, yea, have mercy upon us, so that where sin aboundeth, grace may much more abound, where accusation doth pierce the heart, there may be a great healing and a perfect comforting of grace. Let thy truth shine upon the understanding, let thy love speak daily to the heart, let all the comforting of thy blessed angels be ministered unto us mile by mile of life's dreary walk, and at the last may we find the beginning, may death be but another phase of life, and as we sink below the horizon of time, may it be to rise upon the infinite horizon of eternity.

Speak comfortably unto us, for we are but bruised reeds ; thunder not against us with thy great power or thou wilt utterly take us away ; urge not against us thy strength, for we are so weak, but comfort us, lure us, draw us to thyself, with the cords of love and with the bands of a man, and may we, thus treated as feeble creatures and sinners divested of strength, find our rest in the heart of God.

Bless the friends who are now at home in this church—bless the stranger within our gates, regard the mocking man and subdue him into reverence, disabuse the prejudiced mind and bring it into holy attention to the spirit of the sanctuary. Release those who are burdened and heavy laden because of tormenting recollections and oppressive accusations. Grant unto us all the spirit of faith, the desire to see more deeply into thy truth, and whilst we are waiting may we know this to be none other than one of the days of the Son of man upon the earth, bright with heaven's own light, glad with music falling from the upper spheres, to make us know the meaning and the mystery of perfect joy. Amen.

### Acts i. 1-9.

1. The former treatise [*λογος*, word or discourse] have I made, O Theophilus [Luke i. 3] of all that Jesus began both to do and teach [Luke xxiv. 19].

2. Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the

Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen :

3. To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion [literally, after he had suffered] by many infallible [there is no word in the Greek answering to infallible] proofs, being seen of them forty days [the only passage which gives the time between the Resurrection and the Ascension] and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God [the whole Christian dispensation] :

4. And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.

5. For John truly baptized with water ; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

6. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel ? [More literally, Art thou restoring ?]

7. And he said unto them, It is not for you [your part] to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power [appointed by his own authority].

8. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you : and ye shall be witnesses unto me [the key-note of the whole book] both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

9. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up ; and a cloud received him out of their sight [a circumstance not recorded by Matthew or John].

## THE BEGINNING OF APOSTOLICITY.

IT is supposed that the man who wrote this record of the Acts of the Apostles was the author of the third gospel—Luke. It would appear as if the gospel and this record also were made rather as *private* memoranda than written as public documents. This would seem to be addressed to one man for his particular instruction in Christian doctrine and movement. It is but another proof that this is God's way of making himself known to the children of men. He speaks to *individuals*. He does not address the great seething throng, but he calls a man aside and puts the mystery of the divine purpose into that man's heart, and from an individual centre there goes out a glowing warmth, that fills the whole earth with its gracious ardour. God made *Adam*, God called *Abram*, God selected *Mary* to be the virgin-mother ; all through and through history God has called out the particular



*individual*, the one person, and has started his kingdom oftentimes from very small and insignificant beginnings.

But great letters cannot be kept private : where there is anything in a letter it burns its way out. There are some letters that *must* be published, though they were never meant for publication. They exercise a secret and wonderful power over the receiver, and he says the whole world must be taken into this confidence, for though I have received the communication as addressed to myself alone, it is so good that to keep it back from others would amount to practical felony.

We cannot hide *gospels* permanently. What is *in* a letter determines that letter's fortune : what is in a book and not what is said about a book, determines the book's fate in the long run. Though it may be a hundred years, yet it will come up and assert its proper place in literature and command its proper degree of the world's attention. Luke wrote a long account of Christ's ministry to *Theophilus*, and the whole world has Luke's narrative in its hand to-day ! So Luke undertook further to write the Acts of the Apostles to this same man (beloved of God, and loving God as his name implies), and to-day the Acts of the Apostles is a document read in every school-house, perused by all students of church history, and in the Acts of the Apostles are the beginnings and the fundamentals of some of the most extraordinary and influential commonwealths that have ever claimed the attention and the homage of the human intellect and the Christian heart.

With a hand so skilful as not to require the touch of mechanical education, Luke divides the great life into two expressive and all-inclusive portions. He says he has written of all that Jesus began both to *DO* and *TEACH*. Jesus Christ's life is divided into *action* and *doctrine*, miracles and truth, marvellous signs and more marvellous revelations. All Christian life admits of precisely the same division. If we *do*, but fail to *teach*, we shall oftentimes be but barren and unanswerable puzzles to those who look on. If we *teach*, and fail to *do*, we may bring upon ourselves the just imputation of being theorists and fanatics, at the best devotional sentimentalists who live in sighing and aspiration and wordy doctrine, but have no bone, sinew or force wherewith to encounter all the challenges of this earthly existence.

And yet Jesus Christ only *began*. God always *begins*. There •

✓ can be no *ending* in anything that God does. Though it may appear to end in itself, yet itself is related to some other and broader self, and so the continuity rolls on, in ever-augmenting accretion and proportion, so that all God's creations are but *beginnings*. There are no *conclusions* in truth; there may be resting-places, a peculiar and practical punctuation of statement, so that we may take time to turn into beneficent action that which has been stated in revealing terms—but the Book is never closed, God's hand never wrote the word *finis*: though the Bible be, in point of paper and print, a measurable quantity, it opens a *revelation* that recedes from us as the horizon recedes from the hands that would grasp it.

So then life becomes a new thing from this standpoint. Men talk about *formulating* Christian truth: from my point of view you might as well attempt to formulate the light, or to formulate the atmosphere. You cannot formulate, with an adequacy, or any approach to exhaustiveness, quantities that are *infinite*. There are those who tell us that we have organized geology, organized botany, organized astronomy, therefore why not have organized *theology*? The answer is simple, sufficient and final, because geology, botany, astronomy, though great and dazzling terms in many of their phases and applications, represent finite and therefore *measurable* quantities, whereas, theology represents infinite and therefore immeasurable realities. We may have fifty sciences of theology: we can have but one science of botany, geology, or astronomy: it will in every instance grow up into a perfect statement, because all the facts are ascertainable, and all the results are stateable in words—but we have a Roman Catholic theology, and a Protestant theology, and Protestant theology is divided into a hundred sub-theologies, showing us that men have been attempting the *impossible*, and showing us too, thank God, that we are not saved by any *theory* of truth, but by the *truth itself*, not by any *theory* of atonement only, but by the mystery of the cross, realisable only by the penitent and believing heart.

We can *begin* a theology. In beginning a theology we shall do well, provided that we never mistake beginnings for endings. To have to deal with infinite quantities should challenge our noblest intellectual ambition, and yet should chasten us with the severest moral discipline. We are permitted to suggest, to read together,

to meet for common study and fellowship in divine inquiry, and whilst we are communing with one another and with the common Spirit of truth, our hearts will burn within us, and we shall know that we have reached the truth by the degree of sacred ardour which glows in our thankful hearts. As to verbal *statements*, we may never agree : one man wants one set of words, and another man says the words must all be enlarged, elevated, and glorified ; such poor syllables as these will never do. The man who talks so is perfectly right ; words have not yet overtaken thoughts ; the action of the *mind* is infinitely in advance of the action or the power of the *tongue*. We *know* always more than we can *tell* : when we have uttered the completest sentence which it is in our power to formulate and express, we know that back in the mind and the heart are things we have not put into that sentence, because no medium of communication is exquisite enough, in its function and power, to express what we want to say in exhaustion of the meaning which makes our hearts glow.

So then we may well be *charitable* one with another. If Jesus only *began* both to do and to teach, we can only do the same, and according to the measure of inspiration he may grant. I enlarge this word *began* in this sentence into more than its merely mechanical meaning : perchance by somewhat of an accommodation I may seize the suggestion of this wondrous word, and if I happen to draw some of you from stubborn conclusions, so as to give you to see they are only feeble *beginnings*, though I may have impoverished you on the one hand, I ought to have stimulated you on the other. No man has the *whole* truth. The Book itself is not a full grown garden, it is a seed-house, a storehouse of roots. We have to plant the root, sow the seed, and look upon the wondrous issue of fruitfulness and beauty. "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing."

We are all *beginners*. The old grey-haired student lifts up his wrinkled brow from the glowing page and says, "I have hardly *begun* it." Who then are we, fifty years his juniors, who should start up and say, "We have reached the goal, there is nothing beyond, we have put out our staff and struck the final granite?" Let us "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." Let us not count ourselves to have attained, or to be

already perfect, but let us press forward towards the mark for the prize of our high calling of God in Christ Jesus, and ever say, humbly, lovingly, and hopefully, "God hath yet more light and truth to bring forth from his holy word."

Notice here that though Jesus Christ both began to do and to teach, he made his beginnings have all the *force and urgency of complete endings*. He gave COMMANDMENTS unto the apostles whom he had chosen: he did not offer mere *suggestions*—never did Jesus Christ say, "I offer these instructions for your consideration: you can adopt or reject them according to your own finding on further inquiry. Jesus Christ was never less than *royal*, never did the Son of Man speak ambiguously or incompletely; he spoke finally, royally, commandingly. "A new commandment give I unto you." "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." He commanded the apostles. The Lord cannot merely *suggest*; Paul will come with his pathetic suggestions, begging the Lord's pardon if he be wrong in making them—but in Christ's speech there are no parentheses, they shoot right out of mind and heart and mouth with the completeness and finality of positive injunctions.

We are then the slaves of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are none other than the Lord's captives and therefore the Lord's freemen. We do not *make* the commandments, we *obey* them—we are not as those who walk under the loose rule of mere license, we are men who are bound to a centre, kept within the limits of a specific moral gravitation, and we have come to know this mystery, that there is no liberty without law, that life without law is chaos, that life *with* law, loyally accepted and obediently realised, becomes a continual stewardship, a holy sacrifice, an everlasting beginning, passing on to increasing satisfactions, as the capacity of the soul enlarges.

With the skill of a scribe well instructed, Luke puts into his third verse a whole library of Christian evidence, so that Theophilus his correspondent may be under no mistake as to what is called amongst us, the missing link. In the third verse Luke says, "Jesus Christ showed himself alive after his passion, to his apostles, by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." In Luke's mind there was no doubt about the Resurrection: Luke

was not a man who had a paid cause to subserve ; Luke was not entrusted with a brief for the purpose of defending a case about which he had some latent doubt or difficulty. Luke behaves himself like a frank-hearted and honest man who has a very simple statement to make, and who makes it on the authority of his own observation, consciousness and experience.

The ring of honesty is in that third verse. Beautifully does it bring in the subject of our Lord's speech to the apostles, " speaking," says Luke, " of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." Jesus Christ had but one subject. You never had to ask what Jesus Christ was preaching about : he was not a preacher with a million texts or a million subjects : he was a preacher with one theme, one utterance, but like the one sky, an eternal variety. We have been accustomed through our studies of the gospel according to Matthew, to the expression, " the kingdom of God." We ourselves could have supplied that ending to this verse of the record. Jesus Christ never talked about anything less than a *kingdom*, a kingdom that rose above all other empires and masteries and enclosed and included them in its infinite sovereignty.

What Jesus Christ said to the disciples or apostles in those farewell days we must learn from the apostles themselves. Let us understand that apostolic life is but a *continuation* of the Lord's own life. If the apostles are faithful men, their word will be Christ's word : he promised to tell them more ; said he upon one memorable occasion, " I have many things to say to you, but ye cannot bear them now." He carried the burden till they were old enough and strong enough to take it up. He always has some *larger burden* to transfer to us, but he will never transfer it till our strength be equal to the occasion. Apostolic life will show us more of Christ's meaning than could be conveyed within the limits of the four gospels. This gives you a new standard by which to value the apostolic writings. Let us not suppose that apostolic writings are mere *individual speculations*, or personal comments upon a great mystery. Apostolic literature is as much a *revelation* as is the evangelic biography of the Lord himself.

When the disciples or apostles were assembled together, they came to Jesus and said, " Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel ?" They never could get away from their little " kingdom" any more than Christ could detach himself

from his great royalty. They were all thinking about "kingdoms," but the kingdom of the one was a little vanishing splendour, the kingdom of the other was the whole universe and purpose of God. So we often find ourselves talking *Christian language* without the full *Christian meaning*. Sometimes, indeed, the terms we use are identical with the terms Jesus Christ used, and yet, though the *terms* are identical, the *meanings* are separated by the diameter of infinity. Jesus Christ said "bread"—we also said "bread," but we did not mean what *he* meant by that suggestive word. Jesus Christ said "kingdom," and we said "kingdom"—in the letter we were identical, but our kingdom, like ourselves, was a little thing, marked by extreme frailty, liable at any moment to be blown out like a light in a strong wind. When he said "kingdom" he laid the foundations of it in eternity and lifted up its towers and pinnacles into all the breadth and security of Heaven.

Do let us understand that *the same words have not always the same meanings*, and further, do let us know that the *larger* meaning is always the right one. A narrow meaning has always been attempted to be forced upon Christ's words, but the meaning has burst the vessel and would not be contained in such unworthy, because such inadequate, limits. Herein is the function of the religious imagination, always to be seeing the broader spaces, the farther lights, the grander possibilities—always to be scourging language, because it is not equal to the expression of the sublimest thought and feeling.

Yet Jesus Christ chided the apostles very gently. He told them in his very promise that they were as yet incomplete men. He said, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." They were unbaptised in *soul*: the symbolic water had done its initial work, but they stood there without the sacred fire, the inspiring afflatus, the presence of Heaven in the heart. May it not be so with some of us? We have been the subjects of but one baptism: we are within the Christian circle nominally, and it may be intellectually, but have we received *power* from on high because we have received the Holy Ghost? What is the Holy Ghost? To that inquiry there is no answer but in the deepest feeling and the sublimest consciousness of the heart. Know that you have the Holy Ghost, not by your narrowness or dogmatism

or pertinacity or selfishness, but by your glowing *love*, your redeeming *hopefulness*, your continual *charity*, your indestructible *patience*.

Into what baptism have we been baptised? We have not received the Holy Ghost if we are conducting a narrow ministry. Jesus Christ said so much when he added, "Ye shall be witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth." No power but the Holy Ghost could take a man through those regions. The man who has been baptized with water only will choose his own parish and sphere of labour and circle of operation, but the man in whom is the burning of the Holy Ghost will say with Wesley, "My parish is the world," and will be constrained by the love of Christ to go out everywhere. The ministry that is called by the name of Christ will be a dwindling quantity in the world's education, except in proportion as it is inspired by God the Holy Ghost.

Have we not *grieved* the Spirit, have we not in some instances even *quenched* the Spirit, is there not now ruling in our hearts the dark spirit of *fear* instead of the bright and joyous spirit of adoption and of *hope*? You will know whether you are inspired or not by the *vastness of your labours*. If we are waiting until we be properly equipped and duly sent out, then know that we have been baptized with *ice*. If we go out with the haste of men who say, "The world is on fire, and the conflagration must be extinguished," perhaps that grand notion of the soul may have been divinely started.

We now pass from the visible ministry of Christ to the invisible ministry of the Holy Ghost. Jesus Christ spake his last words to the apostles, and a cloud received him out of their sight. Nothing more—only out of sight. Not out of *hearing*, not out of *sympathy*, not out of the region of direct and ever helpful ministry—only out of *sight*. We are not out of *his* sight. We want sometimes to *see* him, but he says to us, "Because ye have seen me, ye have believed: blessed are they which have not seen and yet have believed." "Whom having not seen, we love." We shall one day see him as he is. He is out of *our sight*: we are not out of *his memory*!

## II.

### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, as men run into a fortress for safety, so would we run into thine house, that we may find rest and peace and full security. We have said, Surely the sanctuary will cover us, and the pavilion of God will afford us safety upon the earth. Thou wilt not disappoint us, in thine house shall we find fulness of bread, and great gladness shall be the portion of the hearts that put their trust in thee. Thou wilt do more and more for us, according to the sharpness of our pain and the keenness and urgency of our want. Thou dost call upon us for larger prayers, because our supplications have not yet touched the infinite possibilities of thy replies. Thou givest more grace, thou dost astonish by larger revelations of shining light. We cannot measure the height of thy heaven, it rises as we approach it: the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee, and yet in answer to our prayer thou wilt open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing upon us, until we have not room enough to receive it. Encourage us by all that is tenderest in thine oath, and in thy promise, to come to thee in the name of Jesus Christ our Saviour, that we may ask large blessings at thine hand. We have not because we ask not: we are not straitened in God, we are straitened in ourselves. We come therefore to pray for such self-enlargement as shall enable us to pray more boldly and importunately, so that through Jesus Christ the Sacrifice and the Priest, we may receive all that our heart needs for its comfort and sanctification.

We have come to praise thee, we have brought with us the trumpet of thankfulness, and the soul of gratitude glows within us, and words are too few and too feeble to express all the emotion of our love. Who but thyself has kept our reasoning power in all its fulness and power of working—what hand but thine own has spread our table in the wilderness and filled our cup to overflow, and into what heart but thine could have entered such thoughts of daily redemption, continual pardon and incessant hopefulness? This is the Lord's doing: we will magnify thy name, we will lift up our heart and voice in loud psalm, and praise thee because of thy tender love.

We do not live in ourselves, we live in God, and in God we move and have our being. Hence our prayer to thee, our daily cry, our perpetual hope, and the assurance which makes our hearts glad, that we shall one day be free from all bondage and enter into the joy of spiritual liberty. We have great hopes in our heart: we are not without large store of



promise, and sometimes the promise takes fire and burns upward toward thyself in glowing and daring aspiration, so that our prayer becomes a violence, thundering upon the gates of thy kingdom as if we would take the kingdom of heaven by storm. Is not this Christ's encouragement to our heart—has he not asked us to seek and knock and pursue our prayer to its utmost bound and desire? We take our stand upon his word, his oath is the secret of our inspiration and of the gravity and vastness of our prayer.

We would have thy Spirit daily in us, a light that is never a burden, an atmosphere that never wearies the heart. We would have his light, his warmth, his comfort and his love, we would be led by him into all truth as into great landscapes rich with harvests, as into infinite palaces stored with all treasure, as into the night when all its stars are ablaze, and the whole sky is alive with planetary fire.

Lead us into all truth. To this end, destroy all prejudice, all misconception, all false ideas, all sectarian notions. emancipate the soul and lead it into all the width and glory of thy liberty. We meet at the Cross—where there is hope for the sinning soul. The cross was set up for sinners: but for sin, the cross has no meaning: it is thy great answer to our great shame. Pardon us every one. Let the joy of forgiveness enter into every heart like a singing angel newly sent from the glad heavens. May we all feel that thy forgiving word has been spoken and has taken effect in our guilty hearts.

Help us to do our day's work with both hands, willingly and earnestly, and with all the joyful hopefulness of those who work for a good Master. May we be covetous of the light, may we fear lest one moment should fail us—so when the whole day is gone, may every moment bear witness to our fidelity. Help us to be gentle to one another, noble-minded, charitable, all-hopeful, all-forgiving. Show us that we are not judges but sinners, that we have fellowship one with another in the common infirmities of the race, and should bear, in Christ's name and for Christ's sake, one another's burdens.

We pray for one another, and whilst we pray do thou answer, and by a strange burning in the heart may we know that thy reply has found its way to our spirits. Comfort us wherein we need cheer, send unexpected light through gloom that is a trouble, come to us in the night season and speak hopefully of the coming day. In the seed time, tell us that that which we sow, cannot quicken except it die: interpret all mysteries to us lest they turn into temptations and sorrows, give us thy truth so far as we may be able to bear it, and spare us from all weight that would distress and exhaust our little strength. Love us all the day, gather us to thyself all the night, make our houses homes, our dwelling-places the chief attraction of our heart.

We bless thee for the house, for all its sanctities and memories and holy uses: help us so to live at home that men shall expect us there and miss us when our place is vacant. If any have singular sorrow for which

there is no speech that may be uttered in public, the Lord send comfort, tender messages to those who bear the smart, they that too may be healed in secret. Upon whom great shocks of surprise have fallen because of sorrow uncalculated, and pains that have been unimagined, let thy blessing come, a healing solace, a new, tender, and complete comfort.

The Lord hear us, for Christ's sake. Amen.

## THE BEGINNING OF APOSTOLICITY.

### Acts i. 1-9.

(Continuation.)

WHO could have told beforehand that Jesus Christ would be the *first* to go? It did not enter our imagination that he would leave us behind, and that he himself would pass away from all the anxiety and distress of Christian service. Our conception would rather have been that he would be the very *last* to go: he would remain until the last little lamb had been safely enfolded: he would keep down within the sphere of earth and time until the very last weary pilgrim entered into heavenly rest. Instead of this, he himself was the *first* to leave! Not only so, he told his disciples that by leaving first, he was actually considering *their* advantage and promoting *their* usefulness! "It is expedient for you that I go away. I do not go away for mere *personal* convenience; in going away I am not consulting my own ease or comfort: now, as heretofore, and always, I am considering what is best for *you*. To remain with you would appear to be the loving course, but it would be in *appearance* only and not in reality. One day you will see clearly as I see now, that it is expedient for you that I go away.

Being about to go, the last interview between himself and the apostles took place. Last interviews are notably pathetic. The words that would be common on any other occasion acquire a new and significant accent amid the darkening shadows of a farewell interview. Little things that would not be noticed under ordinary circumstances, start up into unusual prominence and effect when we know that the interview will speedily close, and that all earthly and temporal fellowship will be at an end. We should *always* listen as if in a last interview. "What I say unto one, I say unto all—*watch*." We should never allow our mind to drop into inattentiveness, as if we should have plenty of opportunities for the

purpose of hearing what now slips our ear. Every day should be the world's *last* day to us in this matter of spiritual attention. Every interview should be the *final* one with regard to the operation of the spirit of *charity* in hearing what each other has to say. We lose so much through inattentiveness ; we do not listen in the open common road as we listen in the *death-chamber*, when every whisper is as a revelation and every sign as an indication carrying with it special claims upon the attention of our love. We lose by unwatchfulness.

Jesus Christ is about to go—*how* will he go? I delight to pause after asking this question, that I may think out for myself all possible replies to it. *How* will he go? He cannot be allowed to *die* : that would be a fatal disappointment to the attention which he has strained by every miracle and to the expectation he has excited by every accent of his eloquence. *Dogs die* : this Man must not die, or if he die he will *contradict* by one pitiful commonplace, all that was phenomenal and impressive in his life. *How* will he go? Luke tells us that he was "taken up." In other places we learn that he "ascended." He entered within the action of another gravitation, and instead of being bound to the earth by some centripetal force, he was lifted up as by a mightier law into his own place, and throned in the heavens as the Priest of creation. It is enough : the mind is satisfied by the grand action ; nothing of discontent is left to trouble the imagination. Were I reading this upon a *poet's* page, I would applaud the poet for one of the finest conceptions that ever ennobled and glorified human fancy. He would have treated his hero *well*. With an infinite subtlety of power he would have answered all the demands of imagination in its most exacting mood.

Jesus Christ then "ascended," and in doing so, he but repeated in one final act *all the miracles* which had made his previous ministry illustrious. The act of ascension does not *separate* itself from any point on the long line of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. The ascension became so *natural* that we paid but little heed to it in its merely phenomenal aspect. We were not startled when we saw him begin to move upward : our education had all been tending in that direction ; from the very *beginning* he had been *ascending*, so that when he took the final movement, it was but completing that which he had been continuing for years.

*Our* life should be an *ascent*! We should not be to-day where we were ten years ago. Not that we are to ascend by sharp steep that attract the attention of mankind with somewhat of abruptness : there are ascents so *gradual* that they do not seem to be ascents at all, measured within any small compass of space or time. Yet looked at as from the beginning to the end, we see that the gradient has evermore lifted itself up by imperceptibility of degree until the very next thing to do is to step into heaven ! It is possible so to live that dying shall be but going home : thank God it is possible so to pray and live and serve as that dying shall be languishing into *life*. There shall be no violent *contrast* between the life and the death, between now and hereafter, between spiritual experience upon earth, and spiritual experience in heaven. It shall be one and the same, and in its realization we shall enter into the mystery of divine fellowship. We are in our *life* preparing the manner of our *death*. Your death-day need not come upon you as a *surprise* such as shocks faith and distresses imagination or falsifies by heavy contradictions all that was most sacred and pathetic in hope. The judgment day, too, can be so *anticipated* as to become as one of the natural days of the common week ! If we close our eyes and shut out wisdom at every entrance and betake ourselves to earthly occupations only, then all the comings of God—for he comes in thousands of ways—will be surprises that will shock and distress us.

You may know how you will *die* by knowing how you really *live*. If your life is a life of faith in the Son of God, a heroic, patient, gentle, pure, noble life, marked by, at all events, the *desire* to be Christ-like, then you shall “ascend.” All that drops away from you will be the flesh and the bones, that have been a distress to you for many a day. Your *Self*, your liberated *spirit*, shall “ascend.” Whoever saw *fire* going downward? It is in fire to go *up*, to seek the parent sun out of which it came ! We too, living, moving, and ever having our being in God shall not die as the dogs die, but *rise* to our fount and origin. We shall in very deed “rise with Christ.”

If the final interview was pathetic to Christ, it was also pathetic to the *disciples*. They had their *question* to ask as certainly as he had his *commandments* to give. So they came to him with this old question, “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom

to Israel?" Mark how after his resurrection, he had become "Lord," and the restorer of *kingdoms*. Everything rests upon the *resurrection* of Christ: "if Christ be not risen from the dead, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain." The great fabric of Christian faith stands upon one rock, *the resurrection of Christ*. No matter what he *did*, or what he *taught*, or what he appeared to *be*: if it was in the power of men to kill him in the flesh, and to bury him and keep him in the grave, all his protestations were *lies*, and all his promises were vanity. Hence, Luke insists that Jesus Christ "showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs: hence, all the succeeding apostolic writers insist that Jesus Christ "rose again from the dead," and hence all the great appeals which are made to our faith and our hope rest themselves upon the one rock of the resurrection. But the inquiry that was put to Christ in this instance was put to a man who had risen again, and the inquiry was this—"Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" There are times in history when everything seems to depend upon *one man*; there are crises which sum themselves up in the judgment of *one thinker*: we look to *him*, he carries the keys, he speaks the final word, and from him we expect the policy which alone can ennoble and save the life.

We learn from this inquiry how long-lingering, how all but ineradicable, is *the influence of first impressions*. The disciples had got it into their minds very early in their Christian thinking that this Man Christ Jesus had come to liberate the Jews from their servitude and oppression, and to give them back their lost kingdom. That was probably the very *first* idea they had about Jesus Christ and his purpose, and they never could get rid of it. What is so long-lived as *prejudice*? What is so difficult to get away from as the first impression we form of one another, of any policy, purpose, thought, or action? How difficult for the mind to forget a first name, how all but impossible to substitute the new address for the old, how difficult for the hand in January to write the new year—the fingers seem to conspire to write again the familiar date. What we know by this common illustration, we may also know to be true of all higher intellectual and spiritual meditations and engagements. Therefore take care what impression you make upon the *young mind* about the Christian Sabbath, the Christian

Book, the Christian Church, and the Christian idea in all its bearings. Who can wonder that some men hardly can open the Bible with sympathy or hopefulness, because they remember that in early days it was the *task-book*. Are there not those who quite dread the idea of going to church, because that action is associated in their mind with early impressions of *gloom* and dreariness and heaviness not to be borne? Was not the church in early days a dark place, and was not the minister a man gifted only with the one faculty of wearying those who paid attention to him; and was not the whole Sabbath a trouble and a burden? Had it been associated with light, music, gladness, joy, the memory of those early engagements would have gone right through all the whole compass of the life, and at the last the pilgrim would have said, "Open unto me the gates of righteousness: I will enter into them and will be glad."

The answer of Jesus Christ seems to be very keen and discouraging in its tone of chiding. Said he, "It is not for you to know the time or the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power." The words may be read in a tone of *rebuke*, but they were not *spoken* in that tone. You cannot report a *tone*—hence it is possible to express the very *words* the speaker said and yet entirely to *misrepresent* him! *Features* can be photographed, but *life* will not submit to have itself taken by any artist, animate or inanimate. Jesus Christ spoke those words in a tone that was *instructive*, and he immediately followed those words of apparent rebuke with utterances of the largest and tenderest *encouragement*. The poet speaks of "soft rebukes in blessings ending"—if there was any rebuke at all in those words, it was indeed a soft chiding, but there was no mistake about the compass and the emphasis of the *blessing*. The eighth verse says: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." There is no gift equal to the gift of *power*. You may answer a man's question immediately, but unless you give him *power* you do but give him a meal for the passing hunger which will certainly return. When a man in distress comes to you, if instead of answering his immediate necessity, you could give him *power to answer his own*, you would bestow upon him the most precious of all treasures.

The gift of Christ to the church is a gift of POWER—not *intellectual* power only, though that is not withheld: Jesus Christ has

illumined our reason and sharpened every faculty of the mind, and blessed the church with penetrating insight—but that is not the power referred to in this instance. Nor did he give merely *social* power to his church—the power that is usually associated with the idea of kingdom, rule, and empire, and authority. What power then did he give? ✓The power of *holiness*—“after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.” Know yourselves to be powerful by the measure of your *holiness*, and contrariwise know yourselves to be weak, though your mind covers the whole register of intellectual possibility, if the supreme desire of the soul burn not with the ardour of God’s own purity.

*We have lost the Holy Ghost.* We betake ourselves now to *church* questions and not to *soul* inquiries. The problem of to-day is a problem of *ecclesiasticism*, it is not a problem of *redeeming* and evangelizing the world. We are building structures, arranging mechanics, adapting means to ends, comparing ourselves with ourselves, instead of being carried away with the whirlwind of divine inspiration, and displaying what the world would call *supreme madness* in consecration and devotion of heart. Into what baptism have we been baptized? Where is the Holy Ghost? Where is the *Ghost* at all—the *Spirit*, the Invisible, the Impalpable truth, the infinite Energy, the Force that has no *shaping*, because of its vastness, and no *name* because of its multitudinousness? A grand church, a learned church, a rich church—these may be but contradictions in terms, but a *holy* church, an *inspired* church, a devoted church, a church with one heart, one aim, one speech of love—why, she would go forth “fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners.” The world can answer our *argument*, so at least as to confuse the listener, but it can have no reply to an unimpeachable *purity*.

The power which Jesus Christ gave to his disciples was a power ✓that was to be *used*. When he puts the staff into my hand, he means me to walk with it; when he gives me opportunities, he means me to use them; when he entrusts me with the custody of time, it is that I may so use it as at last to secure his approval. So this power was to be used *gradually*—“Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.” Do not begin at the *end*: grow, little by little, often mayhap by imperceptible degrees, but

see to it that your motion is constant. It is *constancy* that surprises the world by its conquests. It is not some great brilliant dashing triumph that strikes consternation into the breasts of beholders, it is that subtle, quiet, imperceptible *growth*, that proceeds night and day, until a culmination is reached that surprises not by its violence but by its completeness and by the tenderness of its working.

The power was to be used *enlargingly*, from Jerusalem to Judea, to Samaria, to the uttermost parts of the earth, until there was no more ground to be covered,—until, the men came back again to their own footprints! You go to the west: go on, farther and farther still, and presently you will find yourselves in the east again! God's universe is a gathering of circles: the stars are not in straight lines, there are no straight lines in God's universe! He moves himself in circles, *time* is a great cycle; the arch of the sky is the type and symbol of all things unseen.

This is our Christian mission, and nothing so enlarges and emboldens the mind as *sympathy with Christ*. There can be *no little-minded* Christians, or if there are, they are Christians in the very earliest stage of their learning, and therefore hardly to be distinguished as such. The Christian man cannot be a small-minded man: he brings within his view the whole horizon of space, and every throbbing pulse of time. Find a sectarian and you find no Christian; pick out a man who says the kingdom of heaven ends here and does not go over there, and he is a man who has *stolen* his position in the sanctuary; he does not hold it by right of divine gift or election.

✓ All Christians are *great* men, great souls, great minds; all who are crucified with Christ see all men drawn to the cross. Christianity never bends the head *downward* towards little and dwindling spaces: it always says, "The world, the whole world, for Christ. Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." If men would have their minds enlarged, ennobled, emboldened, inspired, they can only enjoy such mental enlargements and quickening by direct sympathy and fellowship with him who is the head of all things, who fills all things, who ascended that he might rule by a longer line and by a more comprehensive mastery.

Have we so learned Christ? Are we little, crippled, sect-loving—are we bigoted, narrow in soul, lame in sympathy, prejudiced



against other people? "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." Know that you are growing in *grace* when you are growing in *charity*. Know that you are right, when you are right in *heart*. A right head coupled with a wrong heart is capable of doing infinite mischief. When the heart is right, when the purpose is pure, when the love is simple and clear, it will keep the rest of the man in proper mood and gesture, and will direct him, not always with mechanical exactness, yet evermore with the most beneficent impulse, to a most beneficent end.

Jesus Christ's last word was about *himself*. "Ye shall be witnesses unto ME." What sublime audacity! What magnificent confidence! "Ye shall be witnesses unto *me*,—not to one another—ye shall be witnesses unto *me*, and I will sustain you in bearing testimony, I will send the *Comforter*, I will give you *power*, I will not leave you comfortless." The church has *one subject*, one King, one Lord, one thing to say—that one thing is—Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and went out of the world to pray for his church and sustain his servants in all the stress of life and in all the anxiety of service.

### III.

#### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou dost call us together that thou mayest bless us, and not that thou mayest pour upon us the wrath of thy judgment. When thou dost call men it is to a great wedding feast, yea, to gladness and ecstasy. When we obey thy call and come together to thine house, we find that thy banner over us is love, and that thy welcome is broader than our necessity. Thou art always working for those who have sinned against thee : thy mercy endureth for ever, thy love is a great sea that cannot be dried up : thy mercy and thy power combine to make one great sky, overarching the earth that has left thee in rude rebellion.

We have come to sing of thy mercy rather than of thy judgment : thy mercy is the angel of our life, it is the light of our eyes, it is our continual comfort. We turn away from our sin and see thy mercy more brightly because of our guilt. What have we not seen of the Lord's compassion, how tender his heart, how continuous his love. We say with the house of Aaron and with all the houses of ancient time and of modern days, his mercy endureth for ever. Because thy compassions fail not, we are here this day, standing in the Sabbath light and looking up with expectancy that shall not be disappointed, into the shining heavens. Do not all things come from above, are not all the gifts of God poured down upon us as from a summer sky ? Continue thy goodness to us, Lord of the heavens, God of the earth and Father of all souls.

We bless thee that we can thus speak to thee in our mother tongue, with all the fulness and plainness of love, because of the revelation made concerning thee by Jesus Christ thy Son. We know thee because we know him, we love him because he first loved us, and to love him is to love God. For all his wondrous life we bless thee : without it our life would be a life in the night-time, all darkness and mystery. For his atoning death we adore thee, magnifying thy wisdom and thy grace because of this infinite answer to our transgression. We need the cross every day : some days we need the cross to save us from the pit that opens at our very feet : may we run to the cross, hide ourselves in the sanctuary of its sacrifice, abide within the circle of its glowing mystery, and there await the communications of heaven addressed to the soul by the Holy Ghost.

Thou hast given us a handful of days which we call our life, our breath is in our nostrils, and we live to die—but in Christ we die to live, he is

our live and our immortality, and because we are in him, rooted and grounded in his purpose of grace and mercy, we shall not be cast away.

Thou wilt continue to redeem us daily, until the whole work of Christ is completed in our life and we are beautiful with his beauty. Herein is our confidence, without this we have no rock to stand upon, but with this we are lifted up above all condemnation, and are set in the sanctuary that cannot be violated. Daily come to us with all thy needed love, continually stand by us, that our weakness may become our strength: and that out of the night of our sin we may see the stars of thy love and promise.

Every heart has its own tale to tell thee, of wonder, distress, loss, gain, joy and gladness. Hear thou the voices of individuals as well as the cry of our common delight, and our multitudinous supplication. Come to us according to our individual requirement; where there is great gloom bring thou back the light that has long fled. Where there is the shining of a great light all round about the life, speak thou the word that shall stay the soul against the time of darkness and storm. Where there is a burning desire to serve thee with both hands, with an entire heart and an unbroken will, this is the work of God the Holy Ghost, and thou wilt surely continue it unto the end: if thou wilt not quench the smoking flax, thou wilt not put out the burning light. Where there is indifference or hesitation, an unloving reluctance, a painful and godless wonder, the Lord come with the olden baptism, the one baptism of fire, the gift of the Holy Ghost, burn up wood and hay and stubble, and all refuse and alloys, and call the soul to the youthfulness of immortal love, and to the consecration of a homage unimpaired.

We commend unto thee the poor, the sad, the lonely, the stranger, the wanderer, the prodigal, our friends upon the sea, our loved ones in other lands, those who are appointed to die, the new born, the bride and the bridegroom, the man in business, in anxiety, in success. We commend unto thee all patient sufferers, all who are undergoing silent distresses, the penitent, the contrite, and the broken-hearted—oh, thou whose great blue heaven surrounds us all, come nearer to us still with the circle of thy love as it is revealed and glorified in God the Son. Amen.

### Chap. i. 10-14.

10. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood [were standing] by them in white apparel;

11. Which also said, Ye men of Galilee [all the Apostles had come out of Galilee] why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner [Zech. xiv. 4] as ye have seen him go into heaven [Dan. vii. 13].

12. Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet [where his agony took place], which is from Jerusalem a Sabbath day's journey [six furlongs].

13. And when they were come in [from the open country], they went

up into an upper room, where abode [where there were abiding] both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James *the son* of Alphæus, and Simon Zelotes [called also Simon the Canaanite], and Judas *the brother* of James.

14. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women [Luke is the only Evangelist who names them], and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren [the last known fact in her life, and the last mention of the brethren].

### THE UPWARD LOOK.

THE action of the disciples was undoubtedly natural. There are some attitudes for which we cannot account and for which we think we need not account, because they express the uppermost emotion of the soul. Who knows how long the disciples would have looked upward steadfastly into heaven? Many of us now look up in that direction simply because we have seen our loved one ascend towards the fount of day. We think we are the better for looking, and so we are. No man surely can be worse for looking *upward*. This is God's old medicament for wounded hearts and bruised lives. Said he to ancient Israel, "Lift up thine eyes, and behold," and then he called attention to all the hosts of Heaven, and asked in effect, if that shining host had no *meaning* in it—whether it did not symbolise and attest, in the most emphatic and gracious way, the power and wisdom of One unseen.

We cannot allow the best part of our life to be taken up without looking in the direction which it took in its flight. No man, clothed in what apparel he may be, can chidingly refer to our attitude. The heart will tell its own tale: under some circumstances the heart will have its own way; it is useless to tell the heart that no good can come of this or of that—the heart finds good in unexpected places, and draws honey from flowers that have not been suspected as bearing honey, by any naturalist or herbalist. There are times when the heart must be left to itself, to find comfort where it can, to throw itself into such attitudes and postures as are inspired and dictated by supreme and uncontrollable feelings. Why should we hasten from the *grave*, why should we turn away from it as if we longed to see it no more? There is a time when sorrow becomes sweetness—such is the mystery and such the

graciousness of life, that loss turns itself into a source of gain, and men can say, without contradiction in *reality*, though not without contradiction in mere *terms*—"When I am weak, then am I strong."

We think, when we look after the *captives* that perhaps we may see the *Captor*. Surely that explains all; by what threadlets is he lifted up? by what secret mechanism, by what subtle attraction, by what spiritual affinity—what is this magnetism that draws him upward to a larger place? So we are kept on the alert, expecting that one day we will *see* the hand that steals the objects of our love and homage. How wonderfully that hand conceals itself! it is beside us and we see it not, it spreads our table and leaves no finger marks that the rude eyes of the flesh can see, it makes our bed in our affliction and yet there is no sign of anything super-human. Yet what a wondrous *feeling* of the supernatural there is, and feeling is beyond language, taking up all words and using them so far as they can go, and then ascending above them, and leaving them behind like the dust of the feet.

While the disciples looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold two men stood by them in white apparel. Who were those men? There are so many *anonymous* influences in life—there has always been a Man in this Holy Book, that would not give up his name—he would be called Prophet, Angel, Messenger, even Voice, but the secret of his *name* he would not disclose. Now he gleamed like lightning, now he moved like a figure through the darkening air, a figure, yet without definite shape, a figure that was *going to be* a shape, and suddenly fell back from the form and troubled us with an outline for which we had no measure.

The Man is *still in our life*, he is the great Presence in our life, did we but know it well. We try so to vulgarise ourselves as to shut out the supernatural, yet ever and anon it breaks through all our arrangements, and troubles us like a sharp pain. But if willingly received, received with welcomes and expectations, he troubles us indeed, but with a great *gladness*. Sometimes there is pain even in *joy*, sometimes there is agony in love, sometimes our delight rises into speechless rapture. Do not give yourselves up to atheistic loneliness; *expect* this Presence, always clothed in

white apparel. Why this whiteness? Why this scorn of colour? Why this infinite and ineffable simplicity? What are these arrayed in white robes, and whence came they? The young angel in the tomb was clothed in white; the men that spake to Jesus on the mountain were clothed with white, with raiment so white that no fuller on earth could touch by imitation the dazzling snow. It is *not* scorn of colour, for white is all colours in one; white is the emblem of light; the emblem of purity, the symbol of Divinity. Who *were* they—were they Moses and Elias? Had they been hovering about ever since they had been on the mountain, when they spoke of the *decessus* he should accomplish at Jerusalem? Such questions may have no answers which we can supply, yet the very *putting* of a great question may itself be a religious exercise. Let us understand this matter of *interrogation*; it is not needful to have an *answer* always; a question may be so put as to be its own best reply. When we are therefore charged not to be wise above what is written, and not to ask questions, we must accept the exhortation within given limits. If we insist upon *answers in words*, then is our question asking a temptation and a snare; but if we ask great speculative questions so as to stir the soul's *wonder* and evoke the soul's *prayer*, to heighten the sky, and widen the horizon, and then say, "What we know not now we shall know hereafter," speculation becomes one of the highest exercises of the religious life. Encourage that kind of speculation, only see that it does not hurry you into impatience, and into that aggravated state of soul which expects *replies in words*. Always would I have some great question standing in front of me, luring me onward and so continuing my education. At the same time, in proportion as the question is great, poignant and urgent, would I pray to be enabled to ask it in the spirit that expects no verbal reply.

What said the two men clothed in white apparel? "Ye men of Galilee"—that term, once a term of reproach, now becomes, through their utterance of it, the beginning of one of the highest social honours. Names that have been spat upon by the world's contempt and scorn shall be lifted up into symbols of glory and honour. The speaker glorifies the words he uses: in one man's mouth the word that would be the sign of vulgarity becomes in

another man's mouth an instrument of refinement and education. The speaker should be *above* his language, and the speaker's sincerity should be as a furnace that purifies all that is cast into it and preserves the hidden gold.

Thus addressed, the speech continued—"Why stand ye gazing up into heaven?" It was not a rebuke; it was a call from *enfeebling reverie*, but it was not a rebuke of the attitude which was then most rationally and naturally assumed. But our attitudes *do* puzzle the angels and the white-clad ones that come from heaven to look into our ways of doing things. We are continual perplexities to our celestial and other-world visitants. When the poor sorrow-laden women went to the grave, the young man clothed in white raiment said, "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" So, when the disciples are looking up steadfastly towards heaven, the voices combine to say, "Why stand ye gazing up into heaven?"

This *why* has stirred us from the very beginning of human history. Collect from the Bible all the questions that begin with the word *Why*, and you will be surprised at their number and their variety. Sometimes God says, "*Why* will you be stricken any more?" Often and often he says, "*Why* will ye die?" Again and again, with remonstrance of wisdom, he says, "*Why* spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not?" How we do *perplex* the better world! the angels will not allow us to look *downward*, nor will they allow us to look *upward* TOO LONG in either case. The angel at the tomb did not drive away the women: having asked them why they sought the living among the dead, and having told them that Christ was not there, the angel said, "Come, see the place where the Lord lay." Gentle word! sympathetic speech for angels to make to broken-hearted ones;—they catch us in the right mood, they know exactly what to say. He was an angel, or how could he have said, "Come see the place where the Lord lay?" He was a man-angel, a human-heart angel, who knew that looking at an empty place might sometimes be equal to going to God's church.

Why look at the *empty chair*? Why look at the little dresses that never more can be worn by the one for whom they were made? Why visit the scenes that have been made heroic by noble valour and sacred endurance? Why climb the pulpit of

the famous preacher? Why look into the rooms once inhabited by great historical personages? What is the meaning of all this? The angel says to us, "Why do you spend your time so? Be-think ye. Yet, now that you are here, come, see the place, and out of emptiness get fulness. Because the grave is empty let your heart be filled with sacred delight."

The women were thus taught not to look *too long* into the empty grave, and the men were taught not to look too long into the vacant space that was between them and the heavens. What were they then to do? In both cases to take the *middle* line. Men must live on *averages*. You cannot be living at the *extreme* point of melancholy, or the extreme point of ecstasy: you must come to the middle line and work along the so-called commonplaces of history. Life is not a dazzling romance; life is not one continual funeral; nor is it one continual wedding-feast; life is made up of *ordinary* duties, *average* occupation, faithful, diligent continuance in the vocation wherewith we are called, and we have to establish our life in patience and in well-doing, rather than to glorify it by ecstasies which perish because of their very violence.

Is *contemplation* then forbidden in the church? No. *Reverie* is; monastic seclusion is; idolatry of place is forbidden, and irrational expectation is interdicted, but the soul must have its times of looking into graves and looking into skies and looking very widely about itself, for in such looking is the beginning of strength. If you go to the grave to aggravate your atheism you will find no angel there. If you look up into the heavens and think that life is to be a daily evaporation and sighing, then are you misspending your opportunities, and letting the whole sphere of service fall into decay and ruin.

But to be turned away from the grave!—yes, but the women were not turned away from the tomb, they were invited to *look* into it. And the men were not turned away from the heavens, they were enriched with a great *promise*—"this same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven shall come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." Pause long at the words "This *same* Jesus." Our fear has been that we should one day see some *other* Christ. I with you, want to see the Christ of Bethlehem and Nazareth, and Galilee, and Jerusalem, and Gethsemane, and the Cross, and Olivet. We have read of him as being "the same



yesterday, to-day and for ever." We often wish that we could have seen him in his humiliation. In some way God will preserve the *identity* of Christ, and we shall see that **same Jesus** that came to save the world. Who wants to see the *glorified* Christ alone? so transfigured and so to say so deified that his own original disciples would not know him? There must be the *reality of identity*; we must so see him as to be able to say at once, without indication from any other quarter, "That is Christ and none other—

In his feet and hands are wound prints,  
And his side."

He must so show himself that we can have no questioning one with the other as to his identity, but by common, universal assent we must be enabled to say, "This is he of whom Moses and the prophets did write: this is the Babe of Bethlehem, the Man mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, the crucified Victim, the prevailing Priest." So women turned away after having been invited to see the grave, and men turned away with the promise that this same Jesus should come in like manner, were in no rude and violent manner turned away, but each was comforted with special sympathy.

How *obedient* the men were to the heavenly vision. There are times when we are just little children in the hands of God, without question-asking or murmuring or complaining. The men returned to Jerusalem, they were wrought up into a mood of docility, self-renunciation, and utter, simple waiting upon God. We know that we are growing in grace, when we know that we are growing in *the spirit of obedience*. They would go or stand, or look or return as they were bidden. We have lost that sweet *simplicity*; we have now become cunning in argument, learned in controversy, skilful in the suggestion of difficulties, and the simplicity of child-like obedience has been lost from our heart. Would that we could open God's book and read it straight off without any questioning or unbelief! Would that we could take the psalms and read them as if they belonged to us. How much richer we would be, and quieter, and stronger.

To *what* did the men return? When they were come in they went up into an upper room. In ancient Madrid the rule was that, except there was a special stipulation to the contrary, the

upper rooms of all houses belonged to the *king*. Ideally the notion is full of beauty. However humble your house, if it had been built under the common law of Spain, the upper chambers were royal possessions. Is there any chamber in *our* house that belongs to the King? Do we keep a chair which He will turn into a Throne by sitting in it? Do we keep one crust which he may turn into a feast by breaking it? Have we one vessel filled with water which he will fill with wine by smiling upon it? Is there anything in all the house that is peculiarly and inalienably the King's? We might make the whole house his : so all-claiming is his love that he would take it, and what he takes he returns—as his kind *earth* does ; the kind, yet voracious earth takes our handful of seed, but returns it in golden harvest.

So the men gathered in that upper room—and their names are given, not in the old order, but with some confusion of consecutiveness. What of that? It was a grand thing to break up *mechanism* at the very first ; to read the list either backward or forward, or beginning at the middle and going either way—for are we not all called to a common brotherhood in Christ, and are not the last first and the first last, and is not the middle name the most glorious of all? And what is the difference between us when we are judged and valued by the redeeming grace of God? Presently the disciples will try to make a little order in the Church, and they will be punished for it. We have but to turn over the page, and the disciples before the Pentecost will make wise fools of themselves. We love to *mechanise*, to build little sand houses, which the first wave will swash down and mingle with the common shore. It is better that we should have the order of *spontaneity*, and that any man should be able to write the list blindfold, and to put the names down as they occur to him. Who cares *where* his name is, provided it be *in the list*? Is my name here? I ask not where, but here, on the record, in the Lamb's Book of Life? I ask not whether on the first page or the last—is it in the book? If so, it is enough.

These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication—all life running up into one grand cry unto God. You cannot pray to order: you may appoint your times for prayer and

endeavour to keep those times, but sometimes we in breaking our appointment with God best keep it. We cannot *always* pray as we can pray *sometimes*. There are days of prayer; harvests of prayer; hours that we could spend, and count them all too short, in the eloquence of loving communion with God. At other times we are speechless in his presence, the heart is dumb, there is no cry in the spirit, and what we have to learn is this, that our speechlessness is oftentimes more eloquent than our speech.

And the women were there, all named together—not only the women, but the Woman—and Mary, the mother of Jesus—one last little line to herself. We hear nothing more about her that is authentic: legend and tradition have their foolish tales to tell about her, but this is the end, so far as the Scriptures are concerned—“And Mary, the mother of Jesus.” Do not complicate that simplicity, add nothing to that completeness. She was there, not officially, not presidentially—she was there as one of the women whose eyes were as the pools of Heshbon.

There was the little society, doing nothing but praying—and when a church does nothing but pray it begins to do the mightiest of all works. I do not say uttering prayerful words and sentences, but PRAYING—when it prays with the heart, with the violence of love, yet with the patience of confidence, when it gives itself in unbroken stress towards the heavens, *then* no angel ever says, “Why speak ye thus steadfastly up to heaven?” The *looking* was turned aside, but not the *praying*, the looking after the vanished figure, but not the praying to the presiding Intercessor. We may *look* too long after that which we think our eyes can descry, but when it comes to *speaking* heavenward, sending the *soul* skyward, bidding the heart go on its own messages and knock at heaven’s door, then no men clothed in white apparel say, “Why speak ye so long?” but all heaven says, every angel says, the church of the first-born in heaven says,—“PRAY without ceasing.”

#### IV.

#### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we know thee as the Searcher of hearts, and we tremble before thee. Thou dost search Jerusalem as with a candle ; the light of thine eyes falls upon the inmost parts of the heart, and there is nothing hidden from thy vision. The darkness and the light are both alike unto thee, the wings of the morning cannot carry us away beyond thy looking, there is no height in heaven, there is no depth in hell wherein is concealment from the eyes that fill the universe. Wherewithal then can we come before thee, wherein is our standing, and on what ground do we now appear? Thou hast nourished and brought up children, but they have rebelled against thee ; no child of thine on all this earth but has lifted up an arm of rebellion against the heavens : there is none righteous, no, not one. All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way,—wherein then do we appear before thee but in him who is our brother and Priest and Saviour, Jesus Christ the Son of God? Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive the homage of all creation, loudest and sweetest of all, the hymn of redeemed men, who, having known the darkness and the torment of sin, have been brought into a marvellous light and into an unspeakable joy. We come before thee to speak of Christ, to bless thee for the Son of Man, to worship him as thy Son, our Priest and our one Sacrifice, who answers every question, soothes us by his grace, gives us infinite comfort by his promises, and who has pledged himself, as with the oath of his blood, to complete what he has begun, and to present us faultless before thee.

How long, O Lord, how long before we are brought into a state of obedience unto thee? We are proud and self-willed, we are ignorant of all that is deep and lasting, we seize things that flit by us, and imagine that they express eternity. We come before thee as those who are foolish of heart and void of understanding, and we ask thee to pity us and forgive us with all the infinite tenderness of thy love. Thou dost show us thyself in wondrous ways ; oh, that we had eyes to see thee in all the story of the day, in all the march of the seasons, in all the displays of thy providence. Thou dost crush the bad man, and overthrow that which is corrupt, and upon righteousness and virtue dost thou set the crown of thine approbation. If for a small moment thou dost forsake men, it is that with everlasting mercies thou mayest gather them.

Take thine own way with us—thy will be done. We cannot follow all thy will, nor do we know the secret of thy movement, but we know Christ

thy Son, and he has revealed the Father. Work in the dark or in the light, as thou wilt, only when thou hast tried us, bring us forth as gold. Preside over the furnace, watch all the burning, when the last dross falls away, when in our purified soul thou dost see the shining of thine image, cool the furnace and present us to thyself. We would be thine : bad in our inmost heart, sullied in all the emotion and passion of our soul, crushed by burdens of our own creation—still we would be thine. We are ashamed of the devil, we are ashamed of ourselves, we find no confidence and rejoicing but in the light and the truth of the Deity : Lord, may our better conquer our worse self, set up thy kingdom in our heart, that great, glad, radiant kingdom which is called the kingdom of heaven.

Help us up the road when it is very steep, draw nearer to us as the wind becomes colder, when we are affrighted by presences in the dark, and by voices mingling with the storm, let thy comforting toward us be multiplied and recall our courage in God.

We pray for those who are not here : for the bad one who would not come, for the sick one who could not come, for the far away one who wants to come, for all who are included within the circle of thy love. Have pity upon the suffering, those who are dying do thou make to live by thy presence and thy soothing : where the house is very lonely and the shadow has the deeper gloom to the eye that reads it aright than any other shadow they ever saw in the house before—where the heart is very sore, where old companionships are about to be broken up, where life-long unions are about to be sundered, where the wedding vow is about to be taken up and to pass on to other meanings, where the child is sick, where the shadow of the coffin rests upon the cradle, and where there is gloom or sorrow or weariness of any kind—O, thou who didst make every star of the night and every flower of the summer day, thou who didst incarnate thyself in Jesus Christ, let thy grace be multiplied, and let thy comfort mightily prevail over all our distress. Amen.

### Acts i. 15-26.

15. And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names [probably a synonym for persons] together were about an hundred and twenty) [of whom one-tenth were apostles].

16. Men and brethren [Demosthenes said, Ye men of Athens !], this Scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David [the beginning of the new method of interpretation] spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus.

17. For he was numbered with us [he had been numbered], and had obtained part of this ministry [portion or inheritance].

18. Now this man purchased [got possession of. In old English purchase often meant acquired] a field with the reward of iniquity [a Petrine phrase, see 2 Peter ii. 13, 15] ; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.

19. And it was [became] known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem ; in-  
somuch as that field is called in their proper tongue [in their own dialect]  
Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood.

20. For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be deso-  
late, and let no man dwell therein : and his bishoprick [the general term  
*office* is preferable] let another take.

21. Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time  
that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us [representing the whole  
life and conduct].

22. Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he  
was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of  
his resurrection.

23. And they appointed two, Joseph [nothing further is known of him]  
called Barsabas [son of the oath or wisdom], who was surnamed Justus,  
and Matthias [given by Jehovah].

24. And they prayed, and said, thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts  
of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen.

25. That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which  
Judas by transgression fell [away], that he might go to his own place.

26. And they gave forth their lots [not votes] ; and the lot fell upon  
Matthias ; and he was numbered [the Greek word is not the same as in  
v. 17] with the eleven apostles.

## THE PREMATURE ELECTION.

“*AND in those days.*” —There were ten days between the tak-  
ing up of the Lord Jesus and the festival of the outpouring  
of the Spirit which is now known to us by the name of Whitsun-  
tide. In those ten days Peter “stood up.” It was a pity he did  
so, for he had been distinctly told to sit down. But who can *wait*  
ten days? Yet those periods of waiting are interposed in every  
life, for the trial of patience and for the perfecting of faith. Where  
is there a man who can sit down ten long days and do nothing  
but *wait*? “They also serve who only stand and wait.”  
“Stand still and see the salvation of God.” “Your strength is  
to sit still.” Mark how this is God’s training of us in this matter  
of sitting, waiting, expecting,—training us to the eloquence of  
silence and to the energy of standing still. Who can do it?

Peter was pre-eminently the man who could *not* do it. Goaded  
by impatience, he stood up and addressed the disciples. He was  
always more or less of a talkative man, letting his energy flow out  
in speech instead of embodying it in noble patience and heroic

endurance. His energy *evaporated*. He will become a better man by-and-by ; from Peter we shall yet hear some of the most solid and noble deliverances ever pronounced by an inspired apostle. He will burn as Paul never burned ; he will excel even John in tenderness, yes, even in this opening speech, made before the time, he begins to show that delicacy of touch which so often made him conspicuous amid all the writers of apostolic letters.

It was to be feared that he would *begin* with a mistake, because he *ended* with one. On the last occasion probably, or near it, on which he saw the Lord, he said to Jesus, " Lord, what shall this man—the disciple whom Jesus loved—do ? " A man who asks a question of that kind will commit a mistake the next time he speaks. Faults go in groups. Jesus rebuked him, saying, " If I will, "—that subtle lordliness of tone which always separated him from all other speakers.—" If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee ? Follow thou me. " The next time we hear of Peter in any conspicuous relation is in the instance before us, when during the ten days of waiting he became impatient, and stood up amid the disciples and made a speech about the vacancy in the apostolate.

The fussy church must be *doing* something, if it is only mischief ; the mechanical church cannot stand still ; church-mongers are infinitely too busy ; they lack repose ; they consider that if they are walking up and down very much, they are *doing* something, they consider that if they be sitting quietly still, looking with wonder-filled eyes to the great silent heavens in expectancy and eager love, they are doing *nothing*. Peter will have a vote taken, or a ballot ; he will complete the broken circle—he who broke the circle most, he whose crime out-blackens Iscariot's, he who said, " I know not what thou sayest, I know not the man, " he who with cursing and swearing denied that he knew Christ,—was that not in reality selling his Lord without the silver ? *He* stood up in the midst and began to organise the apostolate ! If Judas had lived, who knows what Christ would have done to him ? Peter lived, and Christ had a secret interview with him, and in that private conversation an amnesty was pronounced and Peter was re-established. No man can expel you from the church. Every expelled man expels *himself*. You can be put away from a *visible community*. You cannot be put away from Christ's bosom,

Christ's family, Christ's church, but by your own hand. It is this terrific power of *suicide* with which God has entrusted rational life! Chrysostom was wont to say, what we now quote as a modern proverb, as if contemporaneous wit had suggested and formulated the wisdom, "No man can hurt a man but himself." Nothing that you can say against me will have the smallest effect upon me or against me, if I be *true in my inmost soul*, unbroken in homage, constant in devotion, perfect and incorruptible in sincerity. Nothing that I can say against you will have the smallest effect detrimental in the long run, if you be true in heart, and full of integrity towards God.

Peter excluded himself from the church. So we read, "Go tell my disciples—and Peter." The first-born disinherited, the great primogeniture broken up, the first last, the leader an exile! And Judas "by transgression fell"—he put *himself* outside the church. It is not a *Papacy* that can unchurch me, it is not an ecclesiastical confederation that can unchurch you. You have in *your own self* the power of life and death, so far as this particular matter is concerned. God has made you your own trustee. You can separate yourself from Christ, you can turn away and walk no more with him, you can commit suicide, but as for *others*, no man can pluck you out of your Father's hand. Let us consider well, therefore, how each soul is treating itself.

But Peter was forgiven. What was said at the secret interview, who can tell? When the hands touched one another again, one of them was just the same it always was, a rough fisherman's hand—but the other was not the same—the *wound print* made all the difference! But the *grip* was the same, the old, old grip, the masonry of the union was the same, and the wound only increased its tenderness. Poor soul, *thou* mayest be forgiven! Black Iscariot, all but damned, thou art not yet lost; seek an interview with the ill-treated Saviour, have it out between yourselves this very day, tell him all the tale without a single reservation or self-excuse, and ere you have got it all out, his forgiveness will be down upon you like an infinite blessing! He never allows the prodigal to *finish* his speech. He sees from the first sentence what the last is going to be, and punctuating the eloquence of penitential grief with his affectionate embrace, the sin is forgotten, as impurity is consumed in fire.



Peter begins where all wise teachers must begin, if they would continue in efficiency, and conclude beneficently. He finds what he has to say upon the *Scriptures*. This is the peculiarity of Christian teaching : it founds itself upon the *written word*, it never fears to rest itself upon that sacred testimony : even where there may be differences of *interpretation*, it rests upon something deeper than merely verbal exposition. Herein is that sublime possibility of *all* Christian sections being substantially and integrally right. The Arminian and the Calvinist, two ghosts that have often affrighted the timid church—they are *both* right. The man who believes in the humanity of Christ, and the man who believes in the Deity of Christ are both right. How is this, then ? Simply because the contradiction and the difference are to be found in *interpretation*, but there is always something *below* anything that can be written, and there is something higher than a tongue or a prophecy, or an interpretation in words ! It is the *spirit* that unites, it is the letter that divides and kills. It is quite possible for an heterodox man to have an orthodox *spirit*, and it is by his *spirit* that he will be saved, and not by his letter. Do not tell me what your *creed* is : but do tell me something of your *temper*, your *spirit*, your supreme aspiration, your highest, broadest prayer—what is the one desire of your heart ? There is nothing true that is incompatible with love ; charity never faileth. As for our conceptions, interpretations, and suggestions, they are but intermediate or transient ; we are passing on through them to some further and higher generalisation : on the road let us exchange views, approach one another with a noble charity, and know that there is no one man who holds in exclusive trust the totality of the Truth which is indicated by the expression “ the kingdom of God.”

Grounding himself upon what is written in the Scriptures, and only partially interpreting it, Peter proceeded to take a ballot for an apostle to succeed the apostate Judas. But could Peter make a mistake when he addressed the disciples at that time ? Who asked him to rise and address the disciples at all ? In our last study of this chapter, we read that the disciples were told to *wait* for the baptism of power—“ Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.” They were waiting for that baptism, and *whilst* they were waiting for it, Peter spoke. Peter was

not endued with the Holy Ghost in the Pentecostal sense when he made this speech : we shall watch him grow ; when the Holy Spirit does descend upon him and burn up all his folly, then we shall see how noble a man was concealed under the exterior of that rough and oft-mistaken fisherman.

The *conditions* of succession to the apostolate are very beautiful. "Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection." *That* is the law of the ministry to-day. "Lay hands suddenly on no man." The men who must come to this Christian ministry must be men who have "companied with us all the time," men who have known the Lord Jesus Christ all the time, men who were present at his birth in Bethlehem, and present at His upgoing on Olivet—men who have been with him "all the time," men to whom he is no stranger, who read his character, peruse the mystery of his spirit, comprehend the beneficence of his purpose, enter into sacred and inviolable unity with every emotion that heaved his breast and that sanctified his life, men who "have companied with him all the time."

You cannot *make* ministers, you cannot pick out exiles and aliens and teach them this language of the kingdom of heaven, as if they were natives of that celestial empire. They must be *born*, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but they must be born of God, and so born nothing can stand against them. They will trample down difficulties with the scorn of infinite strength, saying, "We can do all things through Christ." This is the mischief against which we have to guard, that you can *buy* ministers with money, that you can qualify apostles by *salary*, that if you offer *higher prices*, you would get higher genius ! It is a LIE ! This genius is not in the market, it is not a commodity that can be exchanged and bartered, it has no equivalent in kind, it is a fire that only one hand can light and that no storm can put out.

Having elected two men for choice, the disciples prayed : they left the case in the hands of God, but unfortunately they had first taken it into their own. Never take your own case into your own

hand : have nothing to do with it : I will not guide my own life. Persons say "Be prudent"—if ever you can for a moment sit yourself down, resolving to be *prudent*, God has forsaken you ! Persons say, "Beware of exaggeration, of over-colouring ; beware of enterprises that are questionable or dangerous"—those persons *never did anything for the world* ; they *cannot* do anything for the world : cold water never drove an engine, and a body without wings never knew the danger, the mystery, the joy of flight. If any man can resolve his life into a life of *prudence* he has taken his life into his own hands, and God will turn his prudence into confusion, and the question will again be asked ; "Where is the wise ? where is the prudent ? where is the scribe ?" Seek an *inspired* life. Say to kind heaven every day, "Not my will but thine be done. I want to build a tower, but not my will—thine be done. I ask for great success, but if failure is better for me, not my will but thine be done. Here is my short programme, re-write it or burn it—not my will but thine be done." So the apostles committed themselves in prayer to God for guidance in this matter. So would I take every matter to God day by day, and say, "It is of no consequence to my poor little life, but everything is of infinite consequence to thy holy and glorious kingdom : Let it be according to thy mind, loving One, and not according to mine."

The disciples gave forth their lots. How pitiful. In a few more days they will have had the Holy Ghost. Casting forth the lots was an Old Testament plan, an initial arrangement, a small introductory mechanism, adapted to the infantile state of the world. There are men now, who would like to decide everything by lot : it seems a short and easy method, but it is no method in the house of God : we are now under the guidance of the *Holy Ghost*. If you were to write all the creeds of Christendom and to put them into an urn and to shake the urn after prayer, asking God that the right creed might come out, I should not wonder but that some creed would fall out of the urn that would shock the sense of nine-tenths of Christendom. There is no such way of discovering God's thought. That is not his scheme, and that is not the scheme of our life : we do not decide things by lot, in our own narrow sphere ; nor do we carry things unanimously ourselves. Let me make that point as clear as I can : you, an individual

man, do not always carry things *unanimously* : you often have to decide your course by a *majority of yourself*. Thus, these are the voters that live in you—Judgment, Self-interest, Immediate Success, Curiosity, Speculation, Family Considerations, Health, Time, and some twenty more voters all have a seat in the council of your mind. Now those who are in favour of this course say, “Aye,” those who oppose this course say, “No,” and then you, that *innermost* You, that Self you have never seen, says, “The ayes have it—or the noes,” so that in reality you do not carry your own personal decisions unanimously. Sometimes your judgment does not vote at all, then the resolution is said to be carried *nem. con.*, no one contradicting. Sometimes you carry your resolutions unanimously, the whole man stands up and says : “Let it be done ;” so various are the ways by which we conduct the personal business and discharge the individual responsibilities of life.

When I have wished in critical hours to know what was right to do, I have submitted myself to three tests. First, what has been the deepest conviction of my own mind ; secondly, what has been the concurrent voice of my most trusted counsellors ; and thirdly, what has been the fair inference to be drawn from conspiring circumstances ? With a strong personal conviction, with a confirmatory judgment from my friends, with circumstances evidently conspiring to point in a certain direction, I have said, “This is none other than God’s will : if it be not, Lord, stop me at once, for he who does his own will is a fool, and he who does Thy will, will be lifted up into Thy heavens. Not my will but Thine be done.”

In the case before us the lot fell upon Matthias, and you hear no more about him. I do not want to be a *balloted* minister : I do not want to be here because I had six votes, and another man had only five : I want to stand in my ministry by *right* divine, by *qualifications incontestable*, by credentials not written by men and that cannot be expunged by men. *That* is the calling of the whole church : do not imagine that Episcopalianism, Congregationalism, Presbyterianism, or Methodism will save you. We are not saved by names, traditions, or legends, nor are we an influential church because we bear an illustrious name. Every day needs its own *inspiration*, as every day requires its own *bread*.

## V.

### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, are we not all in one place, with one accord, and is not our heart steady towards thee in love and in eager expectation? Have we not come together in the one all-uniting and all-reconciling name of Jesus Christ thy Son? Wilt thou then withhold the gift of the Holy Ghost, and allow us to abide in our own emptiness and poverty of mind and heart—wilt thou not rather open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing until there be not room to receive it? Thy blessing is always larger than our space, thou doest unto the children who pray unto thee exceeding abundantly above all that they ask or think. Thy grace is an eternal surprise, thy providence is a daily miracle. If thou dost not astonish us by great interpositions which our eyes can see, it is because of the daily appeal which thou dost make to our understanding and our heart, by thy care and gentle patience.

Thou hast beset us behind and before and laid thine hand upon us : thou knowest our downsitting and our uprising, our going out and our coming in, and there is nothing in all our life on which thine eye doth not rest with the anxiety of love. The very hairs of our head are all numbered ; thou dost notice the falling sparrow. Thou dost not neglect to baptize any root that is in all thine earth, thy great impartial sun throws its infinite splendour over all thy works which we behold. We will expect great things from thee, our hearts shall be warmed by a special hope, our eyes shall look for the blessing as if they would bring it. Behold this desire is of thine own creation, and this expectancy cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, and thou wilt not forsake the work of thine hands, thou wilt not inspire a prayer that thou mayest deny it.

Thou knowest with what psalms and loud thanksgivings we have come into thine house. Every heart has brought its own tribute of love and praise, no life before thee in all thy courts is dumb, but everywhere is the sign of thy presence and thy life. Hear the thanksgiving of those in whose houses thou hast set a great light, hear the blessing of those who praise thee for life giving and for life sparing, and for afflictions survived—the Lord send after such thanksgiving, answers of inspiration that shall guard and guide, ennoble and bless, the praising life.

Thou knowest who have come with songs that have in them suggestions of sorrow : they will sing though it be in the night time : whilst they sing, the darkness lowers itself upon them, in the very midst of their praising their hearts are stung with cruel memories, and in the very

house of God, the enemy faces them as if even here they should find no rest on the day thou hast made for thyself. The heart knoweth its own bitterness, the life is aware of its own agony, weakness, poverty, and helplessness. Are not these the conditions upon which thou dost visit us in Christ Jesus—was it not when there was no arm to save, when there was no eye to pity, that thine own eye and thine own arm brought salvation? Thou dost address thyself to our weakness; it is because of our nothingness that thou dost come unto us; when we are weak then are we strong; emptied of ourselves and of every broken trust we have ever recorded, thou dost come to us with the fulness of thy salvation, and with the infinite sufficiency of thy grace. Therefore our hope is in God this day: were we rich and increased in goods in our own deluded imagination thou wouldst not come to us, but because and though we are blind and naked and miserable and have nothing, and because our tearful eyes are lifted up unto the heavens, thou wilt come to us in Jesus Christ, the ever-living Priest, the one Man whose prayer is ever acceptable.

We put ourselves into thine hands, thou didst make us and not we ourselves, we know not what a day may bring forth: we are plagued by our own ignorance, we are deceived by the pretensions of a strength that can do nothing, we are misled by spiritual enemies on every hand, our convictions are trifled with, our best vows are laughed at, and our endeavors after the better life are mocked by foes invisible. Yet amid all this experience of temptation and danger and distress, we know that the Lord liveth, that he regardeth them that put their trust in him, and that he will not leave them desolate in the time of his visitation. Lord, how long? Take our little life into thy keeping: its days are but a handful that a child can number, yet is our life the beginning of thine own—we begin to be immortal as thine own eternity.

Be with those whom we have left at home—those who are afraid of the cold, such as are weak and in pain, and are ready to die. With those for whom the physician can do no more, before whom he has let his hands fall in helplessness, saying that his resources are at an end. Thy resources have no end, thou dost begin at the point of our exhaustion, and when we say there is nothing more, behold thou dost create gardens round about our feet, and lead us forth into paradises unsuspected. Gladden thy desponding ones with new hope, give them that sureness and constancy of faith in thyself, before which death dies away, or comes with excuses, because we are sent for to the King's inner chamber. Amen.

### Acts ii. 1-21.

1. And when the day of Pentecost [the second of the three great Jewish feasts, the Passover being the first, and the third the Feast of Tabernacles] was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place [the upper room].

2. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing

mighty wind [lit., a mighty wind borne along], and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

3. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire [a comparison, not a reality], and it sat upon each of them.

4. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues [languages they had not known before], as the Spirit gave them utterance.

5. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven [it was to the Jew much to be desired that he might die and be buried near the holy city].

6. Now when this was noised [cried abroad], the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.

7. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilæans ?

8. And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born ? [there was no jargon or incoherent speech].

9. Parthians [from India to the Tigris], and Medes [east of Assyria], and Elamites [in the district known to the Greeks and Romans as Susiana], and the dwellers in Mesopotamia [between the Euphrates and the Tigris], and in Judæa, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia.

10. Phrygia, and Pamphylia [all countries within Asia Minor], in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya [anciently applied to the African continent], about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome [sojourners from Rome], Jews and proselytes [persons who have come over].

11. Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God [the majesty of God].

12. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this ?

13. [But] Others mocking said, These men are full of new [sweet] wine.

14. But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them [spake forth unto them], Ye men of Judæa, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken [the only instance of the word in the New Testament] to my words :

15. For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. [Wine was drunk by the Jews with flesh only, and flesh was only eaten late in the day.]

16. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel [with perhaps one exception the oldest prophetic book] ;

17. And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh : and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams :

18. And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit ; and they shall prophesy :

19. And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath ; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke :

20. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come :

21. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord [an expression which does not occur in the Gospels, though so common in the Old Testament] shall be saved.

## THE OUTPOURING OF THE SPIRIT.

MARK the very critical care of the divine Head of the Church, in fixing special *times* for the communication of special blessings. Here we have the largest possible *opportunity* which God himself could have secured for the communication of his supreme gift. Pentecost was a harvest festival : about that time people could come with the least degree of danger, from various outlying countries and districts. In the spring time the sea was troubled violently, and in the winter almost impassable, but in the quiet solemn harvest time everybody seemed to be more at liberty than at any other period of the year, and the sea and the land seemed rather to invite than to repel the traveller. So at the very time when men were released from the greatest pressure of business, and when the elements were most favourable to voyaging and journeying, God came down in the great heaven-wind and the great heaven-fire and owned and crowned the redeemed and expectant church.

There are opportunities even in divine providence. The days are not all alike to God. Not only has he chosen what we call the first day or the seventh day, as a day of rest—if you read carefully the whole record of his providential dealings with the world, you will find that he has chosen a hundred days. We in our narrow interpretation of things bind him down to *one* day, whereas is there in reality a single day in our life that he has not a lien upon? He may not say, “I will claim most of every one of those days, from the very beginning to the very end thereof : and one day I will have all for myself,” but does he not come in upon birthdays, days of deliverance, times of surprise, days of unusual sorrow, periods when anxiety sharpened itself into agony, and when the whole life seemed to be one cruel and burning pain? Has he not come in upon our wedding days, and joyous days of



every name and kind, saying in gentle whispers, "I have some share in these?" Let your drinking be a sacrament, let your eating be a religious festival, let all your bell-ringing and heart-enjoyment have in them subtle suggestions of divinity and of religious sacrifice.

God is not the God of one day only; he takes up the one day and specially holds it before us, but only symbolically. What he does with that day he wants to do with all the others, but his is an educating and not a driving process; it is little by little that he moves, almost always imperceptibly, nevertheless most constantly and surely. He will not rest until he has secured every whit of us, judgment, imagination, conscience, will, and every element that enters into manhood—and we shall be sanctified, body, soul and spirit.

Not only did God seize the largest possible opportunity, but he also availed himself of *the largest memorial feast* known in Israel. There was no feast like the Pentecost; there were three great things done at that time—there was a remembrance of bondage. This feast was fifty days after the leaving of Egypt, and was fixed on account of the leaving of Egypt: it was a feast of deliverance and triumph, and yet having in it, sobering it and chastening it all the way through, memories of cruelties endured and of oppressions survived. Thus whilst the heart was tender, while Egypt seemed to be just behind Israel like a threatening spirit, and whilst Israel was confident of its final escape from thralldom, just then, at a critical point, visible to no eye but the eye of Omniscience, was this special communication of divine grace made to the human heart.

At the Pentecost *all* the sacrifices were offered. On other occasions there might be partial sacrifices, but at the pentecostal season the *whole series* of sacrifices was gone through, and one became added to the whole, the offering of two wave-loaves, two loaves made of fine flour and leavened, were taken up and waved, before the Lord, in token that *loneliness* had given place to *union*, that isolation had entered into companionship, that that which before was without fermentation, inspiration, and movement, had now begun to lift itself towards the heavens in wordless but most significant aspiration and prayer.

At the Pentecost it was specially required that Israel should remember *Sinai* and the giving of the law. Thus all through, Israel was called upon to bear the memory of thunder and lightning and earthquake, and a great shaking of earth's stablest things. Will there be any other period in all the history of the earth yet to come, dating from the giving of the law, when amid thunders and great wind-storms and lightnings there shall be given some better gift than the stern *law*, before which all men fell down as self-accusing offenders? Will the great voices, the solemn thunders, the appalling fires, always be used for the giving of mere *law*? Or will they one day be turned as it were into a sanctuary from the midst of which God shall breathe his spirit of *peace* and rest and sanctification and love?

On this occasion we have *the largest possible union*. For example, here is the largest possible union of *nationalities*. There were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men out of every nation under heaven. Jerusalem was never so full as then—there was therefore a union in the introductory sense of mere nationality and association. There was always the largest union of *desire*. Note the word *accord*. The instruments were all in tune together: there was but one feeling, one wish, one desire; the assembly was without mental distraction or moral discord; quarrelling, clamour, suspicion, jealousy, envy—these were all outside; within the gathered circle there was but one spirit, one expectation, one hope, one growing wonder—the silence that precedes revelations.

Have we known the mystery of silence, or has there in our very own quietness always been an undertone of trouble? Know we the restlessness of an eloquence so eloquent that it says nothing? Or are our ears filled with minor noises and are a hundred colloquies proceeding within us? If so, it is not along that noisy thoroughfare that God comes to the heart. God has promised nothing to *disunion*: the man that creates disunion in the church must instantly be put away: he is worse than an infidel, he is worse than a drunkard, a liar, a thief. The man who utters one jarring note in God's assembly is a thief in heaven; he is not stealing some property that was mine, 'tis his, 'tis trash—he is stealing the very riches of the divine grace.

The Christians, then, were gathered with one *accord*: that is the eternal term. They were also gathered in one *place*: that is the

transient word. The place is nothing, the accord is everything. At the time the place was of importance, but since that time place is nothing. Neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem, because at both will men worship the Father ; but the accord, the union, the trusting heart, the rhythmic fellowship—this is the eternal quantity, and he who meddles with it is a violator within the very shadow of the altar. Yet who thinks of this? If a poor moral cripple should be caught suddenly in some moral fault, then is the imperfect and blind church enraged with him, but the man who is speaking ungracious words, making unlovely statements breathing a spirit of dissension in the church—who takes note of *him*? Number me with the wildest drunkards that were ever lost in the wild night, rather than with those men who with bated breath even, can seek to mar the union, the sweet accord, of Christ's redeemed church. I know of no gospel for such men. It hath not entered into the infinite compassion of God to have pity upon them. To all the rest of you I have gospels high as heaven, wide as the horizon, but to the marplot in the church, to the spirit of disunion, to the disciple of dissension, God has given me no message except the message of anathema and excommunication.

Then we have the *the largest possible bestowment of the divine gift*. There is one word in the first verse which must not be omitted, and that is the word *all*. By that word *all* you must not understand the apostles only : the word ALL includes the apostles, the disciples, the followers of Christ of every name and degree. This suggestion is of the utmost practical importance : we are not to sit aside and say we have no part or lot in this bestowment of the Holy Ghost : we are not to suppose that popes, prelates, preachers, ministers, leaders, alone have this gift of the Holy Spirit. This is a *common* gift, accept it, ask for it, claim it in Christ's name. If men being evil know how to give good gifts unto their children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit unto them that ask him? At this moment I happen to occupy the level of what is called a minister, but on that level I claim no more of God's Spirit and grace than the humblest man in all the church may claim. Get rid of any idea that would lead you to worship the priest : cleanse yourselves of that defilement. We are *all* God's clergy. We are a royal priest-

hood, we have to maintain the priesthood of believers : I am not ordained by a *priest*, I am ordained by a *priesthood*. To this ministry I am not called by one man bearing any distinctive name of official pre-eminence, but called, if truly called, by the consenting voice of *the priesthood of the church*.

We must not imagine that a minister merely as such has greater spiritual privileges than a mechanic. It must not be supposed that because a man is entrusted with a high trusteeship, that therefore God has been partial to him. We are all in the priesthood, we are equally priests before God, our priesthood has no standing but in our *holiness*. Not in our intellectual capacity, not in our technical training, not in our official status, but in the sanctification of the will and of the heart—the total sacrifice of the man to the God.

As to the church all meeting in one place, do not believe in a place-church. God's church is everywhere. Many of you belong to God's church and may not *know* it. Poor outsider, you think that the *sect* is the church : that is your fundamental sophism. What is your heart, what is your heart's desire, what is the uppermost wish of your mind, what is the sovereign purpose of your life? If you can say it is to know God's will and do it, to find out God unto perfection and serve him and be like him, then you are *in* the church, whatever particular place you may occupy. And you who were born but yesterday, are as much a priest as the venerable teacher who is about to close the record and pass on to his higher status, only that he has the advantage of you in time, it may be also of opportunity, but speaking of the nature, essence and substance of things, you also, new-born child in Christ's kingdom, are a priest in Christ, unto God.

Jesus Christ made a great promise to his disciples when they asked him whether at that time he would restore the kingdom unto Israel. It is always interesting to observe how *great promises* are fulfilled. The very *greatness* of the promise necessitates that the fulfilment of it shall be upon a scale *proportioned* to itself. We have often been amazed because we have wondered how Jesus Christ would find equivalents of the great propositions which he laid before the people. We were unable, for example, to conjecture how he would *leave* the world ; we insisted that the Man who

came into the world as no other man ever came should not be allowed to leave the world in an ordinary way, should not be allowed to lure us at the one end, and mock us by a common place at the other ; we must see him go out. And when we were told that he ascended, imagination said, " It is enough, it is infinite in grandeur, and it satisfies the mind in its highest moments."

Now we have the question before us, how will he fulfil the promise which was given to his apostles, when he told them to wait until they were endued with power from on high? That would be no commonplace realisation of that promise, nor was there one. " And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." Again imagination says, " It is enough, I knew not," my feeble fancy continued, " how that great promise would be carried into effect, but hearing as I do of the suddenness of the coming I remembered that the Lord will suddenly come to his temple, and remembering as I do, when poor Elijah hid himself in an unbuilt chamber in the rock there went by him fire, wind, earthquake, and then the still small voice, so I see here the old ministry, the grand old agency of rushing mighty wind, cloven tongues as of fire, sudden seizure of things, and marvellous world-enclosing eloquence." God always takes care to satisfy the *imagination*, to say the least of it, and often to confound it. Specially does he take care to satisfy the *moral nature*, and to call upon conscience to say " It is right."

We see from this revelation how *helpless* we are in the matter of *spiritual revivals*. What did the apostles do towards this demonstration of divine power? They did nothing but wait, pray, hope, expect—what the world, so fond of action, would call *nothing*. That is all we can do towards a right revival of religion and virtue. Have nothing to do with those persons who organise revivals, beware of those persons who lay traps for God, have nothing to do with, any mechanised resurrection of spiritual life. Let us read the word " *suddenly*," reverently, prayerfully, let us read it with secret expectation that the Lord may at any moment come, the darkest

hour of the night, or at cockcrow, or early in the morning, and our business is only to wait and watch and lovingly listen as if we might at any moment hear the first foot-beat on the far-away road.

We need to know the power of *waiting*. There are those who tell us that we ought to be doing something practical, and they degrade that word "practical" into a kind of mechanical exercise. Is *he* doing nothing, who continues steadfast in prayer? Is *he* doing nothing, who speaks great words of wisdom and who calms the heart in the midst of its searching trouble? Is *he* not a great preacher and a great evangelist, who, by sympathy, love, tenderness, includes all men in his wrestling prayer and gives all men who hear him to feel that every case has been lifted up in a light where the king and the angels can well see it? To be practical is not to be demonstrative, to be building wood, hay, stone and metal, it may be to give thought, to offer suggestion, to stimulate the mind, to check the ambition, to elevate the purpose of life. The disciples and apostles, previous to Pentecost, did everything by doing nothing.

We see, also how *unmistakable fire* is. Who can mistake fire? The difference between one man and another is a difference of heat. Heat, or fire, is the secret of all things. God is fire. It is so in all things. The difference between one reader and another is a difference of fire; the difference between one musician and another is that one man is all fire, and the other man all ice. The difference between one preacher and another is a difference of fire. Who can mistake the gift? Did not our hearts burn within us while he opened unto us the Scriptures? So with a true revival: we shall find it manifesting and vindicating itself, not in an accession of intellectual cleverness, but in that burning glowing fervour which purifies whatever it touches, consuming the dross and leaving the fine gold for the king's using.

## VI.

### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, may we not be as fools but as wise, having understanding of the meaning of things, and knowing what thou art doing in all the days as they brighten and die. Thou art always most surely fulfilling thy Holy Word—may we be numbered amongst those who are inspired with a great expectation, and who are constantly looking for the Lord's coming. Surely thou art always coming, thou art nearer now than ever before ; give us the insight which sees thee in the events of the day, and so ennoble our religious faculty that we may be able to interpret unto others the movements which appear to be common or degraded. Enable us by thy presence in the soul, so to see what is transpiring, as to acknowledge thine hand in it, and to be enabled to point out to others the gracious rule of thy sovereignty.

Thou art expressing thyself to our vision and feeling and thought, in every occurrence of the time. Shall there be evil in the city and the Lord hath not done it—shall the devil have larger scope without the Lord having given it to him—doth hell enlarge its borders without permission from heaven ? The Lord reigneth : there is but one God and his name is great : in the hollow of his hand all things rest, in his heart is the centre of all force. This faith thou hast taught us in Jesus Christ our Saviour and Priest, through whom we have large access unto the throne, and whose name gives the prevalence of power to the mean petitions which our own hearts suggest. If thou dost so enable us to read the signs that are passing around us, we shall be no more children tossed to and fro, visited by sudden and irregular tumults, the prey and victim of all uproar and accident, but in our inmost soul, as in a sanctuary hidden from the touch and the gaze of others, we shall have thine own quietness, the peace which maketh glad. Enable us to know that all we are and have cometh down from the heavens shining with daily blessing and offering continual hospitality. Thou dost lead us by ways that we do not know, yea in paths from whose entrance we have shrunk ; thou hast found for us gardens of flowers and springing wells and places of secure repose—so will we no more interfere with thee, we will not meddle with God, we will stand in Christ and say, Not our will but thine be done : it is the only wise will and good, and in us there is no thought of excellence, we live and move and have our being in God. God's will be done though it be death to us, yea God's will be done though our chosen places be turned upside down and the nest in which we have hidden ourselves be torn to

pieces. God's will be done : lead us on as thou wilt and how thou wilt, only hide in us the sure and indestructible confidence that thou art undertaking our life for us, and that in the end thou wilt show us the goodness and glory of thy purpose.

We have come up to praise thee with unanimous song. Thou hast been good to us with infinite grace, thou hast spared nothing from our lot that would brighten and ennoble or sanctify it, and for this providence of thine we now bow down ourselves before thee in grateful and delighted homage. We have nothing that we have not received, what we have received is enriched with thine own image and superscription, and if we have given aught to thee, of thine own have we given thee, and the glory shall be thine.

For all chastening and mellowing providences we bless thee, for everything that teaches us the brevity of our life, for all helpfulness towards the true enjoyment of thy providence we now laud and magnify thee in our common psalm. Surely thou dost not waste the days upon us, all the sunshine is not lost upon our mean life, thou dost purpose the growth of our soul and its ultimate sanctification and complete purity. Towards this end thou art working in divers ways. We humbly pray thee for growing insight into the truth as it is in Jesus, for the spirit of sympathy with the very heart of Christ, for the tenderness of soul which feels every tear the Saviour shed, and that responds with penitence to the blood which he shed in atonement for the world. Bind us to the Saviour of souls, put both our hands and our whole heart upon the cross of Christ, and bound to that sacred symbol of thy love, thy law and righteousness, may we live the rest of our time in the very spirit and under the very blessing of Christ.

Wherein we have done wrong, thy pity will be greater than our sin. We cannot go beyond thy grace in any extent of guilt. Where sin abounds, grace doth much more abound, and as for the blackness of our guilt, lo, it becomes as wool and as snow under the cleansing blood.

Thou knowest our life, it is in our breath, it is a vapour that cometh for a little time and then vanisheth away. It is as a flying shadow, or a hastening post, as a shuttle quickly moving from point to point. We die whilst we live, we breathe ourselves away, every pulse that beats leaves but the number less. So teach us to number our days as to apply our hearts unto wisdom. The year is dying, the year we once called new, under the morning of which we breathed our salutations and loving wishes to one another. Behold the golden vessel is being lifted up again into the heavens whence it descended. Help us to know that our days are a handful, that a child can name the sum thereof : whatsoever our hand findeth to do may we do it with our might.

Pity all who need thy pity, save us one and all, look not upon us in the light of thy righteousness, for who can stand when thou dost appear ? but look upon us in Christ and through the cross, and from the altar of his sacrifice, and hear us when we say, Thanks be unto God for his unspeak-



able gift. Deliver us from all embarrassment, show us what we ought to do on the morrow, give us unexpected answers to surprising difficulties, lead us over the road when we cannot see it, when it is too perilous to be trodden by human feet, lift us up in thine arms and carry us clean over. Let the old man forget his age in the inrush of new life and the inshining of celestial hope, let the feeble forget his weakness by an instant access of spiritual strength, and let the young be lifted up into a chastened and joyous maturity because of the conscious presence of God.

Nurse our sick ones : they are too delicate for us to touch, our gentlest embrace would but crush them in this very last feebleness—make their bed in their affliction, for our rough hands cannot touch it, speak comfortably to them, for in our voice there is no music ; heal those whom the physician has surrendered ; when all human aid has gone out of the door dejected, helpless, confessed to be exhausted, go thou in and show us that our ex-remedy is the opportunity of God. Amen.

## THE OUTPOURING OF THE SPIRIT.

### Acts ii.-21.

(Continued.)

IT is in the presence of the Holy Ghost that we find the true union of the church. There are diversities of operation, and must always be such, but diversity of operation does not destroy, or in any degree impair, the unity of the Spirit. There is one Spirit, there is one faith, though there be many *creeds*, there is one baptism, though there be many *forms* of it, there is one Lord, though He shine in a thousand different lights. We have been vainly looking for union in *uniformity*, and because of the lack of uniformity we have oftentimes most ignorantly mourned the absence of *union*. Consider how irrational is such mourning, and how it is rebuked in the most practical terms by all that we know, even of the lower life with which we are most familiar. Is the human race one or many? is there any difficulty in identifying a *man*, whatever his colour, form, stature, language, or individuality of expression?—yet are there any two men exactly *alike*? Consider how few are the elements which, so to speak, God had to work upon in making men, and yet see the infinite *variety* which he has wrought out of the few. Man has, say, some seven features, forehead, eyes, nose, mouth, chin, form or contour, colour or complexion, so that they roughly sum up the man, yet out of those seven notes what music of facial expression has God

wrought! Out of the twelve hundred millions of men now on the face of the globe, who can find two absolutely alike and identical? Yet, "God hath made of one blood all nations of men:" the unity is not in the form, but in something *below* the form, yea, in a something so subtle that it cannot be expressed in image or in word. "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin."

Do you therefore think of asking whether these two men can really belong to the same human nature: namely, a man black and a man white; a man speaking an unknown tongue, and a man speaking the language with which you are most familiar; a man with habits diametrically opposed to the habits of other men? Does it ever occur to you to ask the irrational question, whether these two belong to a common stock? You do not doubt the unity of the *humanity*, you comment upon diversities of temperament and peculiarities of habits, but you never think of striking at the central and vital unity of the *race*.

It is so in the Christian *church*. The Christian church is split up into a score of sects, but the church itself is *one*. When we seize that idea in all its range and significance, we shall not be seeking any *mechanical* unification of Christendom. Christians are one, the world over. To those who look upon things from the outside merely, it would seem impossible that the Arminian and the Calvinist can both be readers of the same Bible, and worshippers of the same God. But their unity is not found in formality, in credal expression, in propositional theology, in ecclesiastical arrangement; down in the *centre of the heart*, in a place untouched, so to say, by human fingers, there lies the common organic nerve that unites Christendom in its worship and in its hope.

It is a common complaint amongst persons who do not look deeper than the surface, that Christians are much divided; they are only divided in outward expression, their division as compared with their union is as a small drop in the bucket; when the CROSS is touched, the defence never comes from any one section of the church, the whole church with unanimous love and loyalty rushes to the vindication.

This has been exquisitely illustrated from another point of view by Mr. Robertson of Brighton, who calls our attention to the diversities which occur in the expression of sorrow, and also in the

expression of worship and of loyalty. He reminds us of the Eastern sufferer, who throws himself upon the ground, and lies there prostrate, crying piteously and vehemently. The Western may be silent and self-controlled, but suffering all the while in his very heart a mortal agony. Is there therefore a difference in sorrow? The difference is not in the *sorrow*, but in the *manifestation* of the sorrow. So the Oriental before his king falls flat on the ground, and the Briton before his God only kneels. Is there, then, a difference in the spirit of worship? The meaning is the same, the whole conception is the same, a conception of lowliness, self-insufficiency, homage, dependence, loyalty. Who, therefore, would argue anything from the superficial comments of men who remark upon the diversities of the modes of worship which are found throughout Christendom? The Papist and the Protestant have different forms; those who follow symbolic worship, and those who are devoted to simplicity simplified, are all meaning, in proportion to their sincerity, the same thing. He therefore will, in my judgment, mis-spend his time, and will throw away his strength for naught, who seeks to mechanise the unity of the church, and to have one form or one liturgy, singing out of one hymn-book, breathing praise through the medium of the same music, and he will be on the right road, and will have a prophet's power, yea, about him shall be the shining of an angel, who tells us that union is in the *heart*, in *sympathy*, in *meaning*, in the ultimate *purpose* of the mind, which is to glorify God in a noble, holy and beneficent life.

Have *we* received the Holy Ghost? The question does not admit of hesitation as to its answer. No man can mistake the summer sun when he sees it; he will not come home with a half tale of having seen some kind of light, but is not quite sure what it is or whence it shone, whether it was a gas jet, or the shining of an electric light, or a new star. The sun needs no introduction, has no signature but its own glory, and needs take no oath in proof of its identity. The shadows know it, and flee away; the flowers, and open their little hearts to its blessing; all the hills and valleys know it and quiver with a new joy.

We may have the *form*, and not the *spirit*. The apostle speaks of some who having the form of godliness deny the power thereof. Herein it is that so many men get wrong in their comments upon

Christianity. They say the great thing after all for a man to do is to *do good*. That is correct. But what would you think of me if I said the great thing after all is for a train to *go*, when the train has not been attached to the engine? You are perfectly right in saying that the train is useless if it does not *go*, and if the train is going it is all right. But you must bring within your argument the fact that the engine could not go without the *fire*, that the train cannot go unless attached to the *engine*, that the engine and the train move, vibrate, fly, under the power of *light*; the light that was sealed up in the bins of the earth ten thousand ages ago, is driving your great locomotives to-day! When, therefore, you tell me that a man must *do good*, a man must be *kind* and noble and forgiving and excellent, and that is enough, you omit from your statement the vital consideration that *we* can only do these things as we are *inspired* by the indwelling *Spirit of God*.

I see before me at this moment certain cords suspended from the roof of this building.\* We are, I understand, about to attempt the experiment of introducing for a brief period, the electric light into this building. Is *that* the electric light which I see now? 'Tis but a piece of dead *cord*; I could burn it, and yet it is necessary, yes, that must be allowed. What is wanted then is but to *connect* these cords with a  *motive power*, near at hand or far away—but until the connection is established these festoons I see before me are but dead, useless things, without a spark of light which I can make available. *Connect* the cords, set the *engine* going, let it cause the necessary rotations to fly, and presently an arrangement may be made by which from these cords we shall receive a dazzling glory. They are nothing in *themselves*, and yet without them, the engine might for a thousand ages, and we should get no light.

It is even so with us in our very soul and heart and mind. We are here, men educated, intelligent, well-appointed, and what is it that we need but *connection with the heavens*, direct communication with the source of light and fire? “Come, Holy Ghost, our hearts inspire.”

Let us see by all these common illustrations, the meaning of

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\* This sermon was preached during the introduction of the electric light into the City Temple.

the grand spiritual truth, "Without me—Christ—ye can do nothing." Except the cord be attached to the really energetic *centre* it can do nothing. Except a branch abide in the vine it cannot bear fruit. Such is the lesson of all symbolism : we have *detached* ourselves from God, we have undertaken our own course in life ; for a time we may go because of the original connection which existed between God and ourselves, and which he may even now in mercy be continuing unto us, in the hope of his infinite love that the filial relation may be re-established. Happy are we if we so interpret these outward symbols and suggestions, as to get from them the solemn lesson that unless we are *vitaly* related to Christ, we have no life abiding in us.

When the Holy Spirit is communicated to the church, we must not imagine that we shall be other than *ourselves*, enlarged, ennobled and developed. The Spirit will not merge our individuality in a common monotony. Whatever your power is *now*, the incoming of the Holy Ghost will *magnify* and illuminate, so that your identity will not be lost, but will be carried up to its highest expression and significance. And more than that, not only will there be development of that which is already ascertained and known, but there will be a *development* of latent faculties, slumbering powers, the existence of which has never been suspected by our dearest friends. "If any man be in Christ Jesus he is a new creature, old things have passed away, and all things have become new." Look for *surprises* in the church when the Holy Ghost falls upon it : dumb men will speak, ineloquent men will attract and fascinate by the sublimity of their new discourse, timid men will put on the lion, and those who had hidden themselves away in the obscurity of conscious feebleness will come out and offer themselves at the Lord's altar to help in the Lord's service.

Do not let us have any attempts at *mechanical* enthusiasm. Any enthusiasm that is simulated, must die in the very act of expressing itself. When the Holy Ghost falls upon an assembly, the assembly loses mechanical self-control, but not spiritual self-direction. It is not carried away by mere exhilaration, as if by "wine wherein is excess," it knows the hour of the day, it knows the genesis and the meaning of the process it has carried up to an enthusiasm which confounds all outside dwellers, but which brings its own explanation to the heart which it inflames.

So we await the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Holy Spirit, baptize us as with fire ! Show me a true Christian who has not surprised his friends, not only by natural expansion of acknowledged power, but by many gifts and impulses, which had not been suspected before. What patience, what long-suffering, what nobleness of charity, what instantaneousness of large interpretation of misunderstood actions, what willingness to oblige and serve ! How courteous, how simple, how chivalrous, how helpful altogether ! The rough places have been made plain, high places have been brought low, the valleys have been lifted up, for the Lord hath come, and in his coming is reconciliation and ennoblement, and we are at our *best* only when we are under his *inspiration*.

The resources of the church will be multiplied in proportion as the church enjoys the presence and power of the Holy Ghost. How the old earth has continued to keep pace with all our civilization and science—why should I not amend that sentence and say, How the old, kind motherly earth has been keeping herself back, as if she would be wooed and entreated and besought to tell the secret of her heart and yield up the riches which she had hidden. The electric light was, as to its possibilities, in Eden, as certainly as it is in the metropolis of England to-day. The locomotive has not created anything but a new combination and a new application and use. The locomotive was lying beside the four rivers that flowed through Paradise. Nothing has been added to the earth, no shower has fallen in the night-time to give the earth new riches and new susceptibilities : we have had to dig and search and wait, and we have realized this great Scriptural injunction and exhortation, Seek, and ye shall find ; ask, and it shall be given unto you, knock, and it shall be opened unto you. Whosoever asketh receiveth, and whoso seeketh findeth, and the door is opened to him who knocks upon it as if he *meant* to go in.

It is even so in the Bible. We have not begun yet the great preaching. The church knows nothing yet about the possibilities of revelation. No new *Bible* will be written, but new *readers* will come. No man may add one word to what is written in the sealed book, but the Lion of the tribe of Judah will open the book and read it as it has never been read before. To a certain extent we have learning enough, ability enough, industry enough : what

we want is the baptism of the Holy Ghost. When that baptism comes we shall not be asking for definitions, for definitions are the exhaustion of terms. Genius cannot be defined, Inspiration cannot be defined, Love cannot be defined—we *know* them all, we bow before them all, but we cannot put our homage into words, or carve in dead, cold stone, the beauty which we see and idolise in the soul. Be not asking frivolous questions about divergent and colliding creeds, fret not yourself because of those who make creeds and create differences, but understand that the union of the church, the power of the church, the life of the church, is in the felt presence of God the Holy Ghost. •

When he comes we shall be one and yet many, no individuality will be lost ; Peter will still flame, John will still burn, Paul will still reason, James will still moralize, David will still sing. Our identity will not be lost, but under the influence of a common fire, warmed by a common love, every man shall bring forth fruit according to his individuality, and as in the infinite diversity of nature we discover one common and grand beauty, and as one star differeth from another star in glory, yet every lamp was lighted at the same fontal fire—so we shall rejoice in one another's gifts, be thankful for the diversity of tongues and offices and services in the church, and shall not make this an occasion of separation. Whilst we look we shall be astounded at the infinite possibilities of human nature, at the infinite graciousness of the divine gift, and out of these very diversities shall come the inspiration of a new and ever-enlarging thankfulness.

## VII.

### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, may Christ be born in our hearts to-day, the hope of glory. We bless thee for all things that call his name to our memory, and for all occasions that draw out our love towards him and his cross. He is the lamb slain from before the foundation of the world : before we sinned, he died. Herein is the fulness of God, and herein the eternity of his grace. Thou wast not surprised by sin, thou didst provide for the wound ere it was inflicted. The cross is older than our crime : where sin abounds grace doth much more abound, for sin is the creature of time, but grace is the offspring of eternity. God is love : herein is love, not that we loved God, but that God loved us and sent his Son to die for us. We love him because he first loved us : our love is but a poor answer to thine—thy love was first, or we never could have loved : thou wilt bring to pass thy word ; thy promise shall stand in all the reality of accomplishment ; the whole earth shall be filled with thy glory, and all the darkness of sin shall be chased away.

This is thy decree : we read it until our hearts burn within us because of thankfulness and love. The word which the Lord hath spoken shall surely prevail : none can stand against thy sovereignty, thou Lord of hosts. Cheer thy church by visions of the coming time, make her glad with the high and sure animation that her Lord is hastening to her, and that her prayer for the quickness of his coming shall be answered by his sudden appearance. O, Lord, how long ? The thing that is promised is true, but the time is long, yet is it long only to us who have so little time to live in ; a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night : a thousand years are as one day, and one day is as a thousand years—thou hast no time, Inhabitant of Eternity !

Save us, we beseech thee, from all the temptations which time suggests. We rise and lie down and count the weary days : we number the slow and monotonous weeks, and our hearts fail within us because the vision does not brighten the sky. Draw us into the peace of thine own eternity ; make us quiet with the serenity of thine own infinitude ; then shall we cease to fret ourselves because of evildoers and to misunderstand the wondrous ways of God.

We bless thee for all the blessings of the year. Thou hast brought us down to its last Sabbath. Through all the year thou hast been mindful of us, the morning has been bright with thy presence, the eventide has spoken to us in its own star, and the night has been rich with the voices and music of light. We desire to thank thee for having taken care of us



and of our houses, and for having blessed our business occupations, and for having brought us together this day to thank thee in common psalm and prayer for all thy wondrous works. Thou hast continued unto us our reasoning faculties, our bodily strength, our social enjoyments, and for all these and for all that they involve and imply, we would now bless thee with unbroken and constant thankfulness. Thou hast redeemed our soul from deadly fear, thou hast broken the chain that bound us to the hard rock, thou hast caused us to escape the wheel which threatened to crush our life. Behold thy goodness, how good, thy mercy, how merciful, thy kindness, how loving. We would be worthy of thy ministry, but in us there is no help ; we would live in answering love, according to all the appeals made to us by thy gentle and gracious providence, but the things we would we do not, and the things we would not, those we do. The Lord have pity upon us, and magnify his mercy according to our weakness.

We present ourselves before thee in Christ, blessing thee for all thy care, patience, love and mercy, and now we would ask thee to preserve us during the few days that remain, that we may use our time in all diligence and love as men animated by a high expectation, and made steady by a sure hope. We would grow in grace, we would be no longer tossed to and fro by various winds of doctrine, we would stand in the sanctuary of thy grace, and rest ourselves in the sure word of prophecy, and fill ourselves with the contented love of those who know that the Lord reigneth. We give one another to thee : every heart offers its little self to thy keeping. How many battles there are to be fought, how many wounds to be endured, how many harvests to be reaped, how many tears to be shed, how many graves to be dug, we ask not : thy will be done. Call us with thine own voice, and may our hearts hear it and our will respond to it with all the eagerness of love.

The Lord be with those who are far away from us, of whom we think, and those who think of us and with whom to-day we hold heart-fellowship, whose excellences we recall and whose defects we forget. The Lord make them merry with a godly mirth, glad with a saintly joy, and may we all be moved by the indestructible expectation of meeting in the city where there is no need of the sun, because of the shining of thy face. The Lord make us glad, the Lord who loveth joy give gladness to the hearts of his people, turn their afflictions into roots of strength and hope and promise, and sanctify their tears so that through them they may see afar.

God bless all the little children, those who are home from school, those whose hearts are overflowing with young delight, because of all the enjoyments and opportunities of the season. The Lord make them glad from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same, and fill their very dreams with young delight, and carry them all through the line of growth even unto old age, and may the last wine be better than the first. Amen.

## Acts ii. 22-36.

22. Ye men of Israel, hear these words ; Jesus of Nazareth [only seven weeks had elapsed since he died the death of a slave !], a man approved [publicly demonstrated] of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know :

23. Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands [a Hebrew formula for "by means of"] have crucified and slain :

24. Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death [the travail-pangs] : because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.

25. For David speaketh concerning him [in reference to him], I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand [an image of the warrior who extends his shield over his comrade on his left hand], that I should not be moved :

26. Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad ; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope :

27. Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [Hades, the unseen world], neither wilt thou suffer [give] thine Holy One to see corruption.

28. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life ; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.

29. Men *and* brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day [thus showing that he did not rise again].

30. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne ;

31. He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption [a pious error therefore to embalm the body of Christ].

32. This Jesus hath God raised up [from the dead], whereof we all are witnesses.

33. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted [into heaven], and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed [poured] forth this, which ye now see and hear.

34. For David is not ascended into the heavens : but he saith himself, The Lord [Jehovah] said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand [a common Eastern expression].

35. Until I make thy foes thy footstool [an expression for complete victory].

36. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.

## THE EFFECT OF PENTECOST UPON PETER.

THIS is a full length portrait of Peter himself. If we see clearly the effect upon *Peter*, we shall have a true idea of the effect of the outpouring of the Holy Ghost upon the *entire church*. God shows us things that are too great to be seen in their completeness, in illustrative and easily-comprehended *parts*. Those who carefully study Peter's speech in answer to the mockers, will see in the case of *one* man, the effect which would follow by the loving acceptance of the inspiration of the Spirit on the part of the *whole* church. Inspiration is followed by self-revelation; a man may thus reveal himself with perfect unconsciousness. Peter is not an egotist in this case, but, so to say, the passive instrument through which the Holy Ghost delivers new and gracious messages to the church. Fix your minds therefore upon *Peter* in the first instance. We know what he has been up to this time, ardent, impulsive, unbalanced, enthusiastic, cowardly. Since we last saw him, during the days of the bodily-present Christ, he has been the subject of Pentecostal influence. We have therefore to look on this picture and on this; and upon the *change* discoverable between the two pictures you may found your estimate of the value of spiritual inspiration.

Notice his *heroic eloquence*. He is not only a speaker, he is a *burning* speaker. It is not enough to *speak*—you may teach an automaton to speak, you may so instruct a machine as to utter a mimic cry. This man is not only speaking words, he is speaking them with *unction*, with *fire*, with emphasis, never heard in his tone before. A man does not read simply because he pronounces words that are in the text that he is perusing; a man does not give out a psalm simply because he articulates without inaccuracy every individual word in the metre. There is something in the reading which cannot be put into type, a halo, or say an atmosphere, or say an aroma, or say an illustrative and far-reaching fire of the soul.

It is even so with this speech of Peter. You have not the whole speech in the *words*. You must be enabled, by a kind of semi-inspiration of your own, to read between the lines, in order to get hold of all the force and weight of this burning oration. We do

not gather all from the speaker that we gather when we take down the mere *words* which he utters : there are palpitations which cannot be reported, and tones which have no typical representation. It was emphatically so in this great speech of the inspired fisherman. It carries everything before it like a fire marching through dry stubble. Already therefore in the mere matter of eloquence, we discover a wonderful change in the man who denied his Lord with an oath. He was always an ardent man, but now he burns as he says the elements themselves will one day "burn with fervent heat." Who but himself could have put those two words together? They are part of his very self. Other men might have said, "The elements will burn;" they might even have gone so far as to say "the elements will burn with heat," but it was Peter's very self that said, "the elements shall burn with *fervent* heat." That fervent heat, in its own degree and with its own proper spiritual limits, we find in this great deliverance.

It was not only eloquence, it was *reasoning* on fire. For notice Peter's grasp of Biblical truth. Who had ever known Peter before as a reader—who was aware until this moment that Peter ever opened the sacred Book and perused it with a student's curiosity and eagerness? We had never thought of Peter as an *expositor*; an errand-runner, a zealous, not always well-balanced friend, a crude thinker, an incoherent speaker, under these terms we may have formed some conception of the apostolic fisherman, but certainly it never entered into our mind that he had been a reader, a student, an inquirer into the deep decrees and hidden things of the sanctuary—yet in a moment he opens the prophecy of Joel, and reads it in the language and tone of his own day, and then he searches into some of the richest psalms of David, and quotes from them enough to establish the continuity and solidity of his great argument.

Not only was he transformed into an orator, he was transformed into a profound *expositor* of the divine purpose in the creation and education of the church. He speaks like a philosopher. He sees that the ages are not unrelated days, broken and incohesive nights, but that the ages are ONE, as the day is one, from its grey dawn to the time of the lighting of the evening star. This always follows deep acquaintance with the mysteries of God and high fellowship with the Spirit of the living One; we

are delivered from the vexation and torment of daily *details*, and are set in the great currents and movements of the divine purpose, and thereby do we acquire the *balance* which gives us rest and serenity, which often glows into courageous joy. Think of Peter, a fisherman, uniting these, and calling upon prophecy as its own witness, and pointing out how life is a development, a growing upward and onward, and outward, into new and harmonious expressions. When the church is inspired, it will be eloquent : when the church is inspired it will be biblically wise, it will be able to read not the letter only, but to decipher the spirit, and to read the letter so that it will quiver into music under the tone refined in the sanctuary and made quick with the vitality of God.

Peter shows us how *prophecy* is fulfilled. The fulfilment of prophecy is not something which God has been arduously trying to do and has at last barely accomplished. The fulfilment of prophecy is not a divine *effort* ; God is not a great giant trying to carry some infinite globe up an infinite hill, and at last just succeeding in unloading the burden. The fulfilment of prophecy is a *natural* process, and it comes to express a natural end. Prophecy is not to God a mere *hope*, it is a clear vision of what must be, and of what he himself will bring to pass. You do not prophesy that the child will become a man, you speak of his manhood as future, but quite certain, you say what he will be, so strong, wise, chivalrous, gentle, prudent, brave—and in so saying you are not expressing the result of an arduous *effort* on your part which you *hope* to bring to a successful issue, but you are taking your stand by the side of God when he created the typical Adam, and you say this is God's purpose and Adam shall come to this estate.

We want the right *way* of reading the fulfilment of prophecy. It is prophesied that the whole earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord. It is not a mere *hope*, it is the sure outcome of the divine way of doing things. Christ *must*, by a necessity which cannot be explained, even by the necessity of *righteousness* and light and truth, reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. So we are not trusting to a vain promise ; prophecy is not a daring expression of a fanatical hope, it is God's prevision of the future, and God's note of hand that he will yet give his Son the heathen for an inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession, signed in every ink in the universe, signed in heaven

before the earth was formed, signed on Calvary with the blood-ink of the Cross. We must rest in this assurance ; the word of the Lord will prevail, not by means of education, eloquence, or mechanical efforts on the part of the church, but the world will be converted unto Christ because God has said it will be so, and when his word has gone forth it cannot return to him void.

Not only was Peter eloquent and instructive—he startled the church by becoming its most solid and convincing *reasoner*. What a wonderful argument this is, to take no higher view of it in the mean time. “Ye men of Israel,” said Peter, “hear these words,” and mark how cunning the words are in the best sense of the term. Observe where and how Peter begins his address, “Jesus of Nazareth, a *Man*,” there is no appeal to theological bias or prejudice. Had he begun by saying to such people, “Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnate *God*,” he would have lost his audience in his first sentence. He was made into a master of assemblies, he began where his hearers could begin, and he who begins otherwise than at the point of sympathy, how eloquent soever, will lose the reins ere he has time to put one sentence to another. Already therefore this inspiration is beginning to tell in the mental force and astuteness of this unlettered fisherman. He gives up the Deity of Christ, does he? He plainly calls Jesus Christ “a *man* approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know.” But does he *conclude* so? He *begins* by describing Christ as a Man, but the glittering point of his glorious climax is this—“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified both LORD and CHRIST.”

Note the argumentative skill. Had Peter broken off his speech in the first sentence, the coldest Socinian that ever wrote about Christ could have endorsed his utterance, but Peter makes way through Scriptural quotations and through inspired exposition, until he concludes with this burning breath, “God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified both LORD and CHRIST.”

Notice, too, how Peter stands without equivocation upon the historical fact of the *resurrection*. He was not talking to people who lived a century after the reported rising again of Christ : he was talking to men who knew perfectly well what had happened.

Does he put any gloss upon the matter—does he seek to make it a parable, a typical instance, a *quasi* resurrection? He talks with the absolute frankness of a man who is relating *facts*, which every child in the assembly *knew* to be such, and he was in the presence of men who could instantly have risen and contradicted the statements which he made, had they been in a position to do so.

Does Peter separate Christ from the wonderful manifestation of the Spirit which had been granted? On the contrary, he connects the Pentecost with the risen and glorified Son of God. This enables him to use another "*therefore*." I refer to these "*therefores*" in this connection because we are trying to show how inspiredly *argumentative* the apostle had become. "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear." *This* is his last miracle, *this* is the spiritualization of all the miracles, *this* is the marvel to which all signs and wonders were leading up, *this* is the capital without which the column would have been unfinished, *this* the revelation of the purpose which moved his heart when he came to save the world and found his church.

It was also a great *evangelical* speech which Peter made. He gave the house of Israel a *new chance*. "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly,"—it is as if Peter would say, "Now you have the opportunity of escaping all the past and beginning a new and glorious future." That is the continual speech of Christianity. Every morning Christianity says, "You can make to-day better than yesterday. Every morning is a new chance, every new year is a new opportunity, every turn in the affairs of men is a new gate opened upon some higher road." Would that we had understanding of these things and could turn our chances to high spiritual use!

All these features will characterise a revived *church*. We shall have heroic eloquence, profound insight into Scripture, strong grasp of the meaning and purpose of prophecy, and we shall ourselves become unanswerably argumentative in all Christian doctrine and truth when the Holy Ghost is poured out upon us.

We have in Peter a standard whereby to measure ourselves. When the Holy Ghost falls upon us we shall go to the Bible with a new reading power, and we shall see wonders where before we

saw nothing because of our spiritual blindness. There are portions of the Bible with which we are nominally familiar, but what do we know of its inner meanings, of the minor prophets, the out-of-the-way histories, the deep things of God? Under the enlightenment of the Spirit we shall see that everything grand in thought, thrilling in poetry, tragic in experience, noble in heroism, is in the Bible. This is the Book out of which all other books are made. All science is here, all history, all fiction, all philosophy, all poetry, even the best *titles* of all books are in the Bible. There is nothing in any literature whose root is not to be found in the inspired volume. This is the Book out of which all other books are made, as the earth is the quarry out of which all its palaces have been dug, and as there are grander palaces in the rocks and woods than have yet been built, so there are more glorious visions in the Bible than we have yet beheld.

How slowly we realise that everything that is upon the earth actually came out of the earth itself. Is the marble palace superb? It was dug out of the earth. Is the city vast and noble, the glittering Jerusalem, imperial Rome, immeasurable Babylon and Nineveh? They were all dug out of the heart of mother earth. Is the navy proud and strong? It was all cut out of the forests which fed themselves at the breast of mother earth. There is nothing upon the earth which did not come out of the earth itself. It is even so with this Bible. You have a thousand libraries, but they all came out of God's Book, yes, the libraries, that were founded, if any such there were ages before the Book was written, came out of the Book. God is older than any book that can be written: inspiration is the most ancient fact in all history, yea, it antedates all history and makes all history possible. There are those who want to run away from the Bible and set up other books, as though they were independent and original. I will believe in their independence and originality as soon as you show me one block of polished marble that did not come out of the earth. Prove to me that you stole it from some of the upper stars, then I will believe in the independence and originality of the marble block. My own deep conviction is that the time will come when every other book will fling itself, so to say, in loyal homage at the foot of God's book and say, "Whatever is good in me, I owe to you." The earth grows no *polished* marble: the old earth will



polish no blocks for you ; she will, so to say, *grow* them for you, hold them in custody until you come for them with great iron keys and open the recesses within which she preserves them. Polishing you will have to do, squaring and measuring, all this *you* will have to do, but the solid block itself came out of the heart of the earth. So with all books that are good and true and wise and useful ; they have their vital relation to God's book, in whatever language written, in whatever country published, though in those languages and in those countries the book we call God's has not yet been known.

Why do men *limit* inspiration—why do men want to yet trace any good thing to any source but *God* ? If there is anything good in Mohammedanism, I claim it for Christ : he was before all things. If there is anything good in Brahminism, I claim it for Christ. If there is anything good in the heart of the wildest savage that this day tears his fellow-creatures in lands of barbarism, I claim it for Christ. My Christ is more than a merely historical figure, born on a certain day, and on a certain day crucified : the Christ in whom I believe is *always* born, always crucified—the same yesterday, to-day and for ever ; not a name upon a *calendar*, but a Name that hides itself under the foundations of everything solid, above everything brilliant, and round everything wide, and that crowns with everlasting glory everything philanthropic and noble.

As the earth owes nothing to any other world but her light, so God has made men that we carry everything in us but our own inspiration. He does not make us new men in the sense of losing our old identity, he makes us new by his inspiration in the sense of lifting us up to the full expression of his own holy purpose in our original creation. We cannot inspire ourselves. The Holy Ghost is the gift of God. We are made in the divine image and likeness, we have wondrous faculties as the earth has wondrous treasures—all these are the gift of God, all these we hold in stewardship for God. But these will be in us so many weights and burdens, curses rather than blessings, unless there fall upon us the mighty Pentecostal Holy Spirit. Then shall we be our true selves, eloquent, wise, argumentative, strong, evangelical, sympathetic, new creatures in Christ Jesus, through whom the Holy Ghost has been shed abroad in our hearts.

## VIII.

### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we stand in thy wisdom and are therefore not afraid. In our hearts is the Spirit of thy grace, and great comfort have they that yield themselves to its sway. We come with open hearts, with mouths filled with prayer and minds aflame with sacred desire. We ask thee to receive our psalm of adoration, to listen to our hymn of praise, and to answer the request which is as a burden upon our souls.

How comfortable are thy words, how sweet is every promise of thine, bright with the dew which makes heaven itself glad. May we now enter into the meaning of thy word; may it be sweeter to our taste than honey, yea, than the honeycomb. Having tasted other words, may we desire thine the more. This is the living word, no other word can live. Help us, therefore, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost. "Blessed are they that dwell in thy house, they will still be praising thee." One song shall follow another; one sacrifice shall prepare the way for a nobler oblation still, and as the days come and go, we shall be brought nearer heaven, through Jesus Christ our Saviour and Priest. For him how can we bless thee in words sufficiently tender; he is the heart of God; he is the only-begotten; the beginning and the end. He is all in all, the beginning of all beauty and music, all truth and wisdom, all grace and hope. In him our souls live; through him we pass from the bonds of death into the glorious liberty of immortality. Reveal his truth to us, we humbly pray thee; more and more as we look up do thou show us all thy stars; as we wait patiently for God may our patience be rewarded with great replies; may our loving waiting hearts be enriched with infinite grace. Take our life, we humbly pray thee, into thine own keeping. Preserve us from all evil, establish thy kingdom in the very centre of our life. When we lose thee may we cry like a child that is lost. When thou art standing afar off, may we cease to eat and drink because of weariness of heart. We long for thee. We say, without words, in many a trouble, yea, in helpless sighing, O Lord, how long? Thou art always coming, and thou art always coming quickly, yet because of our littleness and impatience we do not measure thy coming by the right standard. Forgive our very prayers; cleanse our very holiness from the corruption which degrades it. May our very waiting upon thee be not reckoned as an aggravation of our sin. Look in upon houses that are dull to-day, because familiar voices have ceased and familiar presences have passed away. Thou knowest the meaning of all this, though we

cannot explain it. Thou dost tear the branch from the tree ; thou dost suddenly, as by a great storm, unroof the house of plenty and comfort and peace, and lay it open to the great winds and rains and tempests ; thou dost take away the delight of our eyes, and whilst we are looking upon the flowers thou dost cut them down, that where they grow our hearts may lie. This is thy way ; how little do we see—the thunder of thy power who can understand ? Thou dost crush us like reeds that are already bruised ; yea, thou dost lay upon us burdens which exhaust our strength ; thou dost send night upon night of darkness upon our path of life, until our eyes are weary with the weight. Yet thou art not far away ; thou dost suddenly lift the gloom and shine upon us, and in the smile of thy love we take heart again. We will not mourn, nor complain, for in mourning there is no end, and in complaining there is no satisfaction. Thy will be done ; thy will is good ; in it there is no bitterness, in it there is no death. True and perfect and unchangeable love is thine, therefore in Christ's name and through Christ's strength and by the infinite sufficiency of Christ's grace would we now say, " Thy will be done." Amen.

### Acts ii. 37-47.

37. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart [stung with remorse. The only instance of the word "pricked" in the New Testament] and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do ?

38. Then Peter said unto them, Repent [the Hebrews express *sin* and punishment by the same word, and also *repentance* and *comfort*] and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

39. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

40. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward [crooked] generation.

41. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized : and the same day they were added *unto them* about three thousand souls.

42. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship [Phil. i. 5] ; and in breaking of bread, and in prayer.

43. And fear came upon every soul : and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

44. And all that believed were together, and had all things common.

45. And sold [the verbs throughout this description are in the imperfect tense, as expressing the constant recurrence of the act] their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

46. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house [*at home*], did eat their meat with gladness and singleness [the only instance of the word in the New Testament] of heart.

47. Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added [the tense implies a continually recurring act] to the church daily such as should be saved [them that were made safe].

### THE EFFECTS OF GOSPEL PREACHING.

PETER having explained the events which happened on the day of Pentecost, an immediate *effect* was produced upon the people who heard him ; that effect is stated in these very graphic words, " They were pricked in their hearts." So the Holy Ghost was poured out upon *them* as he had been poured out upon the assembly of the *Church*. We see here, therefore, the *double action* of the Holy Spirit. He is poured out upon the Church to sanctify and to confirm in the faith ; and he is poured out upon those who are outside the Church that he may alarm and quicken and direct to right conclusions.

We must remember that this was the *first* Christian Sermon that had been preached. Jesus Christ was no longer present in the *body*. Christian revelation, so far as the bodily presence of Christ was concerned, had been completed, and his last word upon earth had been spoken. Now we are curious to know how the truth will make its way upon its *own merits*, apart from that singular magnetic influence which attached to the bodily presence and the audible voice of the divine Master.

Will the truth make its way by sheer force of its celestial beauty and grace, and comfort, or will it perish under other voices than Christ's own? So long as Christ was present, he could work miracles. His soul could look out of his eyes upon the multitude as the soul of no other man could look. Perhaps therefore any progress which the kingdom of heaven had made amongst men was owing entirely to the *bodily presence* and magnetic influence of the visible Christ. So we wait, we hear the discourse, and when it is concluded we read,—that when the people heard this they were pricked in their hearts.

Observe the peculiarity of that effect. Not, they were awed by the eloquence ; not, they were excited in their imagination ; not, they were gratified in their taste ; the result was infinitely deeper and grander. " They were pierced in their hearts." An arrow

had fastened itself in the very centre of their life. In their conscience was inserted the sting of intolerable self-accusation. This was the grand miracle. Truly we may say this was the beginning of miracles of the higher, because the *spiritual* kind. Great effects are produced by great causes. A reflection of this kind would, however, have a very remote interest for us were it confined to an ancient incident. As a matter of fact, the Apostle Peter preached the *only* sermon that any Christian minister is ever at liberty to preach. This discourse of Peter's is not nineteen centuries old. It is the *only* discourse that any minister of Christ dare utter, if he be faithful to his stewardship. This is the *model* sermon. This the evangelical doctrine. No change must be made *here* or a corresponding change will be made in the *effect* which is produced. Men may be more eloquent, men may be more literary, men may be more technical and philosophical, they may use longer words and more abstruse arguments, but the effect will be like other talk, it will be pointless, and there will be no answer in the great human heart,—no conscience will accuse, no eyes will be blinded with tears, from no multitude of men will there be extorted the cry, "What shall we do?"

Let us look at this sermon and see how it is made up. It is full of *Scriptural allusions*, and no sermon is worth listening to that is not full of Bible. The reason why our preaching is so powerless and pointless is that we do not impregnate it with the inspired word itself. Peter did not *make* the sermon. He quoted David and Joel, the Psalms and the prophets, and set these quotations in their right relations to what had just happened in Jerusalem, and whilst he was *talking* history he *made* history. Faithful to God's word, God's Spirit was faithful to him, and herein was that grand word eternally realised in all its beneficent tenderness—"My word shall not return unto me void." *Peter's* word would have returned void, but *God's* word is as a sower going forth to sow, and in the eventide of his labour bringing back his sheaves with joy.

This discourse of Peter's was also *full of Christ*. But for Christ it never could have been delivered. From end to end it palpitates with the Deity and glory of the Son of God. It is also full of holy *unction*. It was not delivered as a schoolboy might deliver a message. The great strong rough frame of the fisherman-preacher

trembled, yea quivered and vibrated under the feeling of the sacred message which the tongue was delivering. The sermon is also full of patriotic and spiritual *tenderness*, and all the while without art or trick or mechanical skill, it led up to a vehement and solemn *demand*. When that demand was thundered upon the people they were "pricked in their heart," and they said, "What shall we do?" They did not applaud the *man*, they were concerned about *themselves*; they were not *pleased*, they were *pierced*; and they were not *gratified*, they were *convicted*; they sought for no excuse; they asked for no great pleader to state their case in reply, they said with tears, What must we do?

But even this great sermon of Peter's does not explain the full result. The *preacher* must have had something to do with the effect. He had just received the Holy Ghost. The cloven tongue like as of fire still sat and burned upon him, and his whole soul thrilled with newly-given inspiration. An inspired *doctrine* demands an inspired *ministry*. The Book is inspired, but when uninspired *readers* read it they kill the very fire of heaven when it touches their reluctant tongues. What if we have an inspired *Bible* but an uninspired *Church*? It is *there* that the holy influence is lost. Inspiration inspires. It is simply useless for us to say that the *Bible* is inspired, if *we* who profess to believe it, do not share its inspiration. When the Holy Ghost is both in the *doctrine* and in the *people* who profess it, the mountains of difficulty shall be beaten with a new threshing instrument having teeth, and will fly away like dust upon the mocking wind.

Are *we* inspired? Do we read the word with the soul, or merely pronounce it with the lips? If with the lips only, what wonder if the people listen to the Bible with a very languid curiosity and are not unwilling that the broken and soul-less reading should cease?

Nor have we read the full account yet of the production of this mighty effect. The *people themselves* were in an anxious state of mind: they were prepared for *vital* statement; anything that was beautiful in nature or in music would not have satisfied them. They would have resented any discourse that bristled with merely clever allusions or curious conceits of expression. They were a *prepared* people. The fire fell upon prepared material, therefore

the word of the Lord had free course and was glorified. How can we preach to a people unprepared to hear? The work is too great for any man. A prepared *pulpit* should be balanced by a prepared *pew*. "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." To the *unthirsty* man the Bible spring is without attraction as it rises and falls and plashes, unheard and unheeded. But to the thirsty traveller, sun-smitten and weary, how sweet, how tender, and delightful is the music of running brooks and streams!

A very solemn reflection occurs here. I feel no difficulty in laying down the doctrine that where the *heart* is unaffected, Christian service is more *mischievous* than beneficial. Let us understand and apply that doctrine so far as we may be able. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness." If in our service, we touch everything but the *heart*, the service has done us more harm than good. What if our *notions* be increased, if our *motives* be left unbaptized with purifying fire? What if we have received a thousand new *ideas* into the intellect, if no angel has been received into the home of the heart? And what if we have been flattered and cajoled and "daubed with untempered mortar," if the word has not reached the very seat of the disease?

Pray for a ministry that shall affect the *heart*. We must have a heart-searching ministry. He who seeks after a *comforting* ministry only, and a restful one that shall give him no disturbance, actually treats himself maliciously, and wounds his own life. Let us pray for a ministry that shall tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and leave the truth in the order of divine providence to make its own way in the intelligence, the affections, and the conscience of the world.

This great gospel revelation is an appeal to the heart; if your fancy has been titillated, or even your graver judgment satisfied, if your *heart* be left unpricked, untroubled, and untorn, the word has been in vain. Lay bare your hearts, say, in God's strength, "Let me hear the exact truth, yea, if it tear me to pieces and inflict upon me the severest cruelties, such piercing shall lead to a great joy." The effect was grand in every aspect. Three thousand souls were added in the city that day, unto them that were being saved. And this will be the effect of Christian teaching

everywhere under the right conditions. People will be added to the Lord : the Lord's list will be enlarged every day, and there will be joy in the presence of the angels of God, over sinners that repent. Again and again we read that the people who heard the Apostolic preaching, "cried out." We have lost that *cry* : we have succumbed to the cold and benumbing spirit of decorum.

I read of men being carried away, forced into exclamation, of men, women and children coming together in common sorrow, and singing together in common joy ; but to-day the Church may possibly have lost much in losing a healthy excitement. Christianity is not a picture to be gazed upon and admired as an instance of ancient skill. It is the *fire* of the Lord. It is the sword of the Spirit. It is a cry that can awaken a cry. And whilst it is perfectly true that there may be an irrational excitement which ought to be subdued and controlled, it is also true that there is a spiritual enthusiasm, a noble feeling, an absolute consecration without which the Church may be but a painted sepulchre.

This gracious effect having taken place, we find that the people continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, and in fellowship, in breaking of bread and in prayers. That effect is just as remarkable as the other. The flock kept well together for fear of the wolf. Were we ourselves in heathen lands as Christians we should realize the joy of keeping *closely together*. We should want very often to see one another and to hear the voice of mutual instruction and encouragement. But living in a Christian land where Christianity has become a luxury, or in some instances even an annoyance, what wonder that we do not realize the primitive enthusiasm, and enter with delight into the original fellowship and union of the Church ? The people continued in the right *teaching*. Until our *teaching* be right our *life* must be wrong. We must ask for the pure bread, the pure water, the undefiled Bible, and live on that ; out of such nutritious food there will come proper results such as fellowship, sacramental communion, and common prayer. Therein perhaps some mistake may have been made. A man says, "I can pray by myself," that is perfectly true, but you should realize that you are something *more* than yourself ; you are part of a *sum total*. A man is not at liberty in



the Christian sense of manhood to *detach* himself from his race, from the common stock to which he belongs, and to live as if he had no relation to the great breadth of humanity.

Herein is the advantage of *common* prayer and *common* praise. "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together." There is inspiration in sympathy, there is encouragement in fellowship. It does the soul good to see the hosts gathered together under the royal banner stained with blood; to see the great army marching shoulder to shoulder under the blast of the great trumpet. Continue steadfastly to realize your *relations* to your fellow-Christians and to the whole Church. "No man liveth unto himself" who lives aright. We belong to one another; the Lord's family is not broken up into *units* only, it is constituted and consolidated into a sacred and happy *household*.

Other effects followed; they had all things common, "they sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all men as every man had need." This is the sternly *logical* outcome of true inspiration. But having regard to all the social conditions under which we live this mechanical form of union is *impracticable*, as it is understood from the reading of the mere letter. But having lost this form, which broke down under the eyes of apostles themselves, we still reserve the spiritual outcome and meaning. My contention is that to-day Christianity makes all things common, and that Christian *society* as it is constituted in a Christian land is the true expression of the spirit which formed itself otherwise in primitive days. My *strength* is not my own, it belongs to the *weakest child* that I may see groaning under oppression. If I interfere in the case of an oppressed man, and if the oppressor should say to me, What have you to do with this man—he is not *yours*? Christianity obliges me to say he *is* mine. If you see an animal ill-used and ill-treated, though it be not yours in any technical or legal sense of the term, you are called upon to interfere by an earlier right, and by a diviner law. Whoever has strength owns it for the benefit of those who have *none*. Why give bread to that poor little child? the child is not *yours*. Yes, the child *is* mine by virtue of its *necessity*. It would not be mine in so tender a sense were it clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day, but by its *weakness*, by its *poverty*, by its *tears*, by its *homelessness*, it is my child, and every man holds

his possession as a trust, for every other man who is in respectable poverty.

So we must go to *larger* meanings, and no longer seek in little narrow definitions the whole meaning of the Christian revelation. This very thing, this high Christian socialism is *now* realized in Christian society, and society owes more to Christ in this respect than society is sometimes willing to admit. To me there is nothing good that I cannot trace back to the heart of the Son of God. Good thinking, true teaching, noble action, high motive, look where I may, I find the only satisfactory explanation of all these things in the priesthood, the doctrine, the life, the cross of the Son of God.

Christianity is followed always by the same effects. Do not let us give way to the mischievous suggestion that certain things happened in *apostolic times* which are impossible *now*. It is not so : that is where the Church has lost her inspiration, her weight and her spiritual philosophy. She is content to have a Christ two thousand years old. The Church is to-day defending the Christ of the first century instead of living the present Christ who is now praying for her. The historical argument will never cease to have its own proper value ; documentary evidence must always be valuable in the very highest courts of Christian tribunal : but what we, the rank and file, have to do is this, to remember that Christ is but a day old as well as a thousand years old. Born *to-day*, as well as twenty centuries since ; living *to-day*, as certainly as he lived when he walked in Jewry and did miracles in Galilee. But we have let him out of our grip ; we have allowed him to pass us unnoticed. We are talking about ancient history instead of testifying to *present experience*. Let me call you—I would I could do so in trumpet tones, yea, with the boom and solemnity of thunder itself—to the realization of this doctrine, that Christ is *now* living, that his gospel is as mighty *to-day* as it ever was, that the human heart is unchanged, that the disease of the heart needs the exact remedy which is found in the gospel, and, if we faithfully and lovingly preach and live what we know of inspired truth, the hearts of men will own our call of God and our ministry by tongue and pen, and life shall not fall without some noble recognition and response.

## IX.

### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, our heart's desire is to climb thy hill and find audience with thee in the heavens. Is there not an appointed way? Is not Jesus Christ, thy Son, a living way to the Father? We can enter only by him; other door there is none; this is a wide open door, and we enter into it with joy of heart. For every beam of light we bless thee; for every hope that makes us glad we give thee thanks. Thou knowest how much we are in the valley, and how often we pass through dark places. Suddenly thou dost shoot down upon us rays of light; they warm us and give us a new comfort of the soul, so that we look upwards and are made glad with heavenly pleasure. We have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, so that thy name is familiar unto us, but now would we know thee by the love of the heart, by the tender sympathy of the quickened soul, yea, we would enter into communion with the Father and with the Son and with the Holy Ghost. How much we have to overcome that we may do this thou knowest; but thou dost beat even mountains to pieces, and crush the rock before the feet of thy people; and as for the rivers and the seas which divide between us, thou dost utterly dry them up. Therefore we bow before thee with a new song in our mouth, with a new hope brightening our hearts, and for this we bless thee in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Thou hast brought us together not to inflict on us a disappointment. For this thou didst not cause the trumpet of convocation to be sounded. Thou hast called us together into one family and fellowship for the passing hour, that thou mayest reveal thyself to us in some new and unexpected beauty. Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us. Let there be a shining from heaven of a great light, that shall chase every shadow away, and create a glory compared with which there is none beside. For all the blessings of the week how can we sing a song of gratitude sufficient? Hast thou not made a way for thyself in the darkness, and hast thou not turned the noon-day itself into sevenfold brightness? Thou hast withheld no good thing from us; thou hast given unto us blessings with both hands, and the windows of heaven have been too small to enable thee to pour down upon us all the stores of thy grace.

Yet we have received thy blessings oftentimes with neglect, sometimes with utter forgetfulness, now and then almost with practical contempt. We have not seen thine image and superscription upon thy daily gifts.

Thou hast been paying tribute unto us, and we have not repaid thee with our deep love. Yet wherein we have answered thee at all we bless thee for the reply we have given thee, forasmuch as the answer was inspired by thine own Spirit. If we have done anything aright, this also is the Lord's doing. If our thoughts have lifted themselves up above all clouds, and have fastened themselves with holy awe upon the subject of thine eternity and thy grace, behold this is the greatest of thy miracles. We are prone to search in the dust for our blessings ; we hew unto ourselves cisterns, that we may drink at them and be sufficed, and behold, they are broken cisterns that can hold no water. The river of God is full of water. To that river we now repair ; may we find in it healing and satisfaction, and see in it all the meaning of thine infinite grace. We are poor, but our poverty is not a hindrance in thy sight, but an attraction. Thou dost give to the poor and needy ; thou dost shelter the homeless ; thou art the Friend of those who have no friend, the Refuge of the penitent and the distressed, the Sanctuary of men who long to be free from sin. Thou art training us by thine own way and Spirit, and we cannot follow all the course of thy discipline, because we understand it not ; but thy way is right ; thou wilt justify thy way to us, and when thou hast tried us thou wilt bring us forth as gold. Let this assurance make our hearts quiet every day ; may we rest in this holy doctrine, and be quieted with thine own peace. The Lord visit us every one according to our personal need, and where there is special praise for special blessing, the Lord receive the hymn of love, and grant reply still larger than before. Where there is mourning of heart because of loss, pain, bereavement, or anticipation of distress, the Lord grant the healing grace of heaven. We have heard of the balm that is in Gilead, and of the Physician that is there, and we now hasten towards thee that we may be healed. Grant unto us in all our life just what we need. If thou dost not answer our prayers as we expect, do thou grant unto our hearts a peace that holds within its depths all assurance of grace. The Lord's light come from the whole heavens and make the place glorious. The Lord pity us, and take away the cloud of fear ; the Lord himself rejoice in his people redeemed with blood, and cause them to sing a new song of mercy and of judgment. May this hour be the most glorious and memorable in the recollection of the soul. Now we wait for thy reply ; we pray in the name of the Saviour ; we go by the way of the Cross ; our prayers we offer to the presiding Priest that he may magnify them and cleanse them, ennobling all their meaning and purpose, and seeking for us the answer of thy peace. Let our sins fall away from us like a garment, never more to be taken up, and let thy grace possess itself of our hearts, and make them glad with the very joy of heaven. Amen.

**Acts iii. 1-11.**

1. Now Peter and John [it is to John that Peter turns for comfort after his fall] went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, *being* the ninth *hour*.

2. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried [we may *carry* those we cannot *heal*], whom they laid daily at the gate [so massive that twenty men were required to open or shut it] of the temple which is called Beautiful [named only here], to ask alms of them that entered into the temple.

3. Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms.

4. And Peter, fastening his eyes [a look which read character] upon him with John, said, Look on us.

5. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.

6. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none ; but such as I have give I thee : In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.

7. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up : and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength [literally, "were consolidated"].

8. And he leaping up [Isaiah xxxv. 6] stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.

9. And all the people saw him walking and praising God.

10. And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple : and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him.

11. And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's [outside the temple, on the eastern side], greatly wondering.

**THE LAME MAN HEALED.**

**Y**OU will not see the whole beauty of this paragraph unless you connect it with the chapter preceding. You remember the infinite excitement of that chapter : it is the chapter which tells us the marvellous history of Pentecost, when the Holy Ghost had been poured out upon the waiting Church. "Suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house" where the Church was sitting, "and there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them ; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance." There had never been such a day in the Church before.

The spirit of the day was a spirit of ecstasy ; men saw visions and heard voices, and formed such noble purposes as had never before animated their breasts. It was a high day in the Church. The silver trumpet had sounded ; the last shadow seemed to have fled away ; and the family of God congregated there was filled with ineffable delight ; so much so, indeed, that even the vexing *property* question fell quite out of sight. No man reckoned that anything he had was his own ; all that believed were together like a family, and had all things common ; they sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men as every man had need. There was no suspicion of selfishness, for no life was bounded merely by its own interests. Life was raised up to a higher level than it had ever attained, and the people were praising God from morning till night ; “ they continued daily with one accord in the temple, breaking bread from house to house, and eating their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.” Surely the millennium had come !

After this there will be no more common-place : anything that can transpire after *such* a realization of the Divine presence will be of the nature of common-place, and will be resented in high temper as unworthy to follow such a manifestation ! Who would willingly come out of the blue heavens, to walk again on the common earth ? Who would voluntarily abandon angelic society, to come down again to the common thoroughfares and pathways of ordinary life ? You must enter into this excitement if you would understand the opening words of the third chapter. Probably there are no quieter words to be found anywhere than are these : “ Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer.” After the excitement of the second chapter, is not this of the nature of an anti-climax ? What can come after the thunder, and the whirlwind, and the mighty revelations of the Divine presence ? Two men—former partners in the fishing trade, often together, the complement of one another as to many mental and moral qualities—two men “ went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer.” Then see that the *ecstatic* hours of life ought to be succeeded by quiet *worship*, for that alone can sustain the heart with true nourishment. Men cannot live in ecstasy ; God grants unto his Church times of refreshing, hours of enthusiasm, days when the whole horizon opens like an infinite door into

the upper places of the universe ; but after such peculiarly solemn manifestations of power and grace, he expects us to go up into the temple to *pray*, as he knows such visions make all other life ordinary and common. Whatever luxuries you may enjoy occasionally, you must have bread permanently ; we do not live on *luxuries*, we live on *bread*. We cannot always live in the extraordinary, for by the very fact of its being always extraordinary it would cease to be other than usual. But were not the men *inspired* ? Had not they seen great sights, and heard great voices, and had they not actually received into their hearts the Holy Ghost ? To these inquiries an emphatic affirmation must be returned. Yet, notwithstanding all these special circumstances, the two men “ went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer.” The clock was not altered ; the time-bill of heaven was not changed : the great Pentecostal storm had rushed across the heavens, and had left behind it showers of blessings. Still the quiet clock ticked and travelled on to the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, and Peter and John were not so transported by special ecstasies as to forget their *daily* and *customary* engagements with God. Suspect any inspiration that makes you contemptuous of *ordinary religious duty*. If any men had reason to suppose that they could dispense with ordinary worship, and customary routine, Peter and John were such. They might have said, “ We have outlived all this ; we are no longer mechanical worshippers, we take no note of time now ; we have received the Holy Ghost into our hearts, and for us all Sabbath days, and sacrificial hours, and sacred places, are abolished—we live the higher life, we enjoy the ineffable consciousness.” No such speech did they make.

Inspiration never lessens *duty* ; true inspiration *ennobles* our conception of what is due from us to the Divine Being. Any supposed inspiration that has withdrawn men from the Temple and poisoned them with the delusion that they could sufficiently read the Bible at home, is an inspiration coming elsewhere than from Heaven. You cannot read the Bible at home in any exhaustive and final sense. You were not made to live at home always ; you have in you instincts that can only be satisfied by great public associations. There is in you that which finds its completion in public fellowship, Christian communion, and general intercourse

of mind with mind upon the sublime topics of Heavenly truth. It does a man good to "go up into the temple at the hour of prayer," that he may pray; it does every man good to be now and then in a *crowd*: public assembly has an educational and social influence upon the individual life. Standing alone, a man may seem to be very great, very important, and very self-complete; it is when he enters into a *crowd* that he realises his humanity, his littleness, and yet the very greatness that comes of that contraction of individuality. "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together." Peter and John did not, for immediately after the day of Pentecost, under the joyous realization of the newly-given Spirit, they went up into the Temple at the hour of prayer. Are we not wrong in supposing that *prayer* can ever be of the nature of common-place? What is prayer? Is it not communion with God?

Our conception of prayer has fallen. Few men can pray all the day. We pray sometimes through the prayers of others, and this is the true interpretation of the priestly element in human nature. Perhaps you cannot sing *vocally*, but you may sing *sympathetically* with the great Vocalist. So sympathetic may you be, that though you may find it impossible to *express* the sentiments which animate your hearts and give a nobility to your aspirations, yet when you hear those sentiments expressed by a gifted tongue they are made *your* prayers of by your cordial Amen. We should never give way to the blasphemous suggestion that prayer is or can be *ordinary*; there is nothing ordinary in any true prayer; to *pray* is to redeem any day from common-place. To have one quick, flashing view of God makes common time sacred. If we pray mechanically or by rote, or if prayer be the mere repetition of words which have never passed through the heart, and been stained with its blood, then I wonder not that men have become weary of prayer, and should long for it to cease; but when we truly realise the nature and scope of prayer, and when the heart beats sympathetically through the whole compass of communion with God, there can be nothing common-place in prayer, even if it immediately succeed the storms and shocks of Pentecost itself. But had the Apostles *lost* their inspiration? Verily, there was hardly time for any such loss to have taken place, for the narrative reads as if it were almost one, without break, and without any punctuation that would separate substantially the one part from the other. They had not



lost their inspiration, as is evident by what they did. Look at the case! Here is a man lame from his mother's womb, who had never walked to the Temple, but was always carried by friends—carried there every day, and carried every day too to the most attractive spot in all the surroundings of the temple. No man had ever cured him; we are not aware that any man had ever attempted to heal him; but Peter, fastening his eyes upon him, with John, said, "Look on us!" That was the first time probably he had ever looked with all his soul. No such speech had ever thrilled him before. Only if we had heard the accents with which Peter said, "Look upon us," should we be able to understand the ardent gaze of the expectant beggar. Verily, these men then had not *lost* their inspiration, or they never would have taken this course with the suppliant at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple. They could work this miracle. Let that be taken as a proof of the *continuance* of their inspiration; and yet we see that notwithstanding the continuance of their inspiration they are going up like ordinary humble worshippers to pray in the temple.

Young men, let me, as your friend and teacher, advise you to beware of any inspiration that leads you away from apostolic practice. Your ambition may be easily excited, and you may not require a very expert tempter of the human mind to say to you that perhaps you may be a genius, a man of a particularly refined and sensitive character. *You* need not submit to take upon you the yoke of religious custom; *your* place is the side of the purling brook, yours to watch the meandering stream, yours to hold converse with rising and setting suns. When such temptation seduces you give it the *lie*. You have not the ardour of holy Peter, you have not the mental crown and moral glow of the divine John, and it will be better for you to follow in the way of apostolic practice than to yield up your religious life at the bidding of an anonymous tempter. The law would seem to be that every *miracle* should be succeeded by *prayer*, and every great effort of human life should be followed by a religious exercise, every outgoing of the soul should have its compensatory movement in silent communion with God. After you have been striving arduously and valiantly in the fight, plunge into the bath, so to say, of divine meditation and heavenly communion, and therein leave your weakness and recover your strength. This incidental conversation with the poor lame

beggar at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple gives us some particulars about the Apostles themselves, and those particulars are the more valuable because of the way in which they are introduced into the narrative. It is perfectly evident that having all things common had not *enriched* Peter and John. We wonder sometimes as to the meaning of the apostolic communion, and here is a sidelight upon it of a very striking kind. The men who belonged to the apostolic communion had neither silver nor gold. Apostolic communion was no priest's trick : it was no attempt to enrich the apostolate at the expense of the Christian public. Here are two of the most conspicuous of the apostolate saying, quite in an incidental manner as an explanatory basis of proposed action, "Silver and gold have we none."

So much the better for them ! Woe unto the Apostle who spends one half of his life in getting silver and gold, and the other half in watching that they do not run away from him. "Silver and gold have I none ;" what had they, then ? They had divine energy, spiritual life, social sympathy, and hearts to bless those who needed benediction and assistance. The poverty of the Apostles was in material substance only ; and therefore it was no poverty at all. *He* is the poor man who has nothing but *money* ; there are no poorer men in all the range of civilization to-day than those men who are overweighted with property. He is rich who has high ideals and noble sympathies, and who lives in the presence of God and in the service of truth. He cannot be alone ; there is no solitude for the truly intellectual and spiritual nature. Some men cannot understand silence ; if you are not for ever talking to them, they suppose that you are dull ; if you do not walk out hour after hour during the day, and talk the whole time, they inquire considerably as to your spirits, and as to whether there is not something in your temperament that tends toward melancholy. If men have not upon their faces an eternal grin they are supposed to be unhappy. You have met with persons who say they never walk out alone. I thank God I can never walk out in company ! Have your riches in your mind, in your heart, in your thoughts, in your purposes, in your beneficent plans, and the night will be as the day, and the day will be seven-fold in brightness. Then you shall not know what it is to feel the chill and pain of solitude. This action of the Apostles also shows how pos-

sible it is to be giving *less* than others, and at the same time to be giving *more* than they all. "Silver and gold have I none." "Then he could give nothing," would be the swift and shallow reasoning of those who read the surface only. "But such as I have give I thee." That is the giving that does not impoverish; the more given the more left. It is the giving of the *sun*.

The sun has been giving his light; he has shone for thousands of years, and yet he is as luminous as when he first looked out upon the darkness which he dispelled. Give *mechanically*, and you will weary of the exercise; but give *spiritually*, and you will increase your possessions by the very giving of your alms. I take this incident as representing our own Christian life to-day in some important aspects. Our Christian life has its Pentecost. There are rare days in our consciousness; there are times when we think we are almost going into the celestial company; there are hours of transport, of high, tender realization, in which we know that though we are separated from the heavenly host by time and space, we yet can almost take hold of hands. And are there not days upon which, when we open the Bible, the whole page gleams with a new light, and when the very rustling of the leaves is as the shaking of the tree of Life? Have we not all said—

"My willing soul would stay in such a frame as this,  
And sit and sing herself away to everlasting bliss"?

But the *practical* lesson immediately succeeds. We are not to live in such ecstasy; we are to go into the ordinary *routine*, if you so please, of worship. Herein many hearers are hard upon those who preach; the preacher is relied upon for the undue and continual excitement of the intellectual and spiritual nature. We forget that we do not live in excitement, but in the ordinary patient, thankful enjoyment of customary service; and our religious life, like the life of the Apostles, has its work to do *outside* the Temple.

A man may pray none the less prayerfully because he has aided some poor creature before he entered the sacred place. We should have enjoyed the service many a time much more keenly if before coming to it we had made some sorrowful heart glad. That is the *preparation* for prayer. To have been with some lonely one; to have created an atmosphere of friendliness around the solitary traveller; to have lifted the burden of life for one short minute

from a back too weak to bear it, would have been to have enjoyed in the most profound and satisfactory sense the service of the house of God. If you want to come up at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice with glowing, thankful hearts, ready to receive any communication God may make to them, spend the intervening hours in doing good to those who sit in solitary places. Visit the poor and the friendless; hear their dreary tales; and when you come to the house of God you will come, not in a spirit of criticism, but in a spirit of sympathy, and from the first note to the last there shall be a shining forth and revelation of the Divine presence. Then, finally, the Christianity of this day, like the Christianity of the Apostolic day, must prove its divinity by its *beneficence*. "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk."

Peter did not preach a sermon to the man. To the excited multitude he expounded the Scriptures; he quoted the Psalms and the Prophets, and shewed what new interpretation God had given to His word; but when he came face to face with the man lame from his mother's womb, unable to help himself, he preached no sermon except as the mention of the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth is always a sermon, but bade the helpless man rise up and walk. Here is the sphere in which Christian argument may yet secure its highest triumph. Words can be answered by words, phrases beget phrases, and the easy trick of recrimination is the favorite amusement of mere controversialists; but a Church seeking out the lowly, helping the helpless, healing the sick, teaching the ignorant, standing by the cause of righteousness, defying the oppressor, and suffering and working for the right, is a Church whose beneficence is its noblest attribute, and whose character is the only vindication it requires.

## X.

### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we pray thee in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord to work thy wonders in our hearts, and to make us signs and tokens unto all the people. May the change in us be so great that all who have known us aforetime may marvel at the mighty power of thy grace. Enable us to live the heavenly life whilst we are yet upon earth ; to speak thy Word ; to answer all the intimations of thy purpose ; and to respond in one continual answer of obedience to all thy holy will. We rejoice that we are thine in Christ. Thou hast caused us to undergo the vital change which makes us sons of God. We are no more strangers and foreigners ; nor are we wandering prodigals, aliens, outcast. We are the children of the living God. We are part of the whole family in heaven and on earth. And this ~~is~~ of the Lord's mercy, and not of our will. Thou hast recovered us from our fall. We stand in thy house with the light of heaven beaming upon our life because of thy goodness. We therefore praise thee in our song ; we lift up our hearts joyously to bless the Lord for all his benefits towards us ; and we take heart again, and will pursue our way to the end, confiding solely in thy grace and strength. Thou dost love us, every one. Thou hast sent thy Son to bless us. The Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. We therefore look unto him who is our salvation. We trust in his Cross ; we look towards the mighty sacrifice which he rendered ; and, because of the infiniteness of his love, we stand before thee this day, confident that thou wilt not forsake us, and sure of thine eternal regard.

We come with many wants, and yet all our necessities are one. If thou wilt grant us thy peace, then shall all our life be quiet. Our necessities shall be supplied ; the sting of pain shall be taken out of our heart ; and in our mouth there shall be a new and living song. Comfort us in all the way of the wilderness. The miles are long ; the way is often dreary ; all thy clouds sometimes gather over head, and look down upon us with infinite threatening, and we know not which way to take in the darkness. Speak comfortably to our hearts in such hours of gloom, and save us from the weakness and the bondage of despair. Surely we see thee all the day long. Thou dost shine in the morning dawn, and at eventide the stars glitter because of thy nearness ; and between the rising of the sun and the going down of the same, is not thy providence a continual miracle ? Thine hand is opened in bounteousness ; thine eyes melt with pity ; the outgoing of thine heart towards us is a continual

redemption. We confess our sins, we mourn the hardness of our hearts. "Surely," we have said, "our stubbornness is now subdued, and in tenderness and filial love we will walk before the Lord all the days of our life." And behold, the enemy returns, the fire of hell is rekindled, and all our hopes are cast down. But thou delightest to forgive. The fulness of thy pardon is as the fulness of the sea. Thy mercy endureth for ever.

We pray to be fed with the bread of life. Lord, evermore give us this bread. So strengthen our minds by daily communications of truth, and so uphold our hearts by continual supplies of grace, that our walk may be steadfast before the Lord, that our spirit may show itself to be continually waiting upon God.

We pray always for one another ; that the dumb may speak ; that the deaf may hear ; that all who are carried from thy fold may return because of recovered strength. Magnify thy grace in our experience ; so destroy the power of the Enemy that we shall forget his existence, and so release us from all anxiety, and from all secondary attachments, as to bind us in constancy of love to the worship of thy name, and the study of thy word. Lift the burden from the back that is too weak to bear it. Touch with thine own fingers the tears which we dare not approach. Send into every heart some angel to speak of Jesus and the Resurrection. And, when the day shall close around us, and shall no longer be passing before us, but shall become a memory of the heart, may the recollection of this sacred day abide with us, a continual peace, and a continual inspiration. Amen.

### Acts iii. 12-26.

12. And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this [man] ? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk ?

13. The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers hath glorified his Son [servant : Isaiah xlii. 1] Jesus : whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined [had decided] to let him go.

14. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you.

15. And killed the Prince [the same word is rendered *Author* in Heb. xii. 2] of Life, whom God hath raised from the dead [better, RAISED once for all] ; whereof we are witnesses.

16. And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know : yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness [completeness ; the only place in the New Testament in which the word occurs] in the presence of you all.

17. And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did your rulers.

18. But those things, which God before had showed by the mouth of all [all is omitted by the east MSS.] his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.

19. Repent [change your minds] ye therefore, and be converted [this word "converted" occurs eleven times in the Acts], that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.

20. And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you.

21. Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution [the only instance of the word] of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

22. For Moses truly [indeed] said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me ; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you.

23. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.

24. Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days.

25. Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.

26. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

### A GREATER MIRACLE.

THIS speech is a greater miracle than the cure of a lame man, in connection with which it was spoken. The great miracles are all wrought *within*. To heal a man with lame feet and weak ankle bones is a very small thing compared to the utterance of this eloquent and thrilling address. Compare Peter before the Resurrection with the Peter of this speech, and tell me what has happened. Surely a great cure has been wrought upon *him*. Who would have known the man again—the ardent, impulsive, often-blundering Peter of the pre-resurrection period? Who could have thought that ever he would have dawned into such glory, and have broken forth into such fluent and noble eloquence? Up to this time all his sentences have been broken ; his speech has rather been timid with the spirit of an enquirer ; we have never found in him, except upon one occasion, the boldness of an inspired expositor. But now he takes the case in hand with masterly completeness and ease, and fearing no man, because not speaking the

words of man, he explains the position and vindicates it at every point with sublime and telling effect.

Peter was no conjuror. In *himself* the miracle had first been wrought, therefore, to work a second miracle upon the lame man became a commonplace to apostolic power. *You* cannot work miracles, because you *yourselves* are not miracles. We are but mechanical reformers ; we approach the whole case from the outside, and with many a lame suggestion we attempt to mend the world's sad condition. We must be greater *ourselves* than any work which it is possible for ourselves to *do*. When we attain that superiority over our own efforts, when Peter is a greater miracle than Peter's cure, we shall see lame men leap up on every side, and behold them walking, and hear their loud thrilling songs of thankfulness because of recovered hope and newly-given strength.

In this speech Peter vindicated his apostolic *primacy*. You might have asked questions concerning Peter's superiority before, but after this speech every objection must be hushed. Its grandeur is so superlative, its strength is so massive, its simplicity is so frank, its mastery is so abounding, that when the grand voice ceases all men feel that the first place belongs to Simon Peter. Any primacy that is not based on *merit* must go down. For a time you may bolster up a man, you may preach him up, you may, in many ways, contribute to his transient primacy ; but any superiority of position that is not based upon fundamental and vital merit falls before the testing touch of circumstances, and before the impartial test of time. So let this Book of God stand or fall. The priests cannot keep it up, though they be robed with white garments and crowned, and have staves and mitres in their hands. Parliaments and thrones cannot give the Bible its lasting primacy over human thought and human actions. If the inspiration be not in the Book itself you cannot communicate it ; and if the inspiration really be in the Book itself you can never talk it down. By force you may quiet it for a time ; but truth is eternal, it returns. Men leave it, supposing it to be dead, but it rises and reasserts its sovereignty.

Thus our position is a very independent one as regards the Bible, and as regards all the miracles which the Bible records. I do not receive the Bible because it is recommended to me by official authority. The Bible commends *itself* to me. It affrights



me, it charms me ; it appalls me by the outflashing of sudden light and unexpected glory, so that I run away from the dazzling revelation. Then it seeks me when I am weary, and lonely, and sad, and hopeless ; and when all life has gathered itself into the image of a deep, grim grave. Then it talks to me as no other book can talk. So, as Peter's primacy rests on Peter's sovereign power of mind, and sovereign power of moral influence, so the primacy of the Bible over all other books rests upon what the Bible itself can do *beyond* all other books to give light and strength and hope to human life.

The danger is that we be not just to such men as Peter. We may take this speech as a mere matter of course. It is so that we take too many speeches. We hear an eloquent man drop sentence after sentence of singular beauty, and think that he does so simply as a matter of course. In every such sentence there is a drop of sacrificial blood. The sentences that move the world and live through all time are heart-drops. The foolish hearer may allow them to pass without recognition or appreciation, but those who have spent long time in the sanctuary of thought, and have often bowed themselves down at the altar with wonder, will recognize in such speeches as Peter's the very grace and glory of Divine truth. Consider what this man was ; how he had been brought up ; how often he had stumbled and blundered ; how the inspired writers never shrink from telling his mistakes and sins. Then see him, in the presence and hearing it may have been of the most learned men of his day, giving this exposition and no other. Do not go beyond the four walls of the case itself, and upon this speech you may risk your greatest and deepest commendation of Peter as a thinker, as a saint, as an apostle, as an expositor of heavenly mysteries. To such men the world owes all its higher wealth.

True eloquence is *forced* out of men. This speech was not a prepared oration. It was not something which he took from his secret place and read, as if the whole trick had been arranged—the cure, and the wonder, and the eloquence. The sermon was as extemporaneous as was the event itself. This eloquence came out of the circumstances which had just transpired. The looking people make the eloquent preacher. All the people fastened their eyes upon Peter and John ; and, as the lame man had drawn out

of Peter spiritual power by his magnetic look, so the people drew out of Peter still higher power by their marvelling—their sceptical yet gracious wonder. In reply to that wonder, see how Peter declines any merely public primacy based on purely personal considerations. Peter stood before the people, not in his personal capacity, but in his *representative* capacity. Said he, “This is not our doing.” “Whose doing is it?” “It is the Lord’s doing; and it is marvellous in our eyes.” And, with the infinite cunning of inspired wisdom, he magnified the occasion by attaching the miracle to the omnipotence of a God about whose existence the *Jew* had no doubt. Said he, “The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified His Son, Jesus.” The Apostles did not snatch at praise for themselves. The original leaders of Christian thought and sentiment did not leap upon pedestals which the people, in their idolatrous wonder and love, set up as temptations in their way. They maintained their royal supremacy, their all-dominating sovereignty, by operating in the presence of the people merely as the servants and instruments of God. We must return to that allegiance to the Divine name and throne. The books you have written were written by the finger of God, in so far as they are true, and wise, and useful. The lives you have lived you have lived by faith in the Son of God, in so far as they have been true, beneficent, and honorable. You must resent merely *personal* eulogium. Accept it as an encouragement in the meantime; lift the wondering eyes from yourself to God, and you shall have added power every day.

Not only does Peter decline the implied eulogium of the wondering look, he takes upon himself to cut the people to pieces. No great progress can be made in moral reform until our apostles slay us. Flattery will do nothing for us—at most, will but mislead or bewilder us. We want knife work; we want to be pierced to the heart, told our sins one by one, and brought to the bar of judgment man by man, like so many hopeless and self-condemned criminals. Hear his speech in proof of what I have said. Speaking of Jesus Christ, he says, “Whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate. . . . But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of Life.” That man must succeed in his ministry, or he must be killed! Such a speaker of such an ad-

dress cannot occupy a middle position. A man who so assails his contemporaries must have a good cause with which to sustain his heart and renew his courage, or he will be borne down, and the heel of the insulted public shall bruise his head. When did the Apostles speak with bated breath and whispering humbleness? When did they try to make the best of the case by appeasing the spirit of the people, and by an endeavor to placate sensibilities which had been strongly excited? They never lowered the tone of their impeachment. Christ's death was never less than a murder, and the men who had taken part in the Crucifixion were never treated as other than murderers. There is no euphemism here; there is no attempt here at the smoothing down of very harsh asperities. On the contrary, we have here the bitter, stern, tragical, truth, and that truth has to be repeated day by day, and age by age, until every man feels that he himself has been the murderer of Christ.

So we come back to a truth with which this message has made us familiar. We are not to put away the Crucifixion as an historical circumstance, nineteen or twenty centuries old. The Crucifixion takes place every day, and every day we nail the Son of God to the Cross. Realize this circumstance, let all its teaching sink deeply into our hearts, and there will go up the old cry of contrition and self-condemnation, and after it will come times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.

In the 17th verse the tone changes with wondrous skill. The Gospel is not an impeachment only—it is an offer. Peter says, “I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers;” and he introduces this new phase of the subject with a word which united himself with the people—he called those who heard him by the name of “brethren.” “And now, *brethren*, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.” Is that a novel suggestion on the part of Peter himself? Has he been considering how to extricate these people from the awfulness of their position? Nothing of the kind. This 17th verse repeats the very prayer of Christ Himself upon the Cross. When Jesus was dying he said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Peter, following along the same line of thought, says, “I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.”

So he opens a great door of hope. The Church ought to be fertile in its invention of opportunities for the worst men to return. Sometimes the Church may suggest reflections which the self-condemned man dare not originate in his own heart. Drop a word of hope wherever you can. Tell the very worst man that the door of hope, if not wide open, is yet ajar, and that the very faintest touch of his fingers will cause it to fall back to the very wall. Learn from apostolic preaching the true range and power of apostolic eloquence. Nothing could be sterner than his words, and yet nothing could be more hopeful than the application of those words. In reality, Peter said to those who were about him, "Begin again. Leave your ignorance behind you. Now take a true view of the case, and under this newly-dawning light fall down before God and ask his pardon."

Then comes the grand exhortation in which we find the keyword of apostolic preaching, and the secret of apostolic success, and that word is found at the beginning of the 19th verse, "REPENT." That is a word which the Church has lost. If now and again we use the word "repent," we use it as a common word, and do not throw into it all the soul's urgency. It has worked wonders in days of old. It is like the sword of which David said, "Give me that; there is none like it." This word "repent" goes to the root and to the reality of the case. Who has repented? I do not ask who has been alarmed by threatened consequences, and who, in order to escape a penalty, denounced in emphatic language, has professed a change of habit and of purpose. My question is a deeper one. Who has felt heart-brokenness on account of sin? real, genuine contrition on account of spiritual offence against God? Have we not forgotten that old word "repent" in its original signification and uses. Has the Church become too dainty in her tongue to use such words? The word "repent" is a multitudinous word: it carries many other words with it. It is a challenge, an accusation, a threatening, a hope, a law, a gospel. Truly, this word is a polysyllable in its theological suggestions, and therefore ought to be often opened out and examined, and its infinite treasures ought to be well weighed and estimated by the Christian thinker.

There is another word in the 19th verse of as much importance as the word "repent;" that word is "therefore." You would not suppose the word "therefore" was a very important one; yet I hold it to be as important as any other word in the whole text. It refers to the *historical* and *logical* argument upon which Christianity is founded. "Therefore" is a logical term. "Therefore" indicates the issue and effect of an argument. "Therefore" is a word which is not given first, but last; and it carries in itself the meaning and the force of all that has preceded. Peter then, having gone back to "the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers," and having traced the history of the Crucifixion, and having explained the secret by which the lame man had been healed—the secret of faith in the name of the Son of God—and having pointed to the probable ignorance of those who had crucified the Saviour, and having shown that all this Christian idea was a fulfilment of words spoken by the mouth of all God's prophets, he gathers himself up in this one supreme effort, and, with the masterliness of an inspired preacher he says, "Repent ye, *therefore*"—for no sentimental reasons, but on historical grounds—on the ground of the ancient dealings of God with his people, and because of the culmination of those dealings in the recovery of the man who is standing there, the living proof of an undisputed miracle.

Then, after his wont, Peter's speech proceeds like a deep, broad river—full of wisdom, full of thought, full of hope, full of sympathy, and he ends with these warm words, "Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you." Apostolic preaching was tender; apostolic preaching touched the soul of the hearer, the wound of the spirit, with a most delicate hand. Apostolic preaching was religious preaching, spiritual preaching, personal preaching, direct preaching, and it kept itself to this one theme—the turning away men from their iniquities. And because it did so it turned the world upside down. Preacher of the Living God, come back from all intellectual vagaries, romances, and dreamings, and stand to your one work of accusing men of sins, accusing yourself first and most deeply, and then revealing the living Son of God, who came with one purpose only, the purpose of blessing men—not by giving them new ideas, not by giving them stolen comfort, not by tampering with their moral position, but by

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“ turning away every one of you from his iniquities.” Blessing and iniquity never can co-exist in the same heart. The iniquity must go, then the blessing will come. The wickedness must depart, and then angels will hasten into the soul from which it has gone out. Let us know, believe, and say from time to time with frankest speech that no man can really be blessed who has not been turned from his iniquities. Ye cannot drink the cup of God and the cup of devils.

## XI.

### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we have come to the waters of life. In times that are gone we hewed out unto ourselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that could hold no water ; but now we have come to the life-stream. May we drink thereof, and be glad with exceeding joy. Thou has made for us wells in the wilderness, and springing fountains in the desert. The river of God is full of water : may we now drink of that living stream that we may never thirst again. Give unto us this water with thine own hand ; it will be to us the more precious for thy touch. Send us not away with a great fire of thirst in the heart ; but quench our desire, and satisfy our yearning, and give us to know how good a thing it is to wait upon the living God. We bless thee that we need thee every day. Were we less we could do without thee the better ; but being what we are we long for thee. Our rest is in thy peace ; our security is in thine Almightyness ; and our hope is in thy grace. Surely, if thou hast taught us to pray, thou wilt reply Dost thou make the eye without giving the light ? and dost thou form the ear without supplying the wondrous air which plays upon it, and brings through it to the soul all tender messages and glorious gospels ? So, thou hast not made the soul to pray without having first provided the answer. Thy reply is older than our supplication. The Lamb was slain before the sin was done. Was not Christ thy Son, our Sacrifice and Priest, the Lamb, slain from before the foundation of the world ! Is not the Gospel from eternity ? We go back to the eternal counsel. We stand in the eternal decree. Thy grace is older than our sin. Thy Almightyness is older than our infirmity. We come to thee, in the house appointed, to-day, to seek great things in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, the Son of God. We have come to seek of thee pardon, many pardons, waves of forgiveness, great billows of pardoning love ; that underneath their infinite fulness our sin may be lost, like a stone in the unfathomable deep. Jesus Christ is risen to-day. This morning, heaven's gate is wide open. We come to-day, though it be to the outside only, and look in and say in the name of Christ, " God be merciful unto us, sinners." Thou lovest sinners. Thou, Jesus, didst go in to sinners, and eat with them. " This man receiveth sinners." Herein is love, that Christ died for us whilst we were yet sinners. God be merciful unto us, sinners. Feed us with the bread sent down from heaven. Lord, evermore give us this bread. Satisfy our hunger as well as our thirst. May we obey thine injunction, inspired by thy love, to eat

and drink abundantly as the beloved of God. Lead us into all truth ; deliver us from all narrowness of thought and all bigotry of feeling, and set us in the infinite spaces ; and give us to know the range and compass of the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Fill us with Christian love. Destroy all self-trust and self-idolatry ; and give us to feel that every man is thy child, and that the more he is lost the greater is the anxiety of thy love concerning him. Deliver us from any feeling of contempt for any living creature. May we take Christ's view of every soul ; and if we have lost but one out of ten, but one out of a hundred, may we sweep the house diligently until we find the tenth piece, and leave all that is secure at home to find the hundredth sheep wandering among the barren rocks. Send out the light of thy truth this day like a new flame of glory. May the nations behold it, and wonder and adore. May the human mind be arrested by a new revelation of the beauty that is in Christ. May thy preachers pronounce his name with a new accent, though with the old feeling of reverence, and awe, and love. May thy servants this day utter the name and title of Jesus as they were never uttered before since the days of the Pentecost. We love Jesus. He is more to us every day. Every day we take to him gold, and frankincense, and myrrh ; now, may we take to him our life and our life's life, and have nothing in us on which his claiming hand doth not rest. Grant Sabbath peace to every soul. Still the tumult and the uproar of the world's busy week. Cleanse the ear from all the vulgar noise of life's common thoroughfare, and fill the hearing ear with the music of another world. Touch the wound no hand of ours may approach. Whisper to the weak, and suffering, and dying. Make the place of sorrow thy chosen sanctuary. Where the darkness is very great do thou set thy largest star. Bless the child at school, and may knowledge be turned into wisdom. Travel with the traveller, and give him favoring winds, and open roads, and bring him to his desired place. Speak to the soldier and the sailor of a higher boldness and a diviner heroism than can be known in human relations. Speak to the prisoner in his solitude, and may his very heart cry unto God for the pardon of his sin. Put thine arms around us all, the everlasting arms, and give us to feel their inviolable security. Amen.

### Acts iv. 1-30.

1. And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple [the chief agents in our Lord's condemnation], and the Sadducees [the higher members of the priesthood], came upon them,
2. Being grieved [expressive of intensity of trouble and vexation] that they taught the people, and preached through [literally, *preached in Jesus*] Jesus the resurrection from the dead.
3. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold [in custody] unto the next day : for it was now eventide [6 P.M.].
4. Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed ; and the number of the men was about five thousand.



5. And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes,

6. And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander [the probable conveners of the meeting], and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem.

7. And when they had set them in the midst [the Sanhedrim sat in a semicircle, the president being in the middle of the arc and the accused standing in the centre], they asked [apparently in a tone of contempt], By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?

8. Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost [the tense implies a sudden inspiration], said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel.

9. If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he [the pronoun implies the presence of the man] is made whole ;

10. Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.

11. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.

12. Neither is there salvation [the Greek has the article—*the* salvation] in any other : for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

13. Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned [unlettered] and ignorant [common] men, they marvelled ; and they took knowledge [they began to recognize] of them, that they had been with Jesus.

14. And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.

15. But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves,

16. Saying, What shall we do to these men ? for that indeed a notable miracle [sign] hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem ; and we cannot deny it.

17. But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them [Gr. : let us threaten them with threats], that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.

18. And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all [Gr. : absolutely not to utter] nor teach in the name of Jesus.

19. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.

20. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.

21. So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people : for all men glorified God for that which was done.

22. For the man was above forty years old [precision characteristic of Luke], on whom this miracle of healing was shewed.

23. And being let go, they went to their own company [their own people] and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.

24. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord [not Kyrios, but Despotes], thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is :

25. Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things ?

26. The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ.

27. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod [Luke alone recorded Herod's share in the proceedings connected with the crucifixion], and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together,

28. For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

29. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings : and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word.

30. By stretching forth thine hand to heal ; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.

## TEACHING AND PERSECUTION.

NOT only did Peter and John cure the lame man, which would have been an incident hardly worth recording, they proceeded to "*teach the people,*" and to "preach, through Jesus, the resurrection of the dead." Herein was their greatest fault in the eyes of the rulers of the Jews. Christianity is a *teaching* religion. Christianity seeks out the people, all the people, and speaks the common popular tongue. The speech of Christianity is the universal speech. It is just here that preachers may learn their most useful lesson. Our danger is that we speak to *classes* of men—the educated, the polite, the discerning. The Apostles never spoke to any particular *class* of men exclusively. They taught the *people*. We can never get back to that universal speech unless those of you who are educated and highly refined will support us in that missionary attempt. You must be content to be partially neglected in so far as intellectual luxuries are concerned, and must assist us in providing good wholesome bread for the common people. That is your duty to-day. "Except a man deny himself he cannot be Christ's disciple." Except a man can sit in his pew and

say, "I would rather hear the common speech, the great, broad, universal speech, than any merely class address," he cannot be Christ's disciple.

The Apostles then, we see, in the first instance, taught *the people*; they did not ask for any particular class of the people, did not speak what may be termed an eclectic gospel to a chosen few. Their words were so simple that they could pour them upon the common winds, and let the breath of heaven carry those living words everywhere. See that ye be not *hinderers* of this Gospel by your love of luxuries. The Gospel is not a luxury, it is bread; it is water; it is a common speech to every soul that lives. The rulers of the Jews were grieved that they taught the people. That is precisely the difference between Christianity and every other religion. Other religions say, "Keep the people in the dark." Christianity says, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." Other religions draw a screen, as Pythagoras lectured from behind a curtain to his disciples; and from behind the screen they mutter their unintelligible incantations. Christianity lifts its red banner, throws it out upon the willing wind, and on it is written, "This thing was not done in a corner." By the compass of its mission; by the universality of its speech; by its chivalry of philanthropy, I ask you to adjudge to Christianity the palm above all the religions of the world. Other religions are *philosophies* philosophies only; Christianity is a *gospel* as well.

A very marvellous thing occurs here, in a kind of parenthesis; Peter and John had been speaking to the people. The rulers of the Jews were grieved by this popular movement; and they laid their hands on the Apostles and put them in prison until the next day. "Howbeit"!—God has his finger in this! He comes through very narrow spaces, and seizes very transient opportunities. A moment is to him as eternity. "Howbeit,"—wait there a while to get the full rush of this glorious announcement—"many of them which heard the Word BELIEVED." Why should not that be the case *now*, so that whatever may happen to the preacher within the next hour he may know, as he goes to his account, that he has left behind him a harvest before the time? No man will put the preacher in *prison* to-day. But he may sicken, he may die, he may lose his mental balance. In *some way*

he may be disabled from the prosecution of his work, so that the eventide shall not find him in his place. "Howbeit," the work was done in the morning. Though the two Apostles were thrust into the prison the number of Christians was increased.

Peter and John went out to go to the Temple. They did enter the Temple; but they spent the night in *prison*. The morning came, and justice must be done. Let us be present at the interview. There were two Apostles, but as for those who were arrayed against them, we read of them as "rulers, and elders, and scribes; and Annas, the high priest; and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest." They will outface the two unlearned and ignorant men. It was easy for the Apostles to ask a lame sufferer to look at them; but they dare not ask this council to look them in the face. The Apostles were set "in the midst," and this question was hurled at them, "By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?" Beware of that point of thought in which you turn your religion into a piece of merely *metaphysical inquiry*. It is at *that* point that Christianity is often defeated in her most beneficent purposes. What did the learned men say? They wanted to go into ways and means, and to analyze what we now call the *modus operandi*. They wanted to turn this question into a metaphysical inquiry. Instead of accepting the *man*, the healed man, the concrete, positive, indisputable *fact*, they wanted to lure the Apostles, and those who followed them, into metaphysical quagmires and difficulties. Preachers of the living Word, do not allow yourselves to answer the "why" and the "how" of merely inquisitive minds. Have the *man* himself with you, and let *him* be your argument. Christianity rests on *facts*, not upon *opinions*. If the Church of Christ, in any part of the world, has not the *Man* with it, any amount of mere philosophical theorizing and speculation will do harm rather than good. Where is the *man* you have saved? Produce him. Where are the hungry you have fed, the ignorant you have instructed, the enslaved you have emancipated? Produce them. This is a fact, not a quibble. The question seems to be very easy, and very rational, "By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?" yet that question was a mischievous one. It was a bait; it was a mean decoy. The one true question was, "Where is the healed man? Let him walk before us. We have

heard of him walking, and leaping, and entering into the Temple with you ; let us see him do this now." That would have been a fair challenge ; and having seen the once lame man walking, and leaping, and entering into the Temple, they should have said, By whatever means it is done the effect is certain, and the cause of such an effect must itself be good.

Peter and John will surely stammer before this glittering assembly ! The maid that taunted the rough-spoken Galilæan was too much for Peter ; when he sees Annas, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, there will be no spirit left in him ! How does the narrative read ? With one explanatory clause—"Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost." That is a thousand Peters : Peter multiplied by the very Deity. Peter ?—a straw blown away by the mocking wind, by himself. But Peter "filled with the Holy Ghost" was a man of war, a mighty captain, a soldier not to be put down ; clothed with heavenly panoply, eloquent with heaven's thunder, gracious with heaven's love.

Have we received the Holy Ghost ? The question is not, "Are we well trained intellectually ?" "Have we read many books ?" "Are we able to conduct very subtle arguments ?" The plain, soul-piercing question is, "Have we received the HOLY GHOST ?" We shall know whether we have received the Spirit by the *fire* that is in us. The Holy Ghost is fire. The difference between one man and another is a difference of fire. The great healers in the universe are fire and water ; if a man cannot be healed by these he cannot be healed at all. We have received the first baptism, we have (to use popular language) been "christened," Christ-named, christianized in the sense of having been brought to the church, and had the initial water sprinkled upon our smooth forehead ; but have we received the Holy Ghost ? There is no mistaking him ! No man can mistake the sunlight for any meaner flame. That great noontide glory comes with a compass and with a splendor that leave no doubt as to its origin. Peter having been challenged to give an account of the circumstance made the eloquent reply which you find within verses 9 to 12 inclusive. He never was more eloquent. Whenever Peter spake *suddenly*, on great subjects, he spake the very heart of God. He once took Christ Himself by surprise in this matter. "Whom say ye that I am ?" Peter answered, "Thou art the Christ, the

Son of the living God." Challenged by the rulers of the Jews upon the occasion now before us, he made an answer equal in splendour to his earlier reply. How much he makes of Christ in the 10th verse! We seem hardly to have heard the whole style and title of Jesus before. We have them here. We have called the Saviour "Jesus;" sometimes we have called him "Jesus Christ." By some short indication of this kind we have made reference to the Redeemer. But how seldom have we given Him His full style and title! Listen to Peter as he says—"Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him." There is no mistaking *that* address. The name, the address, the tragedy, the resurrection, and the "even by HIM," the last thrilling emphasis that crowded into itself the passion of the entire reference! What Christ do *you* preach? We have heard of the Christ of the painter—a figure tenderly coloured, set in wondrous lights and shades. We have stood before it, and sometimes we have thrilled in its presence, and felt the waters stealing into our eyes. But *that* Christ never saved the soul, it is only a creation of art. We have heard of the Christ of the poet. Christ has been spoken of in flowing rhyme and stately blank verse; but that Christ never came from the intellect into the depths of the heart, to save that heart in its deadliest remorse on account of sin. We must go back to the *apostolic* Christ if we have to realize apostolic conceptions and to win apostolic successes in the ministry. I will read the full style and title again—"Jesus"—"Jesus Christ"—"Jesus Christ of Nazareth"—"Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified,"—"Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead." They could not say after that "To what Christ does he refer? Of what Jesus does he speak?"—the name, the place, the crucifixion, the resurrection: all re-affirmed. There was no escape from that description. Is it not possible for us to escape from many a Christ that is *now* preached? The Christ we want is a Saviour: a man who knows us, loves us, dies for us, rises again and intercedes for us, who came out of eternity, who has passed into eternity, and whose one thought is to SAVE THE WORLD!

Peter might well have ended by the statement contained in the 10th verse, but Peter often found it difficult to conclude when Christ was the theme. How can a *river* end except in the *sea*?

The little pool, the purling rill, soon sinks in the sand ; but the river,—deep, broad, fluent—moves on through channelled rocks and shady woods, on, on to the solemn sea ! Peter went onward. Said he, “ This is the stone which was set at nought by you builders, which is become the head of the corner.” The place trembled under the vibration of that living voice ! He might have ended there ; but it was difficult, let us repeat, for Peter ever to end when Christ was the theme. So he continued, “ Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.” Peter could never fall again ! There are some speeches that are crises in a man’s history. Surely after such eloquence he could never fall into the commonplace of ordinary speech. And he never did. Tradition, truly or untruly, I care not which, brings Peter to the cross that he may be crucified, head downwards. They did not crucify *Peter* ; they only crucified his *flesh*. When we are “ filled with the Holy Ghost ” we know not the puncture of iron or the sting of fire.

The original question was not one of *salvation*, it was merely a question of healing a lame man. But you never find the Apostles confining themselves to the mere *incident*. Every miracle is only a text ; every sign or token is only a starting-point. Let an Apostle heal a man’s ankle-bones, and from those ankle-bones he swings clear off to Christ’s world-saving Cross. Sometimes *we* find it difficult to move from our Old Testament text to our New Testament gospel ; the *Apostles* never experienced such a difficulty. At one step they passed over to the Cross and said, “ If we have given you bread for the *body*, we meant it to be typical of the bread which endureth unto everlasting life. If we have healed your *ankle-bones*, we meant it to be symbolic of the greater healing of your *soul*. If we have opened the eyes of the body, we meant it but as an initial act realizing its fruition in the illumination of the spirit and the whole inner man.” See how grandly Peter stands above the occasion ! He was not a mere healer of ankle-bones ; he was, in the Almightyness of God, a healer of *souls*. Can I by the same Almightyness heal *your* souls ? Hear Christ’s words, “ Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Now, it was the turn of the Sanhedrim to be shut up and put "in hold unto the next day," and every day after that! When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they had a provincial accent in their speech, and talked like two intelligent fishermen only, "they marvelled." May every other Sanhedrim marvel about you young preachers just in the same way! If there is not a peculiarity in your speech, if there is not a disparity between you and your speech, you can be accounted for: and any man that can be accounted for will never influence his age. He will make a splash in the pool; but the bubbles will be seen a moment, then will sink for ever. You never can make out the secret of a Whitefield. You never can make out the secret power of any man who makes a whole world hear him. If you could *account* for him you would be as great as he is. What then did the wise and influential Jews do? I can but smile when I hear them muttering and whispering, "But that it spread no further among the people let us straitly" (strictly and sharply) "*threaten them.*" You feel the difference of the climate, do you not? the difference of temperature between verses 11 and 12, and verses 16, 17, and 18? The apostles were THREATENED! They must not speak any more! There must be an end of this nuisance. Society is not to be disturbed by such propagandists. Peter, having heard the threatening, said unto them, "Whether it be RIGHT." . . . That is the word that makes history! "Whether it be RIGHT." That is the word that thrills the ages! Whether it be RIGHT in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye? Ye are judges and learned men. Judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." And the Apostles having received this threatening, "went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them." What a talk they had; How they reminded one another of the occasion of the movement! And when the company had heard it all, "they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said . . ." They too became eloquent, sublime in speech: they quoted the second Psalm. "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?" And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they



were all filled with the Holy Ghost." Pentecost after Pentecost ! Poor Church ! Thou hast fallen upon empty times. They are but mean challenges that are addressed to us now. If we could be once more threatened with the prison and the stake, the rod of iron and the keen double-edged weapon, some of us might be heroes. At present we may be but common clay !

## XII.

### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we have heard that power belongeth unto thee, and we are afraid : we have also heard that mercy belongeth unto thee, and we are no longer under the bondage of fear. We come to thy mercy in Christ Jesus, and we have no dread, but an inspiring and indestructible joy. We are all prodigals. We come to-day from a far country, and we bring back nothing with us but hunger, and shame, and nakedness, and self-reproach. God be merciful unto us, sinners. Thy Church was built for sinners. We did not know thee until we sinned. Through our guilt thou dost cause to come the brightest revelations of thyself. Thou shalt yet make sin help heaven. Out of this root of poison thou wilt gather wondrous fruits of health. We know not how this thy great miracle will be wrought ; but we know thou wilt make the wrath of man to praise thee ; and the remainder thou wilt hold at arm's length. The Lord reigneth ; the God of Salvation holds the universe in his grasp. Thou dost not delight in destruction, but in salvation : thy purpose is to abolish death and make the universe glad with spiritual life. In this confidence we always come near thee. Great waves of love rise in our hearts, and would find expression in fitting words ; but they cannot. We are dumb before thee. Our very speech is but a mockery of our want. Our hymn, though it swell loudly and tremble with all pathos, cannot tell thee our praise. Thou hast made no speech, nor song, for the higher emotions of the soul ; but, when we come to the better land, and learn inspired speech and larger music, we will bless thee fitly.

Take care of us whilst we are in the desert. There is no path here but of thine own making. Keep us close to one another, lest we lose the touch of sympathy and the voice of communion, and be lost amid the unmeasured sand. Lead us over the rocks when they are sharp and slippery. Take us up awhile into thine own heart, and carry us until we may be trusted to walk again. Leave us not, neither forsake us. We go to the graves of the past, the green hillocks, the eloquent churchyards, thine own acre, O God of the living, and by all the providence of history, by all the gentle care of individuals and families which thou hast exercised, we revive and strengthen and consolidate our faith in God. We bless thee for all the love which makes our life rich. Thou dost live for us. Thou didst so love the world as to give thy Son to die for it, and cleanse it with his own blood. Thou dost give him every day to die for us, and every day does he rise again, and all the while is his prayer heard

in heaven. Therefore do we stand in thy church to-day redeemed by his blood, and secured by thy grace.

As families we bless thee. All the dear little children clasp their hands and look up, though they know not what to say; their look is better than their speech. And all the elder ones, to whom life is a vanishing dream, muse, and wonder, and hope, and now and again thrill with an expectation that cannot be uttered in words. And busy men thank God for the bread that is in both hands. The afflicted look to thee; and the sad in heart have no helper but thyself; and the lost turn round and look for the light. The Lord send it to shine upon them, and may they be brought home every one.

God save the Queen. Guard her person; defend her throne; prolong her reign. We bless thee for her escape from danger; for she has done us good and not evil all the days of her life. The Lord crown her with fine gold, and fill her diadem with jewels of his own finding.

Lord, regard all the little earth: to us so great: to thee but a handful of dust. We have marked it out into continents and nations, and have broken up its speech into many tongues; but all the earth is thine, and the fulness thereof; and thou art Lord of the sea. Still keep the little earth in its right place, and whilst it swings around the sun may its human multitudes revolve around the sun of righteousness and catch from him all life, and light, and joy. Amen.

### Acts iv. 31-37.

31. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken [pointing to the God of nature] where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.

32. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul [Jer. xxxii. 29]: neither said any of them [the Greek is emphatic, *and not one of them said*] that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.

33. And with great power gave the apostles [there the Greek verb *gave* implies much more than the English word. It is constantly used for *paying a debt*, or *rendering an account*] witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.

34. Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold [we never hear that a similar fund was established except at Jerusalem],

35. And laid them down at the apostles' feet [when gifts or offerings are made to an eastern king or priest, they are not placed in his hands but at his feet]: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

36. And Joses [Joseph], who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas,

(which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation) a Levite [he may have held lands from his marriage], and of the country of Cyprus [in the Eastern Mediterranean],

37. Having land [lit., a *field*] sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

### Chap. v. 1-11.

1. But [much stress is not to be laid on the word *But*, for no contrast is intended] a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession [the same word is used Matt. xix. 22],

2. And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it [an aggravated offence], and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

3. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart [made thee bold enough] to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?

4. Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived [implying long and deep deliberation] this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.

5. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.

6. And the young [younger] men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him [it was common to have graves ready beforehand].

7. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in.

8. And Peter answered [yet not an answer but a question] unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much [and *no* more].

9. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out.

10. Then fell she down straightway at his feet [where the money probably lay], and yielded up the ghost [an expression used in one other place only, Acts xii. 23]: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.

11. And great fear came upon all the church [assembly or congregation], and upon as many as heard these things.

### COMMUNISM AND ITS VIOLATION.

WE have just seen what great excitement there was *outside* the Church. A lame man had been healed, and Peter and John had been shut up in prison, and had afterwards been threat-

ened by the Sanhedrim. "And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them." The Christians, having heard the report, "lifted up their voice to God with one accord," and praised him, and gave themselves into his keeping, saying, "And now, Lord, behold their threatenings; and grant unto thy servants that with all boldness they may speak thy word. By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus." There they left the case. They passed no official resolution amongst themselves: they looked up unto the hills whence their help came, and having looked upward, and having spoken to God, they waited for an answer from heaven. That answer came: "When they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness." They did not offer it as a *suggestion*, they did not submit it as a *possible solution* of great moral anxieties: they hurled it across the heavens, they uttered it with thunder, they spake it with the accent of the soul. We must go back to that cordial eloquence. Preachers of the everlasting Gospel do not stand up to make *suggestions*: they stand to deliver what they believe to be God's testimony; and in proportion to their faith in the Divine testimony will be the clearness of their utterance, and the bold and thrilling emphasis of their very voice.

A great practical issue immediately took effect. A new conception of property entered into the mind of the Church. Little ownerships, and narrow boundaries of individual claims and primacies, were done away. "No man said that aught he had was his own; they had all things in common." "As many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the price of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the Apostles' feet, and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need." Here then are two concurrent movements, viz., a spiritual movement, and a social movement. The social movement arose out of the spiritual; if the cause go down, the effect must go down along with it. The Church can only do great social duties, and continue with constancy in great social sacrifices, in proportion as its heart is continually inspired by the Holy Ghost. The hand cannot go without the heart. The heart

cannot be right without compelling the hand to do its holy and ennobling bidding. It is in vain to attempt to keep up the outward when the *inward* has given way. That is precisely what we are in danger of doing now. We keep up churches, institutions, organizations, machineries, after we have lost the *Spirit*. Is there anything more ghastly to the religious eye and the spiritual imagination than a Church out of which GOD has gone? The building stands there of undiminished magnitude, and undimmed beauty of form and colour, and undiminished commodiousness; but GOD has gone. The Bible is read, and *not* read. It is not the Bible that the man mumbled, but a book which he has found somewhere, out of which the Spirit has been driven. The very self-same old hymns were sung that fifty years ago caused the walls to vibrate as with conscious joy; and though the music was exact in technicality, and well performed as to mere lip service, the old passion was not there, and the hymn rose to the ceiling, bruised itself against the beams of the roof, and fell back, a service unrecognized in heaven. This accounts for all the results of statistics as to attendance upon places of worship; for all the "dilapidated husbandry" of the Church; for all the boundless provision of mere space, and accommodation, and machinery, without eliciting the sympathy and the consent of the great heart of man. We have lost the *Spirit*; or we have forgotten that there is diversity of operation even under the same Spirit, and we have been trying to maintain old economies without new inspiration. What has to be done? Not to mend the outside, but to fall to praying, and to bring to bear upon heaven the violence of our impatient necessity, and the sacred ambition of men, who have found by prolonged and bitter experience that all answers worth having are to be had from heaven only. What is now wanted is a *mission to the Church*. It would be well for you if you would be good enough to let the *masses* alone for a while; the Church is now mad upon the masses. Any proposition to go after the "masses" is hailed with delight by those persons who do nothing but approve excellent schemes and then leave them to themselves. The great soul I cry for is a man who will preach to the *preacher*; who will convert the *pulpit*; who will set fire to the *Church*, and bring back our conscious need of the Holy Ghost. We are orthodox, but we are not Christian. Our *notions* are in excellent repair, but our *love* is a

dead angel in the cold heart. We are sound in *doctrine*, but we are bitter in *speech*. We are clever in the arrangement and the re-arrangement, and the repairing and the re-adaptation of *machinery*; but when we come to pray, it is as if a skeleton should open its cold mouth and chatter with its lifeless teeth.

We come now upon a scene that contrasts with the marvellous exhibition of feeling we looked upon in our last reading of this exciting story. When persecution began to take effect upon the Church we trembled—*needlessly*. The Church *needs* persecution. Now we come upon real danger. External persecution brings to our memory the heroic words of our heroic Captain, "Fear not them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do." Now we come *inside* the Church, and it is *there* and *there only*, that any deadly mischief can be done! The Church! Fire cannot burn it, water cannot drown it, fiends cannot intercept it; but it has *in its own hand* the power of suicide! Annas and Caiaphas, and John and Alexander, and all the kindred of the high priest, cannot touch the Church. They can "threaten" it, and they can denounce it; they can for a time imprison it; but its life they cannot touch. Do not fear the issue of anti-Christian literature, as if that could do the slightest injury to God's truth. There is a secret fever amongst men as to the answering of the latest attack which has been made upon the Christian doctrine. We are not called upon to answer the last fool who has escaped from the mortar in which he was brayed. That is not the work of the Church: it is but an incidental service, and upon some occasions it may be a most valuable and indispensable service; but there is another work to be done. Let the Church put on her beautiful garments, and she will create a space for herself. Let her be pure, noble, seen as the angel of mercy and help and hope, that God meant her to be, and all other things will settle into their right courses and eventuate in their proper issues. Ananias and Sapphira can do more mischief in the Church than all the atheists that ever declared the heavens to be an untenanted space! *That* is the truth that needs now to be understood; and no other is, in comparison with it, worthy of a moment's consideration. You uttered an unkind speech about your brother: *that* did more mischief than all the atheistic publications that have been poured from the press of infidelity for a quarter of a century. You, a preacher,

a student, a member of the Church, a professor of Christianity, did a mean trick : *that* had a deadlier effect than all the denunciation possible to the feeble eloquence of unbelief. The " BUT " with which the fifth chapter opens is like a blow in the face. We were reading so joyously, passing on with a step of triumph, and suddenly an invisible but tremendous fist felled us to the earth. We gloried in the statement found in the fourth chapter, we smiled at Annas, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, when they threatened Peter and John : we felt the infiniteness of our strength, the overflow and redundancy of power. Now that we come to this great, black " But " of the fifth chapter, there is no longer any laughter in our voice ; nor does mirth write its signature upon our solemn faces. *This is death.* Ananias and Sapphira endeavoured to keep up a *mechanical* enthusiasm, and that is an impossibility in the divine life. We must here have reality. Some people try to sing in God's house ; but if you look at them they are not singing at all, for their eyes, like fools' eyes, are wandering all over the congregation. They bow in the attitude of prayer, but all the while their eyes are upon vacant space, or upon the earth.

". . . God abhors the sacrifice  
Where not the heart is found."

In other places you may have art, arrangement, adaptation of part to part ; but in God's house the only acceptable order is *reality*. You had better be at home than be here without *being* here. This attendance at the altar may be the crowning sin of a guilty life. To have touched the sacred Book with an irreverent hand, to have *looked* as if you were interested, whilst all the time your *heart* was a mile away, may be the blasphemy which outblackens every other profanity ! Were we all here inspired, do you suppose that this great city would not soon know the reality of our spiritual life ? Could a host of this number be one heart, one soul, loyal to the Holy Ghost, and London never hear of it ? But ours may be but a mechanical attendance, a respectable arrangement, a repetition of an approved custom, and may not express the fire and the enthusiasm of an inward and divine inspiration. Do not sign the bond with your *hand* only, or you will certainly break it. This bond, Christ's covenant, is to be signed with the ink of the *heart*. " God will judge thee, thou whited sepulchre." You had better



curse and swear, and steal the purse of the next man you may find upon the high road, than be in God's Church under the pretension that such attendance expresses the uppermost thought of the heart, when in reality it expresses but a purpose to promote on a larger scale some selfish interest. Judgment must begin at the house of God! Annas, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, heed not; but watch Ananias and Sapphira!

This is a beautiful revelation of the life of the early Church, in so far as it shows us the entire *voluntariness* of every sacrifice and every service rendered by the first Christians. The selling of houses and lands was not a *compulsory* act. The property belonged to the individuals, they might claim it, they might part with it, they might keep a portion of the proceeds of the sale: all that was wanted from them was *reality*. This is the glory of all Christian service, that it is voluntary, expressive of the will, and of the vital love of the person rendering that service. This is the charm of our work; every man is here doing what he can do because he loves the engagement. Sunday morning is too slow in its movement for the inspired heart, for that heart is saying all the while, "Would that the golden gates were opened, and that the service were begun, and that we were already half-way up the hill which is crowned by heaven." Nothing is done of constraint; therefore labour is rest; therefore giving is getting; therefore prayer is its own answer; and therefore the Sabbath is the golden crown of the week of toil.

What then was the guilt of this man Ananias? It was the guilt of every age. Do not regard Ananias as a liar eighteen hundred or nineteen hundred years old; Ananias is the liar of *to-day*, and he is present in every congregation, and probably will be present until the end of time. Ananias represents those who say they have done *all* they can do, when they know that their statement is a lie. *No man* has done all he can do. Are we then all guilty before God in that respect? Certainly not. If a man will honestly say to God. "There are twelve hours in the day, and I cannot profess to give thee more than two of them," that man is an honest man, and the two hours may be acceptable. But if a man shall endeavour to represent his *two* hours as *twelve* he will die, he will be killed, he will be buried, but not in "the sepulchres of the kings." Which of us has done all he can? Not I. I could

have done ten times more. I could have prayed more, preached more, and suffered more. What they can say who have done nothing but enjoy themselves I know not. They make me afraid. I was told of persons who were supposed to be worth five-and-twenty thousand pounds that at the Communion of the Lord's Table never contribute a coin, but put in the communion card alone. Is it possible? Thy money perish with thee. Keep it; keep it. Take it in the coffin with thee. Do insist upon having it there. Make a pillow of it; make a footstool of it; make a lining of it. Keep it, thou whited sepulchre! Ananias lied without *speaking*, and that is the worst form of falsehood. The blundering *speaker* of a lie may be converted; but the *actor* of a lie can only be killed.

The *discipline* of the Church here sets in very strongly. Ananias and Sapphira, his wife, probably thought that Christianity would endure only for a little time. They meant to make the most of it, and, in order to do that, they must undergo something like the process of a sacrifice. *They underwent it.* "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." To bring my piece, and lay it down as if it were all, can any *atheist* stab the Christ of God so far in as that? To sit in the Church and drop in the little square communion card as if there might be something behind it, when there is nothing—can any bloodless atheist strike him between the eyes like *that*? O Church of the living God! conversion must begin *within* thee; and then the fire will burn, and throw out its happy influence upon the wide circumference, and there shall be joy in the presence of the angels of God over a prodigal *Church*, repentant and returned!

### XIII.

#### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou dost speak wonderful things unto the children of men. Thy voice is like none other. The sound of thy voice is heard in our heart like music from heaven, and it soothes and inspires, and warms our life with a new glow. All thy words are wonderful, but who shall tell the graciousness of thy promises, how sweet they are, how many in number, strong as a great host, many as the drops of the dew of the morning. And thou dost not withhold one of them from the hearts that love thee. Men of old called thy promises exceeding great and precious, and the men of to-day could repeat the word, for in our case thy promises have been greater than our imagination, and more precious than our love. We lean upon thy promises, we run into them as into a sanctuary, when the storm is very high. Hast thou not clothed us with salvation, and made us rich with confidence, and driven away our fear by the shining of an inextinguishable hope? We are in thy house, standing in the appointed place, and at the appointed time, and we come to thee in the appointed way, Jesus Christ, the wounded One, the triumphant Saviour, and we expect great things from heaven. Thou hast wrought in us a discontent with the prizes of time and the triumphs of earth, and by the very discontent which thou hast inspired, will we expect great things from Thyself. Open the windows of heaven, and astonish us by the outpouring of thy blessing! Let thy people be glad with a new joy, and thy saints shout aloud for ecstasy of heart. Return, oh Holy Dove! Return, sweet messenger of rest! Thy Church is indifferent, neglectful, reluctant to follow the heroic impulse; dead, all the fire of enthusiasm extinguished. Come, Holy Ghost, our hearts inspire. Thou art the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever! And are not we also the same, but if left unto ourselves, do we not fall, and wither away? Then indeed is our strength dried up, and our power is as a dream that has vanished. Come, Holy Spirit! Wind from heaven, blow upon us! Spirit of the living God, baptize our souls as with fire! In the name of Jesus Christ, who knew no fear do thou deliver our souls from the bondage of apprehension. We feared for thy truth, and we are ashamed, because we were afraid. We feared for thy Church, forgetting that thy Church is in very deed thine own; lest any man should hurt her, thou wilt keep her night and day. We are not as were the Apostles in the early time. We are cold and calculating. We are self-involved, and self-satisfied. We have lost the sacred ardour; and the wings that could fly in the open firma-

ment have been bruised or torn away. Return, oh Holy Dove—return ! Shew us what we are, what time is, what earth is, how few our days are, how urgent is the King's business ; and may we hasten upon it, as those whose only delight is in its discharge. Comfort us one and all this day with reassured forgiveness. Say unto those who would serve thee, " Though the just man fall seven times a day, yet shall he stand up at the last." If any are cast down, tell them that they are not therefore destroyed. Speak comfortably to every heart as thou only canst speak. Where there is a great vacancy because the old companion is no more, join the solitary thyself, and make the companionship divine. Where there is great fear because the loved life is panting in its last weakness, send healing from Gilead. and balm from the chief of the vineyards. Where there is any desire to serve thee with nobler strength, the Lord double the power, and give the resolution confirmation in heaven. And where the life is staggering because of the burden it has to bear, and the poor brain reels in great wonder, and the heart long so valiant, nearly gives up the unequal fight, oh God, be gracious with double tenderness. To them that have no might do thou increase strength. Unite us all in Christ, in the great Cross, in the infinite atonement for sin, in the profound, the eternal reconciliation wrought out by the Priesthood of Christ. May we walk the few remaining miles together, strengthening one another, loving one another, forgiving one another, and at last, one by one, may we be gathered to the general assembly and church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven, and from the heights of the heavenly Jerusalem we shall see the way along which thou hast in mercy brought us, and then shall our praises never cease. Amen.

### Acts. v. 12-42.

12. And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people ; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.

13. And [But] of the rest durst no man join himself to them : but [Howbeit. There are two different conjunctions in the original] the people magnified them.

14. And believers were the more added to the Lord [Better, Persons believing in the Lord were added to his church] multitudes both of men and women.)

15. Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches [the warm climate making this possible], that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.

16. There came also a multitude out of the cities [commonly used of small places as well as large] round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits : and they were healed every one.

17. Then [But] the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees) and were filled with indignation [jealousy].

18. And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.

19. But the [an] angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said,

20. Go [and], stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life [emphasising once more in the most natural manner the point at issue between the Sadducees and the Apostles].

21. And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early [the first sacrifice was offered at the very peep of day] in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came [into the council chamber], and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate [the older men ; seventy-one in number] of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.

22. But when the officers [the same word is rendered *minister* in Luke iv. 20] came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told,

23. Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors : but when we had opened, we found no man within.

24. Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow.

25. Then [not an adverb of *time*] came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing [a prominent and undaunted position] in the temple, and teaching the people.

26. Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence : for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned.

27. And when they had brought them [to the judgment hall], they set them before the council : and the high priest asked them,

28. Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? Better affirmatively, We straitly charged you] and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem [the testimony of enemies !] with your doctrine, and intend [wish] to bring this man's blood upon us.

29. Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought [we *must*] to obey God rather than men.

30. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.

31. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

32. And we are his witnesses of these things ; [the Crucifixion and Resurrection] and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.

33. When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, [not compunction, but annoyance] and took counsel to slay them.

34. Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, [the teacher of Saul,] a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space ;

35. And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men.

36. For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody ; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves : who was slain ; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought.

37. After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, [seven years later than the enrolment mentioned, Luke ii. 2] and drew away much people after him : he also perished ; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.

38. And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone : for if this council or this work be of men, it will come to nought :

39. But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it ; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.

40. And to him they agreed : and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

41. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his [The] name.

42. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

### APOSTOLIC AUDACITY.

BY reading these verses through all at once, you get into their swing and rhythm. A keen, subtle music touches the reader whose heart is interested in the graphic story. Of what is the history? Of something quite dead and gone for ever? Would any man imagine from the controversies which now agitate the Church within its own boundaries, that the Church of to-day is the legitimate descendant of the Church of whose history these verses form a part? It requires the greatest effort, not of faith, but of imagination, to trace any connection between the Church of to-day, as we represent it, and even as we know it, and the Church of the heroic days. What is your ancestry? Why, if you knew it, you are children of the storm! It does not become you as a Christian to talk about quietness, and enjoyment, and absence of sensationalism. You are the children of the tempest, you were rocked in the cradle of the deep! You have lost the accent of your family. Men cannot tell whence we came, they cannot indi-

cate our native country ; we speak the usual language in the usual tone, we are afraid of anything that is eccentric and unusual, and thus we have abandoned all that makes our ancestry worthy of recollection. We cannot get away from the fact that we represent a faith which has been the most fighting faith of the earth. Christianity is a combative religion. What is the meaning, then, of this whimper that I now hear about retiring to quiet places, leaving all sensationalism, and adopting old-fashioned ways of doing things? My friends, bethink you, when you say the word old-fashioned, what do you mean? Where do you draw the line? Mention the date and measure of your old-fashionedness? There are those who take to themselves the character and quality of being old-fashioned people. Christians of the old-fashioned sort. I would God they were! They would be so good. They would warm the place. Their nearness would send a glow of enthusiasm and sacred ardour to the heart. But alas! their old-fashionedness may only go back to an intermediate period. It may be a kind of middle-age collapse. If you want the old-fashioned sort, you must go back to the Evangelists and to the Apostles, and read the document in the New Testament, which is specifically called the Acts, and there you do see what old-fashioned Christianity really was. But it is in this case as it is in tracing a man's ancestry. He goes back in his ancestry until he finds the most important man in it, and there stops. But I ask about the ancestry of that most famous man himself. And so if we trace our ancestry back, not stopping at points we like the best and are proud of, we shall all come to Adam and Eve, and all fall in the first apostasy. Let us then be true to the facts of history and go really back to roots, and origins, and causes, and do not let us call ourselves old-fashioned simply because we are slothful. By every name that redeems and beautifies the earth, I protest against an old-fashionedness that thinks of itself, and is never lost in the generous absorption of apostolic self-oblivion.

Take a cutting out of any modern Church record, and put it beside this cutting from one of the earliest Church writers ; then look on the two pictures, and tell me how the latter can justify even a family connection with the former. Verily there was not much to induce the Apostles to go on with this work. Their payment was not large. The bribe did not amount to a temptation.

Scoffing, imprisoning, neglect, hunger, cold, nakedness, thirst, abandonment. Yet they went forward with their work as if kings were their hired servants, and as if the treasures of the earth were bound to give them daily riches. How is this? What a fulfilment of Christ's own word! In speaking of the revelation which Peter reported from heaven, Jesus said, "On this rock I build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The gates of hell were not long in trying their strength upon that rock. Yea, the very bolts of fire seemed to be let loose upon the rock, as if they might melt it and cause it to flow away in fear and weakness. Are we in the Apostolic succession? Not so far! No man is in the Apostolic succession who is not in the Apostolic *spirit*, and the Apostolic spirit was a spirit of self-denial, self-suppression, courageous faith, valiant, soldier-like determination, to speak the truth and to live it. We trim, we modify, we adapt. Yes, that is what we are. Not Apostles, but adapters. I knew there was a word somewhere in the language that would exactly express our present spirit and service. We *adapt* the Gospel to the age. We preach to the times. We do not stand back in those eternal truths which belong to all ages, and whose musical thunder should bring into reconciliation every antagonism and discord. Yet we claim to be of the old-fashioned sort. The old-fashioned ministers bore scars for medals; they took honours in the school of suffering; they graduated in the dungeon and in the wilderness, and their breath was like the fresh air that blows round a mountain top. Do I speak to any young man who is about to enter the ministry? Any gentle, delicate, pale, frail creature who is going to take up the Apostolic banner—at least, the silken end of it? It is hard work. You can make it easy if you please; but in so pleasing you offend God. Wherever this Gospel is preached it must create antagonism. We have indeed, by a tacit compact, villainous in its every syllable, agreed to shut up the unpleasant, and to confine the disagreeable, and to hold converse only upon such topics and principles as soothe and comfort us, and assure us of our personal safety. Why, Christianity began as a fighting religion. When did it lay aside its first charter? Christianity came as a fire, as a sword, as a voice of judgment. When did it pass through a transformation which robbed it of its combativeness and made it as other faiths? When was this Samson



shorn? See to it in very deed, because if we are Christians we must do deeds—at least bear such testimony as will bring upon us the aversion and hatred of wicked men. Any man who insists upon the disuse of ambiguity, and upon the use of straightforward and simple terms, must expect to bring upon himself hatred in the form of criticism, and must expect to be imprisoned within strong walls. Would that the old heroic days could come back upon us all! Do you know to whom you are indebted for the quiet enjoyment of Gospel privileges? Name the land from which the treasure came which you call your peace? You are indebted for your peace to the battles of *other men*. Because the Apostles suffered, we enjoy. Because they went to prison, we are kept out of it. But the fear is, the shameful fear, is that we imagine that we are the creators of our own safety, and the originators of our own security. That would indeed be the climax of injustice and ingratitude. You are asked as young readers now and again to read the history of your nation; of the heroic days, of the brave days of chivalry, and I join in the appeal; but I add to it, and elevate it, and glorify it, by telling you to go back to Apostolic history, and to learn from those thrilling pages what it once was to be a Christian.

We ought, then, to have great patience with all persons who are starting up in any novel and eccentric way to endeavour to advance the Kingdom of Christ. If we begin to frown upon them, we repeat the iniquity which our Lord we know will condemn. We live in freedom. Christianity is wanting if it does not try by all means to save some. Christianity is still the religion of the Cross. That sacred, grim emblem is never allowed to fall into desuetude; and even on the most dazzling State occasions it is known by the agony of that symbol. Who dare appropriate the place in which we are now assembled, and many like it, to extraordinary or unusual religious services? Who dare fill such places as this with the very refuse and offscouring of London? If you came through many of the streets of the Metropolis this morning you saw crowds of persons who, probably, were never inside a Christian Sanctuary, or if they were, it was in some little colonial institution downstairs, or in some back place of the city, but not in the citadel that you call your Cathedral or your Temple, or your Tabernacle, or your Conventicle. The moment Christianity became respect-

able it became one of a multitude. Christianity must never have a second ; she must not even be at the top of a list ; she must be the Ruler, the One ; and her uniqueness must be at once her strength and her beauty. Never forget that you are the descendants of men who ate up the fire that was to burn them, and digested it, and turned it into noble strength ; that drank up the seas that were to have drowned them, and came through ever-thickening danger, gathering strength with exercise, and being made out of common men, heroic and illustrious characters.

Here you find Christianity working according to its opportunity. There were persons who brought sick folks in great numbers. There were multitudes out of the streets round about bringing with them those that were vexed with unclean spirits. Christianity does not examine into a man's motive with such severity as to repel him from its bodily blessings. This is a law which, perhaps, we have not sufficiently recognized. Jesus Christ knew and said that the people came not for the sake of the doctrine, but for the loaves and fishes ; but He did not, therefore, drive them away. Many others came to be healed, or to have their friends cured ; and they cared not what was the speculative or metaphysical doctrine taught so long as a cure was effected. Jesus Christ healed all in the hope that he might save some. If you would feed all the poor of London you might save a few. Expect the sting of ingratitude, expect the discredit of imputed motives, expect that many whom you have helped will turn away from you in the time of your own necessity ; but take not your inspiration from man's ingratitude, but from Christ's redeeming love. If we work for gratitude we will be ill paid, and we deserve to be. Whoever works for any degree of applause deserves all the contempt which may be inflicted upon him. Jesus Christ, let me repeat, for in repeating it I repeat a Gospel, healed all, if haply He might save some.

How do we account for the difference between Apostolic times, and our own days ? Man is the same, truth is the same, the enmity of the heart against Christ and righteousness is the same. Christ is the same, the Holy Ghost is the same, and yet we are living along dwindling lines, and we are fast sinking into spiritual exhaustion. How is this ? It is because we have lost the proper vocation of Christianity. What is that proper vocation ? To save

men, not to please them ; not to flatter them, but to save them ; and we have lost the proper vocation of the pulpit. The pulpit has become now another branch of book-making. The sermon has lost its individuality. It ought to be a thing that cannot be printed. A sermon that can be printed is not a sermon. A sermon is a speech, an expostulation, an entreaty, an exhortation, having its quality made up of the very personal elements of the man who delivers it—his accents, his quality of mind, his enlarged sympathy and nobleness ; hence the true sermon is impregnated with elements which cannot be caught, fastened down, and presented to the eye. The sermon is not addressed to the eye ; it is a thunder that beats upon the ear. You are to blame, as I am, along with all our contemporaries for the degradation of the sermon. We talk now about sermons being polished, and finished, and exquisite, with many a delicate little touch artistic. The Lord send fire upon all such abortions and burn them up, till their white ashes cannot any more be found ! Read Christ's words and wonder at their power. Read many of the subjects of Apostolic discourses and wonder at the results produced. Who can find in Whitefield's sermons, Whitefield's power ? The sermon is not a book or a part of a book, it is not in the literary trade at all, it is something that stands apart, alone, and the preacher who is true to the vocation of the sermon will never lack a congregation. He has no competitor. It is when he begins to read his sentences and to measure them with sentences in books, that he becomes one of a number.

When he is true to inspired doctrine, and to his vocation, when he stands shoulder to shoulder with Paul and Peter, then he cannot be compared, for he is not in the list of competitive wrestlers and strugglers. But the Church must help the preacher. The Church must say to him in so many words, " Yes, you stand faithfully to that conception of preaching, and rely upon our prayers and sympathy, and trust and help."

As to the speech of Gamaliel, I accept it every word. Gamaliel gives me the only conditions the Church ought ever to ask for. To be left alone to carry out her own policy, and to realize the results of her own conception and faith. As a Christian teacher I have no right to ask to be heard at the expense of any other man. Let Theudas speak, let Judas of Galilee speak, and when they are

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done, let the Christian speaker make his appeal, and “the God that answereth by fire let Him be God.”

Let Socrates conduct his dialogue, let Seneca read his moral proverbs and sententious ethics ; let all Greek and Roman thinkers unfold their theories and make good their positions ; let every man have all the hearing which he demands, and when they are all done, let us hear what Christ of Nazareth has to say, and “the God that answereth by fire let Him be God.” Christianity is nothing if not heroically fearless.

## XIV.

### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thy mercy meets us everywhere. It is not far to seek. Thy mercy in Christ Jesus is round about us, we breathe it, we live under its influence, without it we must surely die. We speak of thy great mercy, and thy tender mercy. Thou dost fill us with amazement, because of the wondrousness of the mercy which covers all thy works. We come by the way of mercy, the way of judgment we dare not tread. On that road there are swords that slay us, and lions that devour, and wrath that burns. We come by the way of the cross. We put our feet in the footprints of Jesus Christ. We stand beside the Priest slain for us by his own hand, and because of this blood we have hope that our sin may be forgiven. We would that every night might see the destruction of the day's transgression. We would not carry the guilt of to-day into the un-sullied light of to-morrow. We would bury it by the cross of Christ in the darkness of the night, never to be seen again. Thus do thou give us assurance that our guilt shall not be piled up against us into infinite aggravation, but shall be destroyed day by day, so that if we sleep the unwaking sleep, we shall be found in heaven, forgiven souls. Come to us in Christ Jesus, Thy Son, to-day, and make festival in our souls. May we enter into the Lord's banqueting house, and enjoy the hospitality of infinite love. May this be no common day in our experience. From the dawn even until the eventide, and the shining of the night stars, may there be joy in our hearts, singing as of angel voices, and lights that shine from the upper places. We would enjoy the Christian Sabbath. We would understand in our hearts the meaning of the resurrection of our Lord, and having looked into the place where the Lord lay, we would look up into the place where the Lord stands, and find in his intercession the utterance of all our prayers. We bless thee for such desires. Thou didst bring the heart out of the darkness, and gave it the joy of light. Once we had no such feeling. We were content with our chains, and found our miserable joy in our mean bondage. Now we have breathed the higher air. Now we have had gleams of the higher light. Now we begin to feel the enjoyment of a nobler fellowship, and our souls are inflamed with high and spiritual desire. Surely thou wilt open thy book with thine own hands. It shall not be to us a book of letters only, but it shall glow with divine presences and sacred influences, and out of the living pages there shall come living gospels. God grant that so it may surely be.

Show us how little we are and frail, always walking upon the brink of our own grave ; feeling even in the warm summer air the chill breath of death. Show us that the flowers wither, even whilst they unfold. Give us to feel that winter is at both ends of the spring, and is a continual threatening of its life. So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom. Still lift up our lives above all mean fearfulness, and give us the inspiration of heroism, the noble and glorious courage of men to whom the issues of a great battle are confided. May we be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. May we know what it is to enjoy the assurance of the Divine favour. Being no more tossed about by every wind of doctrine, may we stand in the sanctuary of thy truth, and fear not fire, or tempest, or famine, or sword. Lord God of Elijah, of Isaiah and Jeremiah, and the great and glorious company of the Apostles, lift us, the children of modern days, up into very noble manhood, and may the last estate of the world be better than the first.

Comfort us according to the sharpness of our pain. Our eyes are often weary because of the burden of tears. Our sleep sometimes flees away before the ever encroaching anxiety which devours the mind. We have pain of body, sorrow of soul, darkness of outlook. Our property has dwindled, our prosperity has been shaken to its foundation, or there is sickness at home, the little one is ill, the oldest of our loved ones is saying—farewell. The heart knoweth its own bitterness. We pray thee, therefore, in Christ thy Son our Saviour, come to us with the comforts that heal the heart, and make us glad because of recovered confidence.

To others thou hast given great joy. Every day sees a battle won. Every night closes upon a fortune advanced. All the days are triumphs. There is no aching of the head, no pain of the heart, no distress of the imagination. Anxiety is a bitterness unknown, and fear has no place in the life. The Lord sanctify such experience, and restrain those who enjoy it, lest they fight against God.

Look over our little life, and repair it every day. The wind blows it down, the fire burns it, the enemy undermines it. Poor little life ! So small to begin with, so weak at its best ! Oh, pity it ! Continue to redeem it. Thou hast not spared the blood of thy Son to ransom it, and therefore at the last it shall be found in thine own hand. Thou that dwellest between the Cherubim shine forth ! Amen.

### Acts vi. 1-8.

1. And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.

2. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.

3. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest

report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

4. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.

5. And the saying pleased the whole multitude : and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch :

6. Whom they set before the apostles : and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.

7. And the word of God increased ; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly ; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

8. And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

### THE ELECTION OF DEACONS.

THERE is nothing *concealed* in the action of the New Testament Church. Verily this whole thing was not done in a corner. The case of Judas Iscariot is not covered up, nor made the least of. It is not referred to furtively as if the writer would gladly escape from the subject. Ananias and Sapphira are not names withdrawn from the sacred record because of the lies which they told. And the murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews is not passed over without reference. The whole life of the Church is brought under the shining light, and everything is narrated, with almost abruptness, as it is with certain minuteness of detail. The Church is not a secret institution. The Church of Christ was never meant to be a concealed force in society, or to have its inner life and inner mechanism, upon which outsiders were not allowed to gaze. Christianity abhors all official secrecy. It is a religion which lives in the daylight. Its registers are not hidden away in iron safes, its writing is written as with a pencil of the sun. It is well known that in consequence of its frankness the Bible has brought upon itself the opprobrium of those who are accustomed to hide all undesirable and repulsive features of character or habits of life. Who would publish an expurgated edition of the Bible ! We undertake to adapt our poets to modern tastes and modern readers. There are transactions recorded in the Bible, which, if taken out of their proper atmosphere and setting, cause a sensation of revulsion in the heart, but taken in their

places, read according to their surroundings, not torn out of their natural atmosphere, and perused in a high and noble spirit, they are as much part of the Bible as they are part of human life ; and they have their high and noble uses in the Bible, which uses can only be understood by those who read in the spirit, and who see in death itself an element out of which life may be brought. It is refreshing to belong to a Church that is so open and fearless, whose judgments are not secret censures, and whose excommunications are not vengeful anathemas, but the just expression of well-argued conclusions.

How was this difficulty of the early Church adjusted ? It might have ended in a rupture. To-day it would surely terminate in many instances with a secession. What was it that guided the Church aright in this first misunderstanding and difficulty ? The *spirit of love* ruled the mechanism of the Church. There can be no permanent difficulties in any Church in which the spirit of love is supreme. If a Church is only a religious debating society, then we shall determine many issues merely by numbers, or merely by accidental force of some kind or other. He who introduces the spirit of *debate* into any community, incurs the very gravest responsibility. We do not meet to argue, to controvert, to oppose one theory to another, we meet to pray. But who can define that great word *pray* ? We have narrowed it, and impoverished, and mechanized it, until now it has become a species of routine. If the Church could meet to *pray*, to bring a thousand hearts into confluence, to dismiss every dividing force, and quality and quantity, and with a thousand-fold voice to cry from the foot of the Cross to the throne of Heaven, the devil of debate would be burned in his native fire. It is most interesting to watch the rise and culmination of this first difficulty in Church government. The Apostles look well in this relation. What is their starting point ? They argue all the question out, from the standpoint of a clear conception of *apostolic work*. Your *first* conception will generally determine the whole course of your argument. Starting with a noble conception, a man will naturally fall into the out-working of a noble course, and will generally reach a useful, because worthy and righteous, conclusion. What was the conception of the Apostles of their own work ? They magnified their office. " We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the



ministry of the Word." And the Apostles *could* pray! Just lately, in this very story, we heard them pray, and the place where they were assembled was shaken! And the Apostles could also *preach*. They divided their hearers into two classes, friends and enemies. There was no languid opinion about Apostolic preaching. The mere critic could not play his little game at pedantry under the Apostolic sermon. It was one of two things in an Apostolic sermon, repentance, surrender, crying to Heaven for pardon, or gnashing of teeth, and malignant hatred, the very fire of hell! We have come to new definitions, and definitions of a most unfortunate and disastrous kind. We pray quietly, easily, superficially, mechanically, respectably; without sensation, without passion. We could almost write our prayers and read them, and sleep over them, and so could others. The suppliant is never maddened by his own inspiration, so that he shall pray the sun down and open his eyes in unexpected midnight. These regulation hours have ruined us. These beginnings and endings have played havoc with the inspiration of the Church.

The apostles conceiving their work to be of this high and supreme kind, were rather anxious than otherwise to escape the daily ministration of the tables. Up to this time they had taken part in the distribution of the public stock, and now they gladly seized the opportunity of leaving this necessary routine to others who were ready to undertake it, whilst they went forward to do the large and inclusive work. This supreme conception of Apostolic service, was itself ennobled by the trust which the Apostles reposed in the people. Who were called together? The whole multitude. The apostles "called the multitude of the disciples unto them." He is the great apostle who has faith in the people. Christianity is the people's religion pre-eminently. There are those in the ministry of Christ who can testify that they owe all their comfort, prosperity, and influence, to the trust which they reposed in the people. The Apostles did not form a little company. They did not select certain notables, or approved specimens, but having to deal with a people's question, they consulted the people's instinct, and therein they have set an example to all Christian associations. Let it never be forgotten, that in this first difficulty of the Church the Apostles did not undertake to settle this matter themselves, nor did they call representatives of the Church, they called the *whole*

*multitude*, and left it to be adjusted and determined by the whole Church.

Whilst this was the case at the outset, it was impossible that the whole Church could constitute a committee of action, therefore the apostles said, "Look ye out seven men," who shall really be yourselves condensed. Such men as shall themselves be equal to the whole multitude. Large-minded generous men, who can see every aspect of a case, and deal with noble wisdom with the practical difficulties of life. The qualifications of the seven are plainly stated. They were to be, "men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom." There are no merely secular duties in the Church. We have divided Church service into the temporalities and the spiritualities. I am not aware that such a distinction was acknowledged by the Apostles. But allowing that some things might be called temporalities, even they were to be handled by men, "full of the Holy Ghost." Church matters are not merely matters of political system. There is nothing done in Christ's Church, whether the opening of a door, the lighting of a lamp, or the preaching of the everlasting Gospel, that is not to be done under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. A door may be so opened as to affront the Spirit of God; a visitor may be so shown to a seat as to manifest a truly Christian spirit on the part of the indicator. There is no part of our work in any section that is not holy unto the Lord. Art thou weary in well doing? Remember thy weariness is an offence to God. If man engaged me to be in the ministry I might sometimes be annoyed by it, and be tempted to flee away from it, but when God ordains a man to the ministry, and ordains him in the mountain somewhere, and ordains him at the Cross of His own Son, he is not at liberty to take offence, he does not live within the region where whims and prejudices ought to take effect. He is God's servant, whether called by this name or not, and he must take his orders from God and to God must submit his work. So, as I read Christian history; I see that the ministry is one. We are all the ministers of Christ; the door-keeper and the preacher are both in the same ministry, there are no priests and outsiders. There is no outer circle and inner circle in my conception of the Church. You have the gift of opening a door, I may have the gift of expounding a passage, both the gifts are from the same Giver. I have no doubt that the men chosen

in this text were better able to serve tables than the Apostles. We have not all the same gifts. We must rid ourselves of the mischievous sophism which teaches us that some kinds of service are menial. There is no menial service in the Church, unless you make it menial by an unworthy spirit.

Looked at as a piece of Church statesmanship, can you suggest a single amendment to this policy? Do not the Apostles vindicate their Apostleship by their noble wisdom and their general strength of mind, and by their practical sagacity? It is not every man in the Apostleship who could have settled a case so. The ancient proverb tells us that "every fool will be meddling." The reason why some ministers are uncomfortable and unsettled is that they will meddle with things that they really cannot arrange. I have confidence in the people. Impose a duty upon a friend, and show by your manner of doing it that you mean him to reveal his best quality. When this spirit seizes us all distribution of labour will not be a division of front, but will rather show that the front is more united because the labour is wisely divided. This instance gives us a glance into the inner life of the early Church. There was great success in those days. We long to have lived amid that tumult of triumph. It is dull now. It is weary monotony to-day. To have lived when the war-horses went out in thousands, and their riders returned with infinite spoil! Oh, they were brave days of old! There were giants on the earth in ancient times. Men were converted in multitudes. There came against the Church daily a great human flood. It is not so now. It is easy to take the census of religious attendance to-day. The old grave days of tumult and uproar, and rush, and sacred eagerness to be first at the sanctuary, read like a species of religious romance. Who is to blame? Has God changed, or has man become weary? In the ancient Church you see an illustration of the possibility of there being superiority without jealousy. There were the twelve Apostles and the seven helpers, and the seven did not entertain jealousy about the twelve, nor did the twelve make censorious remarks about the seven. They divided their labour, and went to work with both hands to serve the Master. Jealousy kills us all to-day. We dare not speak to one man lest another man should see the action. There are those who would gladly give something to know if we shake hands more warmly with one man than with

another. How did this evil spirit get into the Church? Mark, I am not speaking about any particular Church, but about the whole Church of Christ, the whole world over. Jealousy is as cruel as the grave; it can only be cast out by the Spirit of God. If a man feel himself the very least under the influence of jealousy, he ought at once to betake himself to fasting and prayer. You know well enough whether there is any jealousy in your heart. If there is, I beseech you, by the mercies of God, that you kill it this very day. Could I be jealous of the success of another minister, I would be no minister of Christ myself. His success is mine. To that spirit must we come. Tell me of any Church that is crowded with eager thousands, that is the scene of daily triumphs in Christ, and I am a member of that Church. Its triumphs are ours, we are not divided householders; we are one great family.

What was the effect upon the public? When this matter was settled, the result upon the public mind is given in these words, in verse 7, "The word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly." It is equal to cause and effect. A united Church means a world impressed by the noble scene. The Church of Christ is not united to-day. There are Christians of high and noble quality who are not, would not, could not occupy a pulpit out of their own communion. The law forbids them. High ecclesiastical authority interdicts them and yet we are said to be all Christians. The noble purpose of Christ is marred by certain geographical distinctions and ecclesiastical arrangements, in the making of which Providence had neither part nor lot. The Church must be united before the world will be redeemed. Hence Christ's great prayer, "May they all be one, that the world may believe." We want the apostle now who can bring men together, who can magnify points of union, who can show that the Church, though divided on many minor points, ought to realize its vital union, magnify and display it, and thus Christ's soul would be satisfied.

The 8th verse deals exclusively with Stephen. We shall have something to say about Stephen presently. They made him a minister of tables, and he became the first martyr of his Master. Stephen was developed by circumstances. Being put into this office, he developed his true quality of mind and heart. There are those who cannot be kept in obscurity, and who cannot be

limited to merely technical publicity. What if Stephen had been the predestined successor of Iscariot? What if this man had been unintentionally neglected? Who can tell? Into these matters we may not enter; but whoever is full of faith and power will do great miracles and wonders in every age, and if he escapes martyrdom it will be by some supreme miracle of God.

## XV.

### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, how good it is to draw unto thee in the name of Jesus Christ the Priest. Our souls warm at the thought of thy love. Our spirits are filled with noble desires when the door of thine house is opened, and the way to thine altar made clear. We turn away from thee, and for a moment may be glad with social joy ; we return unto the Lord, and are made glad with the delight of heaven. We are here this day to magnify thee as thou art revealed by thy Son—to call thee Father—to hide our hearts in thy love—to ask thee for Christ's sake to forgive all our sins. This is our sacred business with thee. This is our one concern. We have come to hold communion with God, through Christ, by the Holy Spirit, and we would that our communion might be simple, deep, loving, long-continued, a hint and pledge of the fellowship of heaven. We have come to thy house without worthiness of our own. We have spoiled every day of the week. We have sent back every moment to thee, stained with some evil. We have not seen thee in all the way of our life as we ought to have done. We have imagined thee to be absent when thou wast really near at hand. We have broken the two tables of the law. We have done despite to the Spirit of thy grace. We have grieved the Spirit. There is no sin we have not attempted, and our success is our ruin. Thou art revealed in Jesus Christ as the Saviour of all men. He has disclosed thee to us as the God of pardon, and grace, and tender love. Infinite in righteousness, yet boundless in mercy. Stern as thine own law, yet tender with unutterable love. To thee we want all to come ; and the least and feeblest standing back on the outskirts of the host would feel after thee by a spirit of reverent inquiry. Oh ! that we knew the place where we might find thee ; our hearts desire one look of thy glory. This we could not bear, but thou wilt surely cause thy goodness to pass before us. Show us the unseen day. Teach us that this light we now see is but the dim emblem of the further glory, infinite in lustre, which makes the very burning and splendour of heaven. Help us to see the unseen meaning of all things ; so that in time we may see the going of eternity, so that above the clouds we may see the shining home of the good, and across the roaring flood may see the green shores of the everlasting garden.

We come with our psalm of adoration, our hymn of praise, our anthem of triumph, our chant of holy delight. Few and poor are the offerings we bring, but we bring them by the way of the cross, and they are

enlarged into sacrifices and are made precious by the baptism of blood. We remember all the way along which we have come, sometimes a weary way, hot because of the scorching sun, cold because of the wintry wind, often up hill, and then steeply down again, with turns sudden, and precipices deep and threatening, so that we cannot tell whether we shall arrive at home. Yet there we shall surely arrive, because we do not guide our own way; the reins are not in our hands; the Lord is sovereign, and all things work together for good to them that love him. Thou dost teach us in many ways. Thou dost make us strangers and foreigners in our own land. Thou takest away the friend that made the land our home. Thou dost suddenly put out with a great flood the fire at which our friendship warmed itself. The grave holds all that is precious of our social life. So dost thou make the old man long for heaven. He does not know those who touch him, nor is he known by them. His history is a sealed book, and he longs to rejoin those who can go over the pages with him. Thou hast given unto us a strange life, full of mystery, full of pain, brightened with occasional lights, thrilling with occasional joys, and then a great burden, an infinite blackness, a night without a star to break its gloom. Lord, be pitiful and kind unto us all in Christ Jesus. Spare us a little while that our repentance may be made complete, and our contrition may shed its last tear of regret and pain over days mis-spent.

Undertake all our life for us, make us rich or poor, put us in chariots of gold, or thrust us into the dark corner; give us purple and fine linen, and fare most sumptuous every day, or shut us out of the castle and make us lie at the gate, hungry and weary, desolate and full of sorrow, as thou wilt, but in all the process give us the sweet sense of thy nearness as purifier of our life. The Lord made the great sky like shining wings stretched over us in sign of infinite protection. In every wind that blows may we now catch some odour of heaven. As the days come and go with hastening rapidity, give us to feel that they do but bring the nearer and the sooner the house of liberty and the land of summer. Amen.

### Acts vi. 9-15.

9. Then [rather, *But*] there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, [*libertini*, freedmen] and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, [Jews resident in Alexandria] and of them of Cilicia [at the south-east corner of Asia Minor. Chief town, Tarsus] and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.

10. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.

11. Then they suborned [Suborn—*provide*, but nearly always in a bad sense] men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.

12. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council,

13. And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ccaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place [the Temple was the object of great admiration and pride] and the law :

14. For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.

15. And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

## THE TRIAL OF STEPHEN.

IN the 8th verse you will find the twofold and complete character of Stephen. The verse divides itself into two parts, and so gives the two phases of Stephen's great character. First of all, he was "full of faith and power." That was his *spiritual* condition. His inner life was made up of these two elements. Instead of "faith" read "grace," and then the representation will be "Stephen, full of grace and power." Not *all* power, so as to be stern, tyrannous, overwhelming, but also characterized by *grace*, tenderness, love, geniality, sympathy, gentleness. Not *all* grace, lest he should be mistaken as a mere sentimentalist, a man who uttered beautiful words without deep meanings, and who contented himself with exquisite expressions without seeking their realization in the sterner qualities of character. Stephen was by so much a complete man ; full of grace and full of power. Approach him on the one side of his character, and you would suppose he was "all tears ;" so soft was the touch of his hand, so gentle and tender the glance of his eye, so winsome his smile, that you would suppose it impossible for such a man ever to utter one sharp or harsh word. Approach him on the other side of his nature, he was stern, unbending, rigorous, insisting upon right and justice, and utterly unaware of the sentiment or practice of concession. Read again the second part of the 8th verse, and you find Stephen "did great wonders and miracles among the people." That was his *outer* life. Mark the beautiful correspondence between the spiritual and the active. The one accounts for the other. With less of a spiritual quality there would have been less of social demonstration and influence. The "wonder" was not a trick of the *hand* ; it was an expression of the deep spiritual history of the soul's life. The "miracle" was not painted on a board ; it flamed forth from an inner and sacred fire.



This description of Stephen should be the description of the Christian *Church*. Not a line can be added to this picture. It does not admit of an additional line of colour that can add to its ineffable beauty. In this verse, then, we find a complete delineation of the Christian *man* and of the Christian *Church*.

*We* do no wonders and miracles. Why? Because we have so little faith, or grace, and power. We have concerned ourselves in looking at the *wrong end* of this business. We have been wanting more "wonders" and more "miracles" instead of looking into the inner condition of the heart in its most secret recesses. Make the tree good, and the fruit will be good. Bestow the faith and the power, and the wonders and the miracles will come by the force of a happy and gracious sequence. They never come alone. Things that *look like* wonders and miracles may come—the grim irony—but not until we have the faith and the *power* will our palsied right hand be plucked out of our breast to lift the Lord's royal banner high in the thickening fight.

This becomes a question of serious import to us, whether we have not been looking at this business at the *wrong end*, looking about for *effects*, instead of inquiring into the *causes*; touching with regretful look, the cheek so pale, instead of feeding the fire of the heart. This, then, is Stephen, the man who is for a little while to figure so largely and nobly in our outlook.

Compare him with the men that assailed him. *Their* character is also divisible into two parts. First of all, they were *controversial*, they "disputed" with Stephen. Controversy is not Christianity. It is most difficult for any man to be both a debater and a Christian. The spirit of debate is opposed to the spirit of love. It delights in victory. It gets itself up for occasions. It addresses itself to technicalities, and to transient details. It is clever in the trick of words. It seizes with eagerness upon an epithet misapplied. Debate is sometimes large, noble, magnanimous, inspired, self-sacrificing, self-forgetting. So long as the Church was in the era of *suffering* she had no time for *debate*. Her controversies were then fights for life. They were not fencings in words, small duels, paper wars, column of abuse answering some other column of abuse. The Christian life is always a controversy; but "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world."

Let us all beware of the spirit of controversy, which delights in the rearrangement of words and forgets that Christianity is a sacrifice, a life of obedience, an offering up of the whole nature to the Divine will, to be inspired and sanctified by God the Holy Ghost.

Being controversial, the enemies of Stephen were also, as if by a necessary logic, *unjust*. Injustice and controversy are twins. The enemies of Stephen "suborned" men—hired and primed men to tell lies; instructed men to utter false words; bribed them to commit spiritual suicide. This is the almost necessary direction of all controversy. Controversy seems to make up its mind to *win*. The aim of debate is not to secure *truth*, but to secure some petty triumph, or to carry out to its melancholy end some rooted prejudice, or some discreditable antipathy. This is my fear of some collateral institutions which are formed in Christian churches. I do not take special delight in the formation of men into companies for the purpose of debating. There are limits within which debate may be conducted to high intellectual advantage; but whoever enters upon a course of debate merely as such, and merely for the purpose of striving in words, without having as a supreme end and purpose the illumination of the subject with a view to knowing, loving, accepting, and obeying the truth, puts his spiritual life to a severe strain. The temptation is a strong one. It is particularly strong in the time of youth. Who does not love to hear the echoing applause which follows a smart reply, a happy retort, an unexpected and felicitous criticism? There may be no harm in such applause, within given limits; but the man who is the subject and occasion of it may be urged on to further lengths in which he will find nothing but danger and ultimate discomfiture. The enemies of Christianity, as represented by these men, were mere *controversialists*—trying to find flaws in the statement and reasoning and conduct of the argument: they were not inquirers after truth, pledged to find it, and bound to obey its mandate. To hear men controvert and dispute about Christian truth, one would suppose to be a sign of intense earnestness and sincerity. You will always find behind intellectual hostility to Christianity an explanatory *moral* condition. A man who does not love the light will use any excuse for getting out of it. Christianity disdains to accept any merely *intellectual* homage. Christianity will not be called astute, well-contrived, admirably-

adapted, keen of insight, and potent in eloquence. Christianity comes among men to *save* them, by first humbling them into penitence, breaking them down with contrition, causing them to burn with penitential shame, and then leading them to reverent thought—only out of death can life come, and only by sacrifice is exaltation.

Further looking into the case, you will observe *the danger which often accrues to truth from its supposed friends*. You find men saying, “We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.” Imagine the irony of such men supposing that they could distinguish between orthodoxy and heterodoxy! This is one of the earliest instances in the Christian Church of heresy-hunting. Once for all, let us lay it down as an impossibility that bad men are judges of truth and falsehood. Men who had accepted a bribe came up to defend orthodoxy! We have heard it said more than once that “such and such a man may not be morally all that he ought to be, but he knows the truth when he hears it.” No! *No bad man knows the truth*. No man with a lie in his right hand can tell whether the sermon was good or bad. These are the pains to which rectitude of opinion has been subjected, that righteousness in doctrine should be judged by unrighteousness in conduct. No man who keeps a false balance can tell whether the doctrine was orthodox or heterodox—as no blind man can tell whether the colour was ardent or subdued. Some of you are probably hardly aware that in some cases bad men go to churches for the purpose of discovering whether the doctrine is orthodox! This is an irony that would not be allowed on common ground. No blind man will be appointed as a judge of pictures in the Academy this year or any other year; no deaf man will be appointed to adjudge the merits of competitive students in music. But a bad man goes to church, and ventures upon an opinion as to the orthodoxy or heterodoxy of the preacher, and says, with intolerable impertinence, that he himself may not be what he ought to be, but he knows the *truth* when he hears it! I would say, shame be upon him—only that he has passed out of the region of shame altogether, and is not worthy of the dignified condemnation he would otherwise deserve. Who dares arise in the Church of Christ and say, this man is orthodox—that man is

heterodox? Who after drinking wine up to the point of dizziness, and eating beyond the boundary of gluttony, and grasping with both hands as iron avarice only can grasp—will dare to say where orthodoxy begins and ends? What is your *life*? What is your *spirit*? What are your wonders and miracles? And what is the interior condition of heart which explains them? *These* are the questions that ought to be answered; when men who listen to doctrine and examine Christian argument are pure of heart, true, and upright of mind, noble in spirit, catholic in sympathy—the one man that will be dreaded more than another is the man who imagines that he was fated by heaven to find out the heterodoxy of other people.

They said, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God!” The men who had just put a bribe into their pockets were horrified at the blasphemy of another man! Those who had *done* blasphemy were horrified at the man who had only *spoken* it! Search into narrow, envenomed, and ignoble criticism in every age, and you will find that the men who speak most against blasphemy in doctrine are often the men who could not live otherwise than by telling lies.

What was Stephen's condition at the time? Hearing these lies spoken about him, he will surely spring from his seat and indignantly deny the impeachment! Some men say they “cannot sit still and hear false statements about themselves.” If they were *greater* men they would learn the art of patience. Great bodies are calm. Stephen sat still, but his face gleamed like an angel. Could you have seen the other faces—with the significant leer, the harsh mouths, and the unresponsive features—you would have known, without hearing the defence, who was right and who was wrong. Would that we could *look* more and *say* less!

If we could watch the accused and the accuser, we should very rarely call upon the defendant for his case. I have heard a debate in which, judging merely by the tone and facial expression, and the graciousness of manner of the speakers, I should have supposed that the Christian was the Atheist and the Atheist the Christian. The man who undertakes to advocate Christianity without the Christian light, the Christian voice, the Christian expression, is a man who has undertaken the cause at other bidding than God's.

The face of Stephen shone like the face of an angel. This is

typical of character. Whenever character is under the influence of Christian inspiration it *shines*. "Ye are the light of the world." It is typical also of the resurrection, the last grand miracle that shall be performed upon these common bodies. The face once dull shall be lighted up with an inward light that shall transfigure it into nobility and gracious expressiveness. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." Christianity never takes hold of any man without making him a new creature, and without investing him, I would say, with new beauty, nobility, and occasionally even splendour of expression. Not beauty by the rules of art, but a subtle, spiritual, marvellous, argumentative beauty that carries with it its own exposition and defence. But whether this can take place in the body or not, it always takes place in the *character*, and the character determines the man.

The modern uses of this incident I have not failed altogether to indicate in the course of these remarks. But if you would hear more about its modern uses, let me tell you we can *all* be full of faith or grace, and we can all do miracles and wonders.

I cannot believe the ages are living backward. I never could accept the suggestion that the world is getting less advanced, less glorious, less competent, than men were three thousand or two thousand years ago. Why, this would be an inversion that would constitute the deadliest of all arguments against Christian inspiration and Divine supremacy. We can all do miracles, wonders, and mighty deeds. Perhaps some of us only needed the suggestion, as the fuel in the cold grate only needs the spark to make it glow and burn. We have been too content to sit down under the impression that miracles and wonders and signs have all ceased, and that the world is now living towards a dwindling point instead of expanding into wider development. What a wonder it would be, for example, if some of us ever helped a fellow-creature under any circumstances whatsoever! That wonder is possible to you. What a wonder it would be for some of us could we ever be met in a good humour! What an astonishing miracle to be really good, magnanimous, sympathetic! Not with a painted smile upon the mocking face, but a laugh from the heart, diffusing itself all over the gladdened and shining countenance! What a "wonder" it would be for some of us to ever give a sovereign to any good cause upon earth! Wonders, miracles, signs! Why, the

difficulty is to *escape* them ! What a wonder it would be if some of us could be patient under suffering ! If they could honestly say downstairs, " He suffers much, but he is nobly patient ; very thankful ; and it is a means of grace to be near him ! "

You thought the age of " wonders " was passed, because the merely *introductory* signs have disappeared ! The blossom is gone that the fruit may come. And we of these latter times are called to exhibit the wonder of a disciplined character, the marvel of a sanctified temper, the glittering phenomenon of a truly obedient sonship.

Who then will do wonders and miracles and signs in the name of Christ ? What a wonder it would be for some of us to *forgive*. It is hard for some of us to *pardon*. We pardon with reservations and qualifications, and with long parentheses, and the liberty of construing which we reserve to ourselves. Forgiveness with a parenthesis is no forgiveness, but an aggravation of the original obduracy. The bolder heroism which gives history new themes, and makes the poet's lyre quiver into new music, it is not for us in these days to realize. There is now no persecutor to " drag us into fame and chase us up to heaven. " The fagot and the axe are words faint as echoes in the immemorial past. But we can toil with loving diligence ; we can suffer with uncomplaining patience ; in the morning we can sow our seed, and in the evening we can still be busy in the field ; we can stifle the hot word of passion, and extend the warm hand of forgiveness ; to the blind we can be as eyes, and to the dumb as a tongue of noble eloquence ! A thousand acts of charity may glitter in our daily life, like dew transfigured by the sun. In ways so modest, yet so useful—so unknown on earth, and yet so prized in heaven—it is possible for us to show that Jesus Christ is not merely a figure in the horizon of the religious imagination, but the living power of the renewed and adoring heart. To such miracles let us rise.

## XVI.

### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we do not know thy way : it is in the sea, it is in the great waters, it is in the midst of the firmament of heaven, and the clouds are the dust of thy feet, and thine eye shineth like lightning from the east even to the west. We have heard of thee, and our hearts have trembled with fear. We have thought of thee, and our spirits have glowed with love. Sometimes clouds and darkness are round about thee ; sometimes the light is thy robe. We cannot tell what thou art, or what thou wilt be to us at any moment, but this great prayer we can utter through Jesus Christ our sacrifice : Give us thy Holy Spirit, and it shall be well with us. Let thy grace dwell in our hearts, beautiful as a guiding cloud in the daytime, radiant and warm as a flame of fire in the night season. If our hearts are filled with thy grace, there shall be no room for the enemy. Fill our hearts with thy truth, and our minds with thy light, as thy truth and thy light are known in the Son of God, and in our soul there shall be the seal of heaven.

We thank thee for thy book, so grand in doctrine, so wondrous in its outlook, so tender in its benedictions, so beautiful in all its gospels. May we know it, love it, reproduce it in our lives, and show that we are men in whom is the indwelling and inspiring God. May our life be a secret like thine own ; may men take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus and have learned of him. May we surprise them not by our information, but by our wisdom. Behind and above all that we say, may there be a mystery of light and of love, not to be solved by the common understanding. May we in Christ, thy Son, our Saviour, have bread that the world knoweth not of, and of the fulness of grace may we eat and drink abundantly day by day. Thou hast led us out of sin, and through a long wilderness of education and discipline. Lead us into Canaan's gardens, into the wider liberty, into the ampler spaces, and may our souls enjoy all the comfort and hope of spiritual freedom. Give us understanding of thy word. Show us how thy book is full of seed ; show us that nothing in thy book has come to fruition ; that we have in thy book the great seed house. May we sow the seed in good and honest hearts, and may it be watered with dew from heaven, warmed by the sun of thy righteousness and love, and may it bring forth not only according to its kind, but according to the kind of soil in which it is sown. Then shall thy church be a beautiful garden, a wondrous landscape with all

beauteous growths adorning and enriching it, and heaven will smile to see a world so blest.

Thou knowest us altogether, our sharpest pain, our dullest care, the anxiety that gnaws the inmost heart, the joy that sings in the spring air like a bird, the hope that lures us with heavenly persuasion on to some nobler conquest and greater peace. According to our necessity and various condition, do thou now command thy blessing to rest upon every soul. We thank thee for all thy love ; it comes before the rising of the sun, it remains through the shining of the stars, it is never withheld. We live upon it ; without it we must needs die. Show us that though we are here but for a little while thou art preparing us for great revelations and supreme destinies ; and in view of the joy that has yet to be, may we forget our little sorrows, may our woes be lost in the sea of gladness which thou hast prepared for us.

The Lord hold the light above his own book whilst we read it. The Lord cause a light to shine out of the book whilst we peruse it. The Lord turn over the pages with his own fingers. The Lord whisper to us the meaning of the spirit whilst we read the letter. The Lord speak to us from the cross of forgiveness, pardon, absolution, complete, entire, final ; and to the release of forgiveness add the joy of sanctification. Amen.

### Acts vii. 1-53.

1. Then said the high priest, Are these things so ?

2. And he said, Men, [omit *Men*] brethren, and fathers, hearken ; The God of glory [the term is applied to the Incarnate Word, John i. 14] appeared unto our father [Stephen if even a proselyte might use this expression] Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, [his ancestral home was called Ur of the Chaldees] before he dwelt [the Greek word implies a settled residence] in Charran,

3. And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee. [The destination of the emigrants was known before they started from Ur.]

4. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldæans, [with Babylon for its capital] and dwelt in Charran : and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed [caused him to migrate] him into this land, wherein ye now dwell.

5. And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on : yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child.

6. And God spake on this wise, [Gen. xv. 13, 14] That his seed should sojourn in a strange land ; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years.

7. And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God : and after that shall they come forth, [with great substance] and



serve me in this place, [these words are not in the promise given to Abraham, but are taken from Exod. iii. 12.]

8. And he gave him the covenant of circumcision : [given the year before Isaac was born] and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day ; and Isaac begat Jacob ; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs.

9. And the patriarchs, moved with envy, [the same word is used Acts xvii. 5] sold Joseph into Egypt : but God was with him, [the argument being that as God's *presence* is not circumscribed, neither should his *worship* be confined to place].

10. And delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt ; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.

11. Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt [the oldest MSS. omit the land of "] and Chanaan, and great affliction : and our fathers found no sustenance.

12. But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first [before he himself went away from Canaan into Egypt].

13. And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren ; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh.

14. Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls.

15. So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers,

16. And were carried over into Sychem, [Shechem] and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem.

17. But when [as] the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn [vouchsafed] to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt,

18. Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph.

19. The same dealt subtilly with our kindred, and evil entreated [“made them to cut a great many channels for the river, and set them to build pyramids, forced them to learn all sorts of mechanical arts, and to accustom themselves to hard labour.”—*Josephus.*] our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live.

20. In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months :

21. And when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son.

22. And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds.

23. And when he was full forty years old, [the verb in the original intimates that the forty years were just being completed] it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel.

24. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian :

25. For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them : but they understood not.

26. And the next day he showed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren ; why do ye wrong one to another ?

27. But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us ?

28. Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday ?

29. Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Madian, [probably the peninsula on which Mount Sinai stands] where he begat two sons [Gersham and Eliezer].

30. And when forty years [making Moses eighty years old] were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sina an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush.

31. When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight : and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him,

32. Saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold.

33. Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet : for the place where thou standest is holy ground.

34. I have seen, I have seen [the Greek is an attempt to imitate an emphatic Hebrew construction, and is literally "having seen, I have seen"] the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt.

35. This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge ? the same did God send [the verb is in the perfect tense in the original] to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush.

36. He brought them out, after that he had shewed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years.

37. This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me ; him shall ye hear.

38. This is he, that was in the church [congregation] in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers : who received the lively oracles to give unto us :

39. To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt,

40. Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us : for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.

41. And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.

42. Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven ; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness ?

43. Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them : and I will carry you away beyond Babylon.

44. Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen.

45. Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David ;

46. Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob.

47. But Solomon built him an house.

48. Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands ; as saith the prophet,

49. Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool : what house will ye build me ? saith the Lord : or what is the place of my rest ?

50. Hath not my hand made all these things ?

51. Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost : as your fathers did, so do ye.

52. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted ? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One ; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers :

53. Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.

### THE DEFENCE OF STEPHEN.

HOW does this speech happen to be here ? It is a long one. Who put it down ? It reads like a verbatim report ; who reported it ? It would be easy for the memory to carry a sentence or two ; but who could record so long and so highly-informed a speech as the one which is given in this chapter ? There was a young man listening to this speech with no friendly ear. His name was Saul. It is supposed that afterward, when he became Paul, he related this speech to Luke, who wrote it in this form. It is not a correct report. No man can report chain lightning. You may catch a little here and there of such eloquence, but the speech itself, in all the elements that lifted it up into historic importance, it was not in the power of memory to carry, or in the

power of recollection to reproduce. This is not Stephen's speech, and you must not therefore hold him responsible for it ; they did not give Stephen an opportunity of revising his speech. He spoke, and they hurried him on ; the punctuation did not undergo the criticism of Stephen's eye. The speech itself is full of historic blunders and contradictions. It is Saul's recollection of Stephen's defence. It is little or nothing more. You have only to compare the Old Testament statements with the statements which Stephen is said to have made, and you will see at once discrepancy after discrepancy, and in one or two cases you will see blank and palpable contradiction. This gives us another view of inspiration than that which we have sometimes too narrowly held. The speech is true, and yet not factual. What is said here is Biblical, but not textual. There is no statement here made that is not spiritually true, and yet there are few sentences in the elaborate apology that may not be challenged on some technical ground. Some persons imagine that they are inspired when they are only technical. They forget that you may not have a single *text* in support of what you are stating, and yet may have the whole *Bible* in defence of it. The Bible is not a text, it is a tone ; it is not a piece of technical evidence, it is an inspiration, a wind blowing where it listeth, to carry with it everywhere life, and freshness, and liberty.

Looking at this speech therefore not as a verbatim report, but as a *résumé* given by an unfriendly hearer, but a most friendly reporter, we may take it as giving *the principal features in Stephen's character*. The man who reported this speech to Luke made it the basis and the model of his own immortal apologies. Truly we sometimes borrow from unacknowledged sources ; certainly we are sometimes indebted to unknown influences for some of our best inspirations. To think that a man whom they appointed with six others to watch over the ministration of tables should have become the first Christian martyr apologist, and should have given the model for the greatest speeches ever delivered by man, namely, the speeches of Paul himself when put upon his trial and defence, is surely a very miracle of Providence ! How little Stephen knew what he was doing. Who really knows the issue and full effect of any action or speech ? Who can tell what little sentences are quoted in the sick room, what suggestions are taken from the speaker's lips and sent in letters to those far away and ill at ease ?

Who can tell what echoes of spent eloquence follow the hearer through his daily engagements, and cheer him in days of dejection? Life is not marked off in so many inches and done with; it is full of reference, allusion, collateral and incidental bearing, so that an act done is not self-complete, but may be the beginning of endless other acts nobler than itself. Compare the great orations of Paul with the speech of Stephen, and you will be struck with the manner in which the scholar reproduced the master, and how Stephen transfused himself into Paul's very spirit, and was under God the making of that sublime Apostle.

I think it is fair criticism to infer the man from the speech on all occasions. It is sometimes proverbially said, "The voice is the man." We may enlarge that common saying, and declare with wisdom, I believe, that the speech is the character. Following this suggestion, what kind of man was Stephen, judged by the speech which is reported in this chapter? Accused of blasphemy, he is called upon for his defence. How does he reveal himself? Surely we may in the first instance describe him as a man *well versed in the Scriptures*. From beginning to end his speech is a Scriptural one; quotation follows quotation like shocks of thunder. There is very little of Stephen himself until he comes to the application of his Scriptural references. Stephen was a man who had read his Bible; therein he separates himself from the most of modern people. Personally I cannot call to mind a single person who ever read the Bible and disbelieved it. It belongs peculiarly to the Bible to get hold of its readers little by little; subtly it gets round about their souls, so that when they come to the amen of the Apocalypse they find themselves spiritually, if not literally, on their knees in homage to the Spirit of the Book. We all know numerous persons who abuse the Bible who have never read it. Such opposition is natural, and when lunacy becomes philosophy it will be about the most rational course to pursue. Not that such persons have not read *parts* of the Bible; such parts they have perused without understanding; they misquote every passage which they cite, and they make imperfect reference to every Biblical proposition they undertake to dispute. They do not distinguish between *verse* and *Bible*,—fractions and whole numbers. Who really knows the Bible by heart? It is the boast of some of us that we can recite from end to end five plays of Shakespeare.

Who can recite the Book of Psalms? You call upon your little children to recite nonsense verses, and it is well enough that now and then the little ones should do so. Which of your children can recite a chapter of the Gospel according to John? Where is the man who can repeat word for word one of Paul's letters to the Corinthians? And would not some of us be posed if we were called upon at a moment's notice to recite six verses of Paul's letter to the Romans? Only the men who *know* the Bible should *quote* it. Only those who are steeped in the Scriptures, saturated through and through with Divine truth, should undertake to express any opinion about it. This is the law in all other criticism, and in common justice it ought to be the law in relation to the Book which we believe to be the inspired revelation of God. Is this not just? Are we asking for anything in the Church which would not be granted in the Polytechnic and the Lyceum? To undertake to discuss an author without knowing him, knowing him within his very spirit and purpose, is to trifle with the occasion, not to rise to its dignity and responsibility. When the Church knows its Bible well, we may trust it anywhere. When other voices arise to charm its ear, what piping voices they will be, what pitiful moans and feeble notes, after the infinite thunder and ineffable music of Moses and the Prophets, of the Psalms, and Evangelists of Christ?

Having this complete knowledge of Scripture, Stephen next shows himself to have been a man who took a *broad and practical view of history*. It is as difficult to find a man who has read history as to find a man who has read the Bible. History itself is a term which needs definition. A man does not know history because he can glibly repeat all the kings of England from the Conquest until now—that is not history. We justly ask our younger students to construct a party. Giving them this or that Pope as president of the Council, we say, collect around him the leading men of his day. It is interesting to watch how the table is supplied with visitors, how every chair is filled up, and how the symposium is completed with accuracy—but that is not history. You will find that history is not a letter, and is not to be reported in letters: it is a tone, an inspiration, a subtle, impalpable, all-involving something—full of voices, full of music, vibrating, throbbing with indefinable life and energy. You do not learn history from the

books. From the books you learn the facts, but, in a sense which might be defended at length if requisite, having ascertained the facts, you must *make* history. The novelist is a better historian than the mere annalist, because history is an atmosphere. It is not only a panorama of passing incidents and anecdotes great and small ; it is a spirit which only the wizard can evoke and express. Stephen lived in history. His was not a little rootless life that lay on the surface, that the sun could smite with withering fire. Stephen belonged to the past, and therefore to the present. Stephen was a member of a great and noble household, he was a link in a far-stretching chain, he was an element in a great composition. Why should we live the shallow life of men who have no history behind them ? We are encompassed by a great cloud of witnesses. Behind us, the undying dead ; beyond us, the immortal living. By what right do we dissociate ourselves from currents, historic and providential ? We have no right to disembody ourselves, and commit an act of dismembership which separates us from the agony, the responsibility, and the destiny of the race. In Christ we have all to be one. "The whole family in heaven and on earth" was the language of Paul ; and that language ought to be ours if we would realize what it is to be sons of God, mighty in the Scriptures, and inspired by history.

Stephen was, in the third place, a man who was *forced into action by his deep convictions*. That is a word which has somehow slipped out of our vocabulary. Why should I say slipped out of our vocabulary ? It has only done so because it has slipped out of our *life*. Who now has any *convictions* ? Life is now a game, a series of expedients. It consists of a succession of experiments. It is a speculation, a bet, a fool's wager, a leap in the dark. It is not an embodied and sacrificial conviction. In the old, old days, men used to live because they could not help it. In those days they spoke because they believed. They had no necessity to get up a speech, to prepare and arrange it in words that would offend nobody, and would be recollected by no hearer. In old Christian days men spoke as naturally and as necessarily as they breathed. Without faith we cannot have eloquence ; words innumerable, but not speech of the heart, sparks from the life, flashes from the inward and living altar. It is not enough to have *information*. It is not enough, my young brother, preparing for

the pulpit, to have an encyclopædia of mere knowledge of letters and of books ; you must have the believing and the understanding heart, the resolute will, which can only come from the Holy Ghost. If you believe Christianity, you will not need any exhortation to speak it. Speech about Christianity, where it is known and loved, is the best necessity of this life. The fire burns, the heart muses, and the tongue speaks. If timidly, still clearly, and if timidly, not with the timidity of cowardice, but with the self-restraint of modesty. It was not enough for Stephen ; hence in the fifty-first verse you find that Stephen was a man *whose information burned into religious earnestness*. Having made his quotation he turned round as preachers dare not turn round now. "Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost : as your fathers did, so do ye." It was an offensive speech. It was unpardonable then, and it would be unpardonable now. Why was it unpardonable ? Because it was truth made pointed. It was doctrine personalized, and that no man will ever endure. No man goes to church to be spoken to. There is not a man amongst us would be here to-day if he knew that the preacher would personally rebuke his sins. The man who would listen all day with delight to an eloquent malediction upon the depravity of the whole world would leave the church if you told him he was a drunkard or a thief. We live in generalities. So preaching is now dying, or it is becoming a trick in eloquence, or it is offering a grand opportunity for saying nothing about nothing. It used to turn the world upside down. It used to be followed by blows, and stones, and fires, and racks.

Stephen shows us the model of the great speaker ; we need no book of rhetoric beyond this great apology. Called upon, he addresses his auditors with courtesy as "Men, brethren, and fathers." He begins calmly, with the serenity of conscious power. He quotes from undisputed authority. Every step he takes is a step in advance. There is not in all his narration one circular movement. Having accumulated his facts and put them in the most vivid manner, he suddenly, like the out-bursting of a volcano, applies the subject, saying, "Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost. As your fathers did, so do ye." Are these the people he described at the beginning of his speech ? Then he called them,



“Men, brethren, and fathers.” This is the law of argumentative progress. Begin courteously, and beg the confidence and respectful attention of your hearers. At the beginning, before they had heard the statement, they are, “Men, brethren, and fathers,” but your speech will be their responsibility. They will not be the *same* at the end of the speech as they were at the beginning. So the hearers who were “Men, brethren, and fathers” in the exordium, are “Stiff-necked and uncircumcised in hearts and ears” in the peroration! A preacher may begin as courteously as he pleases, but having got out the truth, having showed what God is and has done, and wants to be done, his conclusion should be a judgment as well as a gospel. Is it possible for any man to-day to be a Stephen? Why not? The Bible is still here. Every one of us can read it in the tongue in which he was born, and every one of us may by the grace and gift of the Holy Ghost have a calm and sovereign confidence in the truth. That is what is wanted. Do not put your case tentatively, interrogatively, suggestively. The Bible is either a revelation or it is an imposition. It is either the *truth* or the aggravation of all *falsehood*. Range yourselves upon the one side or the other, and, having the truth of God, speak it. But how did Stephen know all about the case? Was he, as suggested, the second disciple who travelled on that eventide from Jerusalem to Emmaus? None can decide that question. There is some inferential evidence in favor of the view. For my part, I think it is most probably true. On that, however, no definite and final opinion can be pronounced by any man. But suppose that Stephen was the very disciple when the two walked together and were sad, and as they went together Jesus himself drew near, but their eyes were holden that they should not know him. Having inquired into the circumstances of the case, he said, “Oh, fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken,” and, beginning at Moses and the prophets, he expounded to them in all Scripture the things concerning himself. What if Saul reported Stephen, and Stephen reported Christ, and so the great Gospel goes on from man to man, from tongue to tongue, till the last man hears it, and his heart burns within him!

## XVII.

### PRAYER.

*(Easter Sunday.)*

O THOU who hast thyself risen from the dead, raise us up also with thyself that we may die no more. We bless thee for the word of resurrection, for the gospel of restoration, and for the hope that death itself shall die and the whole creation be filled with joyous life. If we be risen with Christ we will set our affections on things above. Help us in this way to show how truly we have been buried with Christ, and how certainly we have been raised again with the Son of God. May we know the fellowship of his sufferings and the power of his resurrection. Crucified with Christ, may we also rise with him. Having known his shame, may we share his glory. Help us to overcome in the great battle of life, that we may sit down with Christ upon his throne.

Thou dost bring the years round from day to day, with all their sacred memories, with all their solemn inspirations, and with all their ennobling and instructive lessons. May ours be the seeing eyes, the hearing ears, and the hearts that do understand. Let nothing of thy providence be wasted upon us. Let the whole ministry of thy grace operate constantly in our hearts, subduing every evil passion, controlling every unholy thought, and lifting our whole life up to the sublimity of the life of Christ. We bless thee for all thy care. May we never forget thy benefits. Make our memories quick to retain every gracious impression, and whilst our memory remembers may our hope strengthen itself upon nourishment from heaven, that it may live through all the night of life, and finally enter into the joy of heaven's own morning.

Thou hast reminded us this day of the open grave of the Son of God. He is not here. He is risen. We will not seek the living among the dead. Our hearts will fly towards the heavens where the Christ of God now pleads and prays, and we will breathe our prayer through His infinite intercession, and because of his priesthood the answer to our desire shall be worthy of thyself, thou giver of all good. Our hope is still in the Cross; our confidence is in the abandoned tomb. Because Christ died we shall live, and because he rose again from the dead death shall have no dominion over us. Having this hope in us, may we purify ourselves, and set ourselves earnestly to all the high service of thy kingdom. May we not be slothful; may we rather be reckoned among those who redeem the time, and who prevent the rising of the sun, and toil till the night has

fallen. Blessed is that servant who shall be found waiting and watching and serving when his Lord cometh. Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Delay not thy coming. The earth is wearying for thee, and the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. Come as thou wilt, and when thou wilt, only make us ready to receive thee with the eager love which should possess the hearts of men redeemed.

Comfort thy people. Speak a word of tender consolation to the heart that is filled with trouble. To some, life is a river of tears, a long pain, a dark and terrible disappointment, an agony which death alone can heal. Surely thou knowest such, and to-day, when the heavens are glad with a new hymn, and the earth is young with a new spring, and a new hope, thou wilt find them out in their hiding-places, and make them also glad.

Help us to hold on steadfastly during the few years that remain. May there be no break in our constancy ; may our fidelity be without flaw or hesitation ; may our life, redeemed with blood, spare not itself in the service of thy truth ; and may our whole hope in Christ be made glad at last with the revelation and the enjoyment of his own heaven. Amen.

## THE DEFENCE OF STEPHEN.

*Acts vii. (continued).*

THE first use we made of this speech was to inquire into the character of the *speaker*. I propose to recur now to this great apology, and to use it in the second place for the purpose of showing *the method of Divine revelation and providence*. Taking this great speech as our guide, what is the method of God's revelation to His creatures and the method of His providence over them? Let us see whether what is related here agrees with our own observation and experience. It may be that we can redeliver Stephen's great speech ourselves. If we cannot find the words of such eloquence, we can identify Stephen's words as a fit expression of the sentiments which animate our own hearts. The first point to which attention is now called is the very point which came before us in our first study of the Acts of the Apostles. Notice how God has from the beginning made himself known to *individuals*. Stephen relates the great names of history. Some names are as mountains on the landscape. We start our journeys from them, we reckon our distances by them, we measure our progress according to their height. God does not reveal Himself to great *crowds* of men by some common revelation which ten thousand men seize at one and the same moment. So Stephen tells us that God appeared to *Abram*, to *Joseph*, to *Moses*, and to

*Solomon.* This is the method of the Divine revelation all through and through history. It is in some senses a perplexing method, but we cannot deny it. We may reason about it, and fear it as we fear a great dark cloud, but there it is ; and it is not there only in theology, it is there in science, in politics, in commerce, in literature, in family life, all through and through—the fact that God speaks to the *individual*, and entrusts him with some great gospel or spiritual mystery, or of scientific and commercial progress. Why make so much ado about *religious* election? Why talk about election as if it were a distinctively and exclusively *religious* word? You find this principle of the selection of individuals as evangelists, apostles, preachers, and pastors, in agriculture, in astronomy, in statesmanship, in theology. If we could conceive valid objections against any *accidental* application of this doctrine of personal election, we should still have to encounter it along the *whole line* of human history. How is it that one man in the family has all the sense? How is it that one of your boys has all the adventure? How is it that one man is a poet and another a mathematician? How is it that one boy can never be got to stay at home and his own brother can never be got to leave home? How is it that one man speaks out the word that expresses the inarticulate thought of a generation, though all other men would have been afraid to speak it, even if they had been wise enough to discover it? Stephen therefore recognizes this great principle in the Divine revelation, that God speaks to *individuals*, and clothes individuals with peculiar and most solemn responsibility. In all ages God has had His prophets, apostles, evangelists, errand runners, men who have dugged into the rocks and soared into the stars, and plunged through tumultuous seas to discover unknown lands. God has adopted the same method also in the kingdom of heaven. He has made some apostles, some prophets, some pastors and teachers, but the principle of *individual* election and coronation has been the same.

In the second place Stephen recognizes the great fact that God has constantly *come along the line of* SURPRISE. Revelation has never been a commonplace. Wherever God has revealed Himself He has surprised the person on whom the revealing light has fallen. The power of surprise is one of the greatest powers at the disposal of any teacher. How to put the old as if it were the

new ! How to set fire to common sense so that it shall burn up into genius ? How to reveal to a man his bigger and better self ! How has God proceeded according to the historical narration of Stephen ? To Abram he said, " Get thee out from thy country and from thy kindred." We cannot conceive the shock of *surprise* with which these words would be received. Travelling then was not what travelling is now. Get thee out on foot, bind on thy sandals, take thy staff, gather together thy family, and go out, not knowing whither thou goest ! No man could receive a call of *that* kind as a mere commonplace ! It must have gone thrillingly through every fibre of the man's being. Called to leave something *positive* for something *promised*—called to give up a *reality* in the hope of realizing a *dream* ! Then pass on to the case of Joseph. Stephen reminded his hearers that God gave Joseph favor and wisdom. Joseph's life was a surprise—a greater surprise to himself than to anybody that could look upon it. How was it that *he* always had the key of the gate ? Why did men turn to *him* in the night-time, and ask him the way through the valley of darkness and across the mountain of gloom ? How was it that *he* only could tell the King the meaning of the King's dream ? Then pass on to Moses. Stephen recognizes the same principle of surprise, for he reminds his hearers that God appeared unto Moses in a flaming bush—not that He baptized him with the dew, not that he insensibly surrounded him with a new atmosphere, and breathed upon him a benediction without words. Moses was *startled*. The power of *surprise* was used by the Almighty to attract attention. So a bush flamed at the mountain base, and a voice said to the wanderer, Stop ! Nothing but fire can stop some men ! There are those to whom the dew is a gospel, there are others who require the very fire that lights the eternal throne to stop them and arouse their full attention. God knows what kind of book to give you. The book that would suit you might be an offence to your own mother. God knows what kind of ministry you need, so He has set in His Church a thousand ministries, of dew, of tenderness, of lute-like music, of pathos and tears and infinite persuasiveness, and thunder and lightning, and fire and alarm ! It is not for us to compare the one with the other, but to see in such a distribution of power God's purpose to touch *every* creature in the whole world.

In the third place, Stephen, looking over the whole range of human history, shows how God has all the time been *overruling improbabilities and disasters*. We should say that when God has called a man to service, the road would be wide, clear of all obstructions, filled with sunshine, lined with flowers, that the man leaning on God's arm will be accompanied by the singing of birds and of angels. Nothing of the kind is true to fact. Stephen recognizes this in very distinct terms. He says that God spake in this wise, that Abram's seed should sojourn in a strange land, and that they should bring them into bondage, and evil entreat them four hundred years! In the face of such an arrangement can there be an *Almighty* providence? Yes. And Joseph was selected, as we have seen, and yet he was *sold into Egypt*. "God-forsaken" we should say, looking at the outside only. And there were those, as we are reminded by Stephen, who evilly entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children to the end they might not live. Yet the first word was supposed to be a Divine direction! Moses himself was "cast out." Stephen does not cover these things up or make less of them, or seek to hasten away from them as from disagreeable circumstances in the order of Divine Providence. Nay, he relates them, masses them into great black groups, and says—Still the great thought went on and on! There is the majesty of the Divine Providence. Its movement is not lost in pits, and caves, and wildernesses, and rivers, and seas. The disasters are many, the sufferings are severe, the disappointments are innumerable and unendurable; still the thought *goes on*. Judge nothing before the time. So is it with our own life. To-day white-clothed apostles, mighty with God, the uplifting of our hands a prevailing prayer—to-morrow like the beasts that perish! Living the forbidden life, eating stolen bread, living the beggar's life, can we be the called of God? Can God be living in us and leading us onward to some great destiny? Yes! He will yet cause death itself to die. There shall be joy in the presence of the angels of God over this little sin-blighted earth, more than over ninety and nine of the planets that never knew the tragedy of sin! Do not say you are forsaken of God because you have broken every commandment of the ten. The gift of God is not a question of good behaviour as from the outside, and as measurable by the letter; it

is a question of *purpose, thought*, supreme intent ; and GOD alone is judge !

There is nothing in this review of history as conducted by Stephen that ought to startle us as a novelty, or disturb us as an improbability. God has revealed himself to individuals in the making of the steam-engine, and the spinning jenny, and the telegraph, and the telephone, and a thousand other things. He did not reveal these inventions or possible inventions to all together, but to the singular man, to the solitary student, to the one brooding mind. "The Holy Ghost hath overshadowed thee, therefore, that holy thing which shall be born of thee, shall be called the gift of God !" *That* is true of every miraculous conception, whether it be of the Son of God or of the last invention of progressive civilization. Do not, then, distrust the individual teacher.

There is a common sophism, which only requires to be stated to refute itself, to the effect that it is very strange that God should have kept back this or that truth until this or that man should have arisen. There is nothing in all history less strange. It is God's common method. Yet there are those to-day who will tell you that it is very strange that God should have kept back his truth for nineteen hundred years, and should have revealed it to this latest of the teachers. It is a most fallacious sophism. We all know better. It is God's plan to say to Abram, "Get thee out." To call individual minds to his service, and to set the flame of the new revelation on the altar of the individual understanding. Do not fear to be surprised. Distrust *commonplace* rather than *novelty*. Astonishment would seem to be the key-word of the Divine Book. Every page is a surprise. Every syllable flames with a new light. The Lord sends us not a new *book*, but new *readers* of the book, men whose tones are comments and whose expositions are revelations. Do not succumb to misfortune. Our fathers were evil entreated, said Stephen ; for four hundred years they seemed to have no deliverer. Moses was cast out ; Joseph had been thrown into prison ; disaster had marked the whole history of the Church. It was still *God's* Church, and *you* are God's child, his loved one still, though you have been evil entreated, and have done evil, and have left undone much that you ought to have done. God does not elect and disentitle according to our paltry rules and technicalities. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance."

Bruised, ragged, sin-stained, tearful, worn, we may yet arrive at the city whose streets are gold and whose walls are jasper, for God's grace is greater than man's sin.

Mark how exactly this whole history of Stephen's corresponds with *Christ's method* of revelation and providence. We can trace the whole of the old history in the new, and entirely fit piece to piece, letter to letter, line to line. Did not Christ reveal himself to *individuals* ? Did he not say to the Abram of his time, "Follow me ?" Did he call ten thousand men with one loud call, or did he go closely to *one* waiting fisherman and say to him, "Come ?" A greater call than was addressed to Abraham ! Peter was summoned to a more honored and sublime destiny. "Follow me ;" to weariness, to shame, to misunderstanding, to reproach, to abandonment, to death, to heaven ! Did not Christ also use the power of *surprise* ? When was he ever received into any town as an ordinary visitor ? Who did not know *his* voice amongst a hundred others ? Who did not wait for him to speak, and look, and act ? Who was not impatient with all the multitude lest they should interrupt any sentence of this marvellous eloquence ? Did not Christ also take his Church through *improbabilities*, disasters, and dark places ? Has not his Church been evil entreated ? Have not our Christian fathers been cast out ? Have we not also our heroes, and sufferers, and martyrs, and crowned ones ? I saw a great city, and one of the elders answered and said unto me, These are they that came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. And, lastly, was not Christ always *master* of the occasion ? Without a place whereon to lay his head, he was still the LORD. Without a beast to ride upon, he still called himself the MASTER. Washing his disciples' feet, he lifted himself up from his stoop to name himself LORD and MASTER. We remember our disasters, our slaveries, our punishments, our reproach, and our sorrow ; still, notwithstanding all, the Church is the Lamb's Bride, and he will marry her at the altar of the universe !



## XVIII.

### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou hast made thy truth a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death. Truly thy word is a fire to enlighten or a fire to destroy. The stone which thou hast set forth in thy Gospel is a wondrous stone. If men fall upon it they will be broken, but if it fall upon men it will grind them to powder. May we know thy Gospel to be the word of life. To us may there be no sound of death in all the utterance of the truth. May our souls leap with joy on hearing the great Gospel of thy Word. We bless thee that we have heard thy truth, that we love its graciousness, and that we answer its music. Thy Word is truth. Thy truth gladdens the heart ; thy truth overthrows the last enemy, and fills the open grave with spring's brightest, sweetest flowers. May we this day enter into thy truth with gladness, with sympathy, with gratitude ; and as we study it in the sanctuary of God may light be increased. Open our eyes until our whole life be filled with glory, and there be round about us the very splendour of heaven. Thou dost grant unto thy people occasional seasons of rapture. Sometimes thou dost permit us to look over the boundary line and to see the better land. Now and again thou dost cause us to hear singing which falls from above. We know it by its tenderness, and sweetness, and power to heal. May this day be a day of vision and of much overhearing of heavenly melodies, and may our hearts be lifted up with all the inspiration of blood-bought freedom, and may we gather under the banner which floats from the Cross itself. Wondrous Cross ! So mean, so grand ! Behold there we see, with our heart's bright eyes, the dying Son of God, the sacrifice for our sins, the one Priest, the infinite Redeemer. We see him die and we see him rise again, and we know that now he prays for us as he only can pray. Receive us, thou Great Intercessor. Speak in words of thine own the griefs we cannot utter, and tell thy Father in words of thine own choosing the keenness of our penitence. We await great answers. We have brought with us the empty vessels of our heart, and mind, and strength, and every power we have, and we await the opening of the windows of heaven, and the deluge that baptizes but never destroys. Our sin is great, but thy grace is greater. It is to grace we come. It is to grace we direct our hope. It is to thyself in thy love that we now hasten like prodigals whose hearts are broken. Receive us every one. Make the old man young again, and may the white hair be but like the white spring blossom, the sign of a real summer. Make the young be sober, strong, enthusiastic.

Recall into thy Church the angels we have banished, the angels of devotion, passion, enthusiasm, self-sacrifice. Let thy Church to-day be as thy Church of long ago, when she walked abroad in the earth, and men knew her by the fire which glowed in her eyes, and by the graciousness of her persuasive speech. Be with all good and honest men—with the missionary here, the evangelist yonder, with the sower of heaven's own seed, and may we one day see him coming back from the field burdened only because the sheaves are so many. Amen.

### Acts vii. 54-60.

54. When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.

55. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,

56. And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

57. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord,

58. And cast him out of the city, and stoned him : and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.

59. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

60. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

### THE DOUBLE EFFECT OF TRUTH.

TRUTH would always seem to produce a *double effect*. Some time ago we read that when the people heard Peter's speech they were pricked in their hearts, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the Apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" When the people heard Stephen deliver substantially the same message they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. This is the history of preaching. It is the history of preaching to-day. This wonderful divergence of feeling is developed in every congregation where the truth as it is in Jesus is proclaimed with faithfulness and power. The Gospel is either a savour of life unto life or of death unto death, that is to say, it either saves men or it kills them. No man is the same after a sermon that he was before. It is a solemn thing to be in the sanctuary at all, and no man can pass through the services of the sanc-

tuary, with any interest either on one side or on the other, and be precisely the same at the end as he was at the beginning. In proportion as this is not so the Gospel is not preached. We must not confound the permanent with the accidental. If men can hear sermons now, and be simply amused or pleased, gratified or delighted, something has been left out in the statement made by the preacher. He has concealed the Lord's sword, he has thrown water upon the burning fire, he has delivered but a one-sided message. "The word of the Lord is sharper than a two-edged sword; it pierceth to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow." Where preaching has become child's play, and hearing a dreary mind's pious entertainment, then the great features of apostolic preaching have been lost. Have you come hungering and thirsting after righteousness, earnestly desiring to see the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and to hold sweet and fervent communion with the Triune God? Then you cannot be disappointed. God will not allow disappointment to follow such aspirations. He would deny himself if he could, for he has plainly said, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." The Lord is not a host who invites more guests than his banqueting-table will accommodate. There is no shortness in the Father's house, there is bread enough and to spare. If we bring the hunger, God will find the food. I do not say that the food will be in this portion or in that portion of the service, but it will be somewhere—in Psalm, or hymn, or inspired lesson, or exposition, or loving fervent prayer. Nay, if you cannot exactly say where it is, if it be as diffused and yet as near as the atmosphere, you will still feel that this is none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven. The righteous man is always satisfied. The good and honest heart never goes away complaining. The effect of truth upon the candid mind is an effect of perfect happiness. Judge the mind you brought to the sanctuary by the result which accrues from its service. On the other hand, let a man go to the house of God with a prejudiced mind, and what is the effect of prayer, exposition, truth, upon him? You cannot get at him. He is behind a cloud; he is ensheathed within the armour of an impenetrable hostility. He has come determined not to hear what he ought to hear. His purpose is to find fault, to gratify the discontent which he brought with

him ; nay, it is even to prove his own prophecy, for he said that such and such would be the result, and he is bound to confirm his own word. Even Christ failed before the power of prejudice. What wonder, then, if Stephen also failed to touch the soul that had enclosed itself within the most aggravated prejudices which could confine even a Jewish heart ?

This brings us face to face with the vital question, in what mind have we come to God's house ? For what purpose have we opened His book ? God says himself, to the froward he will show himself froward, and to the upright he will show himself upright. God will be to us as we are to him in these sacred things. This was Jesus Christ's method of revelation to those who heard him. When men came from curiosity, he never satisfied them. When they reared a great wall of prejudice between him and them, he never spoke over it, but turned away. He was a thousand Christs to a thousand different men. " Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." " To this man will I look, to him that is of a broken and contrite heart, and that trembleth at My word."

The truth therefore produces one of two effects. It saves or it kills. It raises men from the dead, or it buries them in a grave sevenfold deep. Verily, it is the great power of God. Is the spring sun which is now shining upon us doing the same thing throughout the forest and the garden to everything he finds there ? The other day I looked upon a tree that was full of blossom, and under its wide-spreading branches I saw a huge limb of a tree withering away. Was the sun that created the blossom causing the tree branch to wither ? Yes ; that was even so. To the living tree whose roots were struck into the earth the sun was giving life, but to the branch cut away, having nothing but itself to live upon, the sun was pouring down arrows of destruction. The great sun, so hospitably full of light, kind, friendly, was feeding, like a mother-nurse, the living tree, and was killing with pitiless fire the Sundered branch. As is the double effect of light, so is the double effect of truth. The question therefore comes back, always, What are we in relation to the truth ? What is our temper ? What is our spirit ? What is our supreme desire ? If we can prove that we have brought the hunger, and God has not given the food, then we convict God of a false promise. Who can do so ? Nay, rather let God be true, and every man a liar.

But how difficult it is to find the reason in ourselves when the result is not satisfactory. How readily we blame circumstances, and persons, and situations. Who ever puts the dart into his own breast saying, I only am to blame for this unhappy effect? Consider the distance that lies between us and God. Not in majesty, but in moral sympathy. We do not like to entertain God in our hearts. The Almighty has to exercise the full powers of His omnipotence to bring us even into a hearing attitude. We do not contribute towards the miracle. We do always resist the Holy Ghost ; as our fathers did so do we. If we seek the Lord we shall find him. If we come to the house of God for the truth we shall see it. If we return with disappointment we must find the reason in our own badness. Do I accuse men who do not accept Christian truth of insincerity? Most certainly not. There may be men listening to this discourse at this moment who have not accepted Christ as I have accepted him, and yet they may be perfectly sincere. No good is to be gained by bandying charges of insincerity. That some are insincere is too plain. I am not talking of all who reject the Gospel, but of men who claim to be of sincere purpose, earnestly wishing to be and to do what is right. Thus would I conciliate such persons ; there shall be no controversy between me and them where they claim consistency of purpose and intent. But even where there is sincerity there may be a subtle action of what I may term intellectual vanity. Not always a conscious vanity. Our life is not measured by our consciousness alone and absolutely. We have a self within a self, and another self deeper still. We are many selves. Oftentimes the mind is its own surprise. Occasionally we feel in ourselves the beating or throbbing of an influence we cannot name. Astronomers tell us that there are perturbations here and there which signify that there is a planet yet undiscovered in the neighborhood of these occasional and singular agitations. The planet has not been seen ; it has not been named ; its weight and measure are unknown, but because of these perturbations, these eccentric movements, the existence of the planet is known to be a fact. Is it not so also with us? For a time we go on equably, regularly, as if we had ascertained our exact intellectual magnitude, and suddenly a new passion starts up in the soul. Fire unfelt before pierces us like a sting, and for a moment we are other than our usual selves. So

there may be a conscious or an unconscious intellectual vanity. See what a man has to give up in accepting God's truth in the Gospel! He has to give up his own respectability. Who can do it? He has to surrender his own infallibility. He has to say to his own reason many a time, "You are not sufficient for this great service. Reason, divinely beautiful, divinely inspired, divinely sanctified, great reason, strong and noble reason, there is a region you cannot enter, and there is a fellowship of whose language you do not know one word. Stand thou here whilst I go up to worship yonder." A man has to surrender a good deal before he falls into absolute sympathy with the will and mind of Christ. He has, so to say, to take a sponge and rub out all his own intellectual inferences and conclusions, and make blank places of room which he thought was already filled with inspiration. A man has to empty both hands and say, "In my hands no price I bring." He has to cast out of his heart everything of the nature of self-idolatry and self-satisfaction, and has to say in effect, if not in terms—

"A guilty, weak, and helpless worm,  
On Thy kind arms I fall."

A man therefore may be, from his own point of view, sincere, and yet his mind may be narrowed, and perverted, and limited by an unconscious intellectual vanity. There is also a great moral difficulty. If some of you were to accept the Gospel this day you could not go to business to-morrow. Christ is not a partner in your firm. If you offered him a share for nothing he would decline it. This truth would shut up so many places. Perhaps the Stock Exchange would not be opened at all to-morrow if this Gospel of Christ took right hold of the soul and made it a loving slave. These things must be considered in estimating the double effect of the truth. A man may be sincere, and he may not be conscious of intellectual vanity, and yet he may have to consider his family claims, his commercial position, his success in life. He may say, "I will go through this thicket first, and then I will pray." He may say, "I do not deny the inspiration of the Bible or the claim of the Creator upon the soul, nor do I deny that there is more truth in the universe than I have yet received into my mind; but if I begin to-day to accept Christ, and to act ac-

ording to his will, I could not live. My trade is a bad one ; it makes people poor and miserable, and it misleads the unwary and the ignorant ; it takes into its iron grip the savings of the industrious ; it promises great interest and great rewards to those who trust me, and I do not see how I can at present give it up." A man under such circumstances is tempted to gnash upon every Stephen with his teeth, to call him rude, offensive, personal, and to cast him out and stone him. Do not suppose that stoning was a Jewish method of treating enemies. Stoning is the method of all countries and of all times. We stone men to-day. We make the Bible so poor by trying to find how much of it was local and temporary. As if we, the leaders of civilization in the nineteenth century, never stoned anybody, when we are stoning men every day ! We throw at them hard words, we write about them bitter things. We endeavour to limit, if not to destroy, their best influence. By many a suggestion we seek to blunt the edge of their keenest appeals for Christ. Do not, therefore, imagine that stoning went out of fashion with the ancient Jews, and has never been heard of since.

Now comes the question, What is the effect of truth upon us ? What are the sermons we like best ? It is curious to listen to the notions of hearers upon that question. There are those who praise the intellectual sermon. They like intellectual truth. They are exceedingly pleased with recondite matter. They are charmed to look into depths which they are never expected themselves to sound. That is useless, and worse than useless. It is not preaching at all, if it be limited to the intellectual treatment of spiritual truth. There are those who enjoy the poetical treatment of truth. They like sweet little touches of art, phrases beautifully cut, diamond phrases with facets throwing back all the glory of the morning sun. That is useless if alone. The merely intellectual will do you no good, the merely imaginative may but lull you to undeserved rest. What then do we want ? We want the intellectual, the imaginative, the argumentative, the doctrinal. We want the preaching that will so apply itself to the lives of men as to cause them to cry out, "What shall we do?" Then we want the great Gospel balm, the evangelical redemption, the Cross of Christ, the Blood of the One Victim, the Sacrifice, all that goes to make up God's heart-offer of pardon and peace. So would I

receive into my confidence and love preachers of all kinds. No one preacher is all preachers. You may regard that statement as trite and paradoxical, but it is significantly true. You must hear all if you would hear the complete one. Do not then stop any man in his career of preaching. Though it be not mine, we are fellow servants, brother prophets, men united in a holy association, having one head, one truth, the one supplementing the other, and both consenting to the mastership and sovereignty of Christ. Do not imagine that the truth is being badly preached because it is seriously opposed. We hear of those who think it to be their duty to attend certain meetings and gatherings for the purpose of forming their own opinion as to their propriety. It is a shocking display of vanity. Who made them judges, and by what standard do they judge? If the standard itself be wrong, the whole judgment is useless and mischievous. Who made them a judge in God's sanctuary? The only standard should be the out-coming usefulness of the service. Show me men edified in the faith, strongly built up in all holy doctrine and thinking, increasingly obedient to every command of Christ, becoming gentler in temper, nobler in spirit; show me wicked men convicted, show me self-interested men crying out for vengeance; and I may conclude that God's truth is being preached there with great vigour and great effect. But where there is a feeling of sleepiness, of passive acquiescence, where hearing is an endurance rather than an opposition; where there is no opposition because there is no excitement; I fear that though much may have been said about the Gospel, the Gospel itself has not been heard in the majesty of its moral dignity, and in the tenderness of its redeeming appeal.



## XIX.

### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, this is thine house, and we are safe in it. Thou wilt not suffer the very least of us to perish. There is no death in thine house, thou Father of spirits. We come to thee with great expectation, with the urgency of love and the shame and sorrow following upon personal sin. We stand by the Cross ; we feel its falling blood. We need it all. Cleanse us, and we shall be made clean. Multiply thy grace towards us until our sin is lost in its fulness. We have heard of thine abounding grace. Men have spoken of it as they speak of overflowing rivers and fountains of water covering and refreshing the land. To that grace in Christ we now come. We all come. We press towards it. There is no reluctance in our spirit, but a great constraint, to which we yield with expectant and grateful delight. Liberate us from the bondage of sin. Destroy the dominion of guilt. Let the grace of Christ gather up into itself the sin of the whole world, and slay it for ever. We love thine house : behold, it is not far from heaven. Into it the angels come with sweet messages. Here there is no common tongue, no inferior theme, but here the altar burns with heavenly fire, and the whole place is radiant with light above the brightness of the sun. Wondrous light ! Everywhere, yet not taking up any room ; falling upon the whole universe, but nowhere as a burden. We live in thy light ; without it we needs must die. Let thy light find its way into our hearts, there to nourish the roots of all good things, of all high purpose, all noble vows, and all desires after God. Give us such lifting up of soul as shall cause us to see the littleness of earth and the vanity of time, then give us such ideas of duty and sacrifice as shall bring us down to the earth again to do its meanest work as by appointment of heaven. May we not be amongst the slothful servants. May ours be a life of religious industry, so let the Master come when he may, in the morning twilight or in the twilight of evening, or in the bright noon, we shall be ready to meet him.

Thou art taking away one and another and making the earth poor. Thou dost remove the lamp of science, and silence the voice of eloquence. Thou dost show us that no man is needful to thy purposes upon the earth. Thou alone art God, we are but men. The Lord reigneth, and on his throne there is room for none other. It is enough. It is eternal Sabbath, it is infinite freedom. We are thy servants, and in thy service is liberty. Spurn us not from thy feet, for we have been bought by the Son of thy love, by the Christ of God, by the Priest of the Universe.

Help us to realize the littleness of our life, and the importance of immediate action. In thy Church may there be no death. May we all live to the very last. May there be no long dying, but working up to the last moment, and then passing into thy peace. Be with those who this day mourn their dead, to whom this is a Sabbath within a Sabbath, who have a Church at home, because of the eloquent that speak not. May they hear the eloquence of that speechlessness, and pray with a wider compass and with a tenderer entreaty of love. Destroy death. Thou dost hate it. It is not in thyself. It is not in thy heaven. There no flower fades, no worm eats the bud of the summer. Death is in us and in our world, and it follows quickly the footprints of our sin. Oh, thou Victor over the tomb, thou raised Christ, Man of the resurrection, Conqueror of the tomb, abolish death and give thy people to feel that dying is living, and that farewell in our world is a salutation in a better. The Lord help us ; the Lord go with us down the steep places, and help us over the rugged crags and rocks that lie in the way. The Lord speak to the last black river, and let it divide that his children may pass over as on dry land. Amen.

## THE DEFENCE OF STEPHEN.

Acts vii. 54-60 (*continued*).

LET us now turn to the fourth aspect of the great speech of Stephen ; let us look at this defence as *refuting some practical mistakes*. We form notions of things, and we say such notions stand to reason, and that being so rational they must of necessity be right and wise, and therefore indisputable. It is very strange to observe how our theories and preconceptions are upset by facts. Given such a case as is represented in the seventh chapter of the Acts, to find what the issue would be, and there would be no difficulty in outlining an issue of considerable pleasantness. As a matter of fact, the issue on the one side at least upsets some of the most mischievous sophisms which vitiate human reasoning. For example, you would say without hesitation that *character* will save a man from harm. You would maintain this doctrine with some vehemence, it is so plausible. The very sound of the terms is a kind of argument in its favor. With this good character there will be a good passage through society. Character will be its own introduction. Character will be its own defence. Where there is nobleness of character there will be unanimity of blessing. That would be so in certain conditions of society, but those conditions are not present in our life. There are certain conditions in which

holiness is an intolerable offence. It mars the bad harmony of the occasion. It stops the flow of evil thinking and evil speaking : it is a check that must be got rid of. Stephen was a man of blameless character, wise, benign, kind to everybody, a servant of the Church, devoted to his ecclesiastical business. Yet when he was called upon to make his defence, and had made it, his character stood him in no good stead. He was treated as an offender. The meanest criminal could not have received more malignant treatment. What, then, comes of your theory that character is its own defence? A bad world cannot tolerate good men. If we were better we should be the sooner got rid of. It is our gift of compromise that keeps us going. It is our trick of playing the double game that saves us from Stephen's fate. We are ambidexters. We are as clever with one hand as we are with the other, and it is this faculty that may be preserving us from a similar catastrophe.

You would further say that truth needs only to be *heard* in order to be recognized and accepted. Truth carries its own music. The fragrance of truth is wafted upon every wind, and all passers-by know the sacred odour. Only let a man stand up in his age and speak the truth with a clear voice, with a keen accent, with a burning earnestness, and men will recognize it, and will fall down loyally before it and will assist in its coronation. That would be the theory, what is the fact? Show where truth has ever been crowned so readily and harmoniously. Truth spoken to the true will always be so received, but truth spoken to the false invites a conflict and challenges a contest of strength. It is not enough, therefore, that you have the truth in order to make your way in the world instantly and successfully. You have to consider the conditions in which you speak the truth. If men were really in earnest one sermon would convert the world. But men are not in earnest. All parts of a man are not equally in earnest. There is a possibility of a man being divided against himself in this matter. Part of his nature votes one way, and part another, and therefore truth must stand outside until the controversy can be in some degree adjusted.

Then you would, in the third place, frankly say that *regularly constituted authorities* must be right. You smile at the suggestion that one odd man can have the truth, and seventy regularly train-

ed and constitutionally appointed men do not know the reality of the case in dispute. You would contend that it stands to reason that it must be so. Do you mean to say that the court does not understand the truth better than an anonymous blasphemer called Stephen? Anonymous so far as social influence and social standing are concerned. Consider the case. The Church must be right; the court must be infallible. We cannot allow ourselves to be bewildered and befooled by eccentric reformers and by individual assailants. All history reverses such opinions and misconceptions. The truth, it would seem, has always been with the one man. It is when a man is alone that you get him in reality and in the sum total of his being. The moment another man joins him he is less than he was before. The moment a man enters into a congregation he loses the most of himself. The sense of individual responsibility is almost lost. Your friend is not the same to you in a crowd as when he is face to face with you alone. Then you have him in the totality of his powers, affections, sympathies. So the Almighty seems to have elected the individual man, and through him to have spoken to the crowd, the multitude, or the race. It does seem singular that the regularly constituted authority should be wrong, and that the one man should have God's message. But he has not God's message simply because he happens to be one. He must not inspire himself. No man is called upon to make a self-election. You are not great because you are eccentric. You are not wise because you are solitary. Do look at both sides, and indeed all sides of the case, and gather wisdom from the widest inferences. But being called, being inspired, having within you the assurance that what you know is the truth, and being prepared to establish that assurance by daily sacrifice, daily humiliation, and daily pain, go forward, and at the last the vindication will come.

Another mistake which this great defence refutes is that *personal deliverance* in trial is the only possible providence. Look upon the case. Stephen is one; the enemy is many. God is supposed to be looking on. What did God do for Stephen? Let us sit in judgment upon this, and suppose a possible interposition of the divine hand. Instantly we should say there is only one thing that God can do, and that is to lift his servant right up above the crowd, and place him securely beyond the reach of his infuriated

opponents. What a childish solution of the difficulty ! Why that is the very idea that would occur to the simplest mind that could look at the case. It is the first rush at a popular riddle. There is nothing in that answer. If that were God's method of deliverance, his method of prevention would balance it, therefore there would never be any need of deliverance at all. Does the infinite Father wait until his children are in this position, and then simply extricate them from personal danger ? If that could be his method at one end, it would be balanced by a similar method at the other ; and therefore, let us repeat, his children never could be in any difficulty at all. There must be something better, something grander than this. What it is I cannot tell until I have read the revelation. But my whole nature says that simply to loose the man and send him home from among the crowd would have been a defence worthy only of a manufactured deity. What did God do for Stephen under the painful circumstances of the case ? He wrought upon the inner spirit and thought of His suffering one. The miracle was wrought within. "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Any miracle of merely personal deliverance set side by side with that miracle of grace would be an anti-climax and a pitiful commonplace. If Stephen had been delivered bodily, and had then uttered this prayer, it would have been but a mocking sentiment. It would have belonged to an effervescent nature, that being unduly urged by a sense of selfish gratitude wanted to play a magnanimous part in relation to parties who had been defrauded of their prey. But wounded, worsted, overwhelmed, without comfort, without hope, sure only of one thing, and that thing death, he said, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." It was a moral miracle ; it was a spiritual conquest ; and any religion that will evoke such a spirit in its believers, and lead them under such circumstances to offer such prayers, needs no vindication of its divinity. This is the eternal miracle of Christian faith. It enables men in the most distressing circumstances of life to forgive animosity. Who can perform that miracle but God ? Silence might have been a sullen acquiescence in an inexorable fate. But under such circumstances, to pray, to pray for others, to pray for forgiveness, is a sublimity of faith we can never know, because we can never live the martyr's life. But if in these high, heroic heights we cannot so discover the sublimity of Chris-

tian faith and patience, there are lower levels open to us every day, along which we may move with the grace of men who can suffer and be strong, who can be stoned and yet pray for the forgiveness of those who inflict injury upon us. If we could pray for forgiveness on account of others, and could really ourselves forgive, our Christianity would be its own unanswerable and triumphant defence.

Another mistake which is refuted by this issue is, that life is *limited* by that which is open to the *eyes of the body*. It would have been a poor case for Stephen but for the invisible. "If in this life only we have hope, we are of all men most miserable." Moses endured as seeing the invisible. The old pilgrims sandalled their feet and grasped their staves with a braver confidence day by day, because they "sought a country out of sight." Should we be the sport of accident, feathers driven by the fickle wind, if we could see heaven open? We should bear our losses as if they were increase of riches if we could see the opening heavens. Stephen said, "I see heaven opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God." We see nothing now but flat surfaces badly coloured, paint without blood, feature without fire. We have not had the baptism of suffering which gives a man the inner vision—heart-eyes, to whose penetration there is no night. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall *see* God. I *see*—that is the cry of Christian experience. I *see* the meaning. I *see* the further shore. I *see* God's purpose. These sights come upon a man in sublime tragedies, in last crises, in the hour and article of death. In great dangers God shows us great sights. What did Elisha ask the Lord to do in the case of the young man who saw the gathering hosts surrounding his prophet master? Elisha's brief but comprehensive desire was "Lord, open his eyes that he may see." That is all we want. The enemy is near, I know it: but the friend is nearer. God can come in where there seems to be no room. Like his own light he fills all space, and yet leaves room for every mountain, planet, and blade of grass. He fills all room, and leaves all. The angels are nearer than we suppose. Things are not most against us when they so seem to be. What we want is vision, sight of the heart, inner eyes, and these are the gift of God.

"I see." Stephen's spiritual faith made him forget that he had a body. Think of trusting his spirit to a God that had allowed

his body to be killed! This is the sublimity of faith. Did Stephen say, "God has taken no care of my body, and therefore he will take no care of my spirit?" That would be rough reasoning, a chain without links, an empty nothing. Stephen showed in this crisis what the spirit can do. He showed what it is in the power of the heart to accomplish. When the spirit is inspired, when the heart is sanctified, when heaven is opened, when Christ rises to receive the guest, there is no flesh, there is no pain, there is no consciousness but in the presence of God, the absorption of the heart in the infinite love. If you feel the body it is for want of the thorough sanctification of the spirit. If the flesh is an encumbrance to you it is because the spirit has not finished its education. When the heart seizes God as an inheritance it fears not them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. The supreme concern of man ought to be not as to the fate of his body, but as to the destiny of his soul. What has happened to the Church? Nothing that was not foretold by Christ. This whole tragedy had been foreseen and fore-described. Before Christ sent out his messengers he told them exactly what would befall them. He took care to reveal all the sorrow, he spared nothing of the dark side of the picture. He said to the messengers in effect, "They will hate you, persecute you, starve you, bring you up before kings and judges, they will not hear half that you have to say, they will spit upon you, they will tear away from you every endearment of life, they will turn your day into night, they will mingle poison in your drink, they will tear you bone from bone, they will set fire to your quivering flesh, they will thrust you down into a nameless and dishonoured grave—if they can." The messengers went out not under summer skies, blue as the morning of heaven, but they went out under a cloud of infinite thunder, and they knew that at any moment that terrific cloud might burst and they be overwhelmed in the storm. How have you gone out from Christ? To exchange opinions, to bandy notions with men to compare your last intellectual drivellings one with another? You have gone out to take a year's rest, during which time you may revise your theological conclusions. You will not be martyrs! You will come home without a spot upon your garments that will betray hard travelling, and without a single sign of anybody having ever been fluttered for one moment by

your most innocuous presence. How have you gone out from Christ? To be his ministers, to speak the truth, to set fire to error, to beard the lion in his den, to challenge the hosts of darkness? Then Christ's word will be realized in your case, for the word of the Lord endureth for ever.

Stephen condensed a long life into a few days. But recently we have seen he was appointed to his office, and now he lies bruised, mangled, killed. Yet he had a long life. He may live again in the young man at whose feet his clothes were laid down. That young man may rave awhile, but in his raving he is only trying to quiet his conscience. It will be needful for this man Saul to be very violent for a time, in order to keep out of his ears appeals he would rather not hear. He will try to find in madness a solace for what he has done. It is a trick of our fallen nature. We do the wrong thing, and then run away in order to lose in violence the sense of what we have done. Stephen's resurrection in certain spiritual senses may take place in Saul. We do not know who is hearing us, or who is watching us, or into whom we are transfusing our spirit. We live in one another. God maketh the wrath of man to praise him. What if by-and-bye we find Saul modelling his own speeches upon the lines of Stephen's defence, and longing to be stoned, that he may find in this suffering some compensation for painful memories? We cannot tell. Life is a mystery, and time its explanation.

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## XX.

### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thy hand is very strong. Make bare thine arm in the midst of the nations, and show us that thou art still the King. Men forget themselves, and with much rioting of weakness they rebel against thy will, but when thou dost arise in thy great strength the nations shall know themselves to be but men. They are a wind that cometh for a little time then vanisheth away. There is none abiding like thyself. Thou only art the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. All else is changing. Thou hast said of thyself, "I am the Lord, I change not." May we hide ourselves in thy unchangeableness, and know that our eternity is secured not by ourselves, but by thy Almightyness. Lift us up this day from the dust, and give us an outlook over the wider world. Deliver us from the prison of darkness, and from the river of trouble, and lift us up into the holy hills whence we can see the morning glory, and where we can overhear the songs of the better land. This, our desire, we breathe at the Cross. At the Cross we learn how to pray. Is not the Cross the open door into heaven? Without it we have no access to the Father. Lord, help us to cling to the Cross with our whole strength, and may the fire of our life renew itself every day in sight of the Cross of Christ. Our life is wasting away. Its days are becoming fewer. The most of them may possibly be behind us. May we now be children of the day, walking in the light, doing heartily thy will, the eyes of our understanding being enlightened. And may our heart glow with a new expectation. We humbly pray thee show us thy goodness in the future, as thou hast shown it unto us in the past. Keep back nothing of thy mercy. One drop the less, and we shall die of thirst. We need all thy help. We are so weak, so poor, so empty of all goodness and strength, that we need God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost to sustain and keep us in the right path, and feed us with the bread of heaven.

We bring our Psalm into thine house, great, holy, noble Psalm. It is meant to express our love. Thou wilt receive it in this meaning, and send back still nobler music in reply. We put ourselves every day into thy keeping. Rock the cradle, make the bed of the afflicted, deal out bread to the hungry, and send a gospel to him that is in despair. Let the heavens make the earth glad to-day. The heavens are older than the earth. Let eternity send out its benediction so that time may be crowned as with a blessing from God. Thou knowest what we need most. Do not withhold it. For Christ's sake, give it to every man. When we

stumble, see that we fall not utterly, and when the darkness is thickest, let the pressure of thy hand be tenderest. Make a way for us where there is no path. Melt the stones that hinder our progress, and as for the mountains that would keep us back, touch them with thy finger, and they shall arise like smoke. Be a buckler to us in the day of battle. Give us the sword, and the shield, and the helmet, and cover us in the day of danger.

Make us like the One Perfect man. Yea, make us like the Son of God. Is he not the brightness of thine image? has he not revealed to us the glory of thy person? May we be, as he was, pure, true, full of loving, meek, all-enduring self-sacrifice—marred more than any man, but victorious even in sorrow.

The Lord hear our prayer for the little child, for the sick life, for the weary traveller, for the absent one, for the wandering prodigal, for the sinner who dare not look back lest he should see nothing but darkness, and sword, and penalty. Send thou messages over the sea to our dear ones in the far-away home who are wondering about us, and returning our prayer with many supplications. Help us to live the few years that may yet remain, nobly, wisely, and well. Work in us all the good pleasure of thy will, and the work of faith with power. Strengthen our hold upon things eternal. May we be right, so that whether the Lord come now or then, at midnight, or at the crowing of the cock, or in the broad noontide, we may all be more than ready. Amen.

### Acts viii. 1-8.

1. And Saul was consenting (same Greek word in Luke xi. 48) unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad [foretold by Christ; Acts i. 8] throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria [the teaching of the apostles must have been with great power to break through the long-standing prejudices of their Jewish converts against the Samaritans] except the apostles.

2. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation [implying beating on the breast] over him.

3. As for Saul, he made havoc [like the ravages of wild beasts; Ps. lxxx. 13], of the church, entering into every house [making search everywhere], and haling men and women committed them to prison.

4. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word [evangelizing the word].

5. Then Philip [mentioned only in this chapter, and in chapter xxi. 8] went down to the city of Samaria, and preached [proclaimed] Christ unto them.

6. And the people [the multitudes] with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.

7. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them : and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed.

8. And there was great joy in that city.

### THREE GREAT FIGURES IN THE CHURCH.

IN this part of the narrative the name of Saul occurs three times. In the seventh chapter and fifty-eighth verse we read, "The witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul." In the first verse of the eighth chapter we read, "And Saul was consenting unto his death." In the third verse of the same chapter we read, "As for Saul he made havoc of the Church, entering into every house, and haling men and women he committed them to prison." He was an apt scholar. He made rapid progress in his bad learning. Observe how quick is the development and how sure ! First of all, he watched the clothes of the men who stoned Stephen ; then he expressed in every feature of his face satisfaction and gladness on account of the death of Stephen ; and in the third place, he took up the matter earnestly himself with both hands, being no longer a negative participator but an active worker. He struck the Church as it had never been struck before ; he made havoc of the Christian society ; women were as men to him, and men as women ; and having secured the keys of the prison, he crowded the dungeons with Christian suppliants. The taste for blood is an acquired taste, but "it grows by what it feeds on." This man Saul began as he ended. There was nothing ambiguous about him. He was positive, well defined in purpose, resolute in will, invincible in determination. A tremendous foe, a glorious friend !

We see from this part of the narrative what we have seen often before—the power of the Christian religion *to excite the worst passions of men*. It is a "savour of life unto life, or of death unto death." It is like Saul himself ; for Saul was a true man whether persecuting the Church or defending it. Christianity either kills or saves. It is either the brightness of day, or the darkness of night in a man's life. I am afraid we have become so familiar with it externally as to cast by our own spirit and demeanour a doubt upon this veritable proposition. Set it down as the most melancholy of facts that it has become possible for nominal Chris-

tian believers to care nothing about their faith. They have degraded it, so that it now chaffers with infidels, doubters, and even mockers. The faith that used to hold no parley with unbelievers is now fagged with much walking on the common road begging, asking leave to hold discussion, and apologizing for suggesting its own revelation. The age has been seized with what is known as a horror of *dogmatism*. But Christianity is nothing if it is not dogmatic. It has no reason for its existence if it be not positive. If it be one of many, saying, "You have heard the others, will you be good enough to hear me?" it is not what it professes. Poetry may hold parley with prose fiction, because they belong to the same category. They are dreaming, guessing, shaping thoughts into aptest forms. Daintily selecting dainty words for dainty thinking. But arithmetic can hold no parley with poetry. Arithmetic does not say, "If you will allow me, I may venture to suggest that the multiplication of such and such numbers may possibly result in such and such a total." Poetry admits of malleability, it may be moulded and shaped into new forms; but arithmetic admits of no manipulation of that kind. It is complete, final, positive, and unanswerable. Now, in proportion as any religion is *true*, can it not stoop to the holding of conversation with anybody. It reveals, proclaims, announces, thunders. It is not a *suggestion*—it is a *revelation*. It is not a puzzle, to which a hundred answers may be given by wits keen at guessing; it is an *oracle*, and every syllable is rich with the gold of wisdom. Clearly understand what is meant. The dogmatism of *truth* is one thing, and the dogmatism of the imperfect *teacher* is another. The dogmatism of the priest is to be resisted, if it be justified only by official descent or official relation, but *truth must* be dogmatic, that is, positive, absolute without ambiguity. Clear in its own conception, clear in its positive demands, clear in its rewards and its punishments. Can you wonder, then, that a religion—namely, the Christian faith—which claimed to be the very voice and glory of God, should have encountered this un pitying and most malignant hostility? If it could have come crouchingly, or apologetically, and have said, "I think, I suggest, I hope," it might have been heard at the world's convenience. But it came otherwise. It came with angels' songs in the upper air, a miraculous conception, a voice saying, "This is My beloved Son, hear ye

Him." Being true, it could not have come otherwise, but so coming it raised the world into antagonism and deadly conflict. So will every true life. We have no enemies because we have no Gospel. We live in a humble and respectable obscurity, because we say nothing. We pass along pretty easily, because we annoy no man's prejudices, or naughtinesses, or indulgences. We dash no man's gods to the ground; we stamp on no man's idolatries; and so we have no martyrs. In olden times Christianity attacked the most formidable citadels of thought, prejudice, and error, and brought upon itself the fist of angry retaliation.

In this part of the narrative we see that *the success of the enemy was turned into his deadliest failure*. Read the fourth verse in proof. "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word." They did not go everywhere with shame burning on their cheek, nor did they go everywhere with a leaden weight upon their once nimble tongues, nor did they go everywhere whining and moaning and complaining that they were doomed to a useless life. They were taught eloquence by persecution. They were made Evangelists by suffering. That is the true way of treating every kind of assault. When the pulpit is assailed as being behind the age, let the pulpit preach better than ever and more than ever, and let *that* be its triumphant reply. When Christianity is assailed, publish it the more. Give it air, give it liberty, give it a wider constituency. Evangelization is the best reply to every form of assault. How do we treat our little and very tepid persecutions say of an intellectual kind? We retire to consider the case. We ask for a year's leave of absence from the pulpit, that we may revise our theological position. Do you wonder that such a method of encountering intellectual opposition should leave the field almost wholly in the hands of the enemy? When will we learn Christ's method and the Apostles' method of meeting such hostility? More hostility should be more preaching; more persecution should be more prayer. We have mistaken the method wholly. We have been wanting in resoluteness and directness. Do not let us be driven away by mockery, or silenced by flattery, or overweighted by prejudice, or deterred by fear. Christianity has one answer to every assault, and that is another statement of its claim, a louder and clearer utterance of its heavenly authority! "They that were scattered abroad went

everywhere preaching the Word." The seed shaken out by the wind was carried by the wind to other fields. It dropped into open soil, and grew up a hundred-fold.

In this part of the narrative we see *Christianity followed by its proper result*. You find that result stated in the eighth verse, "And there was great joy in that city." Joy was a word that was early associated with Christianity. Said the Angel, "I bring you good tidings of great joy." Where is that singing, holy joy? Not in the Church. We are gloomy, despairing, uncertain. We have lost the music, we have retained the tears. The Church ought to be a very fountain of joy, delight, triumph. Instead of that the Church is a valley of tears. The Church looks upon death and sighs. The Church is gifted in sighing. The Church that used to have a voice like a band of music, that used to lift its blood-red banner high in the air, and shake it with the defiance of already attained and unchangeable victory. There ought to be no death in the Church: Christ hath abolished death. And tears should be but dew, to be exhaled in the sun and carried up to enlarge and beautify the rainbow of promise. Why this sighing, fainting, doubting? The revelling is now in the other house. It used to be in our Father's House that there was music, and dancing, and feasting, and great festival of joy. We have lost the trumpet, and the cymbals, and the dances, and the holy merriment, and now we are langishing like men who are simply waiting the coming of the executioner.

Looking at the narrative from another point of view, we may say that already there are *two* graves in the early Church. Since we began this reading of the Acts of the Apostles, we have seen two graves opened. In the one grave lie Ananias and Sapphira, in the grave opened to-day there lies Stephen, over whom devout men made great lamentation. Already the old story writes its record in the documents of the Apostolic Church! In one or other of these graves *we* must be buried! Which shall be our resting-place? Over the first there was no lamentation, no tears were shed, no hearts broke in pity and in grief. The occupants of that grave were shot with the lightning of God! Sad grave! Pit deep, black, hopeless! The liars' retreat, the hypocrites' nameless hiding-place! No loving one goes thither to lay a white flower on the black sod. Will you be buried *there*? Lightning-struck,

blasted from heaven with God's bolt of anger in your heart ; will you be buried *there*? Then there is the good man's grave, which is not a grave at all, it is so full of flowers, and so full of peace and promise—those vows spoken by Christ Himself—will you be buried *there*? The road to it is rough, but the rest is deep and sweet, and the waking immortality ! Will you so live that you will be much missed for good doing? So that men shall say, "Alack, the world is very poor to-day, for the noblest of hearts beats no more?" Will you be missed in the haunts of poverty, and by the bedside of suffering, and in the church of activity, and in the school of education and discipline? How shall we go? Buried without prayers, or buried in showering tears of regret, and love, and thankfulness?

Here is the persecuting Saul *testing the sincerity of the Church*. We know what we are made of, when the fire of persecution tries us ! You do not know your best friend until you have been in trouble. For want of knowing this many men are to-day living on a false reputation. Your friends are nice, amiable, pleasant, fond of hand-shaking, and salutation, and courteous remark. Always cordial, always sunny, always agreeable. Have you ever needed them? Have you ever sent for them to come to you through some bitter cold night-wind? If not, you do not yet know them. They may be nobler than you suppose, they may be meaner than your friendly dream. It is when we are in poverty, and straits, and difficulties that we know our friends. The persecution which Saul inflicted upon the Church tested the Church's reality and sincerity, and it is under such circumstances, according to their degree, that we ourselves are to know what we are made of.

Here is the evangelist Philip *extending the influence of the Church*. "Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them." Not Philip the Apostle, but Philip the *deacon*—Philip one of the seven. Stephen dead, Philip taking his place—that is the military rule ! The next man, *Forward!* "Who will be baptized for the dead?" When Stephen was killed the remainder of the seven did not take fright and run away in cowardly terror, but Philip, the next man, took up the vacant place, and preached Christ in Samaria. Who will take up the places of the great men and the good men? Who will fill the

vacant pulpits? Who will undergo the so-called *drudgery* of the Church? Who will consent to be nothing in name that he may be everything in helpfulness? Is the Church to be a broken line, or a solid and invincible square?

These three great figures are still in the Church—the dead Stephen, the persecuting Saul, the evangelistic Philip. Our Stephens are not dead. We see them no more in the flesh, but they are mightier than ever since they have ascended to heaven, having left behind them the inspiration of a noble example. John Bunyan is more alive to-day than he was when he wrote the *Pilgrim's Progress*. John Wesley is more alive to-day than he was when he began to preach the Word in England. Richard Baxter is more alive to-day than when he wrote the *Saint's Everlasting Rest*. Your child is not dead when the memory of the dear little creature leads you to do some kindness to some other child. Our fathers, heroic and noble, are not dead, when we are able at their graves to relight torches and go on with our sacred work. We cannot peruse a narrative of this kind without feeling that we are in a great *succession*, and that we ought to be in proportion great *successors*.



## XXI.

### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, come to our waiting hearts and give us the light and the comfort which are alone in thy gift. We come in the name of Jesus Christ. If we forget it, may our right hand forget its cunning, and our tongue cleave to the roof of our mouth. It is the Name above every name. It is "the Name to sinners dear." Write it upon our heart and continually draw towards it all the passion of our love. Save us for Christ's sake. Draw us away from all bondage into the infinite liberty of thy dear Son. With him thou wilt also freely give us all things. Thou delightest to give. Thou dost live to give. Every good gift and every perfect gift cometh down from heaven. We have nothing that we have not received, and upon everything that is in our lives is written thine own name. Continue to give unto us according to the need of every day. Refresh us with the dew of the morning. Find honey for us in the flowers that open in the noonday sun. At eventide do thou spread our table, and make our bed that we may rest. We would give ourselves to thee, thou God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. When we are wise we are foolish. When we are strong we are weak. When we would seek our life we lose it. Lord, help us to understand these things, and to throw ourselves with completest faith upon the Infinite Arm of thy Providence, and the Infinite heart of thy love. Few and evil, but a handful at the most, are the days of our pilgrimage. May we know to what goal we are moving, and with steadfast eye and continual progress, ever leaning upon the strong for strength, may we move onward to our destiny in thy providence. Thou dost rebuke us with many humiliations. Out of our voice thou dost take the boastful tone. Thou dost smite us for our healing; and that we may be solidly enriched thou dost first make us very poor. When we are weak then truly we are divinely strong. Feed us with the bread of life, which is Jesus Christ the Son of God. We would eat his flesh, we would drink his blood, that we might have life abiding in us. Show us the mystery of eating and drinking the flesh and blood of thy dear Son. Help us to distrust ourselves. Enable us to give the lie to our own senses, and to order them behind when they would attempt to penetrate the mystery of God. Thou art constantly showing us that we know nothing as it really is until our eyes are opened, and we do not hear the wondrous, the subtle, and ineffable music until thou dost anoint and inspire our ears. Sometimes we are ashamed of our wisdom. It is not what it looks. It is but a furbished lie. Our reckoning is one long line

of mistakes, and so busy are we in putting the figures together, and looking as if we could handle them, that the humiliation thou dost inflict upon us becomes intolerable. Lord, teach us how to pray. Lord, increase our faith. Lord, take us from the alphabet of the senses into the deep reading of the spirit. Lord, spare not thy light, thy light in Christ, but let it drive every shadow away for ever. Bless the hearts that mourn with a little release from their distress. Dry the tears, lest they blind the eyes that are looking for thee. Put thine arms around all the little children, that in thine arms they may find perpetual security. Number our hairs when they are grey and white, that in old age men may know how to find in Christ the beginning of youth. As for those who are in prosperity, and who have no pain in head, or heart, or limb, on whose whole road the broad sunshine lies day by day—men who have pulled down the altar and hidden thy Book away—the Lord send a serpent to bite them and a great affliction, not for their destruction, but for their conversion. Amen.

### Acts viii. 9–13.

9. But there was a certain man called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one :

10. To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.

11. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.

12. But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

13. Then Simon himself believed also : and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.

### SIMON THE SORCERER.

LOOK first of all at the *condition* in which Philip found the city or the region of Samaria. You find there the condition of the *whole world* represented in one pregnant sentence. Samaria was (1) *diseased*, (2) *possessed*, and (3) *deluded*. These are the conditions in which Christianity has always to fight its great battle. Christianity never finds any town *prepared* to co-operate with it. All the conquests of Christianity imply a long siege, stubborn hostility, inveterate prejudice, and the victory of right over wrong. We are none of us by nature prepared to give the Christian

teacher a candid hearing. We "hate the fellow, for he never prophesies good of us." If he could prophesy *good* of us he would have nothing to tell our soul that could do it vital and lasting good. The first thing a Christian teacher has to do is to tear us, morally, to pieces! There is nothing in his favour. The literary lecturer pays homage to his audience, but the preacher rebukes it, humbles it, pours upon it holy despite and contempt. The early preachers did not trim, and balance, and smooth things. They spoke thunderstorms, and the very lifting of their hand was a battle half won. It was because they did *fundamental* work that they made progress so slow, but so sure. The *world* is no better to-day than Samaria was when Philip went down. And these three words, whole categories in themselves, include the moral condition of the race. *Diseased*,—there is not a man in this house who is thoroughly and completely well, nor in any house, nor in all the world. If he suppose himself to be so, he is so only for the moment; he was ill yesterday, or will be to-morrow, and presently the oldest oak will be lightning-struck and laid flat down on the cold earth. The world is a great lazarus-house. The world is dying. You stand up in the mere mockery of strength; it is when we lie down that we assume the proper and final attitude of the body. How ill we are, what aches and pains! What sharp shootings, what burnings in the head, what throbbings in the heart!

The world is not only diseased, it is *possessed*. Possessed with demons, possessed with unclean spirits, possessed with false ideas. Why make a marvel or a mystery about demoniacal possession, when we are all so possessed? Why push this idea back some twenty centuries or more, as if it were an ancient anecdote? We are *all* insane! We are all devil-ridden. We had better give the right names to our mental conditions, lest we be attaching the wrong label and mistaking ourselves utterly. Out of Christ, out of the Cross, self-centred, self-poised, self-seeking, we are *mad!* Of course we are as usual the victims of the vulgarer interpretation of words. We do not account persons mad who are not shut up in confinement. Until we get a clearer conception of that word we shall be reading in the dark, and the Bible will be to us but a rock of stumbling and offence. Diseased, possessed—these are the terms we must understand in their spiritual meaning. **To**

these terms we must add a third, for Samaria was not only diseased and possessed, Samaria was also *deluded*. She was bewitched. The sorcerer had flung his charms upon her mind, and she was led as the sorcerer's will suggested or desired. Understand that *somebody* has to lead the world. In Republicanism there is a Sovereignty. In a mob there is a captaincy; *somebody* must lead the world. And the question is who, Christ or Barabbas? There is only one question worth discussing so far as the future is concerned, and that is who is to *rule*, from whom is the future to receive its *law* and *inspiration* and its best rewards? To-day you find men making *churches* for the future. You might as well make clothes for the future: for ages unborn! There are those who are anxious to know which will be the Church of the future. Personally I am not interested in the inquiry. It may be elaborately answered. The reply may be as magnificent as a cipher would be if it were the size of the firmanent. Personally I do not care. My question is, who is to be the *man* of the future, the *life*, the *Sovereign*, the *King* of the future? This Man, Christ, or Barabbas? As Christians we have no difficulty about the result. We believe that Jesus of Nazareth, marred more than any man, shall come up out of his weakness and humiliation, and sit upon the throne of glory. We do not *sing* only, or say, we believe—

“ Jesus shall reign where'er the sun  
Doth his successive journeys run,  
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore  
Till suns shall rise and set no more.”

If this were a *sentiment* only we might despise it. It is a *faith* which lifts up the whole life along with it to a noble level, and charges it with the function of a larger beneficence. It is not as if we could depose *Christ*, and then all be upon a level. There remains the historic certainty that *some one man* must lead. *Who* shall that one man be? Simon or Christ? Superstition or faith? Wrong or right?

As we are all diseased and all possessed, so we are all *deluded*. And who can encounter a delusion? None but God the Holy Ghost. There are no fingers dainty enough to take hold of a delusion and pull it out of the nest of the mind. This kind goeth forth only by the ministry of the Holy Ghost. A delusion be-

longs to the same class as a *prejudice*, and prejudice has no shape, no form, no hiding-place, that we can penetrate. It can only be dislodged by that which takes up all room, and yet leaves all space at liberty—*Light*. Wondrous light! Filling all things and burdening none! Occupying all space, yet not encroaching on the little sphere of the meanest insect!

It is marvellous what delusions the mind can acquire, and most truly humbling is it to hear the deluded man's tale about his personal suffering—what he sees, what he hears, what he suspects, what he thinks he knows. That man is yourself, is myself, in one phase and aspect of our possible experience. Do not stand back from him as if you had nothing to do with his humanity. When *he* withers, *you* also wither. We are "members one of another." From the weak we may learn our weakness; from the strong, the imperial, we may learn how mighty we too may become. Again, therefore, would I say, we are "members one of another."

Superstition is not to be laughed at. I would rather laugh at the merely arithmetical man who never had a dream in his life. Were I disposed to mock, I would choose him as the butt of my bitter taunt. Even you who supposedly have the clear head and practical mind, without a single whim or fancy disturbing the equal balance of your intellectual monotony, what Gospel there can be for *you* it hath not entered into my mind to conceive. Show me a man who has dreams, fancies, visions of the night, and who is following invisible leaders, and out of him there may come a very apostle of the everlasting kingdom of Jesus Christ. He has the making of a *man* in him. And yet I would not despise the other man, simply because we do occasionally require to eke out the structure with stones that have only a burden to carry and with pillars that are covered by the painter's trick. Christianity has to encounter all the *false faiths* of the world. There is a strong man already in possession of the citadel, and he will not easily give way. It is not an easy thing for the missionary to persuade the most barbarous of his hearers to throw away the piece of wood or stone, which the barbarian hugs as his god. It is a long way from the physical eye to the spiritual light! The barbarian likes a god that he can finger well. He knows then that he *has* a god. To be told that God is Unseen and Invisible, "God is a Spirit," "No man hath seen God at any time," "No man can

see God and live," is a Gospel that requires *time* to make its way in the world—the world that wants to make the globe a factory and human life a toil! Christianity must continually startle its students by showing them how very little there is in its Book that is *literal*. You put the water into the firkin and it comes out wine! You peruse the letter, and it turns into a spirit! *There* is the difficulty to men who live an intellectually jaunty life, who touch things with their fingers, count things up to ten, then add, multiply, and subtract, and divide at pleasure, and who suppose that they have in this way settled the whole case. I can ask the strongest-sighted man in the world to look at a piece of glass and tell me if there is anything upon it. And his necessary answer must be, if he limit his judgment by his sight, that the glass is absolutely vacant. I can hand to him a magnifier, and say, "Look at the glass now, for whatever is upon it that magnifier will increase one hundred fold." He takes the glass, he looks at the object, and he says, "I still adhere to my judgment and declare that this piece of glass is absolutely void, there is literally nothing upon it." I like his emphasis, because presently it will be turned into contrition. I encourage him to be very emphatic, and when he has reached the very limit of his emphasis, and almost taken his stand upon his dignity, I bring the proper microscopic power to bear upon the glass which he declared to be vacant and void, then imagine his look! He sees that within the thousandth part of an inch there is written the sublimest prayer ever offered to God! What was *wanting*? A *medium*. What was absent? The necessary *help* to the eye! Yet there are those amongst us who say, "Seeing is believing." Truly say I, but what is *seeing*? Where does it begin, where does it end? And what do we know now about sight, or light, or anything as it really is? This being so in the lower realms of thinking and inquiry, I am enabled to move upward to the higher regions, and to believe that "God is a Spirit."

It is very instructive to watch Philip's course in Samaria, because first of all *he took no notice* of Simon. There are some persons who think we ought to send missionaries to argue down the infidels. Do not let us belong to that extremely foolish class of persons. There is nothing to be *argued* down. Argument is the weakest of all weapons. If occasion should naturally arise for the

answering of some sophistical argument, avail yourselves of it, but do not imagine that Christianity has to go down to Samaria to fight a pitched battle, face to face with Simon Magus. What then did Philip do? Philip preached CHRIST. Simon had been preaching *himself*. Philip never mentioned himself, all the while he talked only about *Christ*. Thus Philip did not argue down Simon, he *superseded* him. The daylight does not *argue* with the artificial light. The sun does not say, "Let us talk this matter over, thou little, beautiful, artificial jet. Let us be candid with one another, and polite to one another, and let us treat one another as gentlemen talking on equal terms. Let us thus see which of us ought to rule the earth." The sun does nothing but SHINE! What then! Men then sneakingly put the gas out! "Let YOUR light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." *Life* is the unanswerable logic. *Holiness* is the invincible argument. *Charity*, love, beneficence, chivalry, self-sacrifice, these form the shining host that will chase all competitors away!

## XXII.

### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, though we have multiplied words against thee, yet hast thou made a flock of us, and thou art thyself our Shepherd. Jesus Christ thy Son is the Good Shepherd who gave, and ever gives, his life for the sheep. We were lost once, but we have returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. Once we were in the wilderness and could find no pasture, nor home, no sweet security, but now we are enfolded upon the high mountains of Israel, and daily dost thou feed us and lead us forth. When the sun is hot at noon, thou dost cause us to lie down in the cool shade. Thou leadest us beside the still waters, so that we may drink, without trouble or fear, of the living stream. And into rich pastures dost thou lead us, that we may not know the pain of hunger. What shall we say unto thee? There are no fit words for the utterance of our heart's great love. Thou hast gone beyond all words, and left them behind, unable to touch the majesty of thy tenderness and the glory of thy power.

Thou wilt still permit us to speak what we feel. In Christ thou hast made us new creatures. We would praise thee and magnify thee, and hallow thy name, because of this thy new creation. Through thy Son, our Saviour, we have received the Holy Ghost, the wondrous Spirit, the Paraclete, the Abiding Comforter, the Leader into all truth! May we not fear as we enter in. As the firmament of thy truth heightens above our heads, may we behold with astonishment and joy this display of thy spiritual riches; and as the horizon, which we thought the limit, goes away in ever-widening circles, may we know that thy truth is greater than our imaginings, and thy creation infinitely more than our thought. Save us from all uncharitableness. Deliver us from the prison of littleness, and bigotry, and supposed finality. By thy Spirit show us that the riches of Christ are unsearchable, without beginning, without ending, without measure, infinite riches of light and wisdom, of grace, and truth. Feed us with thy word. We have forgotten most of it; have mercy upon us! We ought to have hoarded it, and guarded it with our whole strength from worldly encroachment and corruption, yet have we forgotten it! We have allowed the noises of the world to interrupt the music of heaven. God be merciful unto us in Christ the Atoning Saviour, because of this our great transgression.

Now come to us, as we need thee most. Some of us have brought summer flowers to offer thee. Flowers of joy, and praise, and new de-



light, and recovered hope. Lord, take them every one in thy hand, and they will never wither. Others have come with pained heads, and heavy hearts, and darkened eyes. The light of hope has been blown out. The staff of dependence has broken in the hand that leaned upon it. The fair-looking garden was but a pit covered with flowers. The Lord cheer such with wine from heaven, and with bread which is angels' food. Others know not why they are here. Some of them little children brought by other hands. Some who do not know what the house is, or the day. Lord, cause a new light to enter the mind of such, and make them glad. The Lord speak a word in season to him that is weary. The Lord show the strongest man that his strength is but the boast of a moment, and show the weakest one that his weakness may be made the beginning of eternal strength. Dry our tears when they flow like a river; and when our joy would lead us away from the trust that is the strength and the glory of life, the Lord dash it with bitterness that we may be made to think and pray.

And now shall this day be thine, thou King of saints, thou leader of battles, thou man of war? The morning is upon us now, and the night will soon be here, and we would that thy banner might float over a conquered field. Ride forth in thy strength, thou whose chariots are twenty thousand, and thousands of thousands. Make thy ministers a flame of fire, and thy house a doorway into heaven, and let thy Gospel be heard in all its ineffable sweetness; and may all rivals flee away before the advancing light of thy glory, and leave thee King of kings and Lord of lords, the only Potentate! Amen.

### Acts viii. 14-25.

14. Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God [the whole sum and substance of the Gospel] they sent unto them Peter and John:

15. Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost [not regeneration only, but the Pentecostal gift]:

16. (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)

17. Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.

18. And when Simon saw [so visible and conspicuous was the change] that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money [*χρημάτα*—riches],

19. Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.

20. But Peter said unto him, thy money perish with thee [be together with thee for perdition], because thou hast thought [the Greek verb has a transitive not a passive sense] that the gift of God may be purchased with money.

21. Thou hast neither part nor lot [Col. i. 12] in this matter : for thy heart is not right [2 Peter ii. 15] in the sight of God.

22. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps [implying a latent doubt] the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee [Peter himself neither condemns nor forgives].

23. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

24. Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.

25. And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord [implying a stay of some duration], returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel [announced the glad tidings] in many villages of the Samaritans.

### THE DEPUTATION TO SAMARIA.

“ **W**HEN the Apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John.” This must have been a most instructive experience to the Apostle John. There was a time when that Apostle did not conceal his feelings respecting a village in Samaria. Jesus Christ wished to enter into a village of the Samaritans and to remain there a little while. The villagers did not understand this desire ; they saw that his face was hardened in the direction of Jerusalem, and because he looked so steadfastly towards that city they did not receive him ; and when James and John saw this they said, “ Lord, wilt Thou not command fire to come down from heaven and consume them even as Elias did ? ” John could not brook the insult, he did not know what spirit he was of. Little by little Jesus Christ brings us to understand his purpose, and to enter into the meaning of his life ; and then the John who would have prayed for destructive fire is himself sent down to Samaria to invoke the falling of another flame that burns but does not consume ! We cannot tell what we may yet do in life. Amongst our old enmities we may yet find our sweetest friendships. Do not seek to destroy any man, however much he may reject you or misunderstand you. A time may come when you can render him the service of prayer. The text is now easy reading, but there was a day when it was a grand story. “ When the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God ”—that is nothing to *us* ; we read it as if

it were a commonplace. In reality it is the *dawning of a new day*, the winning of a great battle, the opening of a beneficent revelation ; that day the *Gentiles* were admitted into the Kingdom of Christ, openly and by a glad celebration. We lose so much by forgetting the *circumstances* of the case which is before us. This is a verse now read as if it had no atmosphere. What is it that we lose in history ? It is the *atmosphere* that we lose. And what is it that gives the novelist or the dramatist supremacy over the historian, or the dry, technical, and most learned annalist ? It is that he creates, or recalls, the *atmosphere*, and thus his fictions become the real facts. We are now, let us suppose, standing upon a great stretch of land, and between us and another stretch of country quite as large there rolls a broad, deep river. We cannot cross it at this point. We travel by its edge mile by mile until we come to a great stone bridge, and it is over that *bridge* that the commerce between the two countries is continually maintained. That bridge we find in the fourteenth verse of this chapter. The bridge was built at *Samaria*, between old Judaism and despised Gentilism, by which these noble Christian prophets and apostles went from one side to the other, and thus Jerusalem became in the apostles' eyes as the mother city of the world, when they heard that the Gentiles had so received the music of the redeeming Word. We do not care for this miracle now. The dreariest part of every missionary meeting to many persons in the excited assembly is the reading of the *report*—a reading which should bring all the Church together in its noblest enthusiasm ; a reading under which strong men should stand and never stir till the last syllable had throbbled upon the hot air—then there should arise a shout as of a conquering host—“ Praise God, from whom all blessings flow.” Such is not our way now. Miracles have become commonplaces, and reports have succumbed to the rhetoric that never suffered.

When this report was made in Jerusalem, the apostles sent down Peter and John. Was *Peter* then really “ sent down ? ” So it would certainly appear from the text. We thought that Peter would have sent down *other men* ! It is evident, however, that that thought is misconceived. Peter himself was a messenger. Yet how delicate the tribute to his undoubted primacy of love and enthusiasm ! *He* it was who was selected to go down.

His name appears *first*, and yet he was but a *deputation*! There is nothing *papal* here. The Pope is not "sent down," he *sends* down. Peter and John were sent down into Samaria to make inquiry and to do whatever might appear needful under the novel circumstances. Our *greatest men* should always be sent down to the villages under circumstances such as these related in the text. Our very grandest preachers ought to be our *missionaries*. A missionary is now, unhappily, a despised man. If I wanted to empty this church I have only to announce that a "returned missionary" would preach here. What a desolation he would make in the earth! The man who has suffered, who has not counted his life dear to him that he might preach Christ, would be left to tell his story to vacant air! He might not tell it in dainty language, in choice music of eloquence; he might have no deftness of speech, no cunning skill in the stringing of sentences, and in the utterance of expressive accents; he might have no genius of emphasis; but he has come to tell of battles being won, and if we were *in Christ*, as very parts of his *soul*, we would not mind the *manner* of the narrative; we would be as soldiers whose noblest pride was touched to hear that the Master's banner floated over all the earth in sign of beneficent victory!

When Peter and John were come down to Samaria *what did they do?* This will reveal *the right aspect of apostolic influence and office*. Let us read the text in a way of our own, and then it will stand in some such fashion as this, "Peter and John, when they were come down, sat upon a great and high throne, and waved over the astounded Gentiles a staff that was supposed to have singular power in it, and the amazed and wonder-struck villagers of Samaria fell back before such dazzling dignity and bewailed their own unworthiness." That would be poor Scripture! That would be Scripture without inspiration from heaven. How does the text really read? It reads in this way: When they were come down, they PRAYED for the villagers, that they might receive the Holy Ghost. *Pray* for your friends; do not *affright* them. Pray for inquirers; do not overpower them. Pray in great religious crises, and thus magnify the event, and do not lessen it. Say, this is an affair which must be lifted up into the light of God's countenance, and God himself must order and rule in such an instance. Do we PRAY now? The question is not,

do we use the *terms* of prayer, or fall into the attitude of supplication, but do we PRAY? Do we ask as if we meant to *have* what we ask? The question is too solemn to be answered by any one man in the name of others. For *what* did the Apostles pray? That Samaria might receive the *Holy Ghost*. Then what had Samaria already received? Samaria had only received the first baptism. Water will do you no good. It was meant to be a *beginning*, not an end. Whether you have received drops of water, drops of dew, upon your infantile brow, or whether you have been plunged of men in the deep river, it matters not, if you have not *gone further*. We have *believed*, but have we received the *Holy Ghost*? As a matter of fact, we have *not*, in many instances as we well know. People seem to imagine that when they have *believed*, the work is *done*. As well tell me that when you have put the fuel into the grate the fire is lighted. We have believed, the fuel has been received into our mind, we know the truth, what we want is the burning spark! Now, have we received the Holy Ghost? There is no mistaking it. We have had occasion already to say that no man can mistake fire. You may paint it, but you cannot warm your hands at the flame on the canvas. Fire is like nothing but itself. It *separates* man from man, yet *unites* man to man. It burns up selfishness. It purifies, it glorifies. It is the secret of the universe. They who truly worship fire are not far from the kingdom of God. What is that there is not in fire? It is even so with the Holy Ghost. It gives a man individuality. It detaches him from the common crowd and gives him a singularity of his own. What if it be true that we do not know what is meant by the words, the HOLY GHOST? We are reasoners, debaters, metaphysicians, theologians, essayists, learned men—all these we may be with the water still upon our faces! When the Church has received the Holy Ghost, the Church will be *unlike* every other community. When the pulpit has been baptized by the Holy Ghost, it will stand alone in the supremacy of its power. At present it is not a Sinai, it is a reading-desk. It is the retreat of the mumbler, it is the living of the essayist. The pulpit should be but a pedestal from which a man cries with the shout of thunder, and with the energy of the refreshing and purifying breath of heaven. Lord baptize us with the Holy Ghost! Our religion is at present an *argument*; our desire is that it may become a PASSION!

Simon the Sorcerer, hearing that through laying on of the Apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was received, offered them money. It is easy to abuse this man known as Simon, but he acted a most natural and rational part. Consider his training, his surroundings, his particular avocation, and the great influence he had acquired, and then say if he did not take the very course open to a keen and penetrating observer. He had lived all his life in the market-place. He had always been behind the counter; he had never breathed a purer air; he knew but one world, and one language. When, therefore, he saw by laying on of the Apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered the Apostles money, saying, "Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands he may receive the Holy Ghost." Simon saw only the outside—which of us sees any further? We ourselves think because we have been to church we have been good, or that because we have bowed at the name of Jesus, or sung a Christian hymn, or heard a Christian discourse, that therefore we are Christians. That is precisely the reasoning of Simon. There has grown up in some sections of the Christian Church a custom which is known as *Simony*. The meaning is that this or that particular spiritual function has been turned into a marketable commodity. The custom derived its name from the name of the Sorcerer, and from the circumstance recorded in this text. He who would buy a pulpit is guilty of what is called simony. He who would hold his place in this Church or any other by virtue of having bought it is guilty of simony. But the simony of the Christian Church is not in the pulpit alone. We may buy or try to buy *influence*, status, and authority in the Church by the use of money. Who is there that does not imagine that everything can be bought? Yet how little in reality can we buy with money! Can you buy *sound judgment*? What is the price of it? Can you buy *wisdom*? Tell me the value of it in plain money. You can buy diamonds for the finger—can you buy *lightning* for the eyes? You can buy musical instruments—can you make your tongue so eloquent as to be a tabernacle of thunder? *What* can you buy? Can you buy *poetic fire*? Can you buy perfect *insight*? Can you buy any form of spiritual and enduring *power*? Know ye that money has but a little world to operate in, and that the highest gifts are not to be purchased with gold. Seek wisdom, seek knowledge, seek

instruction—the price of it is above rubies. If we could rightly lay hold of this idea it ought to open great worlds of possibility to us. God hath chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and strong in power. “He doeth as he will among the armies of heaven and amongst the children of men.” To the poorest man he says, “Take this Gospel and preach it.” A manger will do for a cradle when there is in it the Saviour of the world. Do you suppose that because you have little money you have little power, little life, little responsibility? What have you? You may have the power of *prayer*! You may be able to put into words at God’s throne thoughts that burn in me, but for which I myself have no speech. You may be able to “speak a word in season to him that is weary.” You may have the gift of hope and the faculty of music, and you may be able to lift the load from many a burdened heart. Poorest man, do not despair! You may be rich in *ideas*, rich in *sympathies*, rich in *suggestion*, and rich in all the noblest treasures that can make men wealthy with indestructible possession.

## XXIII.

### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, the earth is thine and the fulness thereof. Thine is also the fulness of the sea. Thou lookest upon all things, and in them thou dost behold a purpose all thine own. Thy day of explanation is coming, and then will be the full shining of the light upon all the way which we have taken ; and in that hour of thy shining glory we shall truly know how good thou hast been, and how evil has been our life in the light of thy holiness. Thou hast redeemed us with an infinite price. We see what value thou dost place upon our souls by the ransom which thou hast paid for their redemption. We are redeemed not with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with precious blood of the Son of God. We are not our own ; we are bought with blood ; we are purchased with life ; thou thyself in thy son didst die that we might live. For these holy thoughts we bless thee. They lift the soul above the things of time, and all the weariness of earth, and bring us into the calmness and peace of thine own quietude. We rejoice in all spiritual impulse, and aspiration, and sacred desire. We would not live in the earth, but would draw our life from the sun. Enable us, therefore, to fix our whole affections upon the Son of God, our one Redeemer and Saviour, and Priest, and in the fixing of that love may we find the only steadfastness and security of our life. Save us from all the weary, and all the exciting processes of self-trust and self-idolatry, and lead us into the infinite rest of faith in thy Fatherhood. We would rest in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We would abide in him as the branch abideth in the vine. We have no life in ourselves. Our life is hidden with God in Christ. Enable us, we humbly pray thee, to know this in all the breadth of its meaning and in all the completeness of its comfort, that we be no more children tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, without a home for the heart, and without a refuge for the wounded spirit. In thy house we expect to see thy light. There is a light above the brightness of the sun. We would walk in that light, feeling all its warmth, and answering with unspotted piety the challenge of its sacred glory. Reveal thyself to us in the sanctuary. Thou hast a beauty which the world doth not and cannot see ; the beauty of love, of grace, of tenderness. Thou canst walk with men, and talk in whispers to their listening hearts. Thou canst cause their trouble to arise like dew of the morning, to be fashioned into the bow of new promise and hope in the blue heavens. Thou canst comfort thy children with tenderest solaces. Have pity upon the broken heart,



spare the reed that is already bruised, and send a Gospel this day to hearts that are longing for it. As the mother would save the child, as the father would bring back the wanderer, and sink the past in eternal oblivion, wilt thou not much more call us every one to thy love and grace in Christ Jesus, and make for our feet a new earth, and for our eyes a new heaven.

We remember the absent. Those who are travelling upon the land or sea, whose return we are expecting with thankfulness and joy. We cannot forget the sick at home and in the hospital. Everywhere on the wide earth is sickness to be found. We thank thee for all the care that is bestowed upon the sick and dying. We pray that thou thyself wilt be the Physician of those who are in deepest suffering. Send messages of comfort to all homes of sickness, whether private or public, and let the healing power of the Gospel of Christ be felt in every suffering heart.

Thy word is truth, let us hear it as such. May we not listen to it as other than the voice of God's eternity. Touch our ears that they may hear the faintest whisper of thy love; open our understanding that we may understand the Scriptures; and by the ministry of the Holy Ghost, God the Spirit, prepare us to receive the truth with all humbleness and meekness, and teachableness of mind. Dismiss the world from our thought and time from our anxiety, and give us thy tender peace, thou that dwellest in the quietness of Eternity. Amen.

## THE DEPUTATION TO SAMARIA.

(continued.)

LET us now see what Simon the Sorcerer did when he saw that through laying on of the Apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given to the people. The expression now reads as a very common one, yet there is hidden under it a very far-reaching and most subtle and potent meaning. Simon offered the Apostle *money*. There was probably no fixed sum in the mind of Simon. If such a bestowal as that of the Spirit could be effected upon him, money should not stand in the way. The text does not read that Simon *asked* the price, or that Simon fixed the *sum*: Simon was a great man in his own line, and a man who had been most successful in business, and therefore he offered *money*, and not any particular or defined *sum* of money. This was the hour of *Apostolic temptation*. They had *no* money. To the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, Peter had said, "Silver and gold have I none." Money is always a powerful temptation to the empty pocket. Where is the man in this congregation who can say, *No*, to every form of temptation which money can assume?

“The love of money is the root of all evil.” It is very easy for us, when no temptation is troubling the ear, to say what we should do under such and such circumstances; but when the money is actually in the hand of the tempter, and when in one moment more it may be in our own possession, and when the thing asked for in exchange is itself a *good* thing, where is the man in the Church who can return a denial with the emphasis of thunder, and, so to say, with the accent of lightning? We are not to suppose that Jesus Christ’s temptation was confined to *Himself*. He was tempted symbolically for *us* as well as really tempted in himself. The way to the Kingdom always lies through the gate of the wilderness. To enter heaven is to *win a battle*. We do not *dream* ourselves into heaven. We do not fall asleep as in the darkness of earth, and quietly and joyously open our eyes upon the summer of heaven. The way to the upper places is a way through temptation, suffering, discipline, and disappointment—a long way, so crooked, so weary, with hardly a well upon the wayside to rest upon and to drink at. *That* is the upward and most difficult way! When the Baptist had his great temptation, in a moment of excitement, when he seemed to sum up in himself all prophecy and noble speech of the ancient seers, the people came to him in their most influential classes, and said, “Art THOU He that should come?” Do not read these words as if they contained nothing. They were a temptation of the subtlest kind, addressed not consciously, to vanity, to ambition, and to some of the lower forms of patriotism. The principal seat upon the chariot was then suggestively offered to John the Baptist; he might have mounted, and said, “Yes, come with me; I am your deliverer and prince!” Every man has *his own* temptations. Temptation is not always explained or always explicable in words. There are battles in *secret*. There is a Gethsemane in every noble life. Ministers will prove themselves to have been anointed with the true and pure oil of the upper sanctuary when they do not smooth over life as if it were a kind of summer dream, but when they recognize trouble, temptation, and inexplicable weakness, and lead the way by noble sympathy, by the lure of a manly and noble example, and by the power that is in spiritual contagion. The Church is always tempted in this same way, namely, by the *offer of money*. We must always *reject* the unholy patronage. Do I address a minister

who preaches to the *moneyed pew*? Your ministry will be blighted with well-merited condemnation. Do I minister to a Church that could accept secular patronage in order to preach a settled and determined theology? Such a Church would have sold its birth-right for a contemptible price. Does any power say to the religion of the Nazarene, "I will patronize, and pay thee, and see thy bill discharged all the way through?" Every thorn in that crown of thorns would answer with angry resentment an offer so detestable. Faith must spread its own daily board. Love must pay its own way. If the Church, be it but two or three in number, has not energy enough, love enough, to pay all that requires to be paid, it is not a church, it is a speculative club. Do I speak to some who represent very feeble communities? My friends, your weakness is your strength. Do not ask any man to help you, unless his help be the inspiration of love—not a taxation, but the outgoing of a noble spirit of obedience to the crucified and now throned Christ. It is not necessary for you to be rich in order to be a Church. There are, perhaps, only some five or six of you in the little village; what then? As two of the disciples walked together and held converse upon Christian themes, "Jesus Himself drew near." And in this *drawing near* the Church was formed. Where *He* is, the Church is. Do not therefore accept any bribe or any challenge, or kneel before any temptation to be rich, and great, and influential. Be you more zealous in prayer, more intense in love and in enthusiasm; in *that* line let your victories lie! Never be *bribed* into silence. Never keep back the truth of God, lest you should forfeit status or income. Again and again have I said, and the conviction grows upon me that the saying is true—*It is not necessary for any man to LIVE*, but it is necessary for every man to be LOYAL to *Christ's truth*. The lesson comes to us from very ancient times. When the king came to meet Abram, and offered him great hospitality and patronage, Abram said, "No; lest thou say, I have made Abram rich." The chief power is *spiritual*, not financial. But the Church has wonderfully fallen under the delusiveness of the fallacy which teaches that the Church ought to be *socially respectable*. It would make the heart cry its hottest tears to read the phrases that are now popular: Such and such a man ministers to a "most *respectable* congregation." Such and such a congregation "has hardly *one poor person* in it."

Other congregations are notable for the considerable number of "*common people*" that degrade the pews. To such a plight has the religion of Christ been brought by those who have been offered money and have accepted the unholy bribe !

How was it that the Apostles were enabled to *escape* the subtle influence of this potent temptation ? The answer is given in the narrative. The Apostles had a *true conception of the spiritual election and function of the Church*. "Thy money," said Peter to the sorcerer, "perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money." The Church had not then become a machine. Ordination was not then a thing to be arranged. It was *inspiration*. It was the sudden seizing of the mind, and its transformation into spiritual dignity and majesty. We do not understand this now. Men are now "*prepared*" for the ministry. Now we "*educate*" men for the pulpit. By all means be educated, be instructed ; but educate the *man*, and the *citizen*, and let the *pulpit* alone. You do not educate the *poet*. You educate the *man* ; and too much education we cannot have ; there is no virtue in ignorance ; ignorance is always weakness ; therefore would I uphold strenuously the education of the *citizen*, the *subject*, the *man*, the *individual*, but let the pulpit *receive the gift of God*. We are not to come to this work by arrangement of man. The ministry ought not to be a class, or clique, or sect of its own by any man's arrangements. It should be elect of God. A minister should wear his credentials openly, and they should be so written that none could dispute their authenticity. Educate men for the ministry ! "Thy education perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God" could be purchased by *schooling*. Get all the education you can ; be the best informed *man* of your circle, so far as is possible ; encourage intellectual ambition, and satisfy it even to satiety ; but *inspiration* makes a *minister* ! And inspiration makes the *Church*. In such a sense as we rarely realize is that word true. "Not by might, and not by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord." When the Church learns that lesson, the Church will have no need to cry out for more ministers, for the Church will by such a feeling utter a prevailing prayer to heaven that "labourers may be thrust into the harvest." Are you, young man, considering whether you will enter Christ's ministry or not ? Then pray God you may never

enter it ; for it is not a question for *consideration*. There are those, shame on their grey hairs, who are telling us that if the Church would offer *more money* to the young men of our "better families," they might possibly give themselves to the ministry ! A malediction from heaven be upon such thoughts ! Does Christ want the members of our "better families" to be kind enough to accept position as his ambassadors, and expositors, and friends ? He was always despised and rejected of men. He will choose his own ministers. *He* will see to it that the pulpit is never silent. It may change its form of utterance, and its attitude towards the whole necessity of civilized life ; but Christ will find His own ministers, and inspire them with his own spirit.

Peter spoke in his own characteristic tone when he said to Simon the magician, "Thy money perish with thee, thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter ; for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee." Peter's speech was not a mere *denunciation*. If you merely *denounce* men you *discourage* them. Learn here *how to preach* ! You need nothing more on this part of your mission than this speech to Simon Magus. Nothing is wanted in the emphasis with which Peter speaks ; his moral dignity is positively sublime, and yet, having uttered the word of malediction he shows that the true object of the denunciation of wrong is to *save the wrong-doer*. Here is the gospel in an unexpected place. After such a thunderstorm who could have expected this voice of lute and harp ? Repent ! Forgive ! It is weakness merely to abuse, or denounce, or rebuke. Reproach acquires its dignity and its usefulness by the tenderness which eventually flows out of it. Your reproof of the age in which you live will derive nearly all its force from the opening up of the way of possible forgiveness and restoration to those whose wickedness you have denounced. Give up no man. Do not spare his sin ; hold the fiercest light over it, but point the wrong-doer himself to the possibility of forgiveness through repentance and supplication. Hear this as a gospel, oh, wrong-doing man ! About your wrong-doing we cannot have two opinions. Upon the wickedness we would rain fire and brimstone from God out of heaven, but you yourselves REPENT, "if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven."

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“ While the lamp holds out to burn,  
The vilest sinner may return.”

Simon did not—nor could he be expected to do—seize the *spiritual idea* which ruled the Apostle's thinking. His reply is most natural, though often condemned. “ Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.” He asked for Apostolic prayer, so far he was not wrong. He suggested the Apostolic prayer “ that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.” There he failed to see the right meaning of prayer. We must not go to God in supplication merely to escape judgment, or wrath, or penalty, but to escape *sin*. Yet let a man come through *any gate* that first opens, only let him COME ! We cannot all be metaphysicians in this respect ; we cannot all be theologically correct as to our way of approaching our Infinite Father. If one man should come through hatred of sin, through such a high spiritual nature that he feels the evil of sin and wishes to escape it ; if another man of lower mould should say, “ I fear hell, I fear fire, I fear the worm that dieth not ; God have mercy upon me.” Let him also come. Every man must pray as he *can*. You cannot send the heart to school to teach it how to pray. It will pray from the point where the burden presses. How instinctively the child lays its hand upon the place where the *pain* is ! So my prayer to heaven will come out of that wound that bleeds most copiously. Where the *pain* is, the *prayer* should be. If the pain is spiritual because of the sinfulness of sin, I will pray some lofty prayer ; and if I be troubled with the fear of eternal night, God will not despise even the penitential cry of fear and dread.

## XXIV.

### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, how great is thy truth ! We cannot understand it all, but in Jesus Christ, Thy Son, we see what we can lay hold of with our mind and with our heart. Thou art revealed in thy Son, who is the brightness of thy glory. We would, therefore, sit at his feet every day, and listen with the attention of our love to all the music of his sacred voice. Give us the hearing ear, and the understanding heart, and may nothing of all the Gospel escape our reverent attention. We need it all. We need thy Son in his body, soul, and spirit. Yea, verily, we need, because of our sinfulness, the blood of his very heart. We would behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world ; with our love would we behold him ; with our inmost desire would we lay hold of him ; with all the pain of our sin would we cry unto him, that he may be our Deliverer, our one Redeemer. We rejoice in the Cross of Christ. It means to us the whole affection of God. We see in that Cross all thy love, thou Ever-loving One. Nowhere else do we see that love in all its infinite tenderness. At the Cross we tarry ; by the Cross will we be found when the sun ariseth ; and at the setting of the sun we will still be there. In the Cross is pardon ; in the Cross is peace. God forbid that we should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We put ourselves into thy keeping ; we know not what is best for us, nor do we know which way to take when the ways are many and mostly distasteful. Save us from judging by appearances. Teach us our ignorance. May we begin at the point of self-distrust, and gradually move onward by the guidance of the Holy Ghost to perfect faith in the Son of God. We would live the faith-life : we would live, and move, and have our being in the Spirit. We would be no longer content with the earth, but would despise it, with an infinite scorn, as a final resting point. We accept it as a beginning—a school, an opening into the eternal future. Help us to use it as such ; enable us to use the world as not abusing it, and to sit so lightly to all its attractions, that at thy bidding we may rise with a good heart, and a glad hope, to go whithersoever thou dost lead. Our life is thine. It is not ours. Our head and our heart are enlightened and warmed by thy glory and by thy love.

Take care of us every one, we are so foolish, and so easily led away from the light and the beauty of thy holiness. Never forsake us ; take hold of both our hands, and surround us with fire that cannot be broken through. Thou knowest all the circle of our life. The old pilgrims, who

have but a mile or two at the most still to go until they reach the end—their lives are behind them, they cannot do any mighty works because of the feebleness of age, and the brevity of time. The Lord comfort such; the Lord himself send tender Gospels to hearts long-tired and greatly enriched with Christian experience. Remember, too, the little ones, for they are all thine. Baptize them with the dew of the morning, and baptize them with the fire of noon-tide; when they come towards the evening of life may their recollection be turned into a prophecy of still brighter revelation. Be kind unto the sick, the weary, the long-ailing, whose days are nights, and whose nights are a burden of darkness. The Lord himself give patience to those who watch, and hope to those who suffer.

We commend the whole world to thee. It is but a little one, a mere speck in thy firmament, but what tragedies has it not seen! Thou dost in little spaces reveal thine own infinitude. This is the miracle of God; this is the wonder of life; this is the revelation of light. Save the world in every land and every place, and by the mighty power of the Holy Ghost work upon the nations until they shall all bow down before the uplifted Cross, and cry unto thy Son for the baptism of all-cleansing blood. Amen.

### Acts viii. 26-40.

26. And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza [one of the five chief cities of the Philistines], which is desert.

27. And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia [now called Nubia and Abyssinia], an eunuch of great authority under Candace [the usual name of Ethiopian queens] queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship [as proselytes did as well as Jews].

28. Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. [Probably a copy of the Greek translation.]

29. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to his chariot [doubtless followed by a numerous retinue].

30. And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?

31. And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.

32. The place of the Scripture which he read was this, he was led as a sheep to the slaughter: and like a lamb dumb before his shearers, so opened he not his mouth.

33. In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth.

34. And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?

35. Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.



36. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water : and the eunuch said, See, here is water ; what doth hinder me to be baptized ?

37. And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. [The whole of this verse is omitted in the oldest MSS.]

38. And he commanded the chariot to stand still : and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch ; and he baptized him.

39. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip [1 Kings xviii. 12], that the eunuch saw him no more : and he went on his way rejoicing.

40. But Philip was found at Azotus [Asdod, another of the five cities] : and passing through he preached in all the cities till he came to Cæsarea [the chief city in Palestine under the Roman rule].

### THE ETHIOPIAN CONVERT.—A TYPICAL MAN.

HOW did Philip know what the Ethiopian traveller was reading ? If we saw a chariot passing along our street, and a man engaged in reading a book, we could not by any possibility know what he was reading or what was his condition of mind. How then did Philip know ? Here we are reminded that it was the habit of the Jews, and of other Eastern people, not only to read, but to read *aloud*, and accompany their reading oftentimes by vehement gesticulation. There is no difficulty therefore about this matter of Philip knowing what the Ethiopian eunuch was reading. The great Jewish teachers insisted in many instances upon their scholars reading *aloud* : they would say, in effect, " If you wish this word to abide in you, you must speak it aloud." And in the Proverbs we have a sentiment to the effect that the words of truth give life to them that *utter them forth*. We know something about this experience in our own life. Some men could never commit anything to memory if they could not speak the lesson aloud. It is more easy for some minds to learn by the *ear* than by the eye ; their minds require both the eye and the ear to cooperate in the act of memory. I speak to the experience probably of many when I say that utterance aloud is often a very powerful aid to mental retentiveness.

Let us look upon this Ethiopian as a typical man. This is not an instance so many hundreds of years old : it falls easily within our accustomed method of viewing Biblical history. The Ethio-

pian still lives amongst us. We have not overpassed him on the earth. He is yet in his chariot, he is yet reading ancient Scripture, and he is yet waiting for the one man that can lead him onward from morning twilight to noontide glory. Let us look at this man as an *enquirer*. He was in a *bewildered* state of mind. I do not visit with rebuke the bewilderment of honest enquiry. In the realm of spiritual revelation things are not superficial, easy of arrangement, and trifling in issue. Who can wonder that a man in reading the Old Testament should feel like a traveller making his uneasy way through a land of cloud and shadow? Do not be distressed because you are puzzled and bewildered by religious mystery. The most advanced minds in the Church have had to pass through precisely your experience. But the path of the just shineth more and more unto the perfect day. Do not make *idols* of your perplexities. Do not make a *boast* of your bewilderment. You know that there is a subtle temptation in that direction—to talk about your doubts and difficulties in a tone which suggests that yours is so critical and so judicial a mind that it is not to be put off with the easy solutions that have satisfied intellects of an inferior order. Be honest in your bewilderment, and be simple and true-hearted. The eunuch was not only bewildered: *he was teachable*. He said, "I wonder what this means; would that some man could join me in this study and throw light upon this mystery; I feel lonely; the voice of a teacher would now gladden me; I would that God would send some director to show me the meaning of this and lead me into the light." Teachableness is one of the first characteristics of honesty. There is no religious honesty that is not adorned by the spirit of docility. If you are self-trustful, if you walk by your own lights, if you contend, even silently and passively, that it lies within the compass of your power to find out everything for yourself, then you are not a scholar in the school of Christ; you are stubborn, you are dogmatical, and, as such, you deprive yourself of all the gifts of Providence. Yet how few people are teachable! So many of us go to the Bible and find proofs of what we already believe. Is this not solemnly true? Whatever your form of Church government is, you go to the Bible and find a text to vindicate it. Whatever your particular theology is, you open the Scripture with the express purpose of finding in it a *proof* that you are right. This is not the spirit of

Christ. The true believer goes with an unprejudiced mind, truly humble, honestly desirous of knowing what is true. No matter who lives or dies, who goes up or goes down, what is truth must be, and ever is, the supreme enquiry of honest and teachable spirits. The danger is that we become mere traditionalists. This was the great blemish in Jewish education. Men believed what was handed on to them from one generation to another, without personal enquiry into the foundations and roots of the doctrines they were required to accept. Do not call such acceptance by the noble name of *faith*. You who accept doctrines in that fashion are not students, or scholars, or enquirers: you are merely passive and indifferent custodians, uttering words which have in them no rays of life, and no pith of pathos and reality. Would that we could all come to the Bible afresh, divesting the mind of everything we ever heard, and reading the Scriptures through from end to end, turning over every page with the breath of this prayer—"Spirit Divine, show me what is truth." We might lose a good deal of our present possession, but we should be enlarged with other and better treasures. Every man would then have the Bible dwelling richly in him, not as a series of separate and isolated texts, but as a spirit, a genius, a revelation, a guardian angel.

Being bewildered and yet teachable, there can be no surprise that as an enquirer the eunuch was, in the third place, *obedient*. The Gospel does not ask us to set up our little notions against its revelation. A revelation cannot afford to be argumentative upon common terms. Any Gospel that comes to me with a quiver in its voice, with a hesitancy or a reserve in its tone, vitiates its own credentials, and steps down from the pedestal of commanding authority. The eunuch, having heard the sermon preached to him by Philip, obeyed. "Here is water, what hindereth me to be baptized?" He would have the whole thing completed at once. So many persons are afraid that they are not *fit*, or they are not *prepared*. They have heard the Gospel a quarter of a century or more, but still they are wondering about themselves. Such people are not *humble*, they are *dishonest*; they are trifling with themselves and with others; they have not reached the point of teachableness, but are still lingering with selfish delight in the land of bewilderment. What hindereth him? No man should hinder you from coming to Christ. I fear sometimes that the function

of the modern Church is to get up *hindrances*, to make fences, and boundaries, and lines, over which men have to step, and hills over which they have to climb. These are men-made hindrances. In the Gospel I find but one word for all honest, teachable men, and that one word is—*Welcome!* Hindrances are man's inventions. As to the *form* of baptism, please yourself. It is not a matter of *form*; it is a matter of *meaning* and spirit. Some believe in *adult* baptism, others believe in what is termed *believers'* baptism; and I believe in LIFE-baptism. So that wherever I find human life in this blood-redeemed world, I would baptize it in the Triune Name. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. *Baptism* is greater than any *form* of baptism.

For a moment or two, regard this treasurer of the Ethiopians not only as an enquirer, but as a *hearer*, and then note his personal characteristics. First of all, as a hearer, he was *prepared*; he was already seriously perusing the mysterious volume. He had not to be called from *afar*. Already he was in the sanctuary. Where are prepared hearers nowadays? Where are those who come to Church from the Bible itself; full of the prophets, their steps to the sanctuary beating time to the noble music of the Psalms? What is the work of Philip nowadays? It is to persuade, to plead, to break through iron-bound attention and fix it upon spiritual realities. Philip has now to deal with men who are reading the journals of the day, the fiction of the hour, and the exciting discussions of the passing time, and from any one of these engagements to the Scriptures of God there may lie unnumbered thousands of miles! So we get so little in the Church. We do not lift up our heads from the prophetic page and turn a glowing face and an eager eye upon the Philip whom God has sent to teach us. Our ear is full of the hum of the world. Our mind is dazed by many cross lights; our attention is teased by a thousand appellants. Could we have *prepared hearers*, as well as *prepared preachers*, then in five minutes a man might preach five hours, because every word would be a revelation, and every tone a call to higher life. A prepared pulpit fights against infinite odds when it has to deal with an *unprepared pew*.

Not only was the Ethiopian a *prepared* hearer, he was a *responsive* one. He answered Philip. His eye listened, his attitude listened, his breath listened. His head, his heart, his will, all

listened. Who can now *listen* ? To *hear* is a divine accomplishment. Who hears well ? To have a responsive hearer is to make a good preacher. The pew makes the pulpit. It is possible to waste supreme thought and utterance upon an indifferent hearer. But let the hearer answer, and how high the dialogue, how noble the exchange of thought, how possibly grand the issues of such high converse ! Do not suppose that a man is not answering his teacher simply because he is not audibly *speaking* to him. There is a responsive attitude, there is an answering silence, there is an applauding quietude, there is a *look*, which is better than thunders of applause ! Let us study the eunuch's conduct in this matter, and endeavour to reproduce it. He was *prepared*, he was *responsive* ; what wonder if in the long run he became a new creature ? He helped Philip ; he preached by *listening*.

We might pass on now from looking at the eunuch as an enquirer, and as a hearer, to regard him for a moment as a *convert*. As a convert he was an *enlightened* one. He had passed from the prophetic to the evangelic, he had seen the Cross, he knew on whom he had believed, and he pronounced his name with sublimest emphasis. " I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." Then Philip must have been preaching this doctrine. You know the sermon by the hearer. Say ye, " It was a beautiful sermon, an exquisite piece of reasoning, a model of persuasiveness ?" When you *blaspheme* after hearing it, and serve the devil with double industry after having passed an hour in God's house,—that is wrong, that is lying ! Show the solidity, the Scripturalness, the power, the practical tendencies of the discourse by *living* it ! Being an enlightened convert, the eunuch was a convert *deeply convinced* in his own mind. There are hereditary Christians, nominal Christians, halting Christians, merely assenting, and non-enquiring Christians. " And they because they have not much deepness of earth soon wither away." There are also *convinced* Christians, men who have fought battles in darkness and have dragged the prey to the mountains of light. They are those who have undergone all the pain, the happy pain, the joyous agony, of seeking for truth in difficult places, and, proving it, have embraced it at the altar as if they had wedded the bride of their souls. These will make martyrs if need be. These are the pillars of the Church ; men not tossed to and fro, but abiding in a noble stead-

fastness. In the use of this incident there is another point connected with the eunuch's experience as a convert which we must not overlook,—he was *enlightened*, he was *convinced*, and in the third place he was *exultant*. “He went on his way rejoicing.” You have not seen Christ if you are not filled with *joy*. You have seen him in a cloud ; you have seen a painted mask that professes to represent him ; you have seen some ghastly travesty of the beauty of Christ. Had you seen God's Son, the Saviour of the world, every dreary note would have been taken out of your voice ; you would have forgotten the threnody of your old winter, and have begun to sing with the birds of summer. See the eunuch, oblivious even of Philip's presence. He does not know probably that Philip was gone. He was lifted up in sublime ecstasy and divine enthusiasm. He saw divine things, new heavens, a new earth, bluer skies, greener lands, than he had ever seen before, and in that transfiguration he saw *Jesus only*. Philip, miraculously sent, was miraculously withdrawn, but there sat in the chariot now “one like unto the Son of Man.” It is thus that intermediate preachers prepare the way for the incoming of their Master. And so preacher after preacher says, as he sees the radiant vision coming—“He must increase, but I must decrease.”

## XXV.

### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, let our hunger be a cry unto heaven. We would hunger and thirst after righteousness, for in so doing we shall be blest with thine own fulness. Thou dost give unto all men liberally, and in thy voice there is no upbraiding tone. Grant unto us now, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and our Intercessor, grace upon grace. We would have fulness of blessing, yea, we would be filled with all the fulness of God. Our heart's desire is that we may be lifted up from the dust into the clear light which shines in the upper places of thy kingdom. We are tired of the earth. We feel that we are greater than our prison. We would break the bars and flee away to the place where the morning rises, and where the mid-day shines in full glory. This impatience comes of the ministry of thy grace. Once we were contented with the dust ; once we needed but one little world ; once we had no eyes but those of the body, and then we were satisfied with mean things. But we are new creatures in Christ Jesus ; yea, we have been with Jesus, and have learned of him. We remember what he said about our Father's house, and the angels, and the sunlight hereafter, in which we are to conduct our study and our services. We have entered into a glorious liberty. It is not merely liberty enough, it is freedom upon freedom, world upon world, yea, an infinite inheritance of liberty. Whilst we are here, may we do thy will with all simplicity, obedience, and joyfulness of heart. May we take nothing away from thy law, nor impair in any degree thy righteousness. May we rather seek to do our utmost to make our calling and election sure. Enable us to bear the petty troubles of the day, and to take them as having some good meaning, if we could but find it. May we know our own divinity as sons of God through the Cross of Christ, and not allow ourselves to be fretted and chafed into spiritual meanness by the trifles of a moment. In thy Son, our Saviour, give us such a hold of other worlds as shall enable us to use the present without abusing it. In the night time, and in the hour of darkness, show us some of the other worlds in vision. Even in the quietness and silence of the night, come into our imagination and reveal what our senses are unable to comprehend. In the silence speak to us as thou only canst whisper to the heart. Recall our best days ; the altar where our noblest prayers were uttered do thou ever set before our eyes. Gather together all our vows and oaths, and promises of better life, and enable us to repeat them, every one, by the grace of Christ, and in his strength to

renew our early devotion to his Kingdom. Pity us in all our weariness, and littleness, and want of perception, and remember that we were born yesterday, and that we are here but until to-morrow. Spare thine anger ; loose not against us the bolts of thy wrath, but take us into thy great compassion and sustain us daily by thy tender mercy.

For all the little joys that come to us on the road we bless thee. For the sweet spring time and the summer flowers, and the singing birds, for all the little surprises of love that make the day glad ; for friendly letters, and loving messages, and graspings of the hand that mean trust and grace ; for all encouragements that make us more hopeful in the time of difficulty, we would bless thee and we would regard them as hints of thine own inspiration and daily benediction.

We remember our loved ones who are not here. The father and mother at home, near at hand, or far away. The traveller who has left us, but in his leaving has also given promise of return. For all who are in sorrow, trouble, and difficulty, we pray thy guidance and thy sanctifying blessing. May the dying die without knowing it, because of the fullness of the triumph of grace in their hearts. Strengthen us during the few little days we have yet to live, and so cause the light of Christ to fall upon us that we may see the true littleness of earth, and the magnitude of the heaven to which we are hastening. Thus may we live in the power of an endless life. And being rooted in Christ's eternity, we cannot die. Amen.

### Acts ix. 1-22.

1. And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,

2. And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

3. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus : and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven :

4. And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me ?

5. And he said, Who art thou, Lord ? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest : it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

6. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do ? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

7. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.

8. And Saul arose from the earth ; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man : but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.

9. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.



10. And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias ; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord.

11. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus : for, behold, he prayeth,

12. And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.

13. Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem :

14. And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.

15. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way : for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel :

16. For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

17. And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house ; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

18. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales : and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.

19. And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.

20. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.

21. But all that heard him were amazed, and said ; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests ?

22. But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.

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The following exposition of Acts. ix. 1-22 is reprinted from *The Cambridge Bible for Schools*, and is here given as one of the clearest and most condensed with which I am acquainted :—

1. *And [But] Saul, yet breathing out threatenings [threatening].* It is better to translate the conjunction adversatively here, as the new subject is not connected except with the first sentence of chap. viii. The verb in this clause should be rendered "breathing," not "breathing out." Threatening and slaughter was, as it were, the atmosphere in which Saul was living.

*and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord].* We are not told of any other death, but Stephen's, in which Saul was a participator, but we can

gather from his own words (Acts xxvi. 10) "when they were put to death, I gave my voice [vote] against them," that the protomartyr was not the only one who was killed in the time of this persecution. It has been suggested that the zeal which Saul shewed at the time of Stephen's death led to his election into the Sanhedrin, and so he took a judicial part in the later stages of the persecution, and, it may be, from a desire to justify the choice of those who had placed him in authority, he sought to be appointed over the enquiry after the Christians in Damascus. We gather from xxvi. 10, that before this inquisitorial journey he had been armed with the authority of the chief priests in his search after the Christians in Jerusalem.

*went unto the high priest]* who would most likely be the authority through whom the power, which the Great Sanhedrin claimed to exercise, in religious matters, over Jews in foreign cities, would be put in motion.

**2. and desired of him letters]** These are the papers which constituted his "authority and commission" (xxvi. 12). From that passage we learn that the issuing of these papers was the act of the whole body, for Paul there says they were "from the chief priests."

*to Damascus]* Of the history of this most ancient (Gen. xiv. 15) city in the world, see the *Dictionary of the Bible*. It had from the earliest period been mixed up with the history of the Jews, and great numbers of Jews were living there at this time, as we can see from the subsequent notices of their conduct in this chapter. We are told by Josephus (*B. J.* II. 20. 2) that ten thousand Jews were slaughtered in a massacre in Damascus in Nero's time, and that the wives of the Damascenes were almost all of them addicted to the Jewish religion.

*to the synagogues]* As at Jerusalem, so in Damascus the synagogues were numerous, and occupied by different classes and nationalities. Greek-Jews were sure to be found in so large a city.

*that if he found any of this way]* Better, "any that were of the Way." The name "the Way" soon became a distinctive appellation of the Christian religion. The fuller expression "the way of truth" is found 2 Pet. ii. 2; and the brief term is common in the Acts. See xix. 9, 23, xxii. 4, xxiv. 14, 22.

*whether...men or women]* We can mark the fury with which Saul raged against the Christians from this mention of the "women" as included among those whom he committed or desired to commit to prison. Cp. viii. 3 and xxii. 4. The women played a more conspicuous part among the early Christians than they were allowed to do among the Jews. See note on i. 14.

*he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem]* That the whole authority of the Great Sanhedrin might be employed for the extinction of the new teaching.

**3. And as he journeyed]** There were two roads by which Saul could make his journey, one the caravan road which led from Egypt to Damascus, and kept near the coast line of the Holy Land till it struck eastward

to cross the Jordan at the north of the Lake of Tiberias. To join this road Saul must have at first turned westward to the sea. The other way led through Neapolis and crossed the Jordan south of the Sea of Tiberias, and passing through Gadara went north-eastward to Damascus. We have no means whereby to decide by which road Saul and his companions took their way. The caravan road was a distance of one hundred and thirty-six miles, and occupied six days for the journey.

*he came near Damascus]* The original is more full. Read, "it came to pass that he drew nigh unto Damascus." The party must have reached the near neighbourhood of the city, for his companions (*v.* 8) "led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus" after the vision.

*and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven]* In xxii. 6 we are told that the time of day was "about noon" when the vision was seen, and in xxvi. 13, Paul says that at "mid-day" the light was "above the brightness of the sun." The mid-day glare of an Eastern sun is of itself exceedingly bright, and the hour was chosen, we cannot doubt, in order that "the glory" of this heaven-sent light should not be confounded with any natural phenomenon. It was in the midst of this glory that Christ was seen by Saul (1 Cor. xv. 8), so that he can enumerate himself among those who had beheld the Lord after His resurrection.

4. *And he fell to the earth]* Dazzled by the intense brightness. From xxvi. 14 we find that not only Saul but his companions were struck down by the light, though there was more in the vision which he beheld than was made evident to them, and by reason of the greater glory which was manifested to him, his natural sight was blinded.

*and heard a voice]* We cannot represent in English the different case of the noun in this verse, and in 7. The Greek puts here the accusative case and there the genitive, and thus indicates that there was a difference in the nature of the hearing of Saul and of his companions. And Paul in xxii. 9 marks the distinction in his own narration, for he says "They heard not the voice (accusative) of him that spake to me." As this difference is made both in St. Luke's first account, and in the speech of St. Paul at Jerusalem, it seems reasonable to accept the explanation which has long ago been given of this grammatical variation, and to understand that Saul heard an articulate sound, a voice which spake to him, while his companions were only conscious of a sound from which they comprehended nothing. St. Paul then is precise when he says "they heard not the voice" which I heard, and St. Luke is correct when in *v.* 7 he says "they heard a sound."

*saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?]* It is very noteworthy that in all the three accounts of the vision the Greek text of Saul's name is a transliteration of the Hebrew, shewing that we have here a very close adherence to the words of Jesus. The Lord spake in the language of his people, and both the Evangelist and the Apostle have preserved for us this remarkable feature of the heavenly address. The only other place where the Hebrew form of Saul's name is retained is in the speech of

Ananias when (ix. 17) he comes to see the convert in his blindness. As he also had received a communication from Jesus in connection with Saul's conversion, we can understand how the same form of the name would have been given to him. Moreover he was himself, to judge from his name, a Hebrew, and therefore that form would be most natural on his lips. Except in these cases St. Luke always employs the Greek form of the word.

Christ speaks of himself as persecuted by Saul, because "in all the affliction of his people he is afflicted" (Isa. lxiii. 9), and "whoso toucheth them, toucheth the apple of his eye" (Zech. ii. 8).

5. *And he said, Who art thou, Lord?*] Saul is sensible of the Divine nature of the vision, and shews this by his address. The appearance of Christ, though in a glorified body, must have been like that which he wore in his humanity, and since Saul does not recognize Jesus, we may almost certainly conclude that he had not known him during his ministerial life.

*And the Lord said*] The best texts have only "And he," the verb "said" being understood.

*I am Jesus whom thou persecutest*] In xxii. 8 St. Paul gives the fuller form of the sentence, "I am Jesus of Nazareth." By using this name, the being whose Divine nature Saul has already acknowledged by calling him "Lord," at once and for ever puts an end to Saul's persecuting rage, for he is made to see, what his master Gamaliel had before suggested (v. 39), that to persecute Jesus was to "fight against God."

*it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.* 6. *And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him*] These words have been inserted here in some MSS. for the sake of making in this place a complete narrative by the combination and adaptation of the additional particulars given in xxvi. 14 and xxii. 10. It is easy to understand the desire which prompted such a combination. The best MSS. omit the words here, giving them where they more naturally find place, in the personal narratives of St. Paul himself.

6. *Arise*] The MSS. which omit the above words insert a conjunction here. Read, *But arise*. Saul had continued prostrate as he had fallen down at the first.

*and go into the city*] A proof that the party of travellers had arrived very nearly at Damascus. Tradition here, as in many other instances, has fixed on a spot as the scene of this Divine vision. It is placed outside the eastern gate, and about a mile from the city. Such a situation answers very well, but its fitness is the only ground for attaching any weight to the tradition.

*and it shall be told thee what thou must do*] In xxvi. 16-18 we have an abstract given by the Apostle of the labours for which Christ designed him, and the words in that passage are placed as a portion of the Divine communication made before Saul entered Damascus, but as in that narrative no mention is made of Ananias or his visit, we may conclude that

we have instead a brief notice of the message which Ananias brought to him, and that therein is contained a declaration of what Jesus in the vision only spoke of as "what thou must do."

7. *And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless*] Cp. Dan. x. 7, "I Daniel alone saw the vision, for the men that were with me saw not the vision, but a great quaking fell upon them."

Saul was not only furnished with authority, but also with men who were to carry out his intentions and bring the prisoners to Jerusalem. Painters have represented the travellers as riding on horseback, but there is no warrant for this in any form of the narrative.

*stood* here means "remained fixed," "did not move." They had been stricken down as well as Saul (xxvi. 14).

*hearing a [the] voice*] On the variation of case here, and the probable difference of meaning, see note on v. 4.

*but seeing [beholding] no man*] The verb is the same that is used by Stephen (vii. 56). "Behold, I *see* the heavens opened." In their astonishment, and guided by the sound, Saul's companions lifted up their faces to the sky, but as with the words so with the appearance of Jesus; it was unseen by all but one, but to him was manifest enough to form a ground of his confidence in his Apostolic mission: "Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" (1 Cor. xi. 1.)

8. *and [but] when his eyes where opened, he saw no man [nothing]* The vision had struck him blind. He opened his eyes, but their power had been taken away. Thus his physical condition becomes a fit representation of the mental blindness which he afterwards (xxvi. 9) deplures: "I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth."

*but [and] they led him by the hand*] His companions saw all things as before, and were able to guide him who had started forth as the leader in their mission of persecution.

9. *And he was three days without sight*] During this time we cannot but think the illumination of his mind was being perfected by the Spirit. He had been convinced by the vision that Jesus was risen from the dead and ascended into heaven. But more than this was needed for the preparation of this mighty missionary. He himself (Gal. i. 16) speaks of God revealing His Son not only *to* but *in* him, and that his conferences were not with flesh and blood, and we are told below (v. 12) that the coming of Ananias had been made known unto him by vision. To this solemn time of darkness may also perhaps be referred those "visions and revelations of the Lord" which the Apostle speaks of to the Corinthians (2 Cor. xii. 1-4). While his bodily powers were for a time in suspense, he may fitly describe himself as not knowing whether what he saw was revealed to him "in the body or out of the body," and it was the spiritual vision only which saw the third heaven and paradise, and the spirit heard those "unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter."

*and neither did eat nor drink*] The mental anguish for a time overpowered the natural craving for food. The newly called Apostle was contemplating in all its enormity his sin in persecuting the Church of Christ, and though there were times of comfort and refreshing before Ananias came, yet the great thought which filled Saul's mind would be sorrow for his late mad and misdirected zeal, and so the three days of blindness formed a period of deep penitence.

10—22. SAUL'S SIGHT RESTORED. HE PREACHES IN DAMASCUS.

10. *And [Now] there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias*] Of this disciple we have no further mention in Holy Writ except in chap. xxii. 12, where St. Paul describes him as "a devout man according to the Law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt" at Damascus. Whether he had become a Christian during the life of Jesus or was among the Jewish converts on the day of Pentecost or at some subsequent time, and had been forced to flee from Jerusalem by the persecution which followed on the death of Stephen, we are not told, but we can gather, from the words which he employs in expressing his reluctance to visit Saul, that he had much and trustworthy communication still with the Holy City, for he knows both of the havoc which the persecutor has caused, and of the purpose of his mission to Damascus. On the name Ananias see v. 1, note.

*and to him said the Lord in a vision*] As Saul had been prepared for the visit by a vision, so Ananias is by a vision instructed to go to him. Dean Howson's remarks (*Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, i. 101) on this preparation and its similarity to the preparation of Peter and Cornelius deserve to be dwelt on. "The simultaneous preparation of the hearts of Ananias and Saul, and the simultaneous preparation of those of Peter and Cornelius—the questioning and hesitation of Peter and the questioning and hesitation of Ananias—the one doubting whether he might make friendship with the Gentiles, the other doubting whether he might approach the enemy of the Church—the unhesitating obedience of each when the Divine will was made clearly known—the state of mind in which both the Pharisee and the Centurion were found—each waiting to see what the Lord would say unto them—this close analogy will not be forgotten by those who reverently read the two consecutive chapters, in which the baptism of Saul and the baptism of Cornelius are narrated in the Acts of the Apostles." When so much criticism has been expended to shew that the Acts is a work of fiction written at a late period to minimize certain differences supposed to exist between the teaching of St. Paul and that of St. Peter, it is well to know that others have seen, in these undoubted analogies proofs of the working of a God who is ever the same, and who would have all men to be saved through Jesus Christ.

11. *into the street which is called Straight*] A long straight street still runs through Damascus, and is probably (so persistent is every feature of

Oriental life) the same in which Ananias found Saul in the house of Judas.

12. *and hath seen in a vision*] The oldest MSS. omit "in a vision." It could only have been in this wise that Saul had been informed, and the words are merely a gloss.

13. *I have heard by [from] many, etc.*] These words seem to point to a longer residence of Ananias in Damascus than he could have made if he had only left Jerusalem after the death of Stephen; and so do the words (xxii. 12) which speak of his good report among all the Jews that dwelt at Damascus.

*how much evil he hath done to thy saints, etc.*] The Christian converts were probably called "saints," i.e., "holy persons," at a very early period after the death of Christ because of the marvellous outpourings of the Holy Spirit upon the first converts, cp. 1 Pet. i. 15. The word is of frequent occurrence in the greetings of St. Paul's Epistles.

14. *all that call on thy name*] To call on Christ is the same as to be a believer in Him. The expression is used as an apposition to "saints" in 1 Cor. i. 2, and thence we see what in the Pauline language was meant by the word "saints."

15. *he is a chosen vessel unto me*] Literally, "a vessel of election." This is a Hebrew form of expression, cp. Jer. xxii. 28, where King Coniah is called "a vessel wherein is no pleasure." So Jer. li. 34, "He hath made me [to be] an empty vessel," literally, "vessel of emptiness."

*to bear my name*] i.e., this shall be the load or duty which I will lay upon this my chosen instrument.

*before the Gentiles*] This was doubtless a revelation to Ananias, who as a devout Jew would not yet have contemplated the inclusion of the whole world in the Church of Christ. The Gentiles are placed first in the enumeration, because among them specially was Saul's field of labour to be. For the wide spirit in which the Apostle embraced his commission, see Rom. i. 13, 14, etc.

*and kings*] As before Agrippa (xxvi. 1, 32) and at Rome, in consequence of the appeal to be heard before Cæsar.

16. *for I will shew him how great [many] things he must suffer*] Cp. Paul's own words (xx. 23), "The Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me." The truth of this is borne out by that long list of the Apostle's sufferings which he enumerates in his letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor. xi. 23-28) and the less detailed list in the same Epistle (vi. 4-5).

17. *Brother Saul*] The Hebrew form of the name, see v. 4, note.

*the Lord, even Jesus*] Combining the name "Lord" used by Saul when the vision appeared, with that "Jesus" which Christ, speaking from His glory, uttered in answer to Saul's enquiry, Who art thou?

*that appeared unto thee in the way*] Thus was brought to Saul after his three days' blindness a confirmation from without of the reality of what he had seen on the road as he came. The words at the same time gave an

earnest that here was the teacher who would explain to him what he was to do.

*and be filled with the Holy Ghost*] On this occasion the Holy Ghost was bestowed without the laying on of the hands of one of the twelve.

18. *And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales*] The word rendered "scales" is used as a technical term for a disease of the eye by Hippocrates, and the verb derived from it is found (Tobit xi. 13) used of the cure of a disease of similar character. "And the whiteness *pilled away* from the corners of his eyes." This "whiteness" is rendered in the margin (Tob. ii. 10) "white films," and was clearly something like the "scales" which caused Saul's blindness, and a process for the cure thereof is called (iii. 17) "to *scale away* the whiteness of Tobit's eyes." St. Paul (xxii. 11) ascribes his blindness to the glory of the heavenly light, and it may have been some secretion, caused by the intensity of that vision, which formed over them, and at his cure fell away. Some have thought that his constant employment of an amanuensis, and the mention of the large characters in which he wrote in his Epistle to the Galatians (vi. 11), "Ye see in what large letters I have written to you," are indications that the Apostle suffered permanently in his eyesight from the heavenly vision.

*and he received* [recovered, and so in 17] *sight forthwith*] The oldest MSS. omit the last word.

*and arose, and was baptized*] In the fuller account (xxii. 16) we learn that the exhortation to be baptized was part of the message with which Ananias was charged, and so was divinely commissioned to receive Saul thus into the Christian Church.

19. *and when he had received* [taken] *meat*, etc.] Needed after his three days' fast, but (says Calvin) "he refreshed not his body with meat until his soul had received strength."

*Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus*] The word Saul is not found in the oldest MSS. Read "And he was, etc." The expression rendered "certain days" is the same which in x. 48, xv. 36, xvi. 12, xxiv. 24, and xxv. 13 is used by St. Luke, and in all cases the time indicated by them must have been brief. It was for this amount of time that Peter tarried with Cornelius, the words are applied to a short period spent by Paul and Barnabas at Antioch, to the time of St. Paul's stay at Philippi, to the short time which Paul was detained at Cæsarea before his hearing by Felix, and to a like period between the arrival of Festus and the visit which Agrippa made to salute him as the new Governor. In most of these instances the time intended must have been very brief, and it is important to notice this here, because in v. 23 we shall find another expression which is translated "many days" and seems designed by the writer to indicate a somewhat longer period. It is clear, from the way in which "disciples" are here mentioned, that there was a numerous body of Christians in Damascus at this early



period. Saul dwelt with them now not as an enemy but as a brother, by which name Ananias had been directed to greet him.

20. *And straightway he preached Christ* [proclaimed Jesus] *in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God*] The best MSS. read *Jesus* in this verse, and this naturally is correct. The preaching which was to be to the Jews a stumblingblock was that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ, their long-expected Messiah.

He went, as was Christ's custom also, into the synagogues as the most likely places where to find an audience who would listen to his proclamation. His letters to the synagogues (*v.* 2) were not delivered, but he came as the herald of one of higher authority than the chief priests. For St. Paul's constant practice of teaching in the Jewish synagogues, see xiii. 5, xiv. 1, xvii. 1, 10, xviii. 4, 19, xix. 8.

21. *But all that heard him were amazed*] Saul's fame as a persecutor of Christians was well known to the Jews of Damascus, and the authorities of the synagogues may have been instructed beforehand to welcome him as a zealous agent. If so their amazement is easy to understand. It is clear from what follows in this verse that they knew of his mission and the intention thereof, though Saul did not bring them his "commission and authority." We should gather also from the strong expression "destroyed," used to describe Saul's career in Jerusalem, that the slaughter of the Christians there had not been limited to the stoning of Stephen.

22. *But Saul increased the more in strength*] i.e., he became more and more energetic in his labours and the Holy Ghost gave him more power. His fitness for the labour on which he was entering was very great. He possessed all the Jewish learning of a zealous pupil of Gamaliel, and now that he had seen Jesus in the glory of the Godhead, he could use his stores of learning for the support of the new teaching in such wise as to commend it to those Jews who were looking for the consolation of Israel. But these would naturally be the smallest portion of his hearers. The rest of the Jews were confounded. They heard their Scripture applied by a trained mind, and shewn to be applicable to the life of Jesus. They could not at this time make an attack on Saul, for they were paralyzed by what they heard, and it was only when some time had elapsed that they resolved to continue in their rejection of Jesus and then, at a later time, their persecution of Saul began.

*proving that this is very [the] Christ*]. The word here rendered "proving" is used again in xvi. 10, and translated "assuredly gathering." The idea conveyed by it is that of putting things side by side, and so making a comparison and forming a conclusion. Thus Saul, well equipped with a knowledge of the ancient Scriptures, set before his hearers a description of the Messiah as he is there portrayed, and relating the life history of Jesus, shewed them that in him the Scriptures of the prophets had been fulfilled.

## THE CONVERSION OF SAUL.

THE third verse of this chapter has in it a statement which is in subtle harmony with all the necessities of the case. The verse reads thus :—“ And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus : and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven.” We have heard opinions about what we term *sudden conversions*. Some persons do not believe in them. They have conceptions regarding conversion which are not confirmed in their truthfulness by any sudden or violent change of mind and action. But here is the very word that is objected to ! It is an Old Testament word. Suddenness was approved by the Lord of the Jewish Church ; for He, Himself taught this prophet to say, “ The Lord shall **SUDDENLY** come to His temple.” Mark the harmony of that particular feature of the incident, with the great *purpose* which was wrought out by the grace of God. A slow, deliberate, intellectual transformation would have been a moral violence under circumstances so peculiar. There are times when quietness itself is out of place. There are occasions which require the thunder and the lightning and all the instruments of surprise which are within the resources of God. It is, therefore, quite in keeping with the keynote of the story when we find that Saul was *suddenly* struck. It is in *such* coincidences and harmonies that we find the broadest and clearest proofs of Biblical *inspiration*. What could be more harmonious in all its particulars and relations than the story of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch ? A man quietly reading in his chariot and filled with religious wonder as to the meaning of the mysterious Word which challenged his attention, what more seemly and beautiful, than that a teacher should sit beside him and show the meaning of the sacred mysteries ? That was beautiful, that was an instance of historical and moral proportion ; but here is a man “ yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter,” a word implying continuous and unsuspending action, yea, blast upon blast of hottest fury—with *such* a man you cannot *reason*, God therefore suddenly strikes him to the ground. In that action is one of the subtlest proofs and illustrations of what is meant by the *inspiration* of the Bible. Not only in great broad features, but in proportion, in colour, in the arrangement of the parts, in the subtle and complete harmony of the whole, I find the pres-

ence of God. You need not direct my eye to constellations and astronomic wonders, for when I consider the lilies, and behold the fowls of the air, I see Divinity. Let us, therefore, admire this Providence of *arrangement*, and this inspiration of *incident*, as well as fall down in religious wonder before the stupendous conversion itself. Do not reprove the suddenness of the conversion until you understand all the circumstances. That very suddenness may itself be part of the occasion.

Now, look at the incident as showing Saul's *relation to Judaism*, or, in other words, Saul's relation to his past life. Does Jesus Christ condemn Judaism? Certainly not. He Himself was a Jew. "Salvation is of the Jews." Saul was not called upon to renounce any one thing he believed as erroneous. Let us carefully weigh that remark, for all that is most sacred in ancient history seems to find its consummation in its few syllables. Jesus Christ did not say, "Saul, you are religiously wrong, you are intellectually mistaken, you are following a wrong course of life which had bad beginnings." There is not a word of religious *hiding* in all the speech. The only thing that was being done was that Saul was hurting *Himself*. "Why kick against the pricks? Why thrust thyself upon the sharp goads, to thy wounding, and bleeding, and death?" The persecutor only hurts himself. The bad man digs a hell for himself alone. Jesus Christ did not condemn the personal attitude of Saul. Saul was an Old Testament man. The Old Testament is a book of stoning and scourging—"an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." The unfilial son must be stoned, the heretic must be stoned, the blasphemer must be stoned. Saul was therefore keeping strictly within historic lines and constitutional proprieties, when he said in effect, "This novel heresy must be stamped out with force." Christianity does not condemn Judaism. If any one were to ask me, "What is the relation of Christianity to Judaism?" I would say, "You find that relation in the very form of the book which we call the Bible." What have we in the Bible? Judaism and Christianity, the Old Testament and the New. In the very form and make-up of the book itself I have the best answer to the question—"What does Christianity say about Judaism?" Christianity does not *oppose* Judaism, it *supersedes* it. Christianity takes up

Judaism, realizes all its types and symbols and ceremonies. Judaism is the *dawn*, Christianity is the full *noon tide*. Christianity is the purple autumn bringing to maturity and sweetness all the roots and fruits of the Judaism which it followed and consummated. There seems to be a good deal of mistake about this matter. The Jew is simply a man who has not come on to the *next* point in history. His beginning is right. Not a word have I to say against any solitary ceremony of Judaism, kept within proper time, and restrained within the relations appointed by God. Christianity continues, completes, and glorifies what Judaism began. But for Judaism there could have been no Christianity. We are debtors to the Jew, and the Jew is, in my opinion, historically and typically the greatest man that lives. The Gentiles never converted themselves. No heathen country ever originated its own Christianity. The Jew was sent to the Gentile. The most stubborn prejudices were turned into the most anxious sympathies, and this is the crowning miracle of the grace of Christ.

In the conversion of Saul we see *the greatest triumph* which Christianity has accomplished. This was the master-miracle. Who is this man? A Jew, of an ancient and honourable pedigree; a student, a scholar, a man of high and influential station. Shrewder than Iscariot, more ardent than Peter—a very volcano of a man. There lay within him capacity to do anything that mortals ever did. When his teeth once took hold, they could only be opened by an Almighty power. His hand once upon the prey, the prey was dead, unless the fingers be unloosed by Almightyness. Jesus Christ himself directly undertakes his conversion, and works thus his supreme spiritual miracle. When Saul was converted there was more than one man changed. There are those who say “count hands,” as if one hand were equal to another. There is a conversion of *quality* as well as a conversion of *quantity*. Some conversions are to be *weighed*, and some are to be merely *numbered*. Statistics cannot help you in this matter. Let a Saul of Tarsus be converted, and you convert an army terrible with banners! He will not let the Church fall asleep. He will not let the world allow him to travel through all its plains and cities *incog*. Many of us will manage that little task. We can go through the house, the place of business, the market, and the exchange, and come out at the other end without

anybody identifying us! Saul of Tarsus will presently show us *how* to go through the world. He will never pass without recognition, and no town will he be in without setting up his holy testimony.

The Lord uses a remarkable expression concerning this man in the eleventh verse, "Behold he prayeth." Had he not been praying all his life-time? In a certain sense he certainly had been praying. Why then say now, "Behold he prayeth"? Old words acquire new meanings. Language is not a fixed quantity, and definition is something more than a technicality. Different words have different meanings in different men, and the same man attaches different meanings to words at different times of life. You were once rich upon a time which you would now count poverty. Once you were proud of a house which now you ignore. So whilst saying prayers, reciting prayerful terms punctilious in ritual, exemplary in all the outward observances of his Church, Saul had yet in a Christian sense never prayed. Prayer is a Christian acquisition. Prayer is a battering ram which only a Christian arm can work. When the Church *prays*, the Church *wins*. If you could PRAY—not merely *say* your prayers—your trouble would be forgotten in the glorious interview with heaven. Prayer is not an attitude, a mere decency, a posture of the body, or an exercise of the tongue, it is *the supreme effort of the heart* to throw, in friendly wrestling, the Almighty God. "Ye have not because ye ask not, or because ye ask amiss." You are yourself often not there when you pray, your soul is elsewhere. If you were present in the fulness, intensity, completeness, and determination of energy with Christ's Cross as the medium through which your prayers went up to heaven, you would arise from your knees more than conquerors.

Another remarkable expression we find in the sixteenth verse, "I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." Mark the harmony of this arrangement also. God knows what we are doing, and he pays to the uttermost. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." Adonibezek said, "As I have done, so God hath requited me." Samuel said to Agag, "As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women." Saul was in *this* succession. "He shall have judg-

ment without mercy that showed no mercy.' Saul was a student in *that* school of compensation. "Whoso shutteth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard." Be not deceived. Saul was now made to feel how exactly true these terms were. "Saul made havoc of the Church" (Acts viii. 3). Next, "Having stoned Paul, they drew him out of the city, supposing him to be dead" (Acts xiv. 9). "Saul yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts ix. 1). Turn now to the twenty-third chapter: "Certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul." "I will show him what great things he must suffer for my name's sake." I will test his conversion (Gal. i. 13). "Beyond measure I persecuted the Church of God and wasted it." Blow for blow, stroke for stroke! "Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one, twice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep." "I will show him what great things he must suffer for my name's sake." A man lays up what he will one day have to meet face to face (Acts xxvi. 10). "Many of the saints did I shut up in prison" (Acts xvi. 26). "And when they had lain many stripes upon Paul they cast him into prison." "I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." Do not suppose you can *escape* God. He will let us for a time suppose that we have escaped, but suddenly He will strike us to the root with light, may it not be with lightning! And He will show us that life is not a series of unconnected accidents, but a great and solemn stewardship leading up to judgment, to penalty, or reward.

## XXVI.

### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, make for us, through Jesus Christ our Saviour, entrances into the upper places, where the light is brighter than it is down here. We desire to mount as upon the wings of eagles. Thou hast created in our hearts a passion for better things. Our souls yearn for loftier skies than those which now shelter us. Thou art always calling us away to higher heights and more splendid scenes. In Christ Jesus we know not the rest of mean contentment, but the peace of noble ambition. We would therefore "press toward the mark for the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus." We have not attained, neither are we already perfect, but knowing this and knowing the fulness of the grace that is in Christ Jesus, we would run with patience the race that is set before us.

Thou dost continually surprise us with some new comfort and some unexpected revelation. Thou dost keep the best wine; thou dost not give it unto us; thou hast ever something more behind. Thou art from everlasting to everlasting, and there is no searching of thine understanding. We have heard that power belongeth unto thee; unto thee also, O Lord, belongeth mercy. In thy mercy alone can we live; thy mercy as revealed unto us in thy Son, Son of man, Son of God, God the Son. Help us to see it in all its purity and fulness, and may it be applied to us in the depth of our humiliation. Our help is in God. In no other can help be found but in our infinite Redeemer. Comfort us every day with his grace, and stablish us in his truth. Accept the thanks we bring thee for all pity, and love, and care; and if any before thee wish to offer special thanksgiving for special mercies, the Lord hear the utterance of thankfulness, and return continual blessing.

Be with those who have new prospects opening before them, and new work on hand, hardly knowing how to do it. The Lord give wisdom to those who desire to walk in the way of understanding, and grant unto those who are looking on a confidence in what is coming, and the steadfastness that comes of faith in a living Providence. Deliver us from all fear, and inspire us with that noble trust in thyself which gives us peace even in the very sanctuary of the storm.

The Lord's blessing be upon this assembly. The Lord light the fire at the altar, and send us light from the upper Sanctuary. Amen.

**SAUL SELF-CONTRASTED.****Acts ix. 1-22.**

WHAT wonderful *contrasts* there are in this narrative in reference to the character of Saul of Tarsus! He is not the same man throughout, and yet he is the same. The contrasts are so sharp, and, indeed, so violent, as almost to make him into another man altogether. For example, take the first of these contrasts, and you will find that Saul, who went out to *persecute*, remained to *pray*. The first verse reads, "And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter!" and in the eleventh verse occurs the remarkable expression, "Behold, he prayeth!" He breathed hotly. The breath of his nostrils was a fierce blast that burned the air. How changed in a little time! for his face is turned upward to heaven, and its very *look* is a pleading supplication. What has occurred? These effects must be accounted for. Have they any counterpart in our own observation and experience? Have any of us passed from fierceness to gentleness, from drunkenness to sobriety, from darkness to light, from blasphemy to worship? Then we understand what is meant by this most startling contrast. There may be others who have advanced so quietly and gradually as to find no such contrast in their own consciousness and experience; but we must not judge the experience of the whole by the experience of the part. This is precisely the work which Christianity undertakes to do. It undertakes to cool your breath, to take the fire out of your blood, to subdue your rancour and your malignity, and to clasp your hands in childlike plea and prayer at your Father's feet. Such is the continual miracle of Christianity. The religion of Jesus Christ would have nothing to do if this were not to be accomplished. Jesus makes the lion lie down with the lamb, and he causes the child to hold the fierce beast, and to put its hand with impunity on the cockatrice den. Other miracles he has ceased to perform, but this continual and infinite surprise is the standing miracle and the standing testimony of Christ.

Take the second contrast, which is quite as remarkable. When Saul was a Pharisee he *persecuted*; when Saul became a Christian we read in the twenty-second verse that he "*proved.*" How many



miles of the moral kind lie between the word "persecuted" and the word "proved"? Yet this is distinctly in the line of Christian purpose and heavenly intent. As a Pharisee he said, "Destroy Christianity, by destroying Christians. Bind them; put an end to this pestilence. Do not stand it any longer. Open your prison doors, and I will fill your dungeons, and we will bring this new and mischievous heresy to a speedy termination." Such was his first policy. Having seen Jesus, and felt his touch, and entered into his Spirit, what does he say? Does he now say, "The persecution must be turned in the other direction; I have been persecuting the wrong parties; now I find it is you Jews, Pharisees, Sadducees, that must be manacled and fettered and put an end to. I change my policy, and I persecute *you*, every man and woman of you"? Nothing of the kind. Observe this miracle, admire it, and let it stand before you as an argument invincible and complete. What is Saul's tone now? Standing with the scrolls open before him, he reasons and mightily contends; he becomes a vehement and luminous speaker of Christian truth. He increases the more in strength, proving that this is the Christ. Has all the persecuting temper gone? Yes, every whit of it. Why did he not prove to the Christians, in his unconverted state, that they were mistaken? When he was not a converted man, he never thought of "proving" anything. He had a rough, short, and easy method with heretics—stab them, burn them, drown them, bind them in darkness, and let them die of hunger! Now that he is a converted man, he becomes a reasoner. He stands up with an argument as his only weapon; persuasion as his only iron; entreaty and supplication as the only chains with which he would bind his opponents. What has happened? Something vital must have occurred. Is there not a counterpart of all this in our own individual experience, and in civilized history? Do not men always begin vulgarly, and end with refinement? Is not the first rough argument a thrust with cold iron, or a blow with clenched fist? Does not history teach us that such methods are utterly unavailing in the extinction or the final arrest of erroneous teaching? Christianity is a moral plea. Christianity burns no man. Wherein professing Christians have resorted to the block and the stake, and to evil instruments, they have proved disloyal to their Master, and they have forgotten the spirit of his cross. Christianity is a

plea, a persuasion, an appeal, an address to reason, conscience, heart, and to everything that makes a man a Man. Christianity uses no force, and asks for no force to be used on its behalf. You cannot make men pray by force of arms. You cannot drive your children to church, except in the narrowest and shallowest sense of the term. You may convince men of their error, and lead men to the sanctuary, and, through the confidence of their reason and their higher sentiments, you may conduct them to your own noblest conclusions. How far is it from *persecuting* to *praying*? From *threatening* and *slaughter* to *proving*? That distance Christ took Saul, who only meant to go from Jerusalem to Damascus, some hundred and thirty-six miles. Christ took him a longer journey; he swept him round the whole circle of possibility. He made him accomplish the entire journey which lies between persecution and prayer, slaughter and argument. It is thus that Jesus Christ makes us do more than we intended to do. He meets us on the way of our own choice, and graciously takes us on a way of his own.

Look at the third contrast, which is as notable as the other two. In the opening of the narrative Saul was a strong man, the strongest of the band; the chief, without whose presence the band would dissolve. His nostrils are dilated with anger: his eye burns with a fire that expresses the supreme purpose of his heart. Nothing stands between him and the accomplishment of his purpose. The caravan road from Jerusalem to Damascus, supposing that he took that road, required some six days to traverse it. Saul knew not the lapse of time, so high-strung was his energy, and so resolute his purpose. And in this same narrative, not further on than the eighth verse, we read of the great persecutor that "they led him by the hand." What has happened? We thought he would have gone into the city like a storm; and he went in like a blind beggar! We thought he would have been met at the city gate as the great destroyer of heresy; and he was led by the hand like a helpless cripple! Woe unto the strength that is not heaven-born! Such so-called power will wither away. When we are weak then are we strong. Saul will one day teach us that very doctrine. Really understood, Saul was a stronger man when he was being led by the hand than when he breathed out threatenings

and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord. You are mightier when you pray than when you persecute. You are stronger men when you prove your argument than when you seek to smite your opponent. Something will come of this. Such violences have high moral issues.

Saul led by the hand ; then why need we be ashamed of the same process ? Saul began feebly ; why should we hesitate to begin our Church service on a very small scale ? Saul led by the hand ; then who will despise the day of small things ? Presently he will increase in strength, the right strength, the power that has deep roots ; not the power of transient fury, but the solid and tranquil strength of complete repose. " Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ ;" and remember that the mightiest chief under Christ that ever led the Christian hosts was conducted by friendly and compassionate men into the city which he intended to devastate.

Turning to another aspect of the case, we see two or three most beautiful and pathetic *glimpses of Jesus Christ Himself*. He ascended, yet he said, " I am with you always, even unto the end of the age." There we find him leaving, yet not leaving ; not visible, yet watchful ; looking upon Saul every day, and looking at the same time upon his redeemed Church night and day, the whole year round. Events are not happening without his knowledge ; the story of all the ages is written in heaven. He knows your persecuting purpose ; he understands well enough what you are doing to interrupt the cause of truth and the progress of Christian knowledge. Jesus Christ knows all your antagonistic plans, thoughts, purposes, and devices. His eye is upon you. As for you Christians, he knows your sufferings, your oppositions, your daily contentions, your painful striving ; he knows exactly through how much tribulation you are moving onward to the kingdom.

Not only is he living and watchful, but, in the case of Saul himself, Jesus Christ was *compassionate*. Listen to the words which he addressed to Saul : " It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." He pitied the poor ox that struck its limbs against the sharp and piercing goads. There is nothing destructive in this criticism. There is the spirit of Christ in this remark. Yea,

this expostulation repeats the prayer of his dying breath, and shows him to be "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." He does not bind Saul with his own chain; he throws upon him the happy spell of victorious love.

Not only is he living, watchful, and compassionate, he is *consistent*. He said to Ananias, "I will show him what great things he must suffer for my name's sake. When Jesus called his disciples to him, and ordained them to go out into the world, he laid before them a black picture; he kept back nothing of the darkness. He told his disciples that they would be persecuted, dragged up before the authorities and cruelly treated; and now, when he comes to add another to the number, he repeats the ordination charge which he addressed to the first band.

All these things were seen in a *vision*. Say some of you, "We have no visions now. Have we not? How can we? We may eat and drink all visions away. The glutton and the drunkard can have nothing but nightmare. A materialistic age can only have a materialistic religion. If men will satisfy every appetite, indulge every desire to satiety, turn the day into night, and the night into a long revel, they cannot wonder if the vision should have departed from their life. We may grieve the Spirit, we may quench the Spirit; we may so eat, and drink, and live as to divest the mind of its wings, and becloud the whole horizon of the fancy. But is it *true* that the vision has ceased? It may be so within a narrow sense; but not in its true spiritual intent and thought. Even now we speak about strong impressions, impulses we cannot account for, movements, desires of the mind which lie beyond our control. Even now we are startled by unexpected combinations of events. Even now we have a mysterious side to life, as well as an obvious and patent side. What if the religious mind should see in such realities the continued Presence and the continued Vision which gladdened the early Church? If you would see the spiritual, you must keep down the material. If you would have visions, you must banish the basely substantial. If you would have high dreamings and noble revelations, you must mortify the flesh.

See from this conversion how true it is that Christianity does not merely alter a man's *intellectual views* or *modify* a man's moral prejudices. Christianity never makes a *little* alteration in a man's thinking and action. Christianity makes *new hearts*, new creatures, and not new plans and new habits only. Other reformers may change a habit now and again, may modify a prejudice, attemper a purpose with some benign and gracious intent ; but this Redeemer, who gave himself the Just for the unjust, who bought with the blood of his own heart, does not make a *little* difference in our intellectual attitude and our moral purpose. He wants us to be *born again*. "If any man be in Christ Jesus he is a new creature ; old things have passed away, and all things have become new." There drop from his eyes "as it were scales," and, with a pure heart, he sees a pure God.

## XXVII.

### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we have come through rugged places that we might enter into thy house. The week has been as a wilderness, and all its days have been stony places, yet all the while we have been set in the direction of God's house, and to-day we feel its holy peace. Give us rest in thy house, thou God of saints. Here may we know the mystery of completeness, which is the mystery of peace. Make us whole in Christ; complete in him; wanting in nothing, so that we may stand before thee perfect men in Christ Jesus. Thou knowest us altogether; where we are strong, and where we are weak, the door which the devil cannot open, and the gate through which he comes with infinite familiarity. Our prayer is that we may put on the whole armour of God. The helmet and the shield, the sword and the girdle, the breast-plate and the sandals, so that we may be able to stand in the evil day, and having done all to stand. Thy purpose concerning us is our salvation, complete and everlasting. May we be co-workers with thee, labourers together with God. In our souls may thou find sweet consent to thy purposes and a ready obedience to all thy will. We would that we might in Christ Jesus receive our sight. We are blind and cannot see afar off by reason of our sin. Our desire is that as it were scales might fall from our eyes that we may see the beauty of holiness and the glory of thy kingdom. Charmed and fascinated by this beauty we shall be blind to all other attractions, and our life shall be absorbed in the worship of thy Cross and Crown, O Christ of God! We walk before thee because of thy grace. It is of thy mercy that we are not consumed. We live in thy compassion. Without thy mercy we cannot live. Thy tender mercies are over all thy works. Behold, are they not the light and the beauty of everything; yea, in thy compassion the whole creation glistens as with the dew of the morning. Reveal thyself to us every day; in some new vision of glory, or with some new hint of beauty. And thus draw us every one towards thyself in an upward line, in the ascent of which our strength shall grow. Beautiful is the life baptized of heaven. Sweet the service inspired by thy love and comforted by thy grace. Lead us into the mystery of more faithful homage, and in the rendering of our worship may we see heaven opened.

Thou knowest what we would say if we could. Thou understandest well that it is not in speech to tell the secret of the heart. We bless thee for words, yet are we chafed by them. For through them we cannot tell

what we want to say, and we are shocked by their rudeness when they shape themselves in articulate prayers. Read the heart, search the spirit. Hold thy candle over the deepest abysses of our nature, and hear each when he says, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee." Regard us as pastor and people, heads of houses and families, men engaged in merchandize and women in all the silent heroisms of the house, and the Lord send his blessing upon the whole company like an impartial rain. May every soul be blessed, may morn arise upon every life, may the saddest see the returning angel of joy, and may the weakest know that the Deliverer is near at hand. Be the physician of every family, the visitor from heaven of every household, the comforter of all disconsolateness, and speak a word in season to him that is weary.

Regard the land in which we live, and the lands from which we come. Remember the whole earth, we beseech thee, in tender compassion and love. Son of God, come forth! Prince of all princes, and Saviour of all men, delay not, but come to the world for which thou didst die. Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Amen.

### Acts ix. 32-43.

32. And it came to pass, as Peter [from this point to chapter xii. 18 the narrative is occupied exclusively with the personal work of Peter] passed throughout all quarters [may have included Galilee], he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda [now Ludd].

33. And there he found a certain man named Æneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy.

34. And Peter said unto him, Æneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. [Do for thyself what others have so long done for thee.] And he arose immediately.

35. And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron [a district rather than a town] saw him, and turned to the Lord.

36. Now there was at Joppa [famous in Greek legends as the spot where Andromeda had been bound when she was delivered by Perseus] a certain disciple [no distinction between male and female] named Tabitha [the two names suggesting points of connection with both the Hebrew and the Hellenistic section of the Church], which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works [a favorite formula of Luke, meaning "given up to"] and alms deeds which she did.

37. And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed they laid her in an upper chamber.

38. And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa [nine miles off], and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them.

39. Then [and] Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments ["the coats were the

close-fitting tunics, worn next to the body, the garments the looser outer cloaks that were worn over them"] which Dorcas made, while she was with them.

40. But Peter put them all forth [Matt. ix. 23, 24], and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up.

41. And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive.

42. And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord.

43. And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner.

### SUMMARIZED SERVICE.

HOW did there happen to be any saints at *Lydda*? That place has not come under our attention in our perusal of these apostolic annals. There are saints in unexpected places. Yet, perhaps, not so unexpected if we had read attentively the portions which have already engaged our interest. In the last verse of the preceding chapter we read, "But Philip was found at Azotus; and passing through he preached in all the cities till he came to Cæsarea." *Lydda* lay between Azotus and Cæsarea, and Philip no doubt had called there and preached the word and founded a Christian Society. How *summarily* our work is occasionally mentioned. We put a whole history into a single verse. In one broken sentence we sum up a life-time! There is a cruel condensation which often does not give justice to those who are its subjects. How easily and fluently we read, "But Philip was found at Azotus; and passing through he preached in all the cities till he came to Cæsarea." These are epitomes which God himself must break up into detail. And thus in many a hurried phrase we shall find service and suffering, trial and triumph, which only God can recognise. We hear it said of the minister that he "called at the house and offered prayer." And probably the announcement is accompanied by the annotation that he was there but a few minutes. By the clock it was but a handful of minutes the man was there, but into those minutes he condensed the experience and the pathos of a *life-time*, and in that one brief prayer he spared not the blood of his very heart. Beware of a ruthless condensation. Suspect any epitome which counts but as small



dust the details which makes up the energetic service and the patient suffering of the Christian toiler.

Peter found his way to the saints. By what magnetism? Do we not all find out our other selves in every city to which we go? When the surveyor would find out whether there are metallic strata in the district which he surveys, he takes in his right hand the enclosed magnet, and watching that magnet he sees as he carries it over the surface of the ground how it dips, and says in the dipping, "Here you will find what you are in quest of." He does not need to rip up the sod, and to dig far down. The magnet knows where the metal is, and instantly points to the secret place. It is so in going through the city. One sentence will tell you what company you are in. A look will warn you from that locality, as from a plague-swept district. A tone will open up communication with the soul, and a sigh may reveal the masonry of the heart. Living *constantly* in Christian society we may become unhappily too familiar with its advantages. Could we live for a time with those who do not know Christ, who therefore do not worship Christ, or honour him as the standard of morals and the ultimate appeal, how we should love even the most imperfect Christian we have ever known! "He that is least in the kingdom of God" is greater than the greatest outside that sacred circle. We pine for our own, we like to hear our own language; there is music in the familiar tongue. We fall with easy grace and second naturalness into the ways of the company of which we form a part. Christian brotherhood is the salvation of society. Inside your social constitutions you find the saving factor, the souls that believe, the hearts that pray, the lives that live in sacrifice. It would do some of us good in the very soul if we could be shut up with Bedouins and savages for a few days. How we should then yearn for the Old Church, the customary society, the most defective Christian we ever knew! We have become dainty in our appetites because we have lived upon luxuries up to the point of satiety.

No *names* are given in verse 32. There is something better than a name. There is *character*. There you find no personal renown, no individuality running up into a flashing pinnacle and throwing its superior glory over the commonplace in the midst of which it stands, but you find a *high level* of character, a solid

quantity of moral and spiritual being, and supreme and effective reality. It is towards *that* estate we should constantly be moving, to the great republic of common holiness.

When Peter was in Lydda he found the man who is to be found in every city. *Locally* called Æneas, but *everywhere* called the sick man. Peter "found a certain man named Æneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy. That man is in every city and is never healed, except in the individual instance. The genus remains unhealed—a continual appeal to the Petrine spirit, the apostolic love, the redeemed compassion of the Church. Whom we cannot *heal* we may at least *carry* to the gate of the temple. We have read of the lame man who was carried daily. These are the *secondary* services of life. We are not all in the front rank of the ministry, it is not given to every one of us to speak miracles, but to every one is given the sweet grace of helpfulness in this matter of *carrying* those we cannot *heal*. Because we cannot do the first and supreme class of work, it does not follow that we are to sit idle all the day. You can bring to Æneas the Christian friend, the Christian suppliant, the Christian sympathizer. Aye, there is no grief but one that cannot be mitigated by Christian love. And even that surely may be in the distance touched with somewhat of redemptiveness, of solicitude and pity, even *insanity* itself may have its bed made in its affliction. We hear nothing of Peter's doings at Lydda except this miracle; but as Philip had done much at Lydda without any record having been made of it, so Peter may have done much beside this miracle. The miracle itself was a sermon. For "all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord."

Now we come to another city. In Joppa there dwelt a woman who "was full of good works and alms deeds which she did," and she *died!* How was that? There are some people whom we almost wish would die, and die they will not; nights of frost cannot freeze them, rivers cannot drown them, they have a kind of earthly immortality in their evil doing and in their pestilent mischief, and others whom we want to live always wither and die. They die in the act of giving bread to the hungry. Dorcas may have died with her industrious needle in her fingers—the garment for the poor child half done! There seems to be such a waste of nobility and service in this mysterious Providence. We may be wrong in

that outlook as we are in others. Why should not the good ship land? Why should we shed tears when the noble life-vessel touches the shore? Why not throw up our arms and exclaim, "Hallelujah, glory be to God!" So foolish are we and ignorant. Yet not unnaturally so. Who cannot recall people whom we wish to have with us every day? Without whom the house is no home, apart from whom life is only a daily tarrying for death. It is so that God trains us, prunes us, and prepares us for the wider revelation and the higher service. Peter was sent for. He came the ~~nine~~ <sup>ten</sup> miles to see what could be done. How natural was this. Who does not send for the *strong brother*? To hear that a strong man is not far away is to hear a kind of angel singing in the skies again, saying, "Peace on earth and good will toward men." There are times when the strong man is sent for, and these are times of darkness, trouble, personal, and social despair. But there is always a strong man to send for. Always some other man is stronger than you are, and in Christ his strength belongs to you. In that sense we must have "all things common," and none must say that aught that he has belongs to himself alone. It is in this spirit of Christian communism that we must keep Society from putrefaction and souls from sudden despair. There is a hint of the One who "sticketh closer than a brother." When your house is very dark, send for Jesus. He can walk upon the darkness as upon solid rocks. When your life gives way in sudden weakness, or in painful fear, send in double prayer for Jesus. He can make "a dying bed feel soft as downy pillows are." But you are not the people to wait for such crises in which to invite the Lord's anointed to your house. Send for him *to-day*, when the table is laden with flowers and every corner of the dwelling is ablaze with His own sunlight. Beautiful was the scene in that house at Joppa. "When he was come they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them." How did these *widows* come to be thus associated? Who took any interest in *their* welfare? If you read again the sixth chapter of this book you will find that special arrangements were made for the ministration of the common stock for the needy widows of the Hebrews and the Grecians, and you

will find amongst the seven men appointed to administer that fund the name of *Philip*. So this man lives in his *works*. At Lydda he founded a Christian Society, at Joppa he organized the widows into a society that should receive help from those who were able to give it. Philip does not appear before us in *name*, but he leaves behind him *memorials* of his wisdom and his beneficence.

How is it that we like the coats and the garments even better when the seamstress is dead than we did when she was actually making them? That is a tender mystery in life. It is a fact everywhere. The little child's little toy becomes infinitely precious when the tiny player can no longer handle it. And the two little shoes are the most precious property in the house when the little feet that wore them are set away in God's acre. Let us love one another whilst we *live*! Not a word do I say against the sentiment, which enlarges the actions of the dead, but I would speak for a kind word on behalf of those who are sitting next you and making your own house glad by their deft fingers and their loving hearts.

Now we come to the first miracle of the kind to which apostolic strength was summoned. Up to this time the Apostles had been healing ankle-bones, healing the palsy and divers diseases, and casting out unclean spirits, but now a mightier tyrant looks them in the face. For the first time must the Apostles grapple without the visible Christ with actual DEATH. We may well pause here in the excitement of a great anxiety. Memory rushes upon the heart like a gracious flood as we read these words, "but Peter put them all forth." That was what *Christ* did! There is the true imitation of the Lord. Some battles may be fought in *public*, others have to be fought in *solitude*, so "Peter put them all forth." "Thou when thou prayest enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut the door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which is in secret, shall reward thee openly." So "Peter put them all forth," and kneeled down and prayed. Have you ever prayed in the death chamber with none there but the dead friend? How eloquent has been your dumbness, how mighty a rhetoric slumber in your blinding tears! When you were weak then were you strong. "And,"—oh, conjunctive that makes one tremble—"turning to the body," now is the critical

moment, "said, Tabitha, arise." "And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up." Let your *miracles* come through your *prayers*. Let your prayers always end in the amen of a miracle. What is the use of your solitude and your prayer, your long, intense, mighty communion with God, if when you turn round you cannot work some miracle of love?

## XXVIII.

### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou hast shewn us great and marvellous things in thy Word to-day. We have read a noble Psalm, and have heard of One who shall come down like rain upon the mown grass and as showers that water the earth. We have heard of One coming who shall save the poor and the needy, and be the helper of him that hath no friend. Our hearts have risen to this sublime music, and our expectation has heightened as we have looked for him in whom all nations shall be blessed. Behold, he is amongst us, even now. We have seen the prints of the nails in his hands, and we have thrust our hands into his side. We know now of whom the Psalmist spake; surely not of his own son, but of a greater still, the Son of God, the Solomon of the Universe, the Wisdom Divine. He said he would give us rest. He had the tongue of the learned that could speak a word in season to him that was weary. He bore our sins and carried them in his own body on the tree. He was wounded for our transgressions. From his lips we heard the Beatitudes, than which there are no tenderer words in all thy heaven. He gave himself for us, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us unto God. We would run unto him. We would outstretch our arms to him in token of waiting, and needing, and loving. May we this day find him as we have never found him before; with some new beauty shining on his countenance, and some new tone of music sounding and thrilling in his voice. We have come to seek Jesus, assured that we shall find him. We love him because he first loved us. We do not seek him, for he has himself come to seek and to save the lost. We are lost. We have turned every one to his own way. We have run greedily in paths forbidden, and have done the evil work with both hands earnestly, but Jesus Christ has come after us. He will find us, and the Universe for which he died shall live for him. We will think of thy mercy till our hearts glow with fire that cannot consume them. Thy compassions are new every morning. As for thy tears of pity, they are more than the dews of the night. Thy heart goeth out after us; through all cloud, and mist, and darkness of gloom. Thou dost love us and live for us, and continually send thine angels after us. What is man that thou art mindful of him? Is not his breath in his nostrils? and is he not blown away by the scornful wind? Doth he not live to die? We bless thee for all Christian hope. We thank thee for the light within the light, the glory hidden behind the dawn. Thou hast yet more light to shed upon our life, and thou wilt give it beam by beam as our poor

vision may be able to receive it. Oh, give us light ! Lord, spare not the gift of light ! Lord, help us to walk in the light ! Enable us at all times to be as the children of the day, and may thy glory burn in us and shine forth from us upon all by whom we are encircled.

Thou knowest our heart's great hunger. The mystery of our spirit is an open revelation to thine eyes. How poor we are, frail, and faint, and naturally infirm. There is no strength in us. Help us, therefore, knowing our weakness, to abide in Christ, and to seek in him that which we have not in ourselves.

We lovingly commend one another to thy blessing. Hear the strong praying for the weak. Listen to those who form an altar of light, pray for those who are wandering in great darkness. Hear the mother's prayer for the castaway child. See the father's dumb entreaty written upon every line of his face as he thinks of one for whom he dares no longer pray. The Lord hear the praises of the glad, and the sighing of those who are ill at ease. As for the little children, take them up in thine arms, and one embrace of thine shall be the benediction of a life-time. Dry the tears, no other hand can touch. Lead the blind by a way that they know not, with great comfortings from heaven ; consolation upon consolation, like wave upon wave ; cause us to forget our sorrows and our daily grief.

Thy Kingdom come, O Christ ! Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven, thou God and Father of us all ! Amen.

### Acts x.

1. There was a certain man in Cæsarea [the usual residence of the Roman Procurator, and consequently garrisoned by Roman troops] called Cornelius, a centurion [commanding the sixtieth part of a legion] of the band called the Italian band.

2. A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people [to the Jews of Cæsarea, as distinct from the Gentiles], and prayed to God alway.

3. He saw in a vision evidently [the adverb here is most important] about the ninth hour [when the evening sacrifice was offered in the temple] of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius.

4. And when he looked on him he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord ? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial [emphatically a sacrificial and liturgical word] before God.

5. And now send men to Joppa [about thirty miles off], and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter :

6. He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side : he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.

7. And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he

called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually ;

8. And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.

9. On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop [the house of the tanner was an upper room] to pray about the sixth hour :

10. And he became very hungry, and would have eaten : but while they made ready, he fell into a trance [an ecstasy].

11. And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners [bound by four ends], and let down to the earth :

12. Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.

13. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter ; kill, and eat.

14. But Peter said, Not so, Lord [a resistance characteristic of Peter—Luke xvi. 32] ; for I have never eaten anything that is common [in the sense of defiled] or unclean.

15. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.

16. This was done thrice [the mystic token of a complete ratification] : and the vessel was received up again into heaven.

17. Now while Peter doubted [was much perplexed] in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate [porch].

18. And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there.

19. [Now. The original has this conjunction.] While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee.

20. Arise, therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing : for I have sent them.

21. Then [and] Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius ; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek : what is the cause wherefore ye are come ? [The last seven words are not in the oldest Greek texts.]

22. And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God [there is no Greek for "from God," but the verb is constantly used of messages from above] by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee.

23. Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren [six in number] from Joppa accompanied him.

24. And the morrow after they entered into Cæsarea. [Their road lay



all the way along the coast.] And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends.

25. And as Peter was coming in [that is, before he entered], Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him [the extremest form of eastern homage].

26. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up : I myself also am a man.

27. And as he talked with him [implying a conversation of some length], he went in [so that the previous part of the interview had been without], and found many that were come together.

28. And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing [from the standpoint of traditional pharisaism] for a man that is a Jew to keep company [to join himself], or come unto one of another nation ; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

29. Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for ; I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me ?

30. And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour ; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing [Rev. xv. 6].

31. And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had for remembrance in the sight of God.

32. Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter ; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side : who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee [those words are not in the oldest manuscript].

33. Immediately therefore I sent to thee : and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear [in this word there is implied the intention to *obey*] all things that are commanded thee of God.

34. Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive [I am fully convinced] that God is no respecter of persons :

35. But in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him [acceptable unto him].

36. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace [Isaiah lii. 7] by Jesus Christ : (He is Lord of all) :

37. That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judæa, and began from Galilee [where Christ's ministerial life commenced] after the baptism which John preached :

38. How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power ; who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil ; for God was with him.

39. And we [a form of speech which has the force of emphatic addition] are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem ; whom they slew and hanged on a tree :

40. Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly [gave him to be manifest] ;

41. Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.

42. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.

43. To him give all the prophets witness [He is not an invented Christ], that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

44. While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.

45. And they of the circumcision [the six Jewish Christians mentioned, xi. 12] which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.

46. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter,

47. Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?

48. And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

## THE CONVERSION OF THE GENTILES.

YOU have noticed no doubt how many *dramatic* chapters there are in the sacred record. There are three that stand out with special prominence, and to my mind, singular significance. Take, for example, the first chapter of Genesis. What movement, what continual and growing excitement! How worlds are made, and light is parted, and arrangements are completed as if some stupendous event were about to transpire! There is no chapter in the Scriptures more intensely dramatic than the very first chapter in the Bible. There is no *rest* in it. It is from end to end all palpitation, movement, expectancy, and high color. Something is going to happen! The secret is revealed in these words, and God said, "Let us make MAN." Thus one creation prepares for another, and even necessitates another, because it would without that other be incomplete and self-dissatisfied. Take, again, the first chapter in the Gospel of Matthew. There you have the same chapter repeated under more human and historic conditions. The first chapter of Matthew is the first chapter of Genesis turned into human history. There again you have that movement, urgency, and great rapidity. Things are happen-

ing every moment. Surely we shall hear upon the door a hand, the very knocking of which may imply that the KING is not far off. The reading of the genealogical record *means* something. The secret is revealed in the statement that JESUS was born to save His people from their sins. But notice how intensely *dramatic* both the chapters are, and how as you read both you feel that you are being *prepared* for something that is ahead, and if you finished your reading one verse too soon you would feel as if the chapter were a broken column or an incomplete anthem. The heart would say, What is the rest? What more? This cannot be all. But when the *Man* in the first chapter of Genesis stands up, we say, "This is the explanation!" And when in the first chapter of Matthew One is called EMMANUEL, heaven has kissed earth in token of reconciliation and blessing yet to come. The third chapter, which is in worthy succession, is the tenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. What movement, what dreaming and visioning and singular combination of events! What novelty of thought, what audacity of progress! What is the meaning of it all? Having read the first chapter of Genesis, I felt that something was going to happen, and the first chapter of Matthew, that a great event was going to be ushered into history; and now in the tenth chapter of the Acts I feel that all these visions and trances must lead to something. What is it? The secret is revealed in these words—worthy to be written with a sunbeam on heaven's most cloudless blue!—"God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is accepted of Him." In all the three dramatic chapters, therefore, I find a result which explains the process and satisfies the imagination.

What *unconscious* preparations are proceeding in life! We cannot tell what we do. No occasion ends in itself as a separate and independent event. We know not what a day may bring forth, but to-morrow will certainly bring forth the seed of to-day. "What I say unto one," said Christ, "I say unto all, *watch*." Always know that you are being prepared for some Divine issue. Your coming to church to-day may be the making of you! The introduction to a friend this morning may change every aspect of your coming history! The grave you dug but yesterday may be the altar at which your first heart-prayer was uttered! How won-

drously Simon Peter was prepared for this marvellous outcoming of Divine purpose. We read in the preceding chapter, in the very last verse of it, that Simon Peter "tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner." He has got *so far* on the road to the Gentiles. A Jew of Peter's temper who could lodge with a *tanner*, may to-morrow go to convert a Gentile. God fixes lodgings. Here we cannot but recall what we have read in Jewish history regarding the relation of the superior Jews to the occupation of a tanner. Modern writers have related instances of a prejudice which to the western mind must be simply preposterous. We have not, however, to judge things from our own historical standpoint, but from the civilization to which they specially belong. Now, consider the relation of the superior Jews to the occupation of a tanner. We are indebted to modern writers for our instances. An ancient Rabbi said, "It is impossible that the world can do without tanners, but woe unto that man who is a tanner." This is the fact upon which your reasoning must be based. Not what *you* think of the occupation of a tanner, but what the *Jews* thought of it, and then remember that Simon Peter, primate of the Apostles, the senior disciple, lodged with one Simon a tanner! The address is vaguely given—"whose house is by the seaside." The reason being that the Jews would not have tanneries in the towns. Tanneries were a necessity—a hated and detested necessity—but they must be kept as far out of the town as possible—in the sea, if the imperious Jews could have had their way! The tanner was not allowed to have his place of business within fifty cubits of a town. He was kept at a greater distance still if he happened to pursue his trade at the *west end* of a town. If a man married without telling his bride that he was a tanner, she could instantly demand release from the nuptial vow. The law which provided that the childless widow was to marry the brother of a deceased husband was actually set aside in the event of that brother following the occupation of a tanner. You see then how *stubborn* were the prejudices which the higher Jews entertained against the occupation of tanning, and yet we read as if it involved no extraordinary principle or secret, that Peter lodged or "tarried many days with one Simon a *tanner*." It means *everything*, there is a *revolution* in these words. There is nothing sublimer in history than is implied in the very last verse of the ninth chapter,

“ He tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner.” This makes a breach in the wall, a stone wall, iron-bound, buttressed with the traditions of generations ; this is a breach in the wall that will widen until the whole falls, and man will everywhere hail man as brother !

The point to be observed in this particular study is, how *unconsciously* men are being prepared for higher communications, wider services, deeper suffering, nobler sympathy. God leads us on step by step. He will send a stubborn Jew who had never eaten anything common or unclean to lodge with one Simon a tanner. Having got him *so far* on the road, He will send him to a *Gentile* called Cornelius. The *tanner* is on the road towards the *Centurion* ! We do not *jump* to conclusions in Divine Providence. We go forward *a step at a time*, and we never know how far we have advanced until we come to the *last* step, and find that it is but a step. Measured from the starting point it is a line longer than miles, but measured by the very *last thing* we did, it is only a *step*. This is *God's* way. This is how He trains *you*, dear young children, for the last step which we now call death. Now in this early morning of your young life you do not *want* to die. But little by little, day by day, suffering by suffering, trial by trial, loss by loss, a time will come when even you will say, “ I have a desire to depart.” God deals thus gradually and gently with us. Sometimes His providences seem to be *abrupt* and even violent, but in reality they move along a gradation settled and adjusted by the tenderest love. Things that are impossible to you *to-day* will be the commonplaces of *to-morrow*. You do not speak to the farthest-off man at once ; he could not hear you ; your voice would be strained in the abortive effort to reach him at that great social distance ; but you speak to the man who is *next* to you, and then to the one following, and so a man at a time, you move on until the distance is traversed and he who was once *far off* has been brought *nigh* ! Upon this daily and inevitable process rests your confidence that prejudice of the most stubborn kind shall be broken down. Boundaries which separate man from man shall be obliterated. Tradition shall go down before the advancing tide of philanthropy, and one day—golden day—we shall know that every land is home and every man is brother !

What mysterious *combinations* of experiences and events are con-

tinually taking place. Cornelius "saw in a vision evidently," "an angel of God coming in to him." Peter fell into a trance and heard a voice. That is our daily life. We cannot be shut up within the four corners of a rude and vulgar materialism. God has still over us the mysterious reign of *dreams*. We have before had occasion to say that dreams *enlarge* our life. Why wonder if dreams will *come* true, when dreams *are* true? You *had* the dream. Why ask if it will *come* true? You have forgotten the purpose and mission of dreams. You should have *spoken* to the angels, you should have said, "What is it, Lord?" You should even have *contradicted* the angel, and said, "Not so, Lord," and then further conversation would have ensued. Instead of that you continue to sleep, and in the morning ask if dreams *come* true! You had your chance, and missed it. The night is full of crowds. In the infinite galleries of the night the angels walk, visiting the beloved of God. Dreams of your own causing are not the dreams we are now speaking about. Physical nightmare is one thing, spiritual vision and clairvoyance, the sight of the soul, is another. But even apart from the ministry of the night, the secret coming, and shining, and talking of the angels, we have in our day-dreams events sufficiently spiritually mysterious to touch the sentiment that inspires the religious imagination. "How strange," say we, "that it should have been so." "How remarkable that our letters should have crossed." "Why at the very time I was doing this you must have been coming to me. How singular!" You may call it merely *singular* if you please, but that is an *irreligious* way of talking about human history and divine issues. It was not an *accident*. I want to cleanse my life of all mere accidents, and to feel that my down-sitting and my up-rising, and my out-going, my in-coming are matters of importance in heaven,—that the very hairs of my head are all numbered! Why do we belittle our experience and deplete it of everything that could give nobility, and enlargement, and apocalypse to our highest nature? Rather be it mine to say the vision was from heaven, and an angel spake to me, than to vulgarize the universe and to find in it nothing that I cannot mark with plain figures.

Here we have a *higher law* swallowing up a *lower one*, "God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean." It requires GOD to show that to some men. This is

nothing short of a Divine revelation—to see the MAN within the *creature*. I see the *figure*, but there is something *behind* it ; I see the poor *clothing*, the unkempt body—there is something *behind* ! I see the roughness, rudeness—there is something behind. A MAN ! Said the murmuring multitude respecting Zacchæus, “ Christ hath gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.” But Jesus called the sinner, “ a son of Abraham.” He saw the figure within the figure, the ideal within the factual, the spiritual within the material. Through the window of the eye he saw the guest of the house, beautiful as a lost angel, worthful as a creation of God ! Lord, open our eyes that we may see one another !

Christianity has come to eat up and absorb all our little laws and to set us under a nobler legislation. Said Christ, “ Who is my mother, and who are my brethren ?” And turning to His disciples, he said, “ Whosoever doeth the will of my Father that is in heaven, the same is my mother, and sister, and brother.” We are under the foolish notion that a man is a brother because we were born of the same mother. Nothing of the kind. There may be no greater stranger in the universe than the one born of the same mother. *They* are brothers who are one in *soul*, one in *conviction*, one in *hope* ! The others are but animals, a blood relationship that may be dissolved because of moral considerations, but no man can repudiate intellectual brotherhood, the masonry of the soul, the joy that is felt in a common prayer and a common obedience. This lesson is not fitted for to-day. Only he that hath ears to hear can hear it. At present it will have no popularity—yea, it will only have partial acceptance ; yet I would write it down, and commit it to the judgment of the future, that brotherhood is spiritual not physical, and that the true relationship is one of sympathy and of religious unity—a common feeling of common loyalty to a common Lord.

## XXIX.

### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, our life is thine. When we die in the Lord surely we return unto thee, and give thee that which is thine own. We bless thee for life, notwithstanding its daily burden and its continual sorrow. Thou hast wrought into the mystery of life a subtle joy which fills the heart with an emotion which we would might abide there for ever. In the midst of life we are in death, but death itself is swallowed up in victory. In Christ Jesus we can say to Death, "where is thy sting? grave, where is thy victory?" Jesus Christ hath abolished death, and in him, our Priest and Saviour, we are more than conquerors. In death we have found life. That which we sow is not quickened except it die. Help us to seize this great truth with all the energy of love, and with all the emotion of triumphant faith, that death may have no more dominion over us. Thou art our God and Father; a sanctuary of defence, and a pavilion of daily protection. Thou art unto us as a high rock, whose cooling shadow refreshes us at high noon. We come to thee always through Jesus Christ the righteous. He is our propitiation, our living answer to an accusing law, and our infinite defence against a righteous vengeance.

We commend to thee all to whom this is a day of mournful suffering. We recall the images of our friends and make them live before the eye of a loving memory. We hear their cheering voices; we feel the contact of their friendly hands, and we would now in spirit unite with them in the higher song of the higher sanctuary.

"They sing the Lamb in hymns above,  
And we in hymns below."

The subject is the same and unchangeable. When we see thee as thou art we'll give thee nobler praise. Comfort those who remain. Recall to their memory all thine exceeding great and precious promises. Show them that the angel is at the grave awaiting their coming, and that his presence there is a pledge of a resurrection to be accomplished by the power of Christ. Recall all that is dearest, sweetest, tenderest in the memory of our friends who have joined the upper band, and may we vehemently desire to be united to the blood-bought host and sin no more. As for those of us who remain, may we be doubly industrious. As the ranks become thinner, may those who are left fight with redoubled strength and watch with keener vigilance. Cause some who are young and strong to come forward and take the places of those who have been



called higher, that thus the army of Christ may suffer no loss, and its leadership may be continually reinforced. We are here but for a moment, presently there will be a cry, "Behold the Bridegroom cometh! go ye out to meet him." May we be amongst those whose lamps will be a flame, and who shall be ready in heart and hand to meet the only One whose presence is heaven. We will see thee presently face to face, and then will speak further with thee. To-day we must be content with these few brief broken words, with references that are a pain to themselves because of their incompleteness. Yea, with sentences pained with much agony because they cannot tell the secret which gives life to our inmost hope.

We bless thee for friends returned from places far away. They come with cheerful countenances, with loving eyes, and with new tones of trust and love in their voices. So gather us altogether from across the seas, and rivers, and wildernesses, and make of us at last in Christ Jesus, Thy Son, one house from which no foot shall ever wander. Amen.

### Acts xi. 1-18.

1. And the apostles and brethren that were in Judæa heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. [The context implies that the tidings travelled, while Peter remained at Cæsarea, first probably to Joppa and Lydda, and afterwards to Jerusalem.]

2. And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended [the tense implies continuous or repeated discussion] with him,

3. Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised [men with a fore-skin], and didst eat with them.

4. But Peter rehearsed [began and set forth] the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying,

5. I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me:

6. Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.

7. And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat.

8. But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth.

9. But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.

10. And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven.

11. And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Cæsarea unto me.

12. And the spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. [The

Greek verb has a special force as being the same as that for "contended" in v. 2.] Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house :

13. And he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter ;

14. Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.

15. And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning.

16. Then remembered I the word of the Lord [ch. i. 5], how that he said, John indeed baptized with water ; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.

17. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ [the Greek construction gives a somewhat different meaning : *If then God gave to the man equal gift as to us, upon their believing*]; what was I, that I could withstand God ? [the Greek gives a complex question, Who was I, able to withstand God ?]

18. When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God [the difference of tenses in the two Greek verbs implies that they first held their peace, and then began a continuous utterance of praise], saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

### ENLARGEMENT OF IDEAS.

"AND the apostles and brethren that were in Judæa heard that the Gentiles had also received the Word of God." This little common word "ALSO" is most pathetic. We find pathos sometimes in little words and in strange connections. In this instance it means more and more—further and further. The light is brightening, and the lands that are afar off are enjoying its glory. The word "ALSO" is, I say, but a common little word in many connections, but in this particular connection it is the creation of a new world, an annexation of new kingdoms and provinces to the central empire of Emmanuel. The same word occurs in the eighteenth verse, wherein the Jews said, glorifying God, "Then hath God ALSO to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." The keyword of Christianity is *Enlargement*—enclosure, continual extension of love and mercy, host upon host, army upon army, till the whole universe is one Church, and its voice one song. Do not believe in any view of Christianity that *excludes* anybody. Christianity came not to exclude men, but to include

them. Let that be a continual test when you are examining religious faiths, and religious propositions and plans. The theology that would shut out from Christ's heart any human creature is a bad theology—is a lie! Election is not *exclusive*, but inclusive. The ninth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans does not *shut out* any man who would come to Christ: it tells the Jews, in startling language, that God is greater than they are, and that in his great love he is going to gather into one *all* the lands and peoples of the earth. Take instances of the Divine election such as we can understand, and you will see how true is this doctrine in its higher relation. God elects *one day* in the week; does he thereby *reprobate* the remaining days? Do the six poor cold exiled days gather around the elected seventh, and say, "The way of the Lord is not equal; you have been chosen and we have been shut out; God has blessed and crowned *you*, and left us without benediction and coronation?" Nothing of the kind. Why does God elect the *one day*? To get at the *whole six* that are outside it. He does not say, "Remember Monday to keep it holy;" he says "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy;" for no man can keep *Sunday* holy without keeping the *whole six days* holy also. You cannot keep one day holy and make the other profane. Given a Sabbath of the real kind, an open door into heaven, a highway on which we meet the angels, a garden path through the very paradise of God, and the *whole week* partakes of its nature—reflects its love, vibrates with its music, and is glad with its joy.

Take the case of the human family. God made *one man*, but he made that man that in him he might make *all* men. God elected *one family*, that through one family he might bless *all the families* of the earth. And this idea of his love has been perverted; this wine of heaven has been turned into sourness; the very election that should have doubled the Gospel beauty, as the river throws back the sky, has been turned into an occasion of controversy and separation, and of mutual misunderstanding, and devils have laughed at the divisions of Christendom.

Here we have the marvellous power of *prejudice*. "When Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him." They had been trained in a certain view, and they were faithful to that view; so far of course they were not to be blamed, for they believed that they alone had the truth, and

so believing they contended valiantly for it. The power of prejudice is probably the greatest power under which human life withers. The man against whom you have a prejudice can do no good. If required to vindicate your unfriendly attitude by fair and equitable argument, you would not have one word to say, but that you do not *like* the man ; you are turned against him ; he repels you in some way or other, reasonable or unreasonable, and that prejudice will be more difficult to conquer and eradicate than any number of *reasons* which you could advance in fair language. Here was a sect that could lay its arms upon its breast, drink in its own Christian satisfaction, and let all the world go down to the devil without one moment's remorse. Any religion that is fully comprehended, that will enable a man to do that is diabolical. There are some people in Christian countries to-day who, imagining themselves to be the chosen favourites of heaven, can allow all outsiders to go down to darkness without ever troubling them on their descending way. But for the spirit of Christ, I could call down fire from heaven upon such sectarians ! Yet it is possible—yea, it is real—yea, more, it is the curse of Christian society. To see what we have seen of narrow-minded, bloodless men, pale, shrivelled, hunger-bitten, thinking that *they* had so attracted the Divine notice as to become the favourites of a discriminating Heaven, and that others had gone to live eternally with the devil because of a Divine decree ! Personally I know of nothing in Sodom, or in Gomorrah, so terrible as such a damnable self-complacency. “ God so loved the WORLD that he gave his only begotten Son, that WHOSOEVER believeth in him might 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.” If I have to-day to elect my Gospel, I elect that, WHO-SOEVER, EVERY CREATURE under heaven, a WORLD redeemed, and not a little company selected. Christianity destroys all complacencies. Christianity tells the most self-complacent man amongst us that the very poorest human creature that crawls on the streets is his *brother*. Nowhere does the Christian Gospel speak one *contemptuous* word of any human creature. Never did Christ say to any one, “ You are too bad.” No ; as the sins piled themselves one upon another, blackening the blue heavens with their shadow, he said, “ Thy sins, which are many, are all for-

given thee." How is it, then, that the human heart shuts out this human religion—a religion that takes up the weak, that represents the dumb, that looks for what the blind have lost, and turns away with haughty independence from every man that would offer it the cruelty of his patronage? Surely this is a mystery to the angels!

We think "they that were of the circumcision" is a sentence which refers to people that lived many centuries ago. It is not; it is a sentence which includes men and women who are breathing in this house at this moment, and who are to be found under every ecclesiastical roof in the world. Every one of us has his own "circumcision." Each says, "We must draw the line somewhere." So say I. I would lay my line on GOD'S LOVE! God did not make me a line-layer. He made me a minister of his grace, and wherein any word of mine is less than God's love, reject my unholy Gospel, for Gospel it is none—only a word that would wither and blight the heart of man. Some men's "circumcision" is the regularly-turned-out *creed*, numbered, partly written in capitals, partly in italics, itemed, and arranged, weighed out, defined, indexed, settled. If you believe *this* creed you are good, if you doubt it you are infidels, if you reject it you are atheists. Others have a notion that there is what they term "a regular ministry." You would be surprised at the fine lines that have been drawn amongst ministers. One man is "only a missionary," nothing more! Another man is "only a *home* missionary," nothing more! Another man is only "a *sort* of a home missionary," and others are "*regular* ministers," properly made, clothed, decorated, and otherwise classified, so as to have no ambiguity about their exact standing. Others have been "educated" for the ministry. Sometimes they can look contemptuously upon men who have not been "educated" for the ministry. Educated to tell mankind that Christ came to the world to save sinners, and that he tasted death for every man. I would that we could escape this "circumcision," narrowness of mere creed, and mere ministry, and merely ecclesiasticism, and know that all men who bow at the altar of the Cross are the ministers of Christ. The Lord's fire consume all priestism! They that are of the "circumcision" know exactly where the right Church is. In their estimation *you* who now hear me are not a

Church at all ! You are labouring under an amiable delusion if you imagine that you are a Church ; and we on our side have prejudices quite as narrow, and in some cases even more irrational. “ Then hath God also ” to every sect and name and party and class granted of the glory of his light and the quietness of his peace. Seize that idea and drop your angry controversies and miserable wrangles over interpretations which there is no human authority sufficiently infallible to determine. I do not know whether to rejoice more over the fifteenth verse or over the eighteenth. The fifteenth verse reads, “ And as I began to speak the Holy Ghost fell on them ; ” that is enlargement. The eighteenth verse reads, they “ glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life. ” The work of extension took place in *two* directions. The mind of the *Church* was expanded. Not only did the *Gentiles* receive the rising light, but the *Church* itself, on hearing that the morning glory had lifted itself above the lands that sat in darkness, became sensible of a great outstretching of mind ; so the Gentiles sang their new hymn, and the Church uplifted its anthem, and hymn and anthem blended into one music-offering to heaven, and the Jew and the Gentile knew that “ the middle wall of partition ” had for ever fallen down !

### XXX.

#### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, this is thine house, and the spirit of it is thine. Surely it is thine altogether. There is no unholy chamber in the Lord's great sanctuary. Are not all things cleansed with blood that are in the house of the Lord? are they not without spot or wrinkle or any such thing? and are not we ourselves called upon by the Spirit of the house to put on garments of righteousness, and clothing beautiful as thine own holiness? Is not this our calling in Christ Jesus the spotless One?—the Lamb of God, the sacrifice for the sins of the world, a sin-offering without sin, an acceptable Propitiation! Enable us, we humbly pray thee, to know that thou art here looking upon us, and that the air also is full of angels and the spirits of the loved who have gone up to the throne and to the light. May we know that this is not common ground, but a chosen place, a land cleansed and prepared, where the flame is, out of which the God of Abraham and the Father of Jesus ever speaks to the sons of men. We have come to see heaven opened and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God. We would be no longer tossed about as those who have no centre and standing place. We would know that the Lord reigneth, that all things are in his kind and mighty hands, and that not a sparrow falleth to the ground without the Father. All things are in the hollow of thine hand. The opening of thine eyes is the sending forth of day and summer over the whole firmament and over the whole land. So we have rest. We have peace with God; we have security in thy righteousness, and hope because of thy mercy. Thou lovest thine own image and likeness. Thou dost see a reflection of thyself even in the ruin which we have wrought. We therefore come, desiring to be reunited with God, restored through Christ Jesus, the one Saviour, purified and comforted by the Holy Spirit. We have brought our sins with us, but we need not take them away. Thou wilt dissolve them as clouds that shall no more darken our outlook. Thou dost send trouble upon us not to grieve but to test us. Sanctify all bereavement, all sudden darkening of the household joy, every opened grave, every shattered hope. Show us that in all these things thou art working out a sovereign purpose of love. Help us to hold fast the hand when we cannot see the face of God. The darkness and the light are both alike unto thee. The night shineth as the day, and all that we now know of light is but darkness compared with the glory which shall be revealed. Thou wilt make the moon as the sun, and the

sun sevenfold in brightness, and the glory shall burn like the light of thy throne. These are our expectations in Christ Jesus the Lord. Already we have in him a wonderful inheritance. Our loved ones have not died who have fallen asleep in his arms. They are still ours, and the more so that they are his, and the whole family in heaven and on earth is named in him who is the Son of man. Let our wants cry unto heaven, and let thy mercy respond. We want more light, more purity and nobleness of soul, more faith, more of thyself. Thou that dwellest between the Cherubim, shine forth. Let there be no darkness in our souls; may our inward life be like a house filled with the light of God. Few and evil are our days—at the most they are but a handful. The grave is always just outside the window, and is part of our very dwelling-place. Show us that in Christ Jesus, the Resurrection, there is no death, and that we should see the garden, not the tomb. The Lord direct us all the remaining days of our life. Give us good cheer by the way, when the heart is made suddenly sad. Pluck the fruit that is on branches too high for us to reach. Take us up awhile and give us rest when the way is long and the flesh is weary, and at the last may we hear rather the salutation of the angels than the farewells of the dying. Amen.

### Acts xi. 19-30.

19. Now they which were scattered abroad [a new and important section begins with these words] upon the persecution that arose about Stephen [whose death was followed by a general outburst of fanaticism] travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch [the great Syrian capital], preaching the word to none [to no one,—the Greek number is singular] but unto the Jews only.

20. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene [Greek-speaking Jews], which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.

21. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.

22. Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas [whose sympathies for such work were shewn in his very name, Son of Consolation], that he should go as far as Antioch.

23. Who when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all [the tense implies continuous action], that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.

24. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people [a great multitude] was added unto the Lord.

25. Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul [probably implying some intercourse with the Apostle, by letter or message, since his departure from Jerusalem].

26. And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And



it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called [got the name of] Christians first in Antioch.

27. And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch.

28. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world [the Roman empire] : which came to pass in the days of Claudius Cæsar.

29. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability [as each man prospered], determined to send relief [to send as a ministration] unto the brethren which dwelt in Judæa :

30. Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

### CLEAVING UNTO THE LORD.

THE first part of this text is a condensation of the former part of the chapter. To the infinite amazement of the early preachers the Word of the Lord took effect upon *others* besides Jews. It touched the heart of the *Centurion*, and it awakened the faith of the *Grecian* in Antioch. In this way Christianity became quite as much a revelation to the *Jews* themselves as to the Gentiles. It was a surprise of love. The Jews saw that Christianity was not a local lamp, but a universal sun, and as its glory brightened the distant hills and made the far-off valleys sing with new joy, the preachers were glad ; they felt themselves at once invested with a new responsibility, and stirred with a new hope. Some such passion should fill *our* hearts when we see far-off men touched by the power of Christ. The extension of Christ's kingdom is the supreme joy of the loyal Church. To see another province added to his empire is to partake in our little degree of the travail of his soul, which brings him his one satisfaction. Herein we may see a proof and seal of the Divine origin of Christianity. All other religions remain *at home*. Other religions are cold theories or entertaining speculations or sentimental dreams. They do not come out in the dark, nor do they brave the wilderness, nor are they tempted across the sea. They pillow themselves at home, and then fall into ignoble rest and useless dreaming. Christianity never stops at one place as a final point. Having showed its light, sounded its trumpet, offered its hospitality, it says, "I must preach the Gospel to other lands also." Any religion that talks in that beneficent tone needs no cunning argu-

ment of man to sustain and vindicate its divinity. Christianity is an aggressive religion, Christianity is a fighting faith, Christianity is a military theology. If its professors are non-militant, easy, self-contained, self-complacent, they give the lie to their own faith : they are baptized infidels. They do not know the spirit of zeal which goes out to the whole earth and to the ends of the world, seeking, calling, blessing, saving, giving itself away in continual and hopeful sacrifice. In proportion as we sit at home we disown the spirit of the Christianity to which we owe our security. In the universality of the Christian offer I see its Godhood. Luxuries are only here and there, but necessities are everywhere. Wines grow on these sunny hills, and in yonder sheltered valley, they do not grow everywhere ; but show me the land where there is no *water* ! Men *need* water, not wine. “ The burning rays of the ruby shine ” in special places, but the light of the sun goeth forth everywhere with impartial splendour and ungrudging benediction. Some of God’s gifts are special, local, and individual, but these gifts are not necessary to salvation. Whatever is necessary to the soul’s redemption and unification with Christ is spoken, or to be spoken, in every language and dialect of earth. Universality is argument in such a case.

There are two *typical* instances given in the narrative. Christianity touched the mind and heart of the centurion. Let him represent Roman strength, sternness, law, force, dignity. Christianity touched the Grecian mind. Let that stand for refinement, elegance, delicacy, philosophy, for the completing line of human thought and service. There you have the whole circle. Christianity becomes Roman to the Roman, Grecian to the Grecian—a great rock to the rocky man, a rainbow to the dreaming genius, a summer light to the poet’s fancy. Christianity speaks to every man in the tongue wherein he was born. Christianity says, You cannot learn my language at once, but I can speak yours. Therefore, with the infinite stoop of Divine and tender grace it comes down to the lowliest and obscurest of men and utters its gracious Gospel. No other religion does this. Every other religion says, “ You must come to me ; I will not take one step towards you.” This religion, symbolized by the blessed Cross, comes out towards every man to seek and to save. In such circumstances such beneficence is argument.

What was the effect upon the Jewish Christian Church when tidings of evangelized Gentiles came to its ears? At once the Christian Church in Jerusalem "sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch," and inquire concerning this last of the miracles. When he came, what was the result? He saw *the grace of God*. There is no *mistaking* it. It is like nothing else. Imitations perish under scrutiny, but the real grace of God grows upon examination. Into it there comes a keener glow and ardour, around it there flashes a tender and more delicate beauty, out of it there rises a holy aroma such as might be felt among the hills of the heavenly paradise. He did not find a number of controversialists, technical theologians, excellent and most skilful disputants. He found men praying, with eager minds, with forgiving souls, unconscious of earth, more on high than below. There are no *words* for such a mystery. This Christian emotion must be *felt*, for it cannot be expressed. When Barnabas saw the grace of God he was GLAD. He did not think that his soul could be any more joyful than it was, but it *could*! There is always a higher wave; beyond is the fuller billow. We have not yet exhausted the possibilities of Christian enjoyment. Is the farmer glad when he sees corn growing upon land on which it never grew before? Does he not come home with a new expression upon his countenance, and when he speaks does he not speak in tones of glad thankfulness, and does not everybody in the house feel that something good has happened outside? It is so the Christian feels when he sees strange men turning to the faith. When looking down the hills he sees whole armies moving up towards the all-uniting and all-sanctifying Cross. He says this is prophecy fulfilled. Is it not said that he who is our Christ shall have the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession?—and lo, they *come*! In that hour of sacred rapture he touches the very ecstasy of Christ himself. Are *we* glad when we see men converted? Do we not criticise the process of their conversion? Are we not given to too much *suspicion* of the genuineness of the so called change of mind and heart? Do newly-converted men find a warm, cordial, comforting atmosphere in the Church when they come in? Let the Church take care lest by a cold internal atmosphere it check and discourage beyond recovery the march and victory of its own external attempts at

evangelization ! Barnabas took the right course ; he said, " This is the grace of God." He himself felt glad beyond all expression. Having made this recognition, and having sympathetically entered into this experience, he said, " Now with full purpose of heart you must cleave unto the Lord." Exhortation will do more than suspicion. A word of encouragement is what young beginners in the Christian race require. They are not to be filled with fear and driven back by suggested doubt and difficulty ; but Barnabas, the man of the musical voice, because of the musical heart, should be found in every Church saying to the young believers, " So far on you are right, but you are only putting on the armour, not putting it off—only beginning the fight, not enjoying the victory ; now with full purpose of heart, with one soul, one thought, one heart, cleave unto the Lord, put your arms around him, and know no other homage but the worship of his name." That exhortation is in time in every age. You who gave your heart to Christ not a week ago or a month since—*persevere*. Cleave unto the Lord ; pray without ceasing ; watch day and night. Look unto the hills whence cometh your help ; let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.

Why did Barnabas take so much interest in these new converts ? The answer is given in the twenty-fourth verse. It is the answer to all such inquiry, " For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith." Good men see goodness in other men. Evil be to him who evil thinks. From some persons you never get a judgment which is not tinged with censoriousness or bitterness, that is not marked by some flaw of half-heartedness or partiality or unholy prejudice. Their hopes are only inverted fears, and their shake of the hand is a genteel repulsion. The good man comes to be made glad. You have a great work of conviction to do in his mind before you can persuade him you are not as good as he is. He comes to be pleased. He says, " I hear that there is a revival in your Church, that obdurate hearts are laying down their weapons of rebellion. I have come to see this great sight ; the Lord's name be praised that I do hear of such victories." Then with a charitable spirit, and benign and hopeful heart, he looks upon all the work, and it must be very bad if he do not see in it something to quicken his own faith, and deepen his own grace, and heighten his own love to God. My brethren,

the pulpit now must be apologetic, or it cannot live. I would therefore venture to ask in the humblest of tones whether when new converts come into the Church they will find in it good men full of the Holy Ghost and of faith? That they will find critics, and controversialists, and hypocrites, I know, to some extent; but will they find men full of the Holy Ghost and of faith? Thank God to that inquiry I can return an emphatic *affirmative*. We owe everything to the people who *encourage* us. You owe very little to the man who merely finds fault with you. What was the consequence of the presence of Barnabas amongst the new converts? So good was he, so gracious, so representative of heavenly influences and ministries, that "much people was added unto the Lord." Barnabas did not go to Antioch for nothing—the work grew upon him, and now he said, "Saul must come." And when he had found him at Tarsus, he brought him to the Syrian capital, and there for a whole year they assembled themselves with the Church and taught much people. Thus are spheres found for men, and thus have men sometimes to tarry at Tarsus till their proper Antioch is found. But God will find it. He will one day tell you that the time is come to break silence and to preach Christ's Gospel to them that are nigh at hand or afar off.

Now comes another picture. "In these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world." "Then the disciples, every one according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judæa." I know no instance in which the *proof* so speedily followed the *argument*. We wondered if the men at Antioch were really converted. We find in the twenty-ninth verse this proof of their conversion,—“Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto—the brethren which dwelt in Judæa.” Unto whom? “The brethren which dwelt in Judæa.” Then their family relations had increased? Yes; marvellously! They were not “brethren” a few weeks ago. What has happened in the meantime? The *revelation of Christ* in the mind and heart has happened! These men at Antioch have heard of the faith that is in Jesus Christ; they have received the Lord Jesus; and instantly on hearing that men who are partakers of the same faith are in pros-

pect of *necessity*, they send to such men under the name of "brethren," according to their ability. This is how Christianity works. Here is the communism of the Church. We have seen in these readings that the formal communism soon broke down, but the *spiritual* communism must continue for ever. Wherever there is Christian need, Christian brotherhood must be acknowledged. If you have means, and see your Christian brother in the remotest corner of the earth suffering want, and do not send to him, your Christianity is vain. How have the men in Antioch and the men in Judæa become brethren? By the Cross. What did that Cross do? It broke down the middle wall of partition. It made the human family one!

These are the two pictures in the text—the picture of Barnabas and the picture of the prophet Agabus. But there is one line which I have reserved for the last, "And the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch." There is great diversity of opinion as to why this name was given. Some say it was given by Saul and Barnabas. Some say it was given in derision and scorn, as men in our own land have been called Puritans, Methodists, Wesleyans, and the like. I do not know whether the Christian believers ever called themselves distinctly Christians. I believe the word Christian occurs only about three times in the New Testament. That is a remarkable circumstance. Believers were called brethren, saints, disciples, but I am not aware of any instance in which they distinctly and formally describe themselves as *Christians*. But however the name was given, it stands above all other names to-day. It is the supreme glory of human designation. Of no man is so much expected as of the man who is called Christian. The man who despises your faith expects from you on its account such conduct as he expects from no other man. So he answers himself. He puts the sword to his own life. After having traduced your Lord, and disproved your documents, and cast scorn and contempt on the whole circle of your theology, if you do anything that calls down his displeasure he is the first and the bitterest to accuse of treason to the faith you profess. I ask for no higher intellectual and moral recognition of the purity of the religion of Jesus Christ. From no atheist is so much expected as from the weakest Christian. When you, a Christian, do anything wrong, the mocker knows how to mock you with the bitterest

taunt and scorn. He charges you with hypocrisy, with degeneracy, with unfaithfulness, whereas, if his own argument were really believed by his own heart, he would congratulate you : he would say, " Now, this is freedom from superstition ; now you have freed yourself from the principles which are gathered up in the hated name of Christ." The enemy always puts an end to his own life. The more we allow him to do so the more leisure we shall have for the affirmative declaration of Christian faith.

By Christians I understand Christ followers, Christ lovers, Christ worshippers, Christ-ones. It is a thousand pities, in one aggravation of distress, that such a name should have been debased, commercialized, and made the password to unworthy confidence and honour. Were we what we ought to be in integrity, in simplicity, and in equity of soul, there should be no nobler designation known amongst men, and no other should be needed. Roman Catholics, Protestants, Episcopalians, Congregationalists, Presbyterians—what are they, and how have they come to have any existence at all, and especially any honor as names? Did Christ ever use them? The one name that we ought to have is Christian, meaning by that a man who takes Jesus Christ as his Lord, Saviour, Priest, Pattern, Inspiration. Could we restore that definition of the now perverted term, no name known under heaven amongst men could be such a warranty of conduct and such a seal of dignity.

## XXXI.

### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we know not what we read in thy book except thou dost teach us its meaning by thy Spirit. We have heard the letter and its music is in our ears, but we would hear the inner meaning of every word spoken to the heart itself, then shall we, though on earth, be really in heaven. Thy word is the same there as it is here, only we do not read it well. We know not all its compass. We do not yield ourselves with thankful delight to the sway and inspiration of its infinite music. We are children of the world. We are travellers who have chosen the night for our pilgrimage. We are not children of the day, flowers of the noontide, lovers of glory cloudless and eternal. Thou can make us such in Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Saviour, and by him alone. Deliver us from this delight in darkness, and make us by the indwelling Holy Ghost children of the morning, with eyes that delight to drink in the glory of noontide. We know not the meaning of our life. We would crowd immortality into mortality, and the miracle is beyond our little strength. We would satisfy the infinite with the finite, and thus do we live foolishly before God. Show us in Jesus Christ, thy Son, that we were meant to lay hold of that which is unseen, and beyond, and immeasurable, and Divine. Thus may we, as followers of the Lord, have our conversation in heaven, and may we bear upon the whole life that we live proofs that our citizenship is on high. We are weary oftentimes because our life is frail. We break down in great unmanly tears because we cannot reach the things that are too high for us. We are fretted and chafed by vexations to which we should pay no heed were we really living in the sanctuary of thy peace. But the world is rough, and time is like a cold wind blowing through our days and carrying them away, and the very earth yields under our footstep and becomes a grave into which we fall. Such is the mystery of this breathing. Sometimes we would we were but beasts of the field, eating their grass, and dying at night. Thou hast stirred us with marvellous inspiration, and caused angels to touch us in the night season, and call us away into liberty and renewed service, and all heaven seems to be busy about us. Why this movement of the soul? Why this joyous trouble? Why this triumphant agony? Surely thou didst make us in thine own image and likeness, and we have lost our glory. Thou art saving us by the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thou hast sent him as the Good Shepherd to bring us home again. May he find us every one, and take us home this day. Regard, we pray, all who



are now bent before thee at the sacred altar, and receive from each heart its hymn of praise. Our houses are thine, and they are homes and sanctuaries, because thy blessing rests upon the roof. The children all are thine, and thou dost ask an account of them at every sun-set. And the sick ones, who would come out if they could, who long to be here, are all thy patients, thou Physician of men. And the prodigals, whose empty chairs at the table trouble us, and whose unpressed pillows are witnesses against them, are surely thine also. Thou wilt not forget them. They make us pray. They compel us to be trustful and uplooking and piously expectant; but for them we might make life one foolish game, and the days a succession of empty jests, but they drag us down and then lift us up. Look upon thy servants who are in business, and who make too much of it, who do not get hold of it aright, and to whom it is a temptation, a snare, and a long mockery. Show them how to lay hold of it with their ten fingers, without one fibre of their hearts ever touching it. And the Lord rule the Nations. Himself be on the throne, and let all lower monarchs draw their breath from his sovereignty. Be with all thy servants to-day; the minister in the pulpit, the teacher in his class, breaking bread for the little ones, and teaching opening minds the truth of God and Christ; with the visitor to the sick, with the missionary to the out-cast, and with all who in any wise shall endeavor to do good. And at night when we sing our closing hymn amid the gathering darkness, may we hear a voice, saying, "The Lord is a man of war, and the victory this day is in his hands." Amen.

### Acts xii. 1-11.

1. Now about that time Herod the king [the son of Aristobulus and Bernice, grandson of Herod the Great] stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church.

2. And he killed James [Matt. xii. 23] the brother of John with the sword.

3. And because he saw it pleased the Jews [the ruling policy of the Herodian house], he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread) [about the end of March or the beginning of April].

4. And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter [after the Passover] to bring him forth to the people.

5. Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.

6. And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison.

7. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison [the chamber or dwelling]: and he smote Peter on

the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.

8. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me.

9. And he went out, and followed him ; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel ; but thought he saw a vision.

10. When they were past the first and the second ward [shewing that Peter had been placed in the innermost dungeon], they came unto the iron [a touch of precision characteristic of Luke] gate that leadeth unto the city ; which opened to them of his own accord : and they went out, and passed on through one street [the word implies narrowness] ; and forthwith the angel departed from him.

11. And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.

### PETER DELIVERED.

“NOW about that time”—we know that troubles never come alone. We know well what the “time” was which is referred to, for it came under our notice in our last study. A time of *famine* was prophesied. There was to be great dearth, and great suffering was to be occasioned by that dearth of food. Whilst the Church was put in charge of this prediction, and had already begun to contribute towards the relief of the brethren, “about THAT time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the Church.” Famine might kill them slowly ; he would find a quicker way ! All ways of destruction are pleasant to the destroyer’s mind. Only let his opponents die, whether by famine or by sword, and he is satisfied. What is the Mystery above us which *allows* such things ? How well it would have been when Herod “stretched forth his hand” to have kept it there so that he could never take it into his side again ! Such would be *our* way many a time of dealing with antagonists and enemies. God takes in more field ; his thought has a wider compass, and he needs more time for the exemplification of his purpose.

“He killed James, the brother of John, with the sword.” This was not a *Jewish* method of killing people. If James had been tried by the regular Jewish Court, and had been found

guilty, he would have been stoned to death. But what is crime of the higher sort if it cannot be *inventive* ? What if a *king* cannot overleap a hedge and take a short cut to the consummation of his purpose ! Beheading is quicker than stoning ! Possibly the law may be dishonoured by the use of the sword, or by the adoption of eccentric and unusual methods, but the indignation of the wicked cannot *wait*. It needs no further condemnation. Its *impatience* is the seal of its iniquity. Justice eternal, impartial, divine, can *wait*. It never misses its aim ! Though hand join in hand, the wicked cannot go unpunished. There is no counsel against the Almighty ! Let the wicked man take what methods he may, in every method which he adopts you will find the seal of its infamy. Having performed this trick of cruelty, Herod saw that " it pleased the Jews," and he proceeded FURTHER. That is the natural history of wickedness ! It is self-impelling. It gathers momentum as it goes. You cannot stop with *one* murder. You get into the *trick* of it ; you acquire the bad skill, and your fingers become nimble in the use of cruel weapons. Murder does not look so ghastly when you have done it once. How many people have *you* murdered ? You think of murder as blood-shedding ; murder is *heart-breaking ; life-blighting ; hope-destroying !* How many people have *you* murdered ? How many are you murdering to-day *at home* ? " He proceeded further." The one glass needs another (it says) to keep it company. Crimes do not like *solitude*—they like companionship ; and so one crime leads to another, and wickedness is self-multiplied. Remember the words, " He proceeded further !" You do not find God's amazement in the completion of a *thousand* sins ; you find his astonishment in the *first* sin. If you can do *one* sin, the whole life is lost. We are not thieves because of a thousand thefts ; we are not liars because of a thousand lies, or murderers because of a thousand homicides ; we find our criminality in the *opening* sin. Therefore, what I say unto one, I say unto all, " Watch !" \*

" Because he saw it pleased the Jews." There are those who like to see you play the fool and the criminal, and will hurrah you and acclaim you, and when the constable comes for you they will flee away ! Why should you be killing other people to please the onlookers ? What will they do for you in the critical hour ? All the while Herod thought he was *king*, and yet " because he

saw it pleased the Jews he proceeded further." King in name, *slave* in reality ! What contradictions there are in social life, and in official terms ! Sometimes the *judge* has been the prisoner. Sometimes the *conqueror* has been the loser. Sometimes, as in this instance, the *king* in name, branch of a blasted tree whose roots were warmed in hell, was *slave*. He lived upon the popular pleasure. Whatever pleased the people he was willing to do. Therein he tarnished his crown, and sold his kingdom, and lost his soul !

In the fifth verse there is a pitched battle. Read it :—" Peter therefore was kept in prison " : there is one side of the fight ; after the colon—" but prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him." Now for the shock of arms ! Who wins ? It is the battle of history. It is a field on which the universe gazes with conflicting feeling. Prayer always wins. You can only be of a contrary opinion when you take in too little field. There is no action of any importance that is bounded by a single day. It is out of death that life comes. Even the darkness is thick sown with the seed of light. Such prayer as we read of in the fifth verse is *irrepressible*. The prayers you could keep down if you liked will never be answered. Any prayer that could have been *stifled* has not force enough to reach the heavens. How to treat irrepressible prayers ! No answer has been given to *that* inquiry. The controversies have waged round such prayer as might not have been spoken—cold, lifeless, hopeless, pointless, prayerless prayer ; a religious *skeleton* ! I want to hear what men have to say about the prayers I cannot *help* praying—that *will* come out of the soul—and in daring fashion sound for themselves all the places of the universe till they knock against the Heart that opens like the door of home. If you are disputing about a prayer of *words* I would join you in condemning it, but that is not the subject ; it is the prayer you breathe in sigh, or troubled cry, or shout of violence, when the dear life is being taken, when there is but one inch of blue in the sky, and that is fast closing ; when the prodigal will not come in ! *Such* praying does not admit of literal criticism. It cannot be written down, it cannot be argued out of the life ; when the skilful disputant has completed his incoherent appeal, the heart untouched rushes in eager haste to seek or make a God !

The miracle is eternally *true* in all that is worth being true. Is it not foolish on our part and most self-improverishing to be directing faithless inquiry towards incidental points and omitting the central and abiding quantity? All the miracles are true. They have counterparts in our own life, and therefore we have no doubt about their truth. The points to which critical scepticism is directed are really not parts of the miracle. They are but accessories, illustrations, helps, or points enkindled to make the story more graphic and memorable. I know of no miracle in all the Bible that I have not personally lived, therefore it is useless for any man who has not lived them to endeavour to persuade me that they are not true. I have been exactly in the condition described in this miracle, and so have you. Why dispute about the *vessel* instead of eating the *bread* which it holds? What have we in this miracle? First of all, we have *last extremities*. "The same night, when Herod would have brought him forth, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers." Have we not been in that very same darkness, my brethren? When we were to have been killed the next day! Not when we were to be injured, or impoverished, or torn to pieces *seven years* from date, but when the catastrophe was to occur as soon as the *next day* dawned? Have we not sometimes counted two or three things that were left, and said, "Beyond these we have nothing?" Have we not sometimes taken up the pieces of the one loaf and said, "This is all?" Have we not sometimes gone out of the house, leaving wife and children behind, with a great sob in the throat, feeling that if we did not succeed this day we must give it all up? So far then you have no difficulty about the miracle. In the next place we have *appearances dead against us*. Thus—two soldiers, two chains, and the keepers keeping the door before the prison! Why these were *compliments* to Peter! The devil cannot avoid paying us compliments all the time he is trying to destroy us. There is an involuntary homage to the very Deity he mocks! Why keep such a man, in such a case, between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and the keepers keeping the door before the prison? Why all this arrangement about a man like Peter? Why all these temptations addressed to a man like one of us? Why these deadly attacks, why these continual repetitions, why these suggestions, and seductions, and lures, and charms, and bribes, and why this waiting through

all the dreary night? It is a reluctant but significant tribute to the *character* whose destruction is contemplated. Have not appearances been dead against us? No letters, no friends, no answer to the last appeal, no more energy, no more hope, the last staff snapped in two. So far the miracle is true. In the third place we have *unexpected deliverers*. Have we no experience *here*? Is it not always the unexpected man who delivers and cheers us? "But a certain Samaritan came where he was," that is the whole history of human deliverance in on graphic sentence. Have you been unexpectedly delivered from accumulating and threatening embarrassment? Has not one of your own proverbists said, "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." Hath not one of your own poets said, "It is always darkest before the dawn?" and shall other men have their proverbs and their poems about unexpected deliverance, and the Christian be silent in the Church when such miracles are challenged? All our life properly read is a chain of unexpectedness. Deliverance shall arise from an unthought-of quarter! We cheer men, not because of a gracious *sentiment* only, but because of a time-long *history*, solid as the rocks on which your towns and towers are built. In the fourth place, we have *spiritual transport*. Peter said, "Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews." Have *we* no special hymns? Has laughter not rushed into our mouth suddenly like an unbidden but most welcome guest? Have we not sometimes taken down our harp from the willows and struck it to some new tone of joy and gladness and hope? Peter did not understand this miracle at first. He thought he saw a vision. He "wist not that it was true" in the mere sense of a fact, "which was done by the angel." "And when Peter was come to himself he said"—that is the point we must wait for. We are not "*ourselves*" just now. A thousand winds are breathing in our head and through our life—stormy winds, musical winds—and we cannot yet catch and determine the whole harmony. Our eyes are dazed by cross lights; the light is coming from every point, and we cannot see things in their right proportion, distance, and colour. We are not "*ourselves*" just now, I repeat. Do not let us imagine that we are now speaking *final* words or giving *final* judgments. For my own part, in this great

universe I see men as trees walking. Innumerable visions float before my wondering eyes. The righteous are trodden down in the streets, the man of integrity has not where to lay his head ; the bad man has a plentiful table, and his fields are so rich that his barns must be enlarged. The little child that has never said "mother," is torn from its mother's arms ; graves a foot long, and no more, are dug in the daisied earth. What is it? When we are COME TO OURSELVES we shall know and praise the Lord, whose angels have been our ministering servants !

## XXXII.

### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, is not our whole life a vision? We have not yet had time to consider the matter. We are still in the waking dream, and still we see men as trees walking. We cannot tell what we look upon, when we have had time to consider the matter we shall flee into the sanctuary, and tell the tale of thy wondrous providence. We bless thee for visions. These dreams make us greater, we should be poor without them, but with them we are exceeding rich. We have seen the future, our souls have lived it; how blue its skies, how green its gardens, how full of life its sunny air! Thou hast revealed these things unto us by thy Spirit, and we are glad of the revelation, for it makes us strong when the immediate tumult would make us weak. Thy Christ shall have the heathen for his possession, the uttermost parts of the earth shall be his to reign over in all the sweet kingliness of his grace. He has redeemed the world, the signature of his blood is upon it, and he will claim his own; not one blade of grass shall be lost, not one hair of one head shall be forgotten in the great audit of thy kingdom. Thy Cross, oh living Christ, shall save the world, and the red drops of thy heart's blood shall follow the most secret sin, and cleanse it for ever. The grave shall give up its dead. In the new earth there shall be no tomb, in the new heavens there shall gather no storm, in the new kingdom there shall be no farewell. This is the revelation made to man in Christ thy Son, our Saviour, the Priest of the universe. It will surely live and shine upon the eyes of men when all their forecasts are forgotten. We love the Saviour with our hearts' undivided love, and because we love him, we love all beautiful things, and all things that may be redeemed. This great love fills us with many fragments of love, so that we bless the little, and the feeble, and the out of the way, with a force and grandeur of blessing otherwise impossible. We would live in Christ until we become as beautiful as himself; the last wrinkle taken away, the last spot of evil removed, the last vanity destroyed; and the whole work finished by the touch of his own hands. Help us to live in the inspiration of the hope that this shall yet be done. Lifting us up from the dust where we have been sitting too long, take away from us the rags of our vanity, and the whole clothing of our shame, and upon us do thou set the beautiful garments of holiness. Bless us all as meeting together in one place, for one purpose, and from thy blessing let there be no excluded heart. Give the preacher power to speak great



words full of healing, melting with tenderness, inspired with more than they themselves can utter. Give his words background and horizon, and height and illumination from every point of life, and when they are uttered may men feel stirred, comforted, uplifted, crowned from above. Let the family be precious to thee. Do not break up the house. Yet thou art always threatening to dissolve the family. Thou hast taken away the head whose incoming was like the rising of the sun, and thou hast taken away the mother whose smile brought back all hope and rest. Out of the right hand thou hast taken the staff, and the left hand thou hast smitten with numbness, and thou hast put thorns in the pillow and made the night sevenfold in darkness, and yet wherein we have said, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth best in his sight." Thou hast been to us husband, and wife, and brother, and sister, and little child, all in all, and thou hast lifted us up to a point whence we could see those who are not lost but gone before. Thou wilt dry up the Jordan for us, and the wilderness shall be carpeted with green sward, and the rocks shall be beautiful as gardens lifted up in the sunlight. This is our hope in Christ, this is our song in the night-time, this is the well at which we drink, this is the rock in whose cooling shadow we sit down at noontide. Amen.

### Acts xii. 12-25.

12. And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark ; where many were gathered together praying.

13. And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda.

14. And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate.

15. And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel.

16. But Peter continued knocking : and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished.

17. But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place.

18. Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter.

19. And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Cæsarea, and there abode.

20. And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon : but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace ; because their country was nourished by the king's country.

21. And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them.

22. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.

23. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory : and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.

24. But the word of God grew and multiplied.

25. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.

### PETER'S FINAL APPEARANCE.

THERE is a word in the twelfth verse which is the keyword of a wise life. If people would not speak until they had carried out the meaning of that small word there would be much silence, and there would be much wisdom. The word is "considered." What is it to consider? It is to put things together. To modify one thing by another, to bring things into right relation, to set them back at the right distance, to view them in the right colour, to weigh, to measure, to add up, and thus to form a broad and solid conclusion. That is what you have never done in your life probably. We leap at things. We have no intermediate process of thinking and relating one thing to another; ours is not a task of chain-making, it is often a leap in the dark. Life will bear to be "considered" because life is full of *mystery*; it is always changing. The four seasons of the year sometimes all assemble together in one brief hour; we are chilled and sweltered in one transient moment; shew your religiousness not by the cleverness of an instantaneous conclusion but by the calm *consideration* of things which are not what they seem. If you "consider" life under the impression that it is a measurable quantity, that it can all be seen at once, that it is a superficies and not a cube, you will live the days of the foolish. Everything that happens in life belongs to everything else. He who "considers" the matter, loses the spirit of impatience and gathers into his soul the spirits of rest and hope and music. Wise *consideration* may escape the agony of transient enthusiasm but it enjoys the repose of continual peace. Your house is dark to-day, and in its darkness you may easily stumble. Know you not that the angel has been there and has touched your companion on the side, and said, "Come

away"? Presently you will see the matter more clearly. *Consider* it. Put things together; rebuke the spirit of impetuosity and distrust, and say, "The Lord reigneth, and because he is Lord, nothing in his empire can be overlooked or lost."

A very human incident next occurs. When Peter "had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark." Why did he not run away? Why did not thoughts of Herod darken his mind? He knew that Herod was an evil branch of an evil tree, and that no Herod ever did one noble deed. Why did he not flee away? Peter was faithful now; he went back to church. In those days the church was in the *house*; a little church, but not therefore the less a church, true in its life and in its constitution. Peter went back to the old nest. Peter sought the old companionship. Peter knew where his native language, the language of regeneration was spoken, he knew where the vision could be related and in a measure understood. We never know how precious the Church is until we have been among the heathen awhile. Six months spent in Herod's jail, and then how inviting the church, the little church in the village, the ill-built church up the dark passage, where the hymns are sung to broken tunes with broken voices! How sweet, how restful, how jubilant! We should enjoy our churches more if Herod had more to do with us. The best preparation for simple bread is long-continued hunger. Peter went to the prayer-meeting.

Yet a still more human incident now takes place. The people disbelieved the answer to their own prayer! When Rhoda said, "Peter stands at the gate," they said, who were praying, "thou art mad!" Truly we are in the succession of that Church! Who ever expects to have his prayers *answered*? Because we are so vague about the prayer, heaven may be equally vague about the reply. Who looks for answers, who keeps Rhoda on the watch saying, "Look out whilst we look up and tell us when thou dost see the answer coming?" A little more anxiety about the *reply* would give accent and fervour to our petitions and would move the all-pitying Father to more definite communications. I am less anxious that people should pray, than that they should look for *answers* to their prayers. Is it right to knock at the door and run away? To ring heaven's bell and vanish in the darkness as if

ashamed of the ringing peal? Let me, having opened my eyes after communing with heaven, look about me for the answer, and shew that I expect it. When your child got better after your prayer—you thought she might have got better without it. Did you not? When you prayed for deliverance from a certain perplexity and the deliverance came,—you thought that perhaps it would have come as a matter of course if you had waited longer. *That* is the atheism which grieves God! The blatant atheism that *denies*, He takes no heed of, but the atheism that comes after *praying* to Him and getting the *answer*, is seven-fold blasphemy! When the damsel affirmed that it was even Peter;—the people who had been praying said, “It is his angel, it cannot be himself.” So we fritter away our religion into a barren sentiment! We will not let heaven speak plainly to us; the mystification is on our side not on God’s; He would oftentimes come straight to us and talk in plain mother tongue to our hearts; when He does we say, “It was a *dream*, it was a *vision*, it was an impression we cannot account for.” In reply to frank words from heaven we return crooked words of unbelief. Let the language be equally plain on *both* sides, and our converse with heaven shall be broader and healthier. The people who believe in their *own* spirits easily believe in spirits *outside* them. If you do not believe that you *yourself* are a spirit you cannot believe that there are *other* spirits in the universe. A great conversion must be made in your own soul. You must know what *you* are before you can tell what GOD is. Let me familiarize my mind with the fact that I am a spirit and not a body, a soul and not a figure, an eagle and not a cage, then all things admit of an emotional and spiritual interpretation; but when I go down in the consciousness of my own spirituality, it is impossible for me to believe, in that degree, in the spirituality of others. But Peter continued knocking. He had just passed through all the experience of the damsel and of the Church, and experience makes us patient with other people. Peter said by his knocking, “I know what they are thinking—it is impossible that I should be here—I have just passed through that self-same mental confusion, and thought it was not an angel, I thought it was a dream; and they are now suffering from the very confusion from which I have escaped, so I will knock on.” “And when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were

astonished." Providence is a daily surprise, God is never commonplace. If we only knew it, every breath is a miracle, every out-putting of our limbs to walk, every uplifting of our hand or eye has behind it the secret which arched the heavens and moves the stars. Astonishment of the highest kind properly belongs to the religious realm. Let us see to it that amazement does not exaggerate itself into disbelief. Peter then made his speech, and the value of that speech consisted in the fact that it was made, after *consideration*. This is a sober-minded statement. The film had fallen from the eyes, the strange air had blown away from the brain, the man had come back again to himself, and knowing the value of words, the shape of things, and the meaning of tones, he separately and studiously went over the whole tale and gave his charge to the Church saying—"go shew these things unto James and unto the brethren"—give them another gospel, add another leaf to their testament, stir up their faith, light to a brighter blaze the shining of their hope.

Now comes the sad line. "And he departed, and went into another place." Peter disappears from the story! "And he departed." His dear name, glorious name will never come up again. We shall hear of him incidentally in a controversy with Paul, but so far as this narrative is concerned he is gone. We cannot say "good-bye" to a man like Peter without remembering his nobleness. I know we first think of his sin, but who is there that has gone with him to the same depths of *penitence* and shed the same rivers of *contrition*? Peter has comforted many of us by his falling and rising again. He was always being called aside to be cross-examined and reprov'd. Christ said the hardest things to Peter he ever said to any of his followers. He called him once—"Satan." Once he said to Peter, "Thou art an offence unto me;" once he ordered Peter behind, saying, "Get thee behind me;" but afterwards they had long talks, sweet, sweet converse. Between them there passed the great act of forgiveness, and the great confession of heart-love deep down beyond all other feeling, and by-and-bye Peter will go to Jerusalem together with Paul, and about the same time they will die a martyr's death. Think of his nobleness, of his enthusiasm, of his kindness, of his great-heartedness, and in the recollection of his splendid qualities forget, as Christ forgave, his momentary wickedness. I am sorry he has

gone, the place was warm whilst he remained in it ; there was a sense of freedom of speech in the church whilst Peter was to the fore. He was not a logician, but he had a great royal heart. The man we miss the most is not the logician, the scholar, the pedant, but the man with the womanly heart, great nest in which we might abide until we forgot our weariness and recovered our hope.

The soldiers knew nothing of the vision. Visions are *near yet far away*. One member of the family sees heaven opened, and the other calls his brother a fanatic. The light can go right past you without your ever seeing it ;—you can sleep through a revelation ! There are those who can listen to words that burn with heaven's own fire, without knowing that any words uncommon have been spoken. Lord, give us the hearing ear and the understanding heart,—that quick hearing that hears a word long after it has been uttered, its echo, re-echo, and far away soundings ! Circumcise our ears that they may hear ! Anoint our eyes with eye-salve that they may see !

Contrast the opening of the chapter with its ending. In the opening of the chapter “ Herod the king stretched forth his hand to vex certain of the Church,” in the end of the chapter he is eaten up of worms, literally, of lice, as was one of his forerunners. They were a bad stock, and the worms were ill-fated that had to live upon them ! Look at the *end* of a man. At the opening of the chapter he said, “ I have fleshed my sword, and now I will kill Peter also,” and at the end of the same chapter he is eaten up of worms. He went down from Judea to Cæsarea, where the life was gayer, where the viands were better, where the wine was keener to the taste, and clothed, as Josephus tells us, in a robe of wrought silver which glittered and shone in the sun as he moved, he sat down to make his speech. And the base sycophants said, “ it is the voice of a god, and not of a man.” The people that would have eaten him up if he had been in the falling line instead of the ascending scale ; the servile mob said, “ it is the voice of a god,” and Herod devoured the tribute and thought he deserved it, and immediately the angel of the Lord, who has been very active in this chapter, “ smote him !” A tremendous and fatal blow ! Look at the *end* of a man ; do not hear the atheist and blasphemer to-day in fatness and prosperity, and abounding wealth : read the chapter through and the chapter will conclude as this concludes,

—Herod eaten up of worms—“but the Word of God grew and multiplied.” *Herod* dead, the *gospel* advancing! Herod eaten up of worms, but Christ gathering the uttermost parts of the earth into his heart and claiming the heathen for a possession! Always read the chapter *through*. Do not break off a man’s life in the middle and say, “see how vice prospers, see how virtue languishes!” I see Herod, I see him in Cæsarea, I see him arrayed in his dress of woven cloth of silver and I see his proud mien, but I will wait longer, this cannot be the *end* of it! Every star protests against this as the conclusion, the very shape of God’s creation says, That is not the full stop; things are *round*, the universe is a *circle*,—wait!—We do wait—and in our waiting we find two things; the king never coming home again, the king delivered to the meanest fate, and the word of God stretching out its mighty pinions and flying abroad with glad tidings of great joy proclaiming ANOTHER KING whose kingdom cannot fall!

## THE DISPENSATION OF THE SPIRIT.

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[THIS may be a proper point from which to look back upon the great event which glorifies the *Acts of the Apostles*, namely, the outpouring of the HOLY SPIRIT, and to connect that event with the Ministry of Jesus Christ as well as with the development and sanctification of his Church. On considering how to conduct this part of my task I have decided to reprint the portion of my book entitled *The Paraclete*, which specially deals with this sublime section of sacred history, and I feel the less hesitation about this course as the book is out of print and is frequently inquired for.]

### XXXIII.

#### 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 unailing, 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 enquirer 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 sin. 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 sins 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.

### PERSONALITY AND MANIFESTATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

EVERYWHERE in the Bible the Holy Ghost is described as a Person, and never as a mere influence separable from personality. Poetic license, indeed, allows natural objects, and even objects of human contrivance, to be spoken of in a limited sense as living creatures, as, for example, when personal pronouns of masculine and feminine gender are used in speaking of the sun and moon; but this is wholly different from the varied and precise expressions which are constantly employed by biblical writers in referring, however fully or incidentally, to the ministry of the Holy Ghost. According to the doctrine of those writers, the Holy Spirit "teaches," "comforts," "reproves," "guides," and "sanctifies" mankind; he "leads into all truth;" he "testifies of Christ;" he quickens the memory, so that all things taught by Jesus Christ are brought to remembrance; he "searches all things, yea the deep things of God." It would certainly appear, therefore, that so far as it is possible for language to escape indistinctness when applied to purely spiritual subjects, such terms must be taken as settling decisively the fact that the biblical writers themselves did, rightly or wrongly, believe in the proper personality of the Holy Ghost; and all the more so in the light of the further fact, that precisely the same terms are applied to the Holy Spirit as are applied to the Father, so that the personality of the one stands or falls with the personality of the other.

But how to escape the danger of bodily manifestation and at the same time secure the consciousness and comfort of divine personality? How to have heaven without the risk and pain of earth? Such is the problem which awaits solution. Think of the danger of any form of personality which is comprehensible by bodily vision. First of all, that vision is itself imperfect, and must therefore come to erroneous conclusions respecting the objects of its observation. What two men ever saw exactly alike? Vision is affected by critical training, by taste, by skill in delicate comparison, also by physical and atmospherical conditions, so much so that not only do no two men see alike, but the same man corrects the observations of his own vision as he grows in judgment or changes his point of observation. The eye takes note of figure, attitude, colour, magnitude, so that whatever may be inward and spiritual in humanity is necessarily approached in the first instance through physical appearances; and appearances are proverbially deceptive. Who can say with unquestioning certitude that he ever saw anything as it really is? The eye is probably the least reliable of the senses, though amply sufficient for noting the rough outlines and magnitudes of objects. But the *hand* is too quick for the eye. The skilled conjuror will make a fool of any man who insists that seeing is believing; yet it *is so*, only that "seeing" is something other than the ordinary use of the visual organs. Seeing is believing, let us say, but what is *seeing*? The young look for beauty of form; the mature look for beauty of character. In early life we enquire for outward charms; we say this is lovely, and that is grand, our meaning simply being that in our estimation the outline is perfect, the colour is exquisite, or the proportions are noble. By-and-bye however, when we are disciplined and mel-  
lowed, we know that there is no satisfaction but in moral excellence alone, and, indeed, a reluctant distrust of all ephemeral charms begins to affect our estimates of life. Out of this experience has come the homely proverb, "Handsome is that handsome does," a proverb full of almost painful meaning when traced to its philosophy,—the outward and the formal having befooled or misled us, and the neglected excellence (without form or comeliness) having only slowly come to recognition and honour. We say of some persons that the more they are known the more they are beloved, or we vary the expression by saying that such and such

persons will "bear knowing;" and on the other hand we say of certain persons that the more they are known the less do they justify either confidence or esteem. In both cases the risks of merely bodily or physical manifestation are illustrated; thus: in the former case there was perhaps something of ungainliness or unattractiveness to be got over before the real quality of the character was ascertained; very little perhaps, yet there it was,—a frown, an occasional expression, apparent coldness or even pride, want of ease and frankness, indisposition to speak, and unconcealed objection to confide;—in the latter case there were marked personal advantages, a winning smile, frankness, geniality, beauty of face, elegance of carriage, but further acquaintance with the life dispelled the charm of mere appearances. Wise men know how much better it is that the difficulty, if any, should present itself in physical appearances rather than in moral features. Yet it is not easy to begin the world successfully without physical attractions, for the world is much given over to the lust of the eyes. The plain man must stand aside until the gainly man has had his full turn; the gold ring first, the mean raiment last, everywhere,—perhaps even in the house of God! In Jesus Christ's own case the most serious dangers arose from the physical and local aspect of his life and ministry. His contemporaries could not get over the appearances, and they had no lack of various expressions of disappointment and disgust. A few of their contemptuous utterances will prove this: "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" "Are not his sisters with us?" "Whence hath this man this wisdom?" "Thou art not yet fifty years old." "Thou art a Samaritan and hast a devil." "Search and look, for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet." Clearly, then, the contention turned upon nativity, relationship, locality,—in a word, upon all the accidents of merely bodily manifestation. The acknowledged "wisdom" could not subdue the prejudice arising out of "Nazareth," "Galilee," and "Samaritanism." A great risk, therefore, in a human point of view, was the incarnation of Godhead. Even to apostolic faith it presented itself as the great mystery of godliness.

Why does this difficulty, in all its varying forms and degrees, arise, in connection with every presence, and especially every living presence that appeals to the eye? Because of the limitation of

such presence. When men can see what they suppose to be the boundaries of a figure, they instinctively compare it with other bodies ; its probable force can be calculated, its relative value can be appraised, and the discrepancy between its capacity and its purpose can be exaggerated or decried according to the bias of the observer. The consequence is that before spiritual questions can be approached, the temptation which is always presented by appearances must be encountered, and at that point spiritual inquiry may be perverted or arrested. Where, as in the case of Jesus Christ, the instrument is considered to be evidently weak, there is a temptation to contemn and distrust it : and where to all human appearance it is obviously equal to the task which has to be fulfilled, there is a counter temptation to forget that after all it is but an instrument. On account, therefore, of this limitation, bodily presence is often detrimental to spiritual influence. We know, for example, how perilous it often is to be admitted to familiar intercourse with the men who have stimulated us by their thoughts and thrown upon our intellectual life the spell of their genius. So long as such men stand afar off, clothed with their spiritual house, and working with their spiritual functions, we give them homage ; but when they come near us they invite criticism upon points which did not enter into their original mastery of our admiration and confidence ; some weakness of the flesh, some conceit of manner or feebleness of expression, or other more or less trifling peculiarity, may impair their spiritual dominion and cause us to regret that the god of our early love ever came down from Olympian invisibility.

An argumentative difficulty may be here interposed. If no two men can *see* alike, can any two men *think* alike ? If a man has to correct his own observation, has he not also to correct his own thinking ? If so, is not mental incompetency as great an objection to spiritual personality as visual defect is to bodily manifestation ? Imaginatively it is, but substantially it is not. Because whilst physical vision cannot be perfected, and is at best but temporary in its uses, spiritual faculties are not only susceptible of the highest refinement, but are the only powers by which men can lay hold upon immortality,—without them there can be no manhood. Whilst, therefore, in the one case the difficulty is inherent, in the other it is a continually decreasing quantity. We shall always, as

a matter of happy necessity, have diversity and conflict of thinking, yet the thinking powers are by this very opposition being trained to the strength and precision out of which will come vital reconciliation and harmony.

From the beginning the danger of a visible manifestation of the Godhead was foreseen and guarded against: "Ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire, lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female." Man has always wanted to *see* God, and God has always refused to be seen. So we have no image of God. Mythological deities we have in galleries of marble cunningly cut, but the God that made the heavens is nowhere to be found amongst all the ambition and daring of the most audacious art. And what have we even of the Man Christ Jesus in sculpture or painting? Much, yet nothing. Do any two heads of his correspond? Does any head of his satisfy the observer, filling up all his dreams and desires, and turning all his holy prayers into visible and enrapturing answers? It would seem, indeed, as if one or two Christs had actually been painted under the direct inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and yet as if the hand of the painter had failed the Inspirer himself. And as if the painter too had reeled just as he was about to add the touch that would have shown divinity. There is a better Christ in every broken heart than can be found amongst the artistic treasures of men,—a Christ full of sympathy, very pitiful and gracious, stooping with infinite condescension, and counting no service mean. Who would have only a portrait of Christ when he can have in his heart the Son of God himself?

This is the point towards which we have been moving throughout these collateral reflections. How needful soever to escape the perils of bodily manifestation (a need whose importance cannot be exaggerated), yet the comfort of divine *personality*, as distinguished from abstract infinitude, must be secured. In his highest aspirations man requires, and indeed demands, distinct, individual companionable life,—he must have pathos as well as augustness, or he will be overpowered and discouraged; his progress will be an advancement into solitude, and loneliness will kill him. We have now to find out, by an honest exposition of Scripture and a fair

interpretation of human consciousness, how far this necessity is provided for in the revelation of the Holy Ghost. That is precisely our work in this argument. Is the Holy Ghost a person? Is it true that he can be the Guest of the heart, the Teacher of the understanding, the Revealer of Christ? Is the Holy Ghost a *Comforter*, and as such will he come to the bruised and aching heart with solaces not earthly but heavenly? These inquiries are of some consequence to men who already see the coming sunset, having first felt the disappointment and bitterness of life. One word may be a key to our reasoning, viz., God is a Spirit,—so is man. Man *has* a body, but he *is* a spirit.

## XXXIV.

### 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 at 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 to-night, 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.

### THE HISTORIC MOVEMENT TOWARDS SPIRITUALITY.

THE succession which is indicated by the words Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is neither nominal nor accidental, it is a philosophical progress and culmination. Any transposition of this order would be felt to be irregular and impossible,—violent, unnatural, and self-destructive. When we think ourselves back towards the origin of things, we are conscious of the keenest dissatisfaction with all mere terms that get no farther than the approbation of the strictly critical faculty ; we want something more ; something for which we cannot hit the exact word, but for want of which the heart often aches and cries. Then is suggested the biblical word, *Father*, and with it comes at least a promise of satisfaction ; it is *felt* to be the true starting-point, having difficulties of its own no doubt, but difficulties that may be overcome. The Fatherhood is not emotional, but causative and sovereign pater-nity. Logic can do but little towards its explanation ; the mind must accept this idea of fatherhood as the mind accepts itself, a mystery certainly, but not greater except in degree than the silent, invisible, spiritual *life* that is in every man. But fatherhood is a plural or inclusive term : immediately it suggests the idea of childhood, and childhood is realized most conspicuously and impressively in the sonship of Jesus Christ ; but sonship such as this, involving manifestation or visible expression, is, as we have just urged, beset with peculiar risks ; provided, therefore, that it go barely far enough to establish itself as an indisputable fact in human history, the sooner it is withdrawn from ocular criticism, the less will the world be tantalised and distracted by the exercise of its own imperfect physical senses. This manifestation and withdrawal are exclusively characteristic of Jesus Christ. He was here long enough to remove all doubt as to his personal identity, yet he withdrew himself immediately that he had secured for his personality an unquestioned place in human history. Nothing

more was to be gained by his visible continuance on earth ; his bodily mission had been wholly fulfilled, and therefore he “ vanished out of the sight ” of men. But what of the future of his work ? Then, according to Christian teaching, was to come manifestation without visibility ; instead of bodily presence, there was to be a new experience of life, spirituality, insight, sensibility, and sympathy almost infallible in holy instinct. In one word, the holy *Man* was to be followed by the Holy *Ghost*.

This idea of a philosophical rather than a merely arbitrary succession is strictly consistent with the fact that *the whole movement of history, in all that is vital and permanent, is a movement from the outward and visible to the inward and spiritual* : this we claim to be true of all history, not merely of any particular section or bias,—it is true of civilization in all its enduring elements. A brief indication of facts will make this clear.

1. The order of *Creation*, as detailed in the account given in Genesis, is a movement towards the spiritual. The succession runs thus : Light, firmament, dry land, seas, the fruit-tree yielding fruit, sun, moon, and stars, the moving creature that hath life, and fowl flying in the open firmament of heaven, cattle, creeping thing, and beast of the earth ; if we pause here we shall be dissatisfied, because of a sense of incompleteness : there has, indeed, been an onward movement, but expectation will be mortified if the scene close at this point. We know the rest : “ God said, Let us make MAN in our image and in our likeness,”—*that* was the highest point of spirituality attainable within the first idea of creation ; yet it was but a promise.

2. The biblical order of *human recovery* (apart altogether from any theological construction of it) is also a movement towards spirituality. Beginning with the Levitical ritual, what could be more objective, or more thoroughly penetrated with all the elements of the most violent tragedy ? Exaction follows exaction, as if the uttermost farthing alone would mitigate the severity of the inexorable demand. The sin-offering, the trespass-offering, the burnt-offering, the peace-offering ; the baptisms, the incenses, and the eternal flow of blood, represent the most sensuous and exhausting system of mediation. Could aught be farther from the point of spirituality ? Every day opening with fire and blood ; every evening darkening around an altar specially consecrated for

its quiet and solemn hours ; the Sabbath having its double sacrifice ; the new moon to have its sacrifice of bullocks and rams ; until it was made plain that in God's estimate of sin, Lebanon itself was not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt-offering. In moving forward to the Incarnation, we take an immense step along the line whose final point is spirituality, yet even there we are still distinctly upon the carnal line. How to escape it? How to pass to the highest homage? The answer is as full of pathos as of truth : the final Representative of sensuous worship must himself be the Revealer of *spiritual life*. Jesus Christ did not pass away as a figure complete in itself ; he *ascended* that he might conduct his work from a higher level and by a more energetic and universal agency. Henceforth we know not even Jesus Christ "after the flesh," for the fleshly Christ has himself placed mankind under the tuition of a spiritual monitor.

3. The order of *written testimony*, though in some respects apparently accidental, moves in precisely the same direction. From picture and symbol we pass to spiritual meanings ; through the noise and fury of war we pass into the quietness and security of moral civilization ; through the porch of miracles and mighty signs and wonders we enter the holy place of truth and love ; from the erratic and most startling course of Matthew's genealogical table we pass into John's gospel, where the WORD meets us without one stain of earth upon its robe of light. The quality of John's gospel requires the very place that has been assigned to it in the New Testament. It is infinitely better that it should be preceded by the synoptic gospels, in which the attention of the world is boldly challenged by activity, spectacle, and a quickly-moving scene of divers strange things, such as had never been seen even in Israel. In the gospel by John, spiritual teaching, promise, devotion, comfort, and sanctification, are dominant, though publicity and mighty deeds are certainly not wanting. John interprets and completes his predecessors. He seems to say, "You have heard what the evangelists have had to tell, and have seen the wonderful things which they remember of their Master's ministry ; now let me explain the deep meaning of the whole." Thus he comes in his proper place. From Malachi to Matthew is but a step ; but to get from Malachi to John, you have to cross the universe. John's gospel is waiting until the Church becomes mature

enough to understand it. It waits without perturbation. Meanwhile there is no lack of interest in Matthew and Mark and Luke ; yet they are but the genesis of which the fourth gospel is the apocalypse. Matthew shows the *fact* ; John reveals the *truth* : Matthew portrays on canvas ; John puts his word into the heart. Only relatively so, of course ; for in Matthew there is a mystery of godliness, as in John there is a panorama of activity.

4. The whole *law* is a movement towards spirituality. From the minuteness of microscopic by-laws men have passed to a spiritual sense of moral distinctions. Every moment of the Jew's time, and every act of the Jew's life, was guarded by a regulation. Amidst our spiritual light, such regulations could not be re-established without awakening the keenest resentment. The great tables of by-laws have been taken down, because the Spirit of Order and of Truth has been given. What is true of law is equally true of all *institutionalism*,—its progress is from a crude outline towards completeness of purpose and critical accuracy of statement, with a due reserve of defensive reply in the event of a serious assault. The original scheme was probably very imperfect, open to hostility at every point, and inadequate to the occasion to which it primarily addressed itself ; then came criticism and reconsideration ; modification and readjustment came quickly afterwards ; the very wording of the purpose was more keenly set, with a view to unexpressed opposition or distrust ; in short, the crude outline was wrought out into intellectual and spiritual completeness and beauty ; so much so, that a comparison between the first prospectus and the last is like a comparison between a rough pencil sketch and a fully coloured picture. And this very word " picture " suggests that even in the department of art the law of progression towards spirituality prevails ; the best pictures and statuary do all but *live* ; though standing out with startling independence from all other earthly things, they seem to have around them somewhat of the mystery of eternity, now tender, now awful, connected by invisible threadlets with the Infinite, and abounding inexhaustibly with suggestion to any observer, whose eye is alight with true life.

Probably these illustrations of the doctrine that the whole movement of history has gone persistently in the direction of spirituality, will be accepted or rejected according to the theological prej-

udices of the reader ; but their practical value will be determined by the fact that *precisely the same movement takes place in the consciousness and experience of every progressive life.* Every man can test this doctrine for himself,—the doctrine, namely, that the growth of manhood is a growth towards spirituality. The child grows towards contempt of its first toys ; the youth reviews the narrow satisfactions of his childhood with pity ; the middle-aged man smiles, half-sneeringly, as he recalls the conceits of his youth ; and the hoary-haired thinker lives already amid the peace and joy of invisible scenes, or if he go back, living in memory rather than in expectation, it is so ideally as to divest his recollections of all that was transient and unlovely. It is worth while to halt a moment that we may see the bearing of this common fact upon the special doctrine under examination. In approaching the mystery of the Holy Ghost, we may be but approaching the highest expression of a mystery which is continually ruling the whole economy of human progress. Whatever we may believe about the personality of the Holy Ghost, we cannot get away from the fact of *spirituality* in our own consciousness. The spiritual world of the wise man increases every day ; and, strangely enough, in point of coincidence, that very increase becomes to him what the Holy Ghost becomes to the Church, namely, a *Comforter* ; so much so, that the wise man is never desolate, nor can any fool trouble the depths of his peace. This is the first testament between man and God ; is it not meant to introduce a higher covenant ? To the intellectual man, the Christian appeal is this : You have a spiritual *consciousness*, to which Jesus Christ would add a spiritual *personality* ; you have the spirit of interpretation, add to it the spirit of sanctification ; you have received the preliminary baptism, receive also the Holy Ghost.

These suggestions point to the conclusion that the Holy Ghost is the *reasonable* completion of theological revelation, and as such his ministry is an impregnable proof of the reasonableness of Christianity. In the person of Jesus Christ truth was outward, visible, and most beautiful : in the person of the Holy Ghost truth is inward, spiritual, all-transfiguring. By the very necessity of the case the bodily Christ could be but a passing figure ; but by a gracious mystery he caused himself to be succeeded by an eternal

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Presence, "even the Spirit of Truth, which abideth for ever." It is claimed, then, on behalf of Christianity, that there is a Holy Ghost, and to this doctrine is invited not only the homage of the heart, but the full assent of the most robust and dispassionate understanding.

## XXXV.

### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thy claim upon our worship is unceasing, for thy mercy, like thy majesty, endureth for ever. Thou dost never withhold thine hand from giving good gifts unto thy children. As thou hast made them in thine own image and likeness, and hast implanted within them desires which the world can never satisfy, so thou dost specially reveal thyself unto them day by day, appeasing their hunger with bread from heaven, and quenching their thirst with water out of the river of God. Oftentimes have we said concerning thy Son, "We will not have this man to reign over us." But when we have tasted the bitterness of sin, and have been convinced of our own emptiness and helplessness, when heart and flesh have failed, when by the ministry of thy Holy Spirit we have come to understand somewhat of thine own holiness and mercy and love, our hearts' desire has been that Jesus might sit upon the throne of our love, and rule our whole life; that he might be King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, our Redeemer the Mighty One of Israel. We desire to live unto the glory of God, to understand the meaning of the gift of life with which we have been blessed. Thou hast entrusted us with solemn responsibilities; enable us to understand their meaning, to feel their pressure, and to respond with all our hearts to their demands. Let thy blessing rest upon us whilst we are here this morning. May this house be unto us as the gate of heaven; may weary souls recover their strength and tone. May desponding hearts be revived and comforted with the consolation of God. May worldly minds be given to feel that there is a world higher than the present; that round about us is the great sea of thine eternity! May we be prepared for all the future, having our hearts saved through the blood of Jesus Christ. We depend upon thy Holy Spirit; we will not look unto our own resources except as they present themselves as the gifts of God. We will rely upon thy power: we will cry mightily unto our God! Thou wilt hear us; thou wilt redeem our souls from all fear; thou wilt inspire us with immortal hope; thou wilt clothe us with adequate power. Cleanse our hearts by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus. Show to us, more and more, the meaning of the mystery of his dear Cross. May we find all that is deepest and truest in our own life, symbolized in that Cross of Jesus. May it be the answer to our sin, the remedy of our diseases, the one hope of our wondering and anxious souls! Amen.

## THE HOLY SPIRIT AS THE INTERPRETER OF SCRIPTURE.

PERHAPS there is no function assigned to the Holy Spirit more important for us to understand than that by which he assures to the church a profound and correct interpretation of Scripture. According to the teaching of the apostle Peter (than whom no man was more experimentally qualified to speak on the subject, seeing that he had often been rebuked for his impetuous treatment of divine utterances), "no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation;" and the reason which he gives for this is philosophically satisfactory, viz., as the prophecy did not come by the will of man it cannot be fully comprehended and explained by the intellectual power of man. In this case man was an instrument in receiving and pronouncing the word, and he must be an instrument also in the study and mastery of its meaning. As holy men of God were moved by the Holy Ghost to speak, so they must be moved by the Holy Ghost to feel and understand, the divine oracle. Yet above all other books the Bible calls for exposition; its very form sets at naught the laws of literary structure, whilst all its problems and questionings have about them the solemn yet fascinating weirdness of an unknown origin and purpose. Its preface is simply—"In the beginning God," and its epilogue is a curse on the man who takes away aught of its sacred store. Between these extremes, so appropriate yet so startling, is found the apostolic caution not to enclose for selfish uses any portion of the freehold meant for the whole world. The very fact that a protest is entered against the narrowness and insufficiency of "private interpretation" should beget a deeper confidence in the divinity and consequent pureness of the revelation. On the other hand, what becomes of the right of private judgment? Can it be maintained without extorting from the holy word mistaken sanctions of personal crotchets or sectarian hobbies? Are unholy men to be turned promiscuously into the Book, and told to get out of it such advantages as they may suppose themselves to find? Is it so, or otherwise? This is a delicate inquiry, demanding treatment that shall in its human aspect be austere and reverent.

It is evident that the inevitable and most serious perils attending



“private interpretation” constitute an unanswerable argument against it, as its exercise is commonly understood. Yes; the perils are inevitable as well as most serious, for in the first instance attention must of course be fixed on the letter, and the letter brings up instantly some of the most vexatious difficulties arising out of secondary interpretation, that is secondary in point of value and importance. There is, if one may so put it, a battle of grammars as well as a battle of doctrines, and by the very nature of the case it is but a small minority of mankind that can take an enlightened and helpful part in such a controversy. Think of the intellectual training that is needful, the self-control, the patience, the thorough acquaintance with comparative philology, and the inexplicable sympathy which *feels* the meaning it cannot *see*. But turn untrained and spiritually incompetent men into a literature of which in its original form they are wholly ignorant, and who does not see that the results must be at once critically absurd and spiritually calamitous? Unfortunately the only man who does not see this is the man whose pride is wounded by the suggestion that there is some difference between a literal form and a spiritual meaning, and the consequence of his humiliation is that he repeats his errors with the greater emphasis, and proclaims that his most sacred rights are threatened or denied. Then there is the certain danger of fixing attention upon isolated passages, and so setting up denominations and schools upon texts, which being torn from the vital body of evidence, are perverted and exaggerated to the point of impiety,—the worst sort of impiety, too, namely, the sort which sets aside common sense and literary rectitude under the pretence of superior sanctity and more humble faith. Is there a single monstrosity in the religious world that does not defend itself by some stray line of scripture, which if compared with other testimony, and read in the light of Jesus Christ’s method of quotation—“it is written *again*”—would assume another meaning, and probably tend in an opposite direction? Can we wonder that such partial interpretation is forbidden in Scripture itself, and that the Bible prays to be protected from the ravages of bigoted and ignorant men? That the Bible exposes itself to such ravages is obviously in its favour, as suggesting that it is not cunningly fabricated and defended as a work of literary art, but that it comes upon the world as a living and generous revelation of spiritual truth ad-

dressed to the attention of the whole human family throughout all the ages of its progress, and so addressed (for there is a question of manner as well as of matter) as to challenge the most careful and unselfish thoughtfulness on the part of those who receive it. Given a God to find out what degree and quality of revelation He will grant, and no human mind would ever indicate such a book, as to structure and method, as the Bible. What dramatic action, rapidity of movement, brokenness of style, and apparent incoherence of plan! What little things are exaggerated, what obscure names are preserved, what trivial incidents are magnified! Stones enough, but where is the altar? Life in profusion, but how does it individualise itself into friendship, sympathy, and benediction? In proportion to the *life* that is infused into any work would seem to be its exposure to variety and keenness of criticism. Inspid books soon find the way into oblivion, but books that have life compel the world to read them even though the reading lead to anger and hostility. A painted portrait offers more points of attack than a photograph, though the subject be the same; necessarily so; there is more life in the one than in the other; the sun is said to be a faithful painter, but that is not an unquestionable statement,—the sun cannot get at the soul; only soul can paint soul, only life can delineate life; man can see his *shadow* anywhere, but where can he see *himself*? As the portrait will excite more criticism than the photograph, so the living man will, by a glance or an attitude, a tone or a smile, elicit a thousand remarks which the most brilliant painting could never have suggested. So much for the subtle illimitableness of life! Is it just to determine the character of a man by a single feature of his personality,—a feature detached and viewed apart? We should then have one estimate founded upon his stature, another upon his voice, a third upon his mien, a fourth upon his face, and so on according to the fancy of each observer, and yet we should, amidst all this variety, have little or no idea of the man himself: we should still require an estimate which recognised the relation of the parts to the whole, and distinguished the incidental from the vital and inseparable. So in the work of Biblical interpretation,—there must be an eye that can take in the whole landscape and a judgment which can allow for distance, light, and colour.

How, then, to realise these conditions and to bring them to

bear? And especially how to do so as not to deprive any man of his Bible by shaming him into the consciousness of utter inability to read what he has hitherto prized as the plainest and wisest of books. He will not, as he ought not, give up the Bible easily; and probably he will insist on the right of private judgment, and in a moment of jealous anger may claim equality of power with his teacher or friend. But such vehemence will be misspent if directed against the present argument, inasmuch as it has no felonious intent upon any man's Bible or upon the rights of any man's conscience. The question is, How to make the most of the Bible; how to get at its proper spiritual meaning; and how to express its revelations in the daily behaviour of life? Is every man qualified to interpret and decide the purpose of the Scriptures? From the point of view of this argument, interpretation is the result of spiritual preparedness, and spiritual preparedness is the work of the Holy Ghost. A reader going to the Bible in a self-sufficient and self-dependent spirit will narrow and dishonour it by private interpretation, and probably bring from its perusal nothing higher than a crotchet; but going to it in another spirit he may see it and know it as a revelation from heaven.

What, then, is that other spirit? It is so specifically defined by an apostle as to prevent all doubt of its meaning; it is "the spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind," and this spirit is the direct gift of God! He who is thus qualified can make no vital mistakes in the interpretation of Scripture; whilst he who has every other qualification but this will never apprehend the genius and purpose of the Bible. So, instead of taking the book from its humblest reader, this argument would make it doubly his, and enrich him with the most comforting promises throughout its perusal. This qualification will give a man so just an estimate of his own powers as will save him from meddling with things which are too high for him, and will move him with so enlightened and gracious a charity as will guard him from the self-exaggeration which expresses itself in illiberal censure or contemptuous distrust. Under the influence of a "sound mind" he will remember that there are some things in the Bible which are not meant to be determinately interpreted, and thus he will escape the vexation which follows abortive efforts to explain and understand every mystery; "the spirit of love" will dictate large and generous in-

terpretations of difficulties ; and “ the spirit of power ” will liberate him from the bondage and hardness of the mere letter. It may be worth while to vary the wording of so important a doctrine, if haply we may set it in a clearer light. Given, then, a man who approaches the Bible in a “ spirit of power, of love, and of a sound mind,” and the following results will certainly attend his reading : first of all, he will carefully distinguish between what is particular and what is universal, because his whole manhood will be enlarged and elevated according to the grandeur of the occasion ; in the next place, he will be dispossessed of every desire to propagate theories of his own, and so to strain and debase the Bible into an *ex-parte* witness ; and in the third place, he will be so completely under the dominion of “ the spirit of love ” as to be saved from the persistent and impious self-conceit which is the very main-spring of ungenerous and demoralising zealotry. He will go to the Bible in quest of *God* ; he will go to it in a spirit of self-control ; he will read it that he may find a *Gospel*, not that he may confirm a creed. The right of private judgment will thus be held in the interests of humanity, and the private reader will, in the best sense, become a public interpreter. Under these conditions let every man have the Bible for his own use, for he cannot forget that it is the book of God and the charter of the world.

Undoubtedly each reader will have his favorite passages,—texts to which he will turn in danger or sorrow with special expectation, and promises which will seem to have been expressly written for his personal use. This is natural and unavoidable ; it is even useful and edifying, as showing the illimitableness, the variety, the infinite adaptation and sufficiency of biblical doctrine and counsel. It is thus that each reader reprints the Bible, and that each life repronounces, with individual emphasis and unction, the righteous commandment and the tender promise. Still, this legitimate privacy of enjoyment and sense of invincible security is happily compatible with all that is claimed on behalf of the universality of the Bible. It should be borne in mind that the divine promise of satisfaction in all spiritual inquiries is independent of accidental, technical, or arbitrary conditions, and is made to rest solely upon the spiritual temper and purpose of the inquirer. In this respect the Bible is wholly unlike all other books. Letters can be interpreted by letters ; but here is a book in the reading of which lit-

erary instruments can give but secondary and imperfect help ; a book which says—You must read me through your hearts if you would see all the fulness of any meaning. A few proofs will show the scope and quality of the whole evidence. “To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at My word.” “Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy ; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.” “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Such conditions are in happy consonance with the genius of any revelation meant for the use of the whole world ; everything that is merely national, temporary, casual, or adventitious is ignored, and a great human condition, independent of place and time, is asked for by the merciful and condescending God,—“the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit ; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise,”—the things of the spiritual kingdom are hidden from the wise and prudent, and are revealed unto babes ; so it seemed good in the *Father's* eyes.

We shall never be able to dispense with literal criticism in reading and interpreting the holy oracles, simply because they are made known to us through a literal medium ; but probably we have yet to receive the profoundest commentary upon those oracles, because we have yet to attain the spiritual purity and sensitiveness necessary to their fullest apprehension. What is true of the written commentary is true also of the oral exposition. Preaching will undergo modifications which some of the elders would have deemed startling, and perhaps more than startling. It will have to throw off everything narrow and technical, and to speak the universal love in the universal language. It is not unkind to say that the pulpit, here and there at least, is marked by a smart trickery infinitely out of place, and truly pitiable, in this matter of biblical interpretation. Probably the inspired writers would be shocked could they know how their utterances are broken up into what are called “texts,” and what hothouse forcing there is in making a little text grow in one hour into a long discourse. No doubt a good deal could be said about the botany of a single blade of grass, but the flock is starving whilst the green

pastures are interdicted by the fluent but most unshepherdly botanist. Text-beating is most irreligious work, and woefully thriftless as to pastoral service. Clever, no doubt,—showing skill in word-twisting and literary legerdemain, thus making vulgar people wonder how the preacher can find so much in a vessel so small,—but no more. An impious cleverness, leading away from interpretations profound, beneficent, wise, such as restore the soul and magnify the excellence of truth, into critical nibbling, and into rhetorical clamour where one cannot hear the little sense on account of the great noise. Spiritual interpretation is directed differently. It is not so much textual as *biblical*,—that is, pervaded by the very life and purpose of truth, and in harmony with the whole plan of the universe. Great expositors will be less anxious that their hearers should listen to a discourse upon a particular sentence, than that they should comprehend the meaning of a whole epistle. Who thinks of giving out the epistle to the Galatians as his text, or the Acts of the Apostles, or the Gospel by John? Would this be inconvenient? Probably so; yet (and this is the point of the suggestion) it is possible to go through the parts *in the spirit of the whole*, as it is lamentably actual that the whole is often slurred as if it were a chaos of unrelated *parts*. Will it be arbitrary to insist that the part can be thoroughly understood only in the light of the whole? To hesitate to say so, is to save the feeling of preachers who, through no irreverence or idleness, may have spent the most of a public lifetime in seriously dishonoring the Bible in the very act of preaching from many of its texts.

It may be asked, How far is an expositor of the Scriptures at liberty to depend upon the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the public interpretation of the word? No categorical answer ought to be given to an inquiry like this, in which there is probably more implied than is expressed; still, the inquiry is of the first importance as bearing upon ministerial responsibility and Christian edification. We must recognise the difference between Interpretation and Utterance. Interpretation may come slowly; in some cases it may be the reward of patient diligence, in others it may come suddenly and startlingly. Interpretations are often given in the course of silent, devout, expectant reading, and, from our point of view, this would seem to be the natural application of the divine method; yet the Holy One of Israel must not be limited, nor His

pleasure be questioned or thwarted by the obstinacy of man. To go into the pulpit and stand there avowedly waiting for inspiration to understand the word would seem to be but one remove (if indeed it be so much) from the most impious affectation; *that*, surely, would be to limit the Holy One of Israel under pretence of magnifying his power. A written revelation implies by the very terms that it may be considered and pondered in quietness; it is already in existence; it is within reach; it is by its very nature an appeal to devout regard; why wait for public circumstances under which to inquire into its import? If, on the other hand, the question relate to Utterance rather than to interpretation, the reply may be fairly modified. Life itself is not the same thing alike under private and public conditions; it admits of expansion, of electrical sympathy, of subtle combination with the living elements and influences around it, and under high excitement it will surprise itself by the variety and intensity of its emotions. All this may come without any suggestion of what is known as divine inspiration; it is rather *human* inspiration, man quickening man as iron sharpeneth iron. It may, however, have its counterpart and complement in the direct action of the Holy Ghost upon the intellectual and spiritual faculties; and where that action supervenes there will almost certainly be enlarged power of sympathy and expression. It cannot, other things being equal, be an offence to the Holy Spirit to ask him for extemporaneous utterance that shall reach the hearts of the congregation,—a very different thing, be it observed, from literary expression, sentences meant for a book, paragraphs measured and numbered for printing. There is an utterance which belongs to the speaker and not to the writer, an urgent, rapid, percussive, and living utterance, that cannot be printed. In the very hour of duty such utterance shall be given by the Holy Ghost to the faithful and honest servant. But ought not a minister to prepare his sermon? There we come upon a difficulty,—the difficulty of *sermonising*, writing and speaking by the hour-glass, and running the risk of artificialising the divinest life. Preaching so soon becomes an art, a craft, a profession. A sermon is so measurable, so cold, so little, as commonly understood, only a mouthful, a hollow word perhaps, an uncertain sound may be. Yet what should it be? A stream of life, love, light,—the very blood of the heart, the very divinity of life. To talk of

“preparing” it, is to run a great risk of talking insanity, and yet, as generally thought of, what can be easier than to “prepare” a sermon! Will it be unduly bold on the part of a writer to give counsel to—what ought to be the greatest of all men—the Christian preacher? The advice would be, not that he should prepare his *sermon*, but that he should prepare *himself*. His exegesis he has of course prepared in secret; he has meditated upon it in the night-watches, and prevented the day by an eager desire to know it still more perfectly; he knows what things new and old he has in the treasury, and as for his searching of the Scriptures, he has dug in them as for choice silver and stones of great price. So far the preparation has been honest, full, even jealous lest aught should have failed in the minuteness of detail; but as to verbal expression, what if he should have left it to the inspiration of the moment? Were it a question of mere phraseology, there is no reason why he might not have prepared it in secret; but it is phraseology with a difference: it is phraseology *plus*, and what that *plus* is no man can determine exhaustively. Perhaps it is most fitly expressed by the word *life*,—that word being a compound of such terms as sympathy, *rapport*, adaptation, responsiveness. When the preacher knows his subject, and clearly apprehends the line upon which his thought is to proceed, it may show a trustful and humble spirit on his part to depend upon the Holy Ghost for the gift of suitable and efficient utterance. But may he not write, so to speak, to the dictation of the Holy Ghost? He would be a bold man who would answer such an inquiry in the negative; yet he might be reverent and wise in hesitating (considering the peculiar vocation of the pulpit) to answer it in the affirmative. “But may the preacher not stumble, blunder, or utterly fail? May he not be disquieted and indeed disabled by the fear of man? How deplorable that it should be so!” Such a suggestion is certainly not without foundation in natural reasons, yet the “deplorableness” which is deprecated is not without mitigation when viewed in a proper light. It is out of weakness that good men are made strong; it is by their falling that they learn lessons which are denied to the proud and the strong; it is by the very earthiness of the vessel that the excellence of the power is often vindicated and magnified,—so these human stammerings and down-breaks may not be so deplorable as was supposed. “But to fail in the



pulpit—to come to a standstill !” Painful no doubt, but not at all necessary as a consequence of depending upon the Holy Ghost. It is human fear, not human piety, that suggests the collapse and shame. But what is *failure* ? What is *success* ? There may be a misapprehension and a misapplication of terms in such a discussion. “ A preacher has read his discourse with unbroken fluency : that is success ;” so it may be said, but the opinion may be unsound notwithstanding its positiveness. The fluent reader may have failed. He may not have lingually stumbled, and yet he may have spiritually broken down, and grieved the spirit of God. His break-down was not towards earth but towards heaven, to man he was a hero much applauded and flattered ; to God and the angels, what if he was a coward and a hireling much pitied and wept over ! “ Failure” is a word often wantonly used in the church, greatly to the grief of honest workers and godly souls. But supposing what is usually called “ failure,” under the conditions demanded by this argument, who is it that has failed ? Man ? God ? Having strict regard to the conditions insisted upon in this contention, it was certainly not *man* that failed, and therefore we must leave the blasphemy of the alternative answer to those who can utter it. One thing only we must ask to be borne in mind, namely, that there is a success which is failure, there is a failure which is success. Given the kind and degree of dependence upon the Spirit of God indicated above, and probably there may be great changes in the form or mode of public ministration. Sermons may be less artistic, language may be less ornate or polished, appeals may be more abrupt and penetrating, methodical propriety may be disorganised, the pulpit may cease to be a refrigerator : great changes of many sorts may take place,—amongst the rest the Lord himself may come to his holy temple as in these latter days he seldom comes, and the eloquent orator may be silent before him. In the olden time the word came very brokenly, but did it not come with wonderful power ? Did not the “ babler” arrest the attention of the world and force new themes upon its reluctant consideration ? We shall be told that times have changed, and that the education and intelligence of the age must be addressed. Herein, then, the *distinctiveness* of the preacher is in danger of being lost, and instead of standing alone, in a noble and awful solitude as to method and claim, he may become but

one of a crowd,—he may become weak as other men. The philosophical lecturer, the academician, the travelling elocutionist, the Christian preacher, each has his manuscript and each his private art. Where is the ancient distinctiveness? Where the voice of the Lord, the background of eternity, the momentum of infinitude, all the old signals of a direct representation of the Invisible and Everlasting? Preaching should never lose its *distinctiveness*; it should stand apart; all coalitions it should avoid as unholy and unequal. When it tampers with the mean idolatries of the common art, it goes astray from the Cross, and sells its power to the enemy; it does not adapt itself to the age, it allows the age to take its crown and to despoil its power. But what if others imitate the preacher, and rival him in his peculiar vocation? Let them try. Their imitation will be the highest compliment; but beyond imitation they can never go. The servant of the Lord will for ever hold a secret entirely his own; his method may easily be borrowed, but his fire is hidden where thieves cannot break through and steal.

As for this Interpreter of the book and Inspirer of the ministry, he is to be had for asking. “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy spirit unto them that ask him?” The very sublimity of simplicity! “Ye have not because ye ask not, or because ye ask amiss.” Who can tell the result were every man resolutely, with all love and zeal, to pray for a double portion of the Spirit of God?

## XXXVI.

### 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 loving kindness 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 thy 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 indwelling, 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.

### THE MINISTRY OF THE COMFORTER.

THE teaching of Jesus Christ respecting the ministry of the Holy Ghost is so peculiar as to raise the inquiry, Where was the Holy Ghost during the earthly ministry of the Son of man ? Throughout the Old Testament there are the clearest testimonies as to his personal service in the ancient church, and yet Jesus Christ speaks of the descent of the Spirit as a new and special gift : for example—“ I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter ;” “ the Comforter which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name ;” “ If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you.” All this is strange, almost startling indeed, after reading the Old Testament. Where was the Spirit that had moved on the face of the waters, that had garnished the heavens, that had striven with antediluvian man, that had been poured out upon Israel ? Was his ministry suspended ? It may be suggested that the *fulness* of the Spirit had not been realised in the ancient church, which is undoubtedly true ; yet though true it is insufficient to account for the treatment of his descent as a new visitation and benediction of God. The answer would seem rather to be, that the Holy Ghost was *in* Jesus Christ himself, and could not be given to the church as a distinctively *Christian* gift until the first period of the incarnation had been consummated in the Ascension of the Son of man,—“ If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you ; but if I depart I will send him unto you.” Jesus Christ was *Himself* the New Testament : whatever happened aforesaid was but preparative and typical : from his coming the world was to date its regeneration and the church was to reckon its birth. “ In him dwelt all the fulness of the godhead bodily ;” and when the influence of that godhead was poured out upon the church, it came as if from the very heart of Christ, and was impregnated with all the elements which made up the mystery and beneficence of the Incarnation.

Jesus Christ gives a specific definition of the work of the Holy Ghost. That his work admitted of definition is itself a significant

circumstance ; and that the Son of Mary should have presumed to define it is a marvellous instance of his spiritual dominion, if it be not a covert yet daring blasphemy. At this point Jesus Christ seems to pass from the theatre within which he had dazzled the eyes of curiosity by the number and splendour of his miracles, and to enter into the holy of holies, the secret place of the Most High, and to seat himself there as the donor of spiritual riches. It is a withdrawalment (even if considered merely as a conception) which invests the Man with peculiar awe. He says he will do mightier works than ever ; he will touch the life, the will, the love, of the world ; he will ascend above principalities and powers, and subject all hosts and forces to spiritual control, invisible and almighty. Daring, truly, was this Son of Mary ! The very idea of putting the spiritual above the material, and consequently of preferring a thought to a miracle, is the sublimity which seems narrowly to escape the charge of insanity. Let us now see with what simplicity and decisiveness Jesus Christ defines and limits the functions of the Holy Ghost :—

1. He shall not speak of himself.
2. He shall glorify Me.
3. He will guide you into all truth.
4. He will show you things to come.

Besides the work of comfort within the church, he has a great work of *conviction* to do in the world at large : “ When he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.” It will be convenient to study primarily the function of comfort which is assigned to the Holy Ghost, and then to discuss the ministry of conviction which he is to conduct in the hearts of all men.

1. “ *He shall not speak of Himself.*” Why not ? Because he would be speaking an unknown tongue. We cannot understand the purely spiritual. Whatever we know of it must come through mediums which lie nearer our own nature. The ministry of the Holy Ghost, therefore, is limited only because we ourselves are limited. The whole ministry of God is an accommodation to human weakness. When he would teach *truth* he must needs set it in the form of *fact* : when he would show himself, it must be through the tabernacle of our own flesh ; when he would reveal

heaven, he must illustrate his meaning by the fragments of light and beauty which are scattered on the higher side of our own inferior world. Everywhere, could we but see it, he has set up a ladder by which we may reach the skies. God would have talked to us without any intervention, but we could not have known the meaning of utterances which were not bounded and illustrated by things lower than ourselves; therefore hath he set his tabernacle in the sun, and made manifest his invisible kingdom and power by the wonderful works of his hands. We must begin with his hand, or we cannot know his heart. The doubting disciple said of Jesus Christ, that only the print of the nails and the wound of the spear could convince him of the identity of the Lord: and at best are we not all, by the pitifulness of the great mercy of God, allowed to begin with the divine hand instead of going at once into the sanctuary of the divine heart? The Holy Ghost does not speak of himself, because there must be a common ground upon which he can invite the attention of mankind. Where or what is that common ground?

2. "*He shall glorify Me.*" The common ground is the work of the man Christ Jesus. What is meant by glorifying Christ Jesus? We know what is meant by the sun glorifying the earth. Let us familiarize ourselves with that process, as it most completely represents the spiritual idea now under consideration. The sun does not *create* the landscape. The mountain and the sea are just as high and as wide in the grey cold dawn as at noonday. The sun adds nothing to the acreage of the meadows or the stature of the rocks. Yet how wonderful is the work of the sun! Look upon the earth in the pale dawn, and watch the ministry of the sun from hour to hour. How the light strikes the hill, burnishes the sea, flushes the trembling dew, and makes the blossoming bush burn as if with the presence of God! Everything was there before, yet how transfigured by the ministry of light! The commonest things are made almost beautiful by that benign service, and as for the higher forms of culture it would seem as if one more flash of sunshine would make them as the angels of God. In this respect, what light is to the earth, the Holy Ghost is to Jesus Christ. The Saviour is glorified by the Spirit. The work of the Spirit is revelation, not creation. He does not make Christ,

he explains him. The sun in doing all his wonderful work does not speak of himself; he will not, indeed, allow us to look at him. If we turn our eyes upon him the rebuke is prompt and intolerable: the language of that rebuke is—Look at the earth, not at me; see the opportunity for service and culture which is given you; do not intrude upon my tabernacle, but work within your own sphere while it is called day. The Holy Ghost, in like manner, does not speak of himself. He will not answer all our inquiries respecting his personality. We cannot venture with impunity beyond a well-defined line. To the very last men will enquire, What is the Holy Ghost? Showing that all attempts at exhaustive definition have ended in failure and disappointment. Yet whilst he himself is the eternal secret, his work is open and glorious. His text is Christ. From that theme he never strays. To the individual consciousness he reveals the mystery of the beauty of Christ. The Christian student sees a Christ which he did not see twenty years ago,—the same, yet not the same; larger, grander, tenderer, every day; a new music in His speech, an ampler sufficiency in his grace; a deeper humiliation in his cradle; a keener agony in his cross. This increasing revelation is the work of the Holy Ghost, and is the fulfilment of Jesus Christ's own promise. That the Son of Mary should have claimed the Holy Ghost as his interpreter. Observe this as an incidental contribution towards the completeness and harmony of the mystery that is embodied in Christ Jesus. Regarded in this light it is very wonderful. The beginning and the end are the same,—equal in mystery, in condensation, in solemn grandeur. Thus: "That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost,"—this is the *beginning*; "He shall not speak of Himself, He shall glorify Me;"—this is the *end*: are the tones discordant? The *incarnation* of the Son of God was the work of the Holy Ghost; how natural that the *explanation* of the Son of God should be the work of the same minister! As he was before the visible Christ, so he was to be after him, and thus the whole mystery never passed from his own control.

The life of the Son of man, as written in the gospels, *needs* to be glorified! He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief: he had not where to lay his head: he gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that

plucked off the hair : he made himself of no reputation ; he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross : he was rich yet for our sakes he became poor : upon all this chasm, so deep, so grim, we need a light above the brightness of the sun. When that light comes, the root out of a dry ground will be as the flower of Jesse and the plant of renown, and the face marred more than any man's will be fairest among ten thousand and altogether lovely. Such is the wizardry of light !

This claim to be glorified by the Holy Ghost is without precedent in human history. That is a fact which ought to have some value attached to it. It is the kind of claim which could be tested promptly and thoroughly by the consciousness of Christianised mankind, and presumptively, on that very account, the kind of claim which an impostor would have avoided. Besides, for such a man, or for any man indeed, to have had such an idea is most marvellous. Had he merely committed his case to the care of time and the judgment of posterity, he would have taken the course of ordinary sagacity ; but instead of the general appeal which is commonly made to the arbitrament of God and good men, he expressly stated that the Holy Ghost would glorify his person and complete his mediation on the earth. The work of the Holy Ghost was to be infinitely more than a work of mere explanation : it was to move forward to the very point of glory, even the glory which the Son of Man had with his Father before the world began. This statement came from the lips of Jesus Christ Himself, and therefore it leaves him a blasphemer without excuse if he was merely a virtuous and courageous teacher. On the other hand, taking our Lord's word as true, there is now going forward in human thinking a spiritual process which is identified with no other name than his own, and which will culminate in splendour ineffable and eternal. The prayer of our Lord to be "glorified" is peculiarly affecting : "I have glorified Thee . . . now, O Father, glorify Thou Me ;"—"glorify Thy Son," as if the full bitterness of his humiliation had been realised, and he could defer the resumption of his glory no longer. He distinctly speaks of it as a resumption and not as an unknown experience :—"Glorify Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee be-



fore the world was." A fierce hunger seized his heart, a home-yearning of which every child knows something.

Having spoken of the ministry of the Holy Ghost in relation to himself, our Lord proceeds to speak of it in relation to his disciples :—

3. "*He will guide you into all truth.*" Not, "He will add to the number of miracles which you have seen at My hands," but "He will guide you into all truth :—" "I am the Truth ; He will glorify Me ; He will show you all my riches." Our Lord himself did not guide his disciples into all truth, nor have men even yet been so far guided ; they are travelling the upward road, but the summits are still beyond. Truth is an infinite quantity. At first it may seem to be compassable, but it recedes as it is approached ; yet it throws the warm rays of promise upon every honest and loving pilgrim to its shrine. The highest grace of manhood is the truth-loving spirit : it purifies like fire ; it throws a strange and holy majesty upon life, yet makes men tender and charitable. Our Lord's expression is comprehensive,—"*into all truth ;*" not only into truth that is distinctively theological, but into all truth, scientific, political, social, religious. Is truth not larger than the formal church ? Is not the physicist under the tuition of the Spirit as well as the theologian ? Our Lord does not divide men into hostile tribes ; he does not open one department of truth and refuse the key of others. His is a universal speech,—he speaks of "*truth*" as indivisible and complete, and of the spirit as the one Guide. It is not to be supposed that any *one man* is to be guided into all truth. Some possessions are put into the custody of the whole race. Paul did not claim to have known truth in its entirety ; nor did Peter ; nor did James. No single star holds all the light. No single flower is endowed with all the beauty. What man is there who knows all things ? It is proverbial that the wisest men are the humblest, and that those who have seen the fullest disclosures of truth are assured that the supreme glory is yet concealed. Has not every honest student some portion of truth that is in a sense his own ? Does not every eye see at least a tint which no other vision has seen so clearly as itself ? It is important to consider these questionings well, because they point towards the mutual trust and the mutual honour without

which society would be disorganized and debased. Men make up *Man*, churches make up the *Church*, truths make up *Truth*, and it is only by a complete combination of the parts that the majesty and lustre of the whole can be secured.

It should be observed that in this connection the Holy Ghost is designated by our Lord as "the Spirit of truth" (τὸ Πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας), and as such he is to "guide into all truth" (παῖσαν τὴν ἀλήθειαν) those who are under his tuition. Observe the quantity—"ALL TRUTH:" observe the method—"He will guide." The quantity is unlimited; the method assumes consent and co-operation on the part of man. A reference to Old Testament history will throw some light upon the scope of the Spirit's ministry, and show how grave is the error which limits it to thinking and service which are supposed to be purely theological. It may indeed (and we believe it will) show that "theology" is actually the all-inclusive term, holding within its meaning all the highest aspects and suggestions both of speculative and practical science. The theologian is entitled to claim astronomy, geology, botany, agriculture, and chemistry, as sections of theology. If he trifle with this claim he will not only surrender his best weapon as a controversialist, but mistake brethren and friends for rivals and enemies.

Can anything be farther from theology, as popularly understood, than stone-cutting or wood-carving? Can any two spheres be much more widely sundered than those of the preacher of the gospel and the artificer in iron and brass? Apparently not. But the biblical testimony sets the inquiry at rest: "I have called Bezaleel, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship" (Exod. xxxi. 2-5). Bezaleel was an inspired theologian. More than this, and apparently still farther away from the theological line:—"I have created the smith that bloweth the coals in the fire, and that bringeth forth an instrument for his work." Then, intermediately at least, may stand the agriculturist, of whose treatment of the earth is said:—"This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working."

The rulers and soldiers of Israel were qualified for their work by the Spirit of the Lord. "The Spirit of the Lord came upon Othniel, and he judged Israel and went out to war." The ministration of the Spirit is various: by it Moses was made wise, Bezaleel was made skilful, and Samson was made strong. "All these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will" (1 Cor. xii. 11). Wonderful is this inclusiveness of the Spirit's work. "Hic Spiritus Sanctus omnium viventium anima, ita largitate sua se omnibus abundanter infundit, ut habeant omnia rationabilia et irrationabilia secundum genus suum ex eo quod sunt et quod in suo ordine suæ naturæ competentia agut." A thorough persuasion of this inclusiveness will put an end to the needless hostility between what is distinctively known as science on the one hand and theology on the other. All things are theological primarily and ultimately, though certain intermediate points in their processes and relationships may seem to be without the higher light. There is a common teacher—"the Spirit of truth;" there is a common end—"all truth;" there should be a common bond—mutual trust.

But what if the fact of the Spirit's ministry be denied on the one hand? Denial proves nothing against the case as it is now put. God works even where he is unknown. There are truths which lie below our very consciousness. Men have denied not only the work of God, but the very existence of God, yet their denial has not destroyed the divine supremacy. "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust,"—and this not only in a material but in a spiritual sense; he has servants who have signed no covenant, and messengers who do his errands in their own name. Nor does he blight them for their ingratitude, or put them to open shame,—“He is kind unto the unthankful and the evil,” and not willing that any should perish. The worshippers of intellect may not know that they are worshippers of God under another name. Our spirit may be not equal to our work: we may profane the name of God in the very act of building a cathedral for his praise. We may, then, venture to speak a word of caution to the men who deny the ministry of the Holy Ghost, and in doing so to sug-

gest whether after all there may not be mysteries in their life which they have not altogether explored and comprehended. They will not ruthlessly resist the hand that would bring them into the inner sanctuary on whose outer walls they have wrought so much exquisite and invaluable decoration.

Upon the church itself this promise of guidance into all truth should exert a healthful influence, especially in the direction of enlarging and refining its charity. The danger is that the church should be content with a limited range of dogma and purpose when it is invited to the mastery and enjoyment of a kingdom that cannot be measured. The church should not be anxious about uniformity of stature and countenance, when God has made it so evident that he himself delights in variety and contrast. Men of the most inquisitive and even sceptical mind should be encouraged by the church to lead the van of inquiry, and subject every doctrine and every spirit to a cross-examination which to minds of an opposite type may become wearisome and even vexatious. The church should extend to its adventurous sons who go out to shores far away and to lands unmapped and unclaimed, the most ardent and loving recognition. Even when they return with hopes unfulfilled and with banners torn by angry winds, proving the abortiveness of their chivalry or the mistake of their method, they should be hailed with a still tenderer love. The pain in their own hearts is keen enough. In secrecy they have known the very bitterness of death. To such men the promise of being guided into all truth becomes a personal torture. They yearn for its fulfilment : they are straitened until it be accomplished. Other men can wait, but their waiting is a grace rather than a virtue. Enthusiasm is unknown by them. Temperamentally they know nothing about time ; and there is no future to them because they have no idea of the suspense and occasional anguish of expectation. Such men are sure to have a kind of advantage over those who are made impatient by a great promise, because, having themselves risked nothing, they may thoughtlessly indulge self-felicitation at the expense of men whose shoe latches they are not worthy to unloose. Martyrdom thus comes without the tragic surroundings which bring with them their own alleviation : it is inward agony, often unconfessed, but terrible as the pains of hell.

Little enough is known about such martyrdoms, and perhaps the less the better, because theirs is a suffering which would be aggravated by the very touch of unsympathetic hands.

4. “*He will show you things to come.*” The word translated “He will show” is ἀναγγελεῖ, he will announce to you ; the word in the Vulgate is *annunciabit*. Such a promise would seem to imply that secret communications about the future will be made to the church ; yet this construction of the promise must be admitted with extreme caution, if admitted at all, because of the dangerous uses to which it may be put. Men would in some cases mistake prejudices and frenzies for inspiration, and in others they would inflict needless trouble upon themselves and upon society at large. Limited to the immediate hearers of our Lord, of course the promise is exhausted and the results are to some extent recorded in apostolic history ; but it cannot be so limited without impairing the worth of the promise by taking it away from the category of assurances which are to enrich and stimulate the church through all time. Merely to “show things to come” in the sense of prevision is a blessing greater in appearance than in reality ; but to *prepare the mind* for things to come—to show the mind how to deal with new and perplexing circumstances—to give the perception which sees God everywhere and the affection which thankfully accepts his discipline—is an advantage which cannot be expressed in human terms. Whatever the promised “announcement” may include, it must involve this supernatural preparedness of mind and heart, or it will merely excite and bewilder the church.

That the Holy Spirit did “show things to come” in a prophetic sense is proved by instances circumstantially reported in the New Testament : for example,—“The Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me ;” “Agabus took Paul’s girdle and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles ;” “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and to doctrines of devils.” In one case this is purely personal ; in the other it is almost vague. Seeing, how-

ever, that the Comforter is to abide with the church "for ever," and seeing that as a matter of fact the church is not gifted with prevision, we are thrown back upon the gracious and all-sufficient assurance, that whatever may come, and with what violence soever its coming may be attended, the church will be prepared to withstand every shock and surmount every difficulty. Out of this assurance comes rest; the future is no longer a trouble; the clouds that lie upon the remote horizon will be scattered by the brightness of the image of God.

We have thus pointed out four aspects of the ministry of the Holy Ghost, which may be described as *universal*. There is a fifth aspect which belonged to the disciples alone, which is yet of supreme consequence to ourselves: "He shall bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." There is an inspiration of memory. Readers of the gospels must have been surprised by the minuteness of recollection which is shown in their pages. Conversations are reported; little turns of dialogue which seem to be merely artistic are not omitted; records of occasions on which the disciples were actually not present, and of which they could only have heard from the lips of the Lord himself, are presented with much particularity and vividness: how, then, was this done, and especially done by men who certainly were not conspicuous for the kind of learning which is needful for the making of literary statements? The explanation of this artless art, and this tenacious memory, is in the promise of our Lord—"He shall bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you: you shall live it all over again: the scene of which I have been the centre shall be set before you in vivid detail, and you shall be so taught how to gather up the fragments that nothing of all its minuteness shall be lost."

## XXXVII.

### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, seeing that dark clouds and darkness are round about thee, may we know of a surety, for our comfort and strengthening in all good things, that righteousness and judgment are the habitation of thy throne. Be thou thyself near to us, so that our weakness may itself become a source of strength, and so that every stroke of thy rod may be sanctified to the well-being of our souls. We would regard all human life as a revelation of God. Work in us that quiet and saintly patience which humbly waits for the solution of all mysteries and the removal of high mountains which oppose our access to the perfect light of thy presence. Be thou thyself the answer to every temptation that assails our heart. Be the defence of our peculiar weaknesses, and when sorrows thicken round us, do thou give new interpretations of thy love, that we may recover our faith and praise thee with a louder, sweeter voice. We would walk all our days hand in hand with Jesus Christ. We would put our feet in his footprints. We would keep our eyes steadily fixed upon his cross. There would we pray for the pardon of our sins, the sanctification of our nature, and the perfect redemption of our whole life! We gather round the Cross to-day. We are bound by its great attraction; and we take hope that our sins may be forgiven, because the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin. Put within us thy Holy Spirit. Direct the way of our life from time to time. May we be humble, courageous, hopeful, childlike patient with God and patiently waiting for God, lest by our impetuosity we interrupt thy providences and divert the stream of thy love. We need no other guide but thee. In God we find redemption, justification, holiness, and all the blessings of a glorious destiny. Keep our hearts in this faith, then shall our life be strong and pure. Amen.

### THE CONVICTIVE WORK OF THE HOLY GHOST.

THERE was a tone of sorrow in the voice of our Lord when he said that the Spirit of truth "will reprove the world of sin because it believeth not on me." Our Lord knew that viewed outwardly, as a question of station or numbers, his personal ministry upon the earth had been a failure, yet it was to be proved by

another, whom he himself would send, that the failure was due to the very sublimity of his character. A character like his was not to be compassed and honoured by the public mind in three short years. With less grandeur he might have drawn around himself a wider homage ; or with a grandeur undegraded by Nazarene associations he might have carried that homage to the very point of superstition, and so have wielded an influence the more commanding from its being spectral and mysterious. But to be just what he was—divine yet human—the supreme anomaly and contradiction in the whole range of history—proved the stumbling-block and rock of offence against which his contemporaries bruised themselves by their obstinacy and unbelief. In withdrawing from the world he said that his case would be completed by the ministry of the Holy Ghost, who would so operate upon the moral nature of mankind as to establish a perfect righteousness and an incorruptible judgment, and in so doing would show the absolute need of himself as Mediator and Saviour. This would seem to be the purport of the words “because they believe not on Me.” The world has never cared to own its need of the Son of man. He has always been a stranger, viewed with suspicion and listened to with reluctance. He came unto his own, and his own received him not ; he was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and we hid as it were our faces from him. The world has never known exactly what to do with this stranger in the house ; it has approached him, and recoiled from him ; it has owned him, and discarded him, in a breath ; it has hailed him as king, and crucified him with thieves ; he has been at once the spell and the dread of all who have known him. He was aware of this, and said in effect :—You will not come unto me ; you are determined to go to the Father through some other way ; I cannot remain longer in the body, but I will send the Spirit of truth, and when he is come he will convince you of sin because ye believe not on me. To this point we shall come again, after some analysis and reasoning.

To convince the world of sin is much more than to convince the world of crime. The world is satisfied with rough definitions, and therefore it has unhappily used the words “crime” and “sin” as equivalent and interchangeable terms. In the higher reasoning



this is a fatal error. There may be sin where there is no crime, but wherever there is crime there is sin to account for it. Society is organized to defend itself against crime, yet every member of it is guilty of sin. This has to be made clear by the Holy Ghost, and has already in a measure been made clear to every one of us. Thus : Society condemns *murder* ; so in his reasoning with us the Holy Ghost begins with this admission, and proceeds to say—You condemn murder, but this is merely a gross and vulgar morality, little better, indeed, than selfishness stimulated by fear ; you must find out how murder begins,—it begins in unholy *anger* ; that anger may never have spoken one word or shown one sign of impatience, yet by so much as you have given way to it in the secrecy of your inmost heart you are guilty of murder in the sight of God ! It required a *Ghost* to teach us that. We had no moral instrument of our own fine enough and keen enough to make so delicate a distinction ; we could only get so far as to make some difference between murder and manslaughter, or between murder with extenuating circumstances and murder without them. There society paused, being unable to go further ; and precisely *there* the Spirit began his work, taking the crime to pieces, tracing it back to its origin, and finding that origin in a secret and perhaps long-hidden excitement of the heart ; and having found it, the Spirit said—*This* is the murder ; the outward deed was a social outrage, an odious and revolting vulgarity ; *this* movement of hatred in the heart, this unbridled passion, is the murder. “ Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer.” Thus we are brought to subtler definitions than have hitherto satisfied our rude morality, and the measure of our assent is the measure of our self-conviction. Those of us who have walked up and down in society as blameless men suddenly find ourselves in the presence of a new law of judgment, and are compelled to own that if murder is traceable into the region of motive, feeling, latent or unconfessed abhorrence of a man, it is more than possible that we ourselves may be murderers in the sight of God. To accept such a doctrine is to invest life with a most solemn and tragic grandeur, and is to do something further, which will appear as the analysis proceeds.

Society has made murder penal, but it has not been able to set *falsehood* amongst the crimes which are to be punished by the magistrate. By society itself falsehood is treated more spiritually

than murder ; so we come into a higher region of the operation of the Holy Spirit. We ourselves make further admissions in this case than we were prepared to make in the other. We own, for example, that a man may *act* a lie as well as *tell* one : that he may use words with two meanings : that he may guard himself and mislead others by mental reservations. These are great admissions, for more spiritual, it will be observed, than were made in the case of murder. What more can the Holy Ghost himself do ? It is not indeed needful that more be done if the object be merely to secure self-conviction. Yet more is possible. The Holy Ghost says that a form of words may be true, and yet it may express a lie ! A conversation may be reported *verbatim et literatim*, yet, by a mere change of tone, by the omission of a facial expression, by a skilful variation of pause or emphasis, the report may be a falsehood from beginning to end. Farther and deeper still a man may be false to *himself*. He may actually have treated himself so dishonestly as to have suspended or destroyed the very power by which he knows right from wrong. His conscience is “ seared as with a hot iron,” and human speech has lost all value and use as a moral medium. Some men are spoken of as “ given over to believe a lie ;” that is to say, the natural conscience itself, the primary element of responsible life, is dispossessed of its proper function, and belief has become an instrument of self-delusion. Under such circumstances the man is something more than a *liar*, he himself is actually a *lie* ! When a man is guilty of lying there may be some hope of his restoration because of certain counterbalancing virtues on other sides of his character ; but when the man *himself* is a living lie, the whole nature is in so false a condition as to leave no hope of penitence and recovery. Under such difficulties who but the Spirit of God can undertake the work of convincing the heart of sin ? There must be a process in a heart so lost, which can only be typified by the most terrible displays of power which take place in the material world,—eruption, and earthquake, and lightnings like the glance of God.

But the process becomes still more spiritual. Murder and falsehood are at all events nominally condemned by every man who has any sense of social decency ; but what of virtues which are praised as the very security and crown of human society ? The Spirit of God seeth not as man seeth ; for man looketh on the out-

ward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart. The form of godliness is to be distinguished from its power. An illustration taken from every-day life will help us to see the meaning of this. Take an act of almsgiving, and let it be outwardly the choicest specimen of its class : the gift is large, most timely in its presentation, and most deservedly bestowed ; many a heart was made glad by the donation, and many an anxiety was set at rest ; the gift was given with such cordiality too : the tone of the giver was cheerful, and gladdening to all who heard it ; altogether the charity was marked by every desirable beauty. Beyond this point society does not carry its judgment,—man looketh on the outward appearance. Where man ends, the all-searching Spirit begins : he holds the candle of the Lord over the secret places of the heart ; he tries the motives of the soul by the fires of the supreme judgment ; and having done so, he says in effect to the applauded man,—“ Your love went not with your gift ; had you been left wholly to the motion of your own will you never would have given it ; it was an oblation to your own vanity ; it was a bribe by which you bought reputation and good standing amongst men ; it was not given to the poor, it was given to *yourself*.” This conviction may be made so clear to a man, and brought to bear upon him with such urgency, as to cause him the most painful suffering at the very time when human applause is most general and vehement. Here, then, is the point of departure from such cases as murder and falsehood, the point of excellent appearance where the informing spirit is vicious and detestable.

We are now upon the line every point of which adds to our knowledge of spiritual realities as distinguished from formal facts. How near, for example, are we to the point which shows that prayer itself may be a lie ! We turned from murder with disgust, and from falsehood with a sense of shame, but what of the prayers so much approved for every charm of expression and tone ? May our *religion* be the chief of our immoralities ? You prayed in the house of your friend, and made your prayer the medium of personal compliment to his supposed excellences and deserts ; you praised the creature to the Creator, making mention of his virtues, but not daring to hint at his sins ; with many a complimentary reference you lingered upon the case of the master, but you dismissed the servants in one hurried and shallow sentence : would

you have *so* prayed for the man if he had not been listening to you? Answer that question distinctly. Would you have called him God's "*dear* servant" if he had been a mile away? Would you have prayed *at all* if you could decorously have escaped the duty? Not only does the Holy Ghost ask these questions, he compels you to answer them to your shame, nor does he cease his piercing and destructive ministry until you own that you have turned your religion into a crime and uttered blasphemy at the very gate of heaven. So, the period of mere definition is passed, and the time of direct and irresistible application has come.

More : even if we are unassailable at any of the great points now indicated—crime, falsehood, selfishness, impious prayer—yet there is another kingdom wherein the divine judgment is set up, the kingdom of unuttered desire and thought. Every man has two lives—the life of motive, and the life of behaviour, into the first of which none can enter but the Spirit of spirits. "He knoweth our thought afar off ;" before it is a complete thought, when it is too dim an outline to have any relation to the uses of human speech, and before it leaves the shadows of its inception, he declares its quality and metes to it the judgment of righteousness. So solemn is life, so perilous, so painful ! Through your heart there shot a desire which scorched you, though no human eye will ever see the blister which it left, and the very memory of that desire will make you dumb whilst others sing ; it will sting you, humble you, and make a coward of you all your days. Into your mind there came what was only *the hint of a thought*, yet it struck you like a thunder-bolt, so evil did it seem to be even in its incompleteness ! These are the visitations which, when rightly understood, show a man that there is something worse than crime, and make him impatient with the deceitful comforters who would 'heal his hurt slightly.'

Thus we come back to the point with which we started, viz., "The Spirit of truth will convince the world of sin,—of sin because they believe not on me." The Holy Ghost will so vividly and thoroughly show the nature of sin, that those who thought themselves the best examples of human society will be afflicted with the keenest compunction because of what they know themselves to be in the presence of God. It will no longer be a question of comparison as between one class and another, or

between one man and another ; the judgment will lie wholly between man and God, and every heart will see itself as if it were the only heart in all the universe. This personal consciousness is to be so vivid and intense as to become painful ; a man will see himself as he never saw himself before, and feel the burden of life with a new and intolerable oppression. His moral sense will be so purified and perfected that he will feel even an evil *thought* to be an unpardonable sin ; and so humbled will he be by finding that even his best deeds are tainted, and that his very prayers are but a refinement of impiety, that all strength will go out of him and all self-hope will expire. Can he in that moment of despair turn to others for help ? No ; because they are in the agonies of the same experience, groaning because of a common paralysis and helplessness. The hour is too solemn to admit of trifling by comparing one degree of sin with another ; there is no question of degrees ; whatever difference there may be in the mere *accidents* of crime, under all surfaces there is the terrible fact that every heart has broken away from the rule of the Divine King. What then ? When the conviction is so keen and relentless, when every concealing shadow is chased from the inmost life by the fierce light of infinite purity, the heart will begin to know that in turning away from Jesus Christ, that strange and tormenting middle quantity by which it was so fretted in the days of its own haughtiness and self-sufficiency, it turned from the Son of God, the only mediator of the covenant of peace, and then the agony will be like the very pains of hell. This is the conviction of sin which the Spirit of God is to work in hearts which have not believed in the Saviour of the world. Jesus Christ cannot be understood until sin is understood. So long as sin is regarded from a merely social point of view, the cross of Christ must appear to be an exaggeration, — justice assuming a sensational attitude. Why do with blood a work which could be done as well with water ? Why sacrifice a man when the blood of a beast would answer every purpose ? These inquiries are legitimate so long as *sin* is underrated or misunderstood, but the moment that sin is seen under the illumination of infinite holiness, the cross of Christ alone is equal to the tragic awe and appalling horror of the situation. The first clear view which any man gets of the sinfulness of sin marks the crisis of his life. From that time he elects his destiny. It is questionable

whether there can be any repetition of that view, so intense, so intolerable is the light. Jesus Christ, then, would seem to say in the words now under discussion, something to this effect:—“ You do not understand me now ; you think you can do without a mediator between yourselves and God ; so little do you know of sin as God knows it, that you suppose yourselves equal to every occasion which can arise in working out all the dispensations of divine righteousness ; so must it be for a little while, but not for ever ; when the Spirit of truth is come he will give you such views of the sinfulness of sin, and show you so clearly the true condition of your own hearts, that under his ministry you will cry out for mediation and remember in the anguish of your pain that you would not come unto *me* that you might have life.”

In the light of this exposition we may see the way clear to some practical conclusions.

1. All attempts to establish a satisfactory life on the basis of what is commonly known as morality, must be given up. Morality has become one of the fine arts. It is an attitude, a fine balancing of calculations, a tacit understanding with evil powers, at best but an armed neutrality. The surface of society is not ill-conditioned ; its politeness was never so polished ; its laws of giving and taking were never so admirably codified. This social behaviour is only the fit expression of individual virtues which conspicuously abound, and which are properly used as bonds of intercourse in carrying on the business of daily life. But what if morality be only an art,—the most cunning and profitable of tricks ? What if the partitions which we call our “ rights ” be saved from destruction merely because it pays better to repress the fire of passion than to give it free course ? This is not said cynically, but rather with bitterness of sorrow. The Holy Ghost teaches us that we cannot be right with one another until we are right with *God*. He says we must be *religious* before we can be profoundly and truly *moral*. By being religious the Holy Ghost means that the human will must be under the control of the will of God ; and it is precisely at this point that a great controversy arises between the human and divine. By so much as a man subtracts anything from the sovereignty of God’s control, and transfers it to himself, he assumes that it is possible to create a satisfactory morality without divine help. The Holy Ghost says, “ No ;

you must be *born again*—you must come into thorough newness of life, and not into a mere readjustment of habits and behaviour—you must die unto yourself, that you may live unto God.” His work is thus fundamental. He will not attempt to do anything that is merely on the outside; he says that the very nature of man must be born again, and that until regeneration takes place, so-called “morality” is but a well-contrived device of selfishness. This is clearly a magnificent basis of life, supplying as it does eternal guarantees of purity and nobleness. In the absence of such a basis there can be no dependence upon the loudest professions of confidence and friendship; they must be taken for what they are worth, as very pleasant to the outward ear, but as liable to be blown away by the first cross wind which assails our popularity. On the other hand, where the heart has been born again, and as a consequence draws all the considerations which govern it immediately from the will of God, there must be incorruptible truth and invincible constancy. If we plead that when thrown entirely on our own resources we can develop a very beautiful life, the Holy Ghost says, “No; your results are *artificial*; they express study and contrivance on your part; they are rather a group of negations which attest a more or less severe discipline, they are not the natural outcome of a moral condition which cannot be changed by outward circumstances; you make clean the outside of the cup and platter, but the inside is full of rottenness and death.” So the very morality which we boast may be, as already said, the last aggravation of our wickedness. Recollect how severe Jesus Christ was with the “righteous” men of his day; he never spared them; he never had one approving word for them; when they gathered up their ceremonial skirts and ran away from the path of the “sinner,” he damned them with infinite condemnation as hypocrites, devourers, and whited sepulchres. This ministry of his is continued by the Holy Ghost,—“He shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you,”—and the ministry thus continued cannot cease until man throws down his artificial morality as a burden and a lie.

2. All hopes founded upon what are thought to be different degrees of sin must be abandoned. There are, of course, different degrees of crime, but the question does not turn upon crime at all.

The murderer is undoubtedly a greater criminal than the pilferer ; but the murderer is *something more* than a murderer, and the pilferer than a pilferer. The murder and the theft are accidental forms, nothing more. For all the purposes of criminal law it may be sufficient to classify men according to the mere accidents of their mischievous behaviour, so that punishment may be assigned with some degree of proportion to the shock which public feeling has sustained ; but another standard must be set up when the offence is between man and God. " Would you send a murderer and a speculative sceptic to the same hell ? " it may be asked. But stop ! It is *not* the murderer, accidentally as such, that is sent to hell, nor the speculative sceptic, accidentally as such, that is shut out of heaven. The question is one of *death*, not of *disease* ; of the heart, not of the hand. According to the teaching of the Holy Ghost it may be (even considering the question as one of degrees) that the heart through which has passed an unholy desire may be in a worse condition than the heart whose momentary passion has vented itself in murderous vengeance. There is an iniquity which is rolled under the tongue as a sweet morsel, a secret enjoyment of sin ; and there are also moments in which is revealed to the soul a horrible *possibility* of sin where such possibility was least suspected, a revelation known only to the soul because too dreadful to be put into words and communicated to a stranger. The first time, in our sunny youth, we realised this awful possibility, can it ever be forgotten ? It was only a shadow that swept over the heart, not a thing for words at all, yet the very memory of it chills us like the touch of death. Or it was a demand of the heart made at a time of festivity, it came upon us without warning, it made the heart bound as if it had been secretly touched with fire,—in that moment we saw that our life is being daily spent on the edge of an abyss. Left to ourselves as a community of men, we can set up comparisons and contrasts, and actually shudder at enormities which secure for themselves a bad eminence ; but introduced into the presence of God, and searched by the Holy Ghost, we feel that a look may be blasphemy and that unkindness may be cruel as murder. The thing to be understood is that sin is spiritual, and that it is to be judged spiritually, without reference to the vulgarity or noise which may make it socially noticeable.



3. Under such realisation of sin the work of Jesus Christ is seen in its true light. On this point some remarks have just been offered, but we may recur to it as the chief point in the discussion. Here it is emphatically true that "they that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." The analogy will help us to higher truths. A man who has never known the agony of pain or the prostration of weakness may feel himself at liberty to treat very lightly the claims of men who follow the profession of medicine. From his own point of view he may feel himself entitled to sneer at such men, and may plead his personal robustness as an argument against their pretensions. He may, if of a narrow and obstinate nature, even go so far as to contend that other people might all be strong as he is, and consequently to withdraw his sympathy from them. But let that boastful and austere man awake to the fact that in his own body there is a slowly developing disease, painless in its early stages, but surely advancing upon his very life; let him come to the *conviction* that at any moment his pulse may cease, and instantly his attitude towards the medical profession may be totally changed. A new *conviction* has given him a new feeling and compelled him towards a new policy. Ask him the reason of the change, so complete and striking, which he has undergone, and at once he will justify himself by his new consciousness. Jesus Christ makes use of this very experience to throw light upon his own ministry: "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance;" "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." Everything, therefore, is made to depend upon *conviction*. Where there is no conviction there will be no pressure of necessity. Where there is no thirst, who cares for the fountain? but in the desert, under an intolerable sun, who can calculate the value of a cup of cold water? Jesus Christ awaits the demands of spiritual necessity. He knows that the Holy Ghost will so torment the heart with a sense of sin as to compel the sufferer to pray for mercy, and at that point of anguish he will show himself to the Saviour of the world. Jesus Christ cannot work in the absence of *conviction*. When the physician lays his finger upon the strong man's pulse, the strong man smilingly anticipates an exclamation of surprise and congratulation; but when the pulse of the dying man is felt, it is amidst the silence of anxiety and fear. Tell the Pharisee that Jesus Christ died

for him, and the man is shocked ; but tell the sinner who knows the torment of remorse that the Son of God died to save him, and the statement becomes " the glorious gospel of the blessed God." Through his remorse he sees what he never could have seen through his philosophy. For years he may have vainly studied the Cross as a controversialist, in a moment he saw all its meaning when his heart was broken because of his sin. In the light of these reflections we may see how far removed from the region of mere controversy is such a doctrine as the atonement. It does not express a controversial result, so how can it be reached by controversial means ? It came out of *feeling*—that is, out of the tender pity and love of God—and cannot therefore be understood but by the aid of feeling. The logician is out of his beat here. The broken heart will see farther than the keenest intellect. It is only for a moment now and then that any man really and truly sees *himself*, and such moments are times, not of equable and serene complacency, but of intense excitement and passion,—times of madness which the world cannot understand : how, then, can a being who can see *himself* only now and then, see *God* always, and explain in easy words the sorrow and the grace of the Eternal ? No man could bear the strain of continual conviction of sin. It kills him, that he may be made alive again by the Spirit, and ever afterwards he speaks of it as a memory rather than as a current experience. The agony upon the cross was soon past, and it could come again no more. It is so with this *conviction* which reveals the cross : however long the preparation, it is but momentary in the final pain, yet long enough to show sin, God, and salvation. This being so, the atonement cannot be dealt with in coolness and patience, like a problem which appeals but to one set of faculties ; it must be seen *at once*, through the agony of broken-heartedness, or it can never be seen at all. Though soon seen it is never forgotten. It rules the life evermore. Fruits of the Spirit will attest by noble confirmation the reality of the Spirit's ministry. The anguish of the birth is forgotten so soon as the man is born, but the man has to live under discipline and to be the willing and grateful scholar of the Spirit to whom he owes **HIMSELF.**

The conviction of sin is to be accompanied by the conviction of righteousness and the conviction of judgment,—*accompanied by,*

rather than *followed*, for these great spiritual quickenings and movements would often seem to involve many simultaneous experiences which are only in *appearance* separated by intervals of time. It may be taken that the convictive work of the Holy Spirit is one great act, describable, however, by a threefold effect, and that such work is initiated *at once* in all its complexity. Commentators have not found it easy to give a clear and satisfactory rendering of our Lord's words upon this subject, nor are we bold enough to hope that we can simplify what they have found it so difficult to explain. The meaning of the words would seem to be substantially this : The world has its own notion of wrong-doing ; the world has its own notion of propriety, or justice as between man and man ; the world has its own notion of moral differences, of right and wrong, of good and bad,—but when the Spirit is come, he will seize upon all these notions, and with convincing refutation will show them to be only names, to be superficial, shallow, altogether inadequate, fallacious, and misleading ; having done this negative work, he will proceed to his affirmative mission, and in doing so he will replace the word “ wrong-doing ” with the word *sin*, the word “ propriety ” with the word *righteousness*, and the word “ differences ” with the word *judgment* ; he will show the spiritual essence and reality, of which the world has but a dim and imperfect notion ; he will throw the world into discontentment with all its own moral theories, and bring it to see that it has been mistaking appearances for realities ; thus, negatively and positively, the Spirit will carry out a profound and vital work of spiritual conviction. But the point which is to be specially observed is that the convictive mission of the Holy Ghost *is entirely identified with the name and ministry of Jesus Christ*. The conviction, regarded simply as the result of spiritual argument, might have been accomplished in the very first ages of human history ; it must, therefore, be something more than an intellectual conviction, and for its accomplishment it must have required every aid that is implied in the gift of the Son of God as the minister of salvation. Mark the statement and the reason : The Comforter will convince the world of sin—*because they believe not on Me* ; the Comforter will convince the world of righteousness—*because I go to the Father* ; the Comforter will convince the world of judgment—*because the prince of this world is judged (is cast out), for for this*

purpose was I manifested that I might destroy the works of the devil. In the light of this connection the whole passage may be treated in free paraphrase thus : When the Comforter is come he will convincingly refute the world's theory of wrong-doing by showing God's idea of sin as proved by the shedding of My blood, which blood the world has trampled under foot and accounted an unholy thing ; in future when men want to know what sin really is (not merely in its accidental expression but in its essence) they will see God's revelation and estimate of it in My cross. When the Comforter is come he will convincingly refute the world's theory of righteousness, which relates wholly to appearances, and is more or less a successful adaptation of expedients, and this he will do by taking up and continuing My work, which I now lay down that I may go to My father. I have spoken the word, I have also shown the example ; now a great spiritual process must set in, and my outward and visible work must receive spiritual illumination and exposition. When the Comforter is come he will convincingly refute the world's theory of judgment, which is founded upon the most obvious differences only, and has no reference to those deep spiritual elements and facts which underlie and account for all human conduct ; he will show the meaning of my temptation, the purport of my answers in the wilderness, and the discriminations with which I startled the men of my day—such as preferring the publican to the Pharisee, and the mites of the widow to the gold of Dives : all this he will do, and then will be seen that My work is not the broken column which it now appears to be, not a failure, not a humiliating overthrow, but the beginning of a kingdom fair as the sun and everlasting as the heavens.

This conviction is being wrought out by many instrumentalities ; as, for example, by the wise exposition of the living Word ; by loyal obedience to the statutes and ordinances of Jesus Christ ; by holy and unblamable lives, whereby ungodly men are silently rebuked and instructed ; by startling developments of spiritual power, by which the people are now sobered by great fear and anon made glad with sure and exultant hope ; by good coming out of evil ; by sudden and terrible reproofs of powers haughty and defiant in their self-sufficiency ; by the honour of methods and plans thought to be feeble and useless ;—in all these ways, and in others many and wonderful, a great work of spiritual con-

viction is proceeding in society, and is showing itself in the higher legislation and the keener discipline of mankind.

Such work is necessarily slow in its progress. Conviction is probably the slowest of all work. By its very nature it is both negative and positive ; that is to say, it has to penetrate error and prejudice, and actually to destroy them, before it can begin its constructive processes. This is the very force of the word *ἐλεγχος* as employed by our Lord in this passage,—a word which involves condemnation, remorse, penitence, and better-mindedness and health of soul. Work of this kind is not to be done in a day, or if so done it may be as quickly overthrown. The kingdom of heaven is in nowise to be hurried in its construction, and inasmuch as it is the highest of all kingdoms it is the least susceptible of impatient influences. It resents them. For a time, godly labour will seem to disappear in nothingness, and to leave the labourer without reward or joy ; but afterwards there will come up signs and tokens which cannot be mistaken for aught but the hire and honour of those who do well. Sin, righteousness, and judgment, are not to be seen objectively, or the work would be easy enough ; they must be revealed subjectively, in much painfulness, self-accusation, and controversy of heart, for thus only can they become part of our very consciousness, and live for ever amidst the ruling memories of human life. Jesus Christ commits his great work to the ages, and to the ministry of the Eternal Spirit, assured that in the long run the world will trace its true ideas of sin, righteousness, and judgment, to the Golgotha of his sorrow and the Olivet of his ascension. “ He that believeth shall not make haste.” “ Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die.” “ 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.”

## XXXVIII.

### P R A Y E R .

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou art our father and our mother ; thou art full of wisdom and power and love towards us. In all thy daily ministry thou comest to us with all the fulness of the Godhead ; thou placest all things at our disposal ; thou dost not treat us with contempt or with indifference, as if, being the creatures of a day, there was in us no germ or hope of immortality. Thou dost surround us with the infinite sufficiency of blessing and care ; thou dost watch us as if thou hadst none in the universe besides us ; there is not one of us that is not dear to thy heart, and whom thou wouldst not miss from thy great family. We pray thee to impress us with the sense of thy continual presence. Teach us that thy presence is not intended as a terror, but as the inspiration and hope of life. Surround us as by fire that no enemy may come near us. Grant unto our understanding the light of thy wisdom that we may see truth as a continual revelation of thyself, and cause our hearts to glow with divine love towards thee as revealed in Jesus Christ. We bless thee for the Cross, for the Sacrifice which it represents, for the love which it puts before us, for all its deep spiritual meaning. We thank thee that in the Cross of Christ, the Lamb of God, we find the only gate of Heaven. Meet us to-day ; comfort our hearts ; solve all the difficult questions which perplex us in this life ; work in us saintly patience, tender trust in our living, loving Father. Say to each of us the word of forgiveness, through the blood of Jesus Christ our Saviour, which shall give us liberty and inspire us with joy. Lord, hear us ! The Lord command his blessing to rest upon us, and we shall be filled with the peace of God ! Amen.

### REGENERATION.

ACCORDING to the gospel of St. John, our Lord taught the doctrine of regeneration at an early period in his ministry. It is remarkable, as illustrative of a point insisted upon at the beginning of this essay, that this fact should have been noticed by John alone, showing, as it does, the intensity of his spritual nature. The narrative given in the third chapter is evidently written *con amore*, being as to its tone and purpose, quite in the vein of John's own sympathies and aspirations. It is certainly made clear that our Lord attached primary importance to the doctrine of the

second birth, and that he identified it with the special function of the Holy Spirit. What, then, is this new birth,—this being born again, or born from above?

Regeneration, as our Lord explained it, was evidently a novel doctrine to Nicodemus. "How," said he, "can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Considerable light is thus thrown upon the intellectual character of Nicodemus: he was a master without mastery, a Horeb without a burning bush,—a fact of which our Lord availed himself in an *argumentum ad hominem*, which must have had a humiliating effect upon the ruler in Israel. When physical facts are set forth as the types of spiritual realities, the success of the figure depends upon the intellectual constitution of the student. One mind reasons upward, another downward; so whilst one man seeks the theology of a flower, another is content simply to know its botany. Nicodemus had only one idea of birth, and with all the simplicity of ignorance he instantly applied it to the kingdom of heaven. It would seem as if our Lord always used what we (mistakenly) call common words in their primary signification, and that consequently there was frequent confusion between him and his hearers. For example: "I will give living water," is an expression which was taken to mean water out of the well; "Beware of the leaven of Herod," was regarded as a reference to ordinary bread; "Be born again," was considered as limited to physical generation. What if *our* uses of these words should be but secondary and relative, and if a reproof of their misapplication should come from heaven? Our sense of the term "water" or "bread" may be but a convenient misuse of words whose meaning points toward the most solemn necessities and desires of life; in that case *we* become the offenders by materialising and limiting words current as between the highest spiritual experiences throughout the universe. We say that when our Lord said "bread" in the instance just quoted, he was speaking *figuratively*; why may not *our* use of the word "bread" be figurative? Who taught man language? Is it inconceivable that God may have lent man an eternal symbol by which to describe a temporary necessity? So with the word "born:" we limit it to one act, whereas it may describe the progressive transitions by which men

and angels pass "from glory to glory" in the highest heavens. It is convenient in a case like this that a man so literal as Nicodemus proved himself to be should lead the conversation, because he will ask questions in their baldest form, which we shall all wish to have answered, but which some of us may have too much pride or too much caution to propound. A dull and candid man often lays his superiors under considerable obligation without knowing it. The presence of such a man in certain companies is invaluable.

A grave difficulty arises on the first reading of our Lord's doctrine, which may be thus generally expressed—"As a man had no control over his first birth, so he can have no control over his second ; the question of regeneration, therefore, is one with which he need not concern himself, for it is entirely beyond his province : if he is to be born again, he will be born again : if not, not : and whether one way or the other, he himself is wholly without will or responsibility." It has been attempted to support this view of the case (more or less modified) by such quotations as these : "Born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John i. 13). "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures" (James i. 18). "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Peter i. 23). These words would seem to destroy the action of the human will in regeneration, and to leave man literally without choice or alternative. This would be of small concern where the act of regeneration *does* take place and all its dignities and inheritances are secured, but it is another matter where no such act transpires and no such enjoyments are realized. What of the men who are not born again, and are consequently excluded from the kingdom of heaven? Let us look at two theories :—

1. Regeneration belongs wholly to the region of divine sovereignty ; it leaves the will of man without choice, election, concurrence, or movement of any kind ; in this matter man is simply as clay in the hands of the potter ; whether born again or not he is wholly without responsibility. And—

2. The act of regeneration transpires with the consent of the human will, that will having first been moved by the Holy Ghost, or had brought to bear upon it all the motives which are accessible



to the most cogent and persuasive appeals, and the man having affirmatively answered the inquiry, Dost thou believe on the Son of God ?

Now are these theories as mutually hostile as they appear to be ? Or are they identical in the sense of one being the doctrine and the other its application ? Most decidedly, in our opinion, the latter. We view the subject in this way : The *idea* of regeneration is essentially and absolutely God's, without the slightest admixture of human thought ; it never came—it never could have come—within the range of man's intellectual province. Man could have proposed reformation, satisfaction by penalty, repetition of life on the basis of experience, but at some such point his inventiveness would have ceased and determined : what, then, was to be done ? From the *human* side, nothing ; from the *divine* side, what ? The question involves an agony. It can be answered only by a revelation, for the soothsayer is dumb and the seer is blind. God answers the inquiry ; he says, Ye must be *born again*. The very phrase took the world by surprise. It was astounding. Nicodemus exclaimed in amazement when he heard it, How can these things be ? Let this surprise on the part of a ruler of Israel be carefully observed, as showing that the most cultivated and trusted minds had never risen to the discovery of such an idea as the possibility of a *second birth*. When Nicodemus spoke, he spoke not for himself alone ; he expressed the bewilderment and confusion of the whole world. Now that we are familiar with the phrase “born again,” we may lose much of its proper force ; but put back the mind to the night on which it was first used, and we shall understand something of the concussion by which Nicodemus was stunned. Coming thus suddenly upon the human mind, without consultation with any human counsellor, the idea of the second birth is so entirely God's that we are constrained to say, “Of his own will begat he us ; not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy hath he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.” No other words would do justice to the case, so complete and absolute is the sovereignty which interposed the possibility of regeneration between sin and death. So much for the first theory. It is in its substance philosophically and theologically sound. Regeneration is as exclusively a divine idea as is creation,

and not the less so that it adds the mystery of grace to the mystery of power.

But how is this proposition, so manifestly divine in its originality and beneficence, to be brought to bear upon mankind? First of all it must, of course, be declared; being declared as a fact, it must in the next place be expounded as a doctrine; but it separates itself so immeasurably from all the tracks of finite thinking, that the mind cannot lay hold of it,—it is like a star which lies beyond the field of the telescope; how then? In the absence of a connecting medium it will mock and trouble every aspiration and every dream of human hope. Is there, then, such a connecting medium? Our Lord says there is, and he proceeds to indicate it to Nicodemus. He preaches redemption by the sacrifice of himself, as completing all the typical processes with which Israel was familiar. Redemption was intelligible; it seemed to carry with it the principle of equivalents; it did, indeed, touch the tragic element of human life, yet it presented a great practical aspect which easily secured attention and confidence. It is of the first consequence to observe that our Lord connected regeneration inseparably with his own priestly work; apart from this it would, as in the case of Nicodemus, have confounded all human thinking and troubled all human effort by a special and indefinable influence. Our Lord proceeded to the divine mystery along the line of the divine love. He said in effect: You must begin with the known and find your way to the unknown; you must first study the work of the Son, and then proceed to study the work of the Spirit; if I have told you earthly things and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you heavenly things? But if you cannot at once realise the purpose of my coming, you must go back to Moses, and study afresh the spirit and method of his administration. He did something which will help you to understand what I am about to do, “for as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life,”—in other words, should be born again. The ground of primary inquiry is thus distinctly defined. We cannot understand Christ until we understand Moses, nor can we understand the Spirit until we understand Christ; “understand,” indeed, in no pedantic or exhaustive sense, but with that tender love which is the best teacher of the intellect. Still, another

link is wanting. How is man to lay hold upon the ministry of Jesus Christ so as to secure its advantages and submit to its discipline? Our Lord himself is a mystery, how then can he be known? Undoubtedly he is a mystery, yet nearer to the nature of man than any purely spiritual being can be. What does he himself say as to the method of approach? He never changes the condition upon which the blessings of his redemption and fellowship are to be secured—"whosoever *believeth*," he that *believeth*," "be it unto thee according to thy *faith*." That this condition was emphatic and unchangeable is shown throughout the whole ministry of the apostles, whose exhortations may all be expressed in the words of one of themselves—"believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." But is not faith itself the gift of God? True: yet "God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith" (Rom. xii. 3); that is, he has given to every one of his responsible creatures a germ, an initial power, call it what you please, on the right use of which depends the destiny of the soul. Every man has something with which to begin the world,—to begin eternity!

Our Lord did not attempt to explain the mystery of regeneration: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." Our Lord does not mean to say that the wind is lawless, or that it blows according to the whim of an arbitrary power; he simply illustrates the limitation of human knowledge in the physical world, and suggests that the same limitation is as actual in a world much higher. Yet as Nicodemus would not think of denying the existence of the wind because he did not know its origin and could not trace its destination, so he must not deny the reality of the second birth simply because he was baffled by its mystery. We ourselves are daily testifying to the soundness of this very reasoning. Are we not the subjects of many processes which may be described as births, and do we not accept the results without pleading the mysteries as a ground of unbelief and inaction? Thus: is not the child born into the man? How? At what precise moment does the child disappear and the man assert his status and dominion? No man can answer the question. Again: is not *thought* being continually born and reborn in the mind? Who can explain, beyond all mystery or doubt, the

origin and succession of ideas? How do thoughts combine, repel, modify each other, or correct and enlarge themselves? Who can measure the eccentricity of the orbit through which the mind daily passes? Of such experiences it may be truly said, The wind bloweth where it listeth, thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth; so are the movements of thine own mind. In every man there seems to be another master than the man himself,—a genius, an angel without a name, with whom he often wrestles, but against whom he may not always prevail. And again: Is there not a similar experience in the development of the affections? Love has never known its own secret. Why not love all persons alike? By what law do hearts claim kindred, and know one another afar off? What is the law of antagonism and recoil amongst persons marked largely by the same general characteristics, and presumably equal to one another in education and status? How is it that a conversation in the highest electric sympathy and confidence, can be thrown into disorder by a person who is a non-conductor? The wind bloweth where it listeth, thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth; so are the currents of thine own sympathies and affections!

Regeneration must be its own witness. It is not to be discovered by a spiritual chemistry known only to a few, but to be proved by a life which the rudest observers cannot but distinguish by its virtue and nobleness. The fruit of the Spirit is manifold, yet it is of one quality and worth throughout: it is described by the Apostle Paul with very remarkable minuteness—"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." Why use so many words? Would not the one word "goodness" have sufficed? No. Because spiritual growth is often in individual *points* rather than in the central substance of the character, and it is helpful to have many lights by which to judge of progress. Regeneration does not destroy the primary individualities of human nature: Peter is as ardent and Paul as courageous after spiritual renewal as before, but each must be taught to add to his original characteristics a culture which may seem to lie far beyond his strength,—Peter must add self-control to his ardour, and Paul must attemper his courage by long-suffering and gentleness. Not so much by the development of his specialities as by a

movement toward new graces will the wise man determine his personal regeneration.

In laying down the doctrine of the new birth, our Lord showed how fundamental and complete was the change which human nature must undergo as the condition of entrance into the kingdom of heaven. He did not propose to effect merely what is known as a social reformation. He had not to treat the question of external decay but of spiritual death. This statement to Nicodemus is our Lord's doctrine of what is known as the fall of man ; instead of saying in so many words that Adam fell, he stated the fact in an infinitely more comprehensive and impressive form when he said, "Ye must be born again." All hope of self-reformation was destroyed, and man was sent back to God for new life on the ground of being already dead in trespasses and in sins. Christianity has no other than the same fundamental message to deliver to every man. When its preachers speak any other language the gospel falls below its mission, and misleads its hearers. Given a humanity only partially dismembered and enfeebled, and Christianity is altogether in excess of the occasion ; but given a humanity "born in sin and shapen in iniquity," then Christianity alone can invest it with eternal life. Man may be staggered by the doctrine of personal and absolute depravity, in the early stages of serious thinking ; it will probably appear to him to be a doctrine of violence ; he will point to a grace here and there in his own character which will practically contradict the fierce impeachment ; but when he is "born again," and looks back upon his old self, he will see in the doctrine a truth which has been but too feebly stated. Some truths, like some objects in nature, are best seen by contrasts. The doctrine of what is commonly known as "original sin" is in some respects the hardest of all doctrines for unrenewed man to receive ; it assails him so desperately ; it shuts up his mouth when he would plead his cause ; it divests him of all status in the sanctuary of God ; it will not grant him a single postulate with which to start an argument in his own defence : what wonder, then, if he be goaded to resentment, and retire within the security of his own pride ? When, after many an hour of agony, he yields to the pleading of the Holy Ghost and becomes "a new creature in Christ Jesus," he will see himself by contrast, and confirm a doctrine which once made him mad.

Regeneration gives its subjects a new standpoint from which to view all outward things,—in a more than poetical sense it gives them new heavens and a new earth. We know how all outward things vary in aspect and value according to the spiritual condition through which we regard them. The world is shadowed or brightened by our own heart rather than by anything in itself; our joy makes the cloudiest day glad, and our grief finds night in the sunniest sky. In that supreme moment when man is first conscious of his regeneration, there is no miracle in all the life of Christ that does not appear to him simple and easy, and the removal of mountains by faith as a grain of mustard seed is only the sober expression of an ordinary truth. Such removal is startling to us in our spiritual coldness and languor,—quite extravagant and absurd indeed,—but the reason is in ourselves. In a moment of high spiritual realisation St. Paul exclaimed, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” Exactly so. Let a man feel that the case is not measurable by his own strength but by the power of Christ, and he is at once delivered from the prison of so-called impossibility; he will know that all things are possible to him that believeth, and gird himself to great occasions by offering the all-inclusive prayer, “Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.” Measuring ourselves by ourselves, miracles are incredible because impossible: animated by “the power of an endless life,” miracles are to us but the large letters in the Bible of nature. If a man be but a *critic* of the things that are about him, he will not see them as they really are. He will defeat himself by his own cleverness. His self-consciousness will isolate and impoverish him. But when a man is “born again” he sees that what he calls the universe is but a speck in a higher kingdom, and that what he calls “the laws of nature” are but constabulary forces intended to keep fools in their places and help honest men to do their work in security.

## CONCLUDING PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we bless thee for the Holy Spirit, and for the Sacred Church which he has built out of the material he has miraculously restored. Thou didst create the heavens and the earth, but he has created a nobler universe. We are his workmanship in Christ Jesus, being sought out by his grace, and fashioned into beauty by his power. Our prayer is that the work may be carried on to completion, and that not one of us may be lost. Lord, answer this prayer of human love, and make us strong in the confidence that it is infinitely less than thine own. Holy Spirit, come with every rising of the sun ; breathe in every wind that blows ; and set a glory and a defence around our whole life ; and thus make us princes and mighty men in our day and generation. Reveal the deep things of thy Book to us day by day, and teach our souls all the meaning of thy statutes ; so shall we be strong, and so shall earth become part of heaven, and life touch the mystery and the joy of immortality. Spirit of the living God, reveal to us the mystery of mysteries, the Cross of the Saviour of the world ! Holy Spirit, set up that Cross in our self-trustful hearts, and on it slay our pride and vanity. We leave ourselves in thy hands, knowing that thou art able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the throne. Amen.

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