

THE PEOPLE'S BIBLE:

DISCOURSES UPON HOLY SCRIPTURE.

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THE EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE

TO THE

EPHESIANS.

(ROME, A.D. 62.)

NOTE.—“The Epistle to the Ephesians was written by the Apostle St. Paul during his first captivity at Rome (Acts xxviii. 16), apparently immediately after he had written the Epistle to the Colossians, and during that period (perhaps the early part of A.D. 62) when his imprisonment had not assumed the severer character which seems to have marked its close.

“This sublime Epistle was addressed to the Christian Church at the ancient and famous city of Ephesus, that Church which the Apostle had himself founded (Acts xix. 1 *seq.*, comp. xviii. 19), with which he abode so long (*τρικετάρ*, Acts xx. 31), and from the elders of which he parted with such a warm-hearted and affecting farewell (Acts xx. 18–35). . . . The Epistle thus contains many thoughts that had pervaded the nearly contemporaneous Epistle to the Colossians, reiterates many of the same practical warnings and exhortations, bears even the tinge of the same diction, but at the same time enlarges upon such profound mysteries of the Divine counsels, displays so fully *the origin and developments of the Church in Christ*, its union, communion, and aggregation in Him, that this majestic Epistle can never be rightly deemed otherwise than one of the most sublime and consolatory outpourings of the Spirit of God to the children of men. To the Christian at Ephesus dwelling under the shadow of the great temple of Diana, daily seeing its outward grandeur, and almost daily hearing of its pompous ritualism, the allusions in this Epistle to that mystic building of which Christ was the corner-stone, the apostles the foundations, and himself and his fellow-Christians portions of the august superstructure (ii. 19–22), must have spoken with a force, an appropriateness, and a reassuring depth of teaching that cannot be over-estimated.

“The contents of this Epistle easily admit of being divided into two portions, the first mainly *doctrinal* (ch. i.—iii.), the second *hortatory* and *practical*.

“The doctrinal portion opens with a brief address to the saints in Ephesus, and rapidly passes into a sublime ascription of praise to God the Father, who has predestinated us to the adoption of sons, blessed and redeemed us *in Christ*, and made known to us his eternal purpose of uniting all in him (i. 3–14). This not unnaturally evokes a prayer from

the Apostle that his converts may be enlightened to know the hope of God's calling, the riches of his grace, and the magnitude of that power which was displayed in the resurrection and transcendent exaltation of Christ,—the Head of his body, the Church (i. 15-23). Then, with a more immediate address to his converts, the Apostle reminds them how, dead as they had been in sin, God had quickened them, raised them, and even enthroned them, with Christ,—and how all was by grace, not by works (ii. 1-10). They were to remember, too, how they had once been alienated and yet were now brought nigh in the blood of Christ; how He was their Peace, how by him both they and the Jews had access to the Father, and how on him as the corner-stone they had been built into a spiritual temple to God (ii. 11-22). On this account, having heard, as they must have done, how to the Apostle was revealed the profound mystery of this call of the Gentile world, they were not to faint at his troubles (iii. 1-13): nay, he prayed to the great Father of all to give them inward strength, to teach them with the love of Christ, and fill them with the fulness of God (iii. 13-19). The prayer is concluded by a sublime doxology (iii. 20, 21), which serves to usher in the more directly *practical* portion.”—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible*.]

Ephesians iii. 20.

“Able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.”

GOD'S ABILITY.

THE Apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Ephesians, expresses himself with a redundance of thankfulness and appreciation which shows the wonderful depth and richness of his nature. He does not mete out his words as if by constraint. He lavishes his heart upon his theme, and, with holy impatience, he urges word upon word, description upon description, that he may give some faint hint at least of the sublimity by which he is dazzled, and of the joy which lifts him almost to heaven. In this chapter we find such expressions as these:—“The unsearchable riches of Christ,” “the manifold riches of God,” “the riches of his glory,” “the love of Christ which passeth knowledge,” “that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.” Never was language so inadequate to express the thought which inspired his mind, and which threw his heart into ecstasies of inconceivable and unutterable delight. The Christian mediation seemed constantly to enlarge upon the vision of the Apostle. It was never to him a diminishing quantity. Every day he saw in the scheme of the Christian redemption some new point of light—felt in it some new pulse of eternal love. Hence it is a most stimulating and

instructive study to follow the intellectual and spiritual development of Paul, to find how he grew in grace and knowledge and wisdom,—yet how at the very last he said, “I count not myself to have attained.” Beyond the giddy peak on which he stood there were sublimer heights, and he pressed towards the mark, if haply he might scale those glittering, heavenly steps. In the text he seemed utterly at a loss to express the fulness of his conception of the grandeur, the riches, the wisdom, the power, and the love of God. We shall miss the force of these words unless we understand the prayer in connection with which they were uttered.

The Apostle does not give this text as I have given it, namely, as a detached sentence. It is the culmination of a statement; it is something that comes after a serious, anxious effort, which he himself has made; and we must look into the preliminary statement if we would know how Paul was dazzled, overwhelmed, made speechless, by the infinite capacity of God to transcend all mortal prayer and all finite imagination. The Apostle has been uttering a prayer which reads thus:—

“That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man [able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask]. That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith [able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask]. That ye, being rooted and grounded in love [able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask], may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge [able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask], that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God [able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask].

Reading the prayer in this manner, using the text as a kind of refrain to each petition, and each petition itself seeming to exhaust the very mercy and love of God, we get some notion of the Apostle's conception of God's infinite wealth, infinite grace, and infinite willingness to give. Understand, then, that in coming to God and availing ourselves of the doctrine of this text, it is incumbent upon us that we should specify what we want from God. A man of flippant speech, of thoughtlessness of mind, may say, “I have asked God for all. Is he able to do exceeding abundantly above that?” Yes, because no man knows what

“all” means. The dewdrop has its little all. The Atlantic has its idea of all; and the great star-laden firmament, arching over all things underneath it, has a wider representation still. A man such as I have described may say, “I have asked God for infinite blessings. Is God able to do exceeding abundantly above infinite?” Yes, as you use the word, because you do not know what infinite means. You have only your own little notion about it, and your inch cannot measure the infinitude of God. But apart from that answer, we are to protest against the doctrine that men when they come to God in prayer are to use such words as “all,” “everything,” “infinitude,” without specification of their wants. We must tell God our necessities, interpret to him our hunger and our thirst of soul. We must go to him with particular, well-defined, and urgently-pleaded petitions.

Perhaps this may be difficult of realisation to some minds. I must therefore set it in a lower light. Suppose that a number of petitioners should go to the legislature with a petition worded thus: “We humbly pray your honourable house to do everything for the nation, to take infinite care of it, to let the affairs of the nation tax your attention day and night, and lavish all your resources upon the people.” Suppose that a petition like that should be handed into the House of Commons, what would be the fate of it? It would be laughed down, and the only reason, the only good reason, why the petitioners should not be confined to Bedlam would be, lest their insanity should alarm the inmates. That is not a petition. It is void by generality; by referring to all it misses everything. We must specify what we want when we go to the legislature. We must state our case with clearness of definition, and with somewhat of argument. If it be so in our social, political prayers, shall we go to Almighty God with a vagueness which means nothing, with a generality which makes no special demand upon his heart? Read the text in the light of the gospel, and you will see the fulness of its glory, so far as it can be seen by mortal vision. Ask anything of God, and I am prepared to quote these words of the text in reply. What will you ask? Let us in the first instance ask what we all want—whatever may be our condition, age, circumstances. Let us ask for pardon. Is your prayer, God forgive my sins? Now you

may apply the Apostle's words: "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask."

You cannot conceive God's notion of pardon. You have an idea of what you mean by forgiveness; but when you have exhausted your own notion of the term forgiveness, you have not shown the Divine intent concerning the soul that is to be forgiven. When God forgives, he does not merely pardon, barely pardon,—he does not by some great straining effort of his love, just come within reach of the suppliant, and lay upon his heart the blessing which is besought. He pardons with pardons! When he casts our sins away, it is not into a shallow pool, it is into the depths of the sea; when he throws it away, it is not on one side, it is behind him. Will you arithmeticians measure the distance which is meant by behind the infinite? When God takes a man's sins away from him, he puts them as far from him as the east is from the west. Can you tell how far the east is from the west? It is an expression that is often upon your lips. Have you ever measured the distance? You cannot; it is an immeasurable line. So, when God comes to pardon us, he pardons with pardons, with pardons again and again, wave upon wave, until we say, "Thou hast done exceeding abundantly above all that we ask." The finite can never grasp the infinite, and our poor mortal capacities cannot hold God's idea of pardon. We have, thank God, some notion of forgiveness; but not until you yourself have entered personally into the mystery of this forgiveness, can you understand or have any hint of the depth of the sea into which God has cast the sins of which we have repented.

What will you ask for now? Ask for sanctification. Is your prayer, Sanctify me, body, soul, and spirit? Then I once more quote the Apostle's text: "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." What is your notion of sanctification? You have thought about it: it is soon exhausted. When you leave reason and get into the region of fancy, your imagination soon wearies, and the description which you give of holiness is after all a negative description. When I read of God's holiness, I read of holiness that is glorious. God is said

to be glorious in holiness. Do you understand the emphasis of that redundance? Holiness would have been a great word to have uttered concerning him, but when you add glorious in holiness—

“Imagination’s utmost stretch
In wonder dies away.”

We know the meaning of innocence; we know what is implied by the terms “not guilty”; we can describe negatively a high condition of character. But God’s notion of sanctification! When we have made our notion of sanctification clear and plain he sets his own holiness beside it, and in contrast our purity of development, and our sublimest moral acquisitions become corrupt in the presence of the blazing glory of the divine purity. This is our destiny, if so be we are in Jesus Christ. Holiness is not something we can describe with sufficiency of terms. It is not a quantity we can see in its completeness. We cannot walk round about it and say, This is the limit thereof. There is always another ray of splendour which we have not seen, and a brighter beam of the ineffable effulgence which has not yet struck upon our vision. So when we ask God to sanctify us, we are to remember that “He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.”

Now, if this be so, it ought to stimulate us in all saintly progress, to inspire us in the study of divine truth, to recover our jaded energies, and tempt, lure, and draw us by the mighty compulsion of inexhaustible reward. This is the peculiar glory of Christian study, that it does not exhaust the student. His weakness becomes his strength. At sunset he is stronger than at sunrise; because Christian study does not tax any one power of the mind unduly. It trains the whole being, the imagination, the fancy, the will, the emotion; lifts up the whole nature equally, with all the equability of complete power,—not by snatches and spasms of strength, but with the sufficiency, breadth, and compass of power which sustains the balance always. This ought to rebuke those of us who imagine that we have finished our Christian education. I believe there are some persons in the world who are under the impression that they have finished God’s book. They say they have “read it through.” There is

a poor sense in which it may be read through; but there is a deeper, truer sense in which we can never get through the Book of God. It is an inexhaustible study,—new every day, like morning light. You have seen splendour before, but until this morning you never saw this light. So it is with this great wonderful Book of God in the study of it. God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. The hoariest-headed student who has spent his days in study, and his nights in prayer, will be the first and most emphatic to declare, that the more he has dwelt upon the wonderfulness of God's revelation, the more and more wonderful it has become to all the highest powers of his nature.

Here then is a stimulus, a spur to progress, a call to deeper study. We think we have attained truth. We have not attained all that is meant by the word truth. No man who knows himself and who knows God will say that he has been led into all the chambers of God's great palace of truth. This is the sign of progress; this is the charter of the profoundest humility. The more we know the less we know. We see certain points of light here and there, but the great unexplored regions of truth stretch mile on mile, beyond all our power to traverse the wondrous plain. How is it with us to-day then? Are we fagged men, exhausted students? Do we sit down under the impression that there is nothing more to be known? If we have that idea, let us seek to renew our strength and to recover our inspiration by the word,—“He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.” There are attainments we have not made, depths we have not sounded, and heights, oh, heights! We can but look up and wonder, expect, adore. If this be so, we ought to look calmly, with a feeling of chastened triumph, upon all hindrances, difficulties, and obstacles in the way of Christ's kingdom upon the earth. We may look at these in relation to our own puny strength, and quail before them. We are not to depend upon our own resources, but upon God's, in attempting the removal of everything that would intercept the progress of his kingdom in the world. There is a great mountain: I cannot beat it down, all the instruments I can bring to bear upon it seem utterly powerless. But God

touches the mountains and they smoke. The Alps, the Apennines, the Pyrenees, and great Himalayas, shall go up like incense before him, and his kingdom shall have a smooth uninterrupted way. There are combinations which I cannot disentangle : conspiracies of the heathen against God and his Son, political conspiracies, social combinations, of which I can make nothing as a poor solitary worker. I can but kneel down before them and pray God to show the greatness of his strength. In a peculiar manner he will touch the reason of such conspirators, and they will become jabbering maniacs in a moment. Sometimes he will touch the speech of such conspirators, and they will not understand what they are saying to one another. Sometimes in passing by, he will touch the earth with his finger : silently it will open and swallow them up.

I say, in my hours of weakness, Yonder is a stone which I cannot remove. If I could get clear of that obstacle all would be right ; but the stone is heavy, the stone is sealed, the stone is watched. What can I do ? I go up the hill wearily, almost hopelessly, and behold ! the stone is rolled away, and on the obstacle there sits the angel of God. "Able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think !" What then is our Christian hope about the world ? Look at ministers, at missionaries, at Sunday-school teachers ; look at writers, and at all the efforts made for the progress of divine truth upon the earth. Then, on the other hand, look at all the Paganism that remains unsubdued ; at the idol temples which debase and corrupt the world ; look at all the institutions that live upon the badness of the human heart ! You say, the instrumentality is not equal to the work. You are right. The straw cannot beat the mountain into flying dust. The hand of man cannot crumble the great gigantic bulwarks behind which error has entrenched itself. You are quite right. But God hath chosen the weak things to throw down the mighty. It is not the straw that does it ; it is the hand that wields it. Shakespeare dips his pen into the ink and writes "Hamlet." I take up the same pen, dip into the same ink, but I cannot write "Hamlet." It is not the pen that does it ; it is the writer. It is not the little instrumentality ; it is the God who is able to do, and who has done, exceeding abundantly above

all that we ask or think. It is therefore because the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it, that we now expect to triumph over the world, and speak of all nations as if they belonged to the Son of God. If the doctrine of the text be true, then it should fill all bad men with terror. We should regard this text as a two-sided text. We are always accustomed to regard it as affording comfort to the Christian heart, strength to the toiling pilgrim who moves heavenward day by day. The text does supply all that is needful for the encouragement and strength of such. But it has a tremendous back-stroke. The word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword—mighty for the gaining of victories, but terrible to those who feel its cutting power.

You have a certain notion of hell. We cannot tell what is meant by that awful word. We speak of the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched. But what do we know about the words which involve so much? We cannot tell what is meant by everlasting punishment. Modify the doctrine of hell as you will,—dilute the term “everlasting punishment” as you like,—avail yourselves of all the resources of etymology to the furthest possible extent, that you may reduce the limit and application of certain words;—when you have done all, it must remain a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God! There are moments that are eternities. It is the nature of all pain to have itself described as an everlasting punishment. Inflict some wound upon yourself now, and the next hour will feel as if it were a day: you feel as if it would never, never pass away. It is of the nature of punishment to force itself upon the sufferer as everlasting penalty. Joy hath wings. Joy filling the hour, the hour flies away, and we say, It cannot be gone already! Yes, already! Yes. It is there we read the meaning of the words “eternal life.” Do not let us imagine that because we may have this notion, or that peculiar or heterodox exception, about the punishment that awaits the sinner, that therefore we have diluted the notion to nothing. When we have done our utmost in that direction, God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we think. The oppressor says, “Well, if it has come to this I am prepared to bear it.” No, you are not prepared to bear it! When I say it is this, I use human words in a human sense; but

when God says it is this, I cannot tell all his meaning. When the poor man who has twelve shillings a week says that a certain person is rich, that is one meaning of the word rich. When the man who has ten thousand pounds a year speaks of the same individual, perhaps he might say he is poor. So words have different meanings as used by different persons. Every man must be his own dictionary. You must look at the speaker before you can understand some speeches. You must look at the etymologist before you can understand the etymology. So when God says he will utterly destroy the wicked, remember that it is God who says so, and do not measure the word by your poor lexicography.

It may be difficult for some minds to follow the argument out spiritually; we must therefore descend to illustration. Here is a very clever artist, who has made a beautiful thing he brings before us, and we gather round it and say, "It is most exquisitely done. What is this, sir?" "That," replies the artist, "is my notion of a flower, and I am going to call that flower a rose." "Well, it is a beautiful thing,—very graceful, and altogether beautifully executed: you are very clever." So he is, and now that exhausts his notion of the rose. But let God just hand in a full-blown rose from the commonest garden in the world, and where is your waxen beauty? Underneath every leaf is written, "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." Let him just send the sweet spring morning in upon us, with the first violet, and all your artificial florists, if they have one spark of wit left, will pick up their goods and go off as soon as possible. "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." The meanest insect that flutters in the warm sunlight is a grander thing than the finest marble statue ever chiselled by the proudest sculptor.

Now we are going to have a very festive day. We are going to pluck flowers and fashion them into arches, and we shall make our arches very high, very beautiful,—and, so far as the flowers go, they are most gorgeously and exquisitely beautiful. We have put up the wires; we have festooned these wires, and we say, "Now, is not that very beautifully done?" and of

course, we who always drink the toast, "Our noble selves," say, Yes. But God has only to take a few rain-drops and strike through them the sunlight, and where are your paste-board arches and your skilful working! "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think." Fellow-students in this holy mystery, believe me, as in nature, so in the higher kingdom of grace. As in matter he surpasses all your sculptors, and is in all schools infinitely superior to men, so in the revelation of truth to the heart, in the way of redeeming man from sin, in the way of sanctifying fallen corrupt human nature,—all your theorists and speculators, all your plaster dealers and social reformers, and philanthropic regenerators, must get out of the way as artificial florists when God comes to us with the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the valley.

Then, let us leave all inferior teachers and go straight to the Master himself. We have to deal with sin, and the only answer to sin, which answer is comprehended in one word, is the Cross. God's foolishness is better than our wisdom. God's weakness is infinitely superior to our strength. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." If you choose to make your own cisterns, broken cisterns, to hold no water, you may do so. Let others of us say, As for us and our house, we will go—poor, guilty, heart-thirsty sinners as we are—to the fountain of living waters, and if we perish, we will pray and perish only there! No dead man was ever found at that fountain. No dead man was ever found with his hand on the Cross,—with his lips at the well of life.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, do thou give unto us the spirit of hearing. Give us a wise and understanding heart, that nothing of the good seed of thy Word may be lost upon us; may we return abundantly for thy goodness. Herein art thou glorified, Father of us all, that we bear much fruit. But how can we bear fruit except we abide in the Vine? Christ is the Vine, we are the branches: as the branch cannot bear fruit except it abide in the vine, neither can we bear fruit except we abide in Christ. May we know this by the teaching of thy Holy Spirit, and may our one desire be for deeper, more vital union with the Son of God. We bless thee if we bear any fruit at all. This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. Help us to be fruitful unto all good works. Keep back thy servants from presumptuous sins; say to each of us in the time of conscious power and elevation, Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe; encompass our souls; for one moment do not leave us to ourselves, or in that moment the enemy will overpower us and bring us to ruin. That we may abide in thy Word, do thou minister unto us constantly by the Holy Spirit. May he abide with us, may he love to be in our hearts as in living temples: every day may he take of the things of Christ and show them unto us, in new lights, in new aspects; the same truth, but with a new beauty, by reason of the ministry of the Eternal Spirit. Thou knowest the perilous road of life: O Christ, thou hast gone before us, thou didst go to the Cross. There is not an affliction which we feel thou dost not understand better than we do; every temptation thou hast encountered. We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are. Thou knowest our frame, thou rememberest that we are but dust. Art not thou the Shepherd of the universe? Wilt thou not gather the lambs in thy bosom? Wilt thou not protect the helpless more and more? Say yes to our heart's burning cry, and we shall attempt the world again with a new energy and a new hope. Amen.

Ephesians vi. 24.

"Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."

THE GOSPEL FOR CHRISTMAS.

[A CHRISTMAS SERMON.]

AT Christmas time we are expected to be full of charity and goodwill. That is the very spirit of the season. It was in this strain that the angels sang when they were heard by the

shepherds of Bethlehem. But even goodwill requires to be defined. Many people think it is all included in a hot family dinner on Christmas Day, concluded with the proverb—How true it is that one half of the world does not know how the other half lives. The quotation of this proverb is supposed in some way to have subscribed to the relief and comfort of the poor. Other persons seem to imagine that goodwill is limited to persons of their own way of thinking. We cannot help thinking kindly of those who agree with us on the deepest subjects. When men differ from us we naturally denounce them as incapable, short-sighted, and pitiable creatures; but when the same people agree with us, we see in them at least the dawning of genius and the budding of sound statesmanship. That is a little peculiarity of men. It comes out very strongly in some newspapers. When I differ from them I am cordially disliked, and represented by many invidious and vivid epithets; when I agree with them I instantaneously become “an eminent Congregational minister.” I want to extend the area within which our goodwill is to operate, so as to include some from whom we are intellectually, and even theologically, separated. For example, how we as Gentiles hate Jews. Why should Jews be hated by Gentiles, and especially hated by Christians? Have they not a right to their own convictions? Are they not the most historical people in the world? Is not salvation of the Jews? We shall never convert them by abusing them. Let us show them how grand a thing is Christianity. We may do more by charity than by controversy. If we outdo them in moral nobleness, they will begin to respect us. If we outdo them in spite and resentment, they will begin to think that our creed has not done much for our purification and ennoblement.

Then again, how we suspect people who do not belong to our chapel, whatever that chapel may be. We will not be responsible for their future. Baptists may possibly go to heaven—if heaven is a very very large place—but as Congregationalists we will not guarantee it. Congregationalists may escape perdition, but the risk is very great in the estimation of the Antinomians, who consider themselves that nothing can possibly happen to hinder them from the occupation of the choicest places in the celestial

world. Quakers are very objectionable to some other communions. Quakers are not themselves the largest-minded persons in the world; this may arise not so much from want of disposition as from want of information. They have lived an insular life. They have never been upon the Continent of the larger public opinion. I want to change all this miserable feeling. We should take the very best view of men, and do so simply because we are followers of Christ. Christianity, properly understood, is the most enlarging and the most ennobling religion known to mankind. Our Master, blessed be his name, came not to destroy men's lives but to save them. He was the guest of publicans and sinners. Friendless women loved him. Little children nestled in his bosom. Repentant sinners caught his sunlight on their tears. I believe in all honest men. I lay great stress on the word "honest." Even Christianity may be professed dishonestly. Some men are better than their creed. That is a fact which is often overlooked in the criticism and estimation of our fellow-men. We look at the creed and think that the men who profess it must be exactly as it is. That is unjust in both ways; it may be unjust as making some men too little, and it may be equally unjust in making other men too great. Perhaps you would not allow an infidel to enter your house. You have a horror of infidels. Perhaps you are right. You may be wrong. We must first of all know what you mean by infidel. Infidelity may be an intellectual term; or it may be a moral term; and before we can say anything about it we must know which it is. Limitation is sometimes definition. It is quite certain that there are some professing Christians whom I would not trust with an open cheque. Their creed is very grand; and so capable of expansion is what they call their mind, that they could take in ten more creeds of any size that human imagination chooses to prescribe; but, because they are corrupt in heart, I would not trust them out of my sight, and whilst they are in my sight I would inflict upon them the most vigilant suspicion and distrust. In your treatment of honest men be just, and you will be noble.

How cordially Churchmen and Dissenters love one another! On Christmas Day it is even permitted to a man to be slightly,

but not maliciously, ironical. Why should not Churchmen and Dissenters love one another? A Dissenter may be as good as a Churchman, and a Churchman may be quite as good as a Dissenter. They should know one another better. I am perfectly persuaded that, if men knew one another better, they would in many cases have a larger mutual charity and appreciation. Men should look for each other's best points. I do not see why Roman Catholics should be hated by Protestants, or *vice versa*, I do see that men may be fatally opposed from an intellectual point of view, and yet not necessarily seek to assassinate one another. Certain terms have come to have bad reputations. No term has so bad a reputation in the estimation of a Protestant as the term Roman Catholic; yet it is perfectly possible, even for a Protestant, not to know what a Roman Catholic is. He may be blinded to justice by what is known as the *odium theologicum*. Terms are not to be defined always by the dictionary. In fact, a dictionary may be most misleading in its definition. Some terms can only be interpreted by atmosphere, but mutual association, by insight into masonic relations and ultimate purposes; in a word, we must often trust to experience, rather than to etymology, in defining theological designations and boundaries.

Your Christianity amounts to nothing, if it does not enable you to see the best of every man. I say emphatically, the best. There is a best in every one of us, if only it could be found. It is possible to stand up for the truth in a spirit of error. We may do right wrongly. Be perfectly assured of this in all our propagandism, that we cannot abuse men into the kingdom of heaven. People are not to be arrested as if by constabulary strength, and thrust into heaven as criminals are thrust into a prison. Only Wisdom can save souls. The Authorised Version reads, "He that winneth souls is wise," but the Revised Version teaches us to believe that it is Wisdom that saves souls; that is to say, wherever there is Wisdom there is a saving force in the world. Only meekness can really inherit the earth. Pomposity and boastfulness may seem to have it, and may go so far as to hold the legal title-deeds of it; but true and everlasting ownership can only be realised by the meek in heart.

The great law of charity should operate all round. We all need it. A Christianity that will not allow you to take into your love all who serve the Saviour is not of heaven, and is not of good men. Let it name its own awful origin. Are we then to love all men alike? The inquiry is absurd. We must prefer some to others. Love is discriminating. You prefer gold to silver; yet you do not throw away the inferior metal. You prefer your own home to next door, yet you do not burn down your neighbour's house. I know how extremely difficult—how well-nigh impossible—it is for an Englishman to think well of any other nation. My inquiry on this happy Christmas Day is, Why should there not be a larger knowledge and a truer appreciation of one another all through and through the social distinctions and classifications by which society is ramified? Perhaps we shall see some improvement in this direction amongst political critics and reviewers. The amplitude of the political vocabulary is simply astounding. No man innocent of political relations and responsibilities could imagine that the English language is so rich in terms of abuse and ridicule. It would really seem as if a man differing from me in political opinion were too bad to go even to perdition. It certainly does seem sometimes as if we applied this doctrine to religious differences. As I have already said, we have only to suggest that such and such a man differs from us in some of our theological conceptions in order to enable us, and indeed to compel us, instantly to class that man as an unbeliever, an infidel, an atheist, and a dog with whom it would be a degradation to hold companionship.

Christianity came into the world to unite the human family. This is the burden of the music of Christ's heart. He always goes out after that which is lost until he finds it. He will not have any man stand outside who is really anxious to come in. His marching orders to his Church are, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." When all authority on earth and in heaven was committed to him, he said, "Go ye therefore and teach all nations." Other religions keep at home. They do not care for missioning the world. There have been two or three apparent exceptions to this home-keeping, but the exceptions have been apparent rather than positive.

Christianity cannot keep at home; Christianity is the travelling religion. It is the greatest explorer; it is the most adventurous navigator. It longs to learn all languages, and to baptise them in the name of the living Christ. We are perfectly aware that men have gone out with divisive theologies and mean ecclesiastical contentions; but they have never been able to justify such separations and conflicts in the name or in the spirit of the Cross. Judge your Christianity by your magnanimity. If your minds are growing less and less, then you simply know nothing about Christ or his religion. If your sympathies are daily contracting, then you are inflicting deadly injury on the Cross of the Saviour. If you cannot give at least the crumbs to the dogs, you are unjust when you profess to be followers of him whose birth we are celebrating. Magnanimity does not mean latitudinarianism. Magnanimity does not mean laxness, vagueness, carelessness about spiritual thought, or moral distinction. But magnanimity does mean that we should hope the most and the best about all men who show any evidence of being reverent and sincere in religious inquiry. We must not condemn men for merely intellectual error. The head may be wrong where the heart is right. It is by the heart that God will judge the world. Not what we intellectually think, but what we morally love and reverence and pursue, will determine the destiny of men. Make sure of your faith by your charity. By your charity I do not mean merely almsgiving. Sometimes the giving away of money may be the easiest part of a man's dower. By charity I mean love, sympathy, comprehensiveness of noble feeling towards all races, classes, peoples, and languages. Christianity sees even in the savage a son of God. Christianity finds the soul of good in things evil. Under no other compulsion could the Son of God have laid aside his glory and accepted the incarnation, which this day we recall with feelings of adoring thankfulness. The more you are impelled to do good, the more are you in Christ. If you cannot rest until you have saved another man, you may be perfectly sure that you are under the inspiration of the Cross. If you can rest perfectly well without caring what becomes of other souls, then know for a certainty that you have not yet seen or felt the meaning of the power of the Cross of Christ.

In the spirit of the Cross would I solemnise and celebrate Christmas Day. Let there be no family quarrels after this morning. It is useless to boast of your Christian aspiration and Christian feeling, if you are not prepared to associate on terms of affection and confidence with all persons within your own house who are willing to reciprocate such feelings. Is it possible that a husband and wife may be living in enmity? Let this be the moment of the cessation of hostilities, and let each emulate the other in a spirit of forgiveness. Is it possible that any son has run away from his father's house and is afraid to return? Let him this day resolve that he will knock at the door of the old house, confess his sin, and ask to be taken once more into the bosom and the love of the family. Are there differences amongst partners in business, amongst old companions and comrades? Are there differences as between the old and the young? Let each consider how he can most earnestly fulfil the law of Christ; let him indeed try to invent opportunities of reconciliation. Let it be his solemn business before God to find the door by which he can re-enter into loving intercourse with those with whom he has held lifelong association. If we really want to be reconciled there can be no difficulty about the matter. Yet all this must be done, not as an expediency and calculation, not with a view to ultimate results in the form of rewards; all this must be done because we have seen Christ, and known him, and felt the power of his own love in our hearts. If we will act in this way, this Christmas will be the brightest day in a life that must of necessity have known much change, felt the coldness of much shadow, and seen the uncertainty of the richest treasures which belong only to time. In this spirit I venture to address you, to counsel you. Let us pray for one another. With the dying year let us bury all our differences. I do not say, Let us obliterate moral distinctions. We cannot inter dishonesty in the grave of the year. We cannot bury unfaithfulness as if it had never been shown. Where there has been moral dishonour there must be the profoundest moral repentance; and fruits meet for repentance must be brought forth, otherwise the guilt can never be buried and forgotten.

THE EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE

TO THE

PHILIPPIANS.

(ROME, A.D. 63).

[NOTE.—“Assuming that the Epistle was written at Rome during the imprisonment mentioned in the last chapter of the Acts, it may be shown from a single fact that it could not have been written long before the end of the two years. The distress of the Philippians on account of Epaphroditus’ sickness was known at Rome when the Epistle was written; this implies four journeys, separated by some indefinite intervals, to or from Philippi and Rome, between the commencement of St. Paul’s captivity and the writing of the Epistle. The Philippians were informed of his imprisonment, sent Epaphroditus, were informed of their messenger’s sickness, sent their message of condolence. Further, the absence of St. Luke’s name from the salutations to a Church where he was well known, implies that he was absent from Rome when the Epistle was written: so does St. Paul’s declaration, ii. 20, that no one who remained with him felt an equal interest with Timothy in the welfare of the Philippians. And, by comparing the mention of St. Luke in Col. iv. 14, and Philem. 24 with the abrupt conclusion of his narrative in the Acts, we are led to the inference that he left Rome after those two Epistles were written and before the end of the two years’ captivity. Lastly, it is obvious from Phil. i. 20, that St. Paul, when he wrote, felt his position to be very critical, and we know that it became more precarious as the two years drew to a close. In A.D. 62 the infamous Tigellinus succeeded Burrus, the upright Prætorian præfect, in the charge of St. Paul’s person; and the marriage of Poppæa brought his imperial judge under an influence, which, if exerted, was hostile to St. Paul. Assuming that St. Paul’s acquittal and release took place in 63, we may date the Epistle to the Philippians early in that year.

“Strangely full of joy and thanksgiving amidst adversity, like the Apostle’s midnight hymn from the depth of his Philippian dungeon, this Epistle went forth from his prison at Rome. In most other epistles he writes with a sustained effort to instruct, or with sorrow, or with indignation; he is striving to supplement imperfect, or to correct erroneous, teaching, to put down scandalous impurity, or to heal schism in the Church which he addresses. But in this Epistle, though he knew the Philippians intimately, and was not blind to the faults and tendencies to fault of some of them, yet he mentions no evil so characteristic of the whole Church as to call for general censure on his part, or amendment on theirs. Of all his Epistles to Churches, none

has so little of an official character as this. He withholds his title of 'Apostle' in the Inscription. We lose sight of his high authority, and of the subordinate position of the worshippers by the river side; and we are admitted to see the free action of a heart glowing with inspired Christian love, and to hear the utterance of the highest friendship addressed to equal friends conscious of a connexion, which is not earthly and temporal, but in Christ, for eternity. Who that bears in mind the condition of St. Paul in his Roman prison can read unmoved of his continual prayers for his distant friends, his constant sense of their fellowship with him, his joyful remembrance of their past Christian course, his confidence in their future, his tender yearning after them all in Christ, his eagerness to communicate to them his own circumstances and feelings, his carefulness to prepare them to repel any evil from within or from without which might dim the brightness of their spiritual graces? Love, at once tender and watchful, that love which 'is of God,' is the keynote of this Epistle: and in this Epistle only we hear no undertone of any different feeling. Just enough, and no more, is shown of his own harassing trials to let us see how deep in his heart was the spring of that feeling, and how he was refreshed by its sweet and soothing flow."—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible.*]

Philippians iii. 1.

"Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord."

RELIGIOUS JOYS.

A FLOWER in a well-stocked garden excites no surprise. When a traveller found a flower under a glacier, he was more affected by it because it grew under the cold bosom of the ice than he would have been by the most gorgeous garden bloom. Times and places are considerations which naturally affect our estimation of men and things. This little violet of joy is growing under a glacier: Paul is in prison, daily suffering is meted out to him by the tyrant, and yet he boldly counsels men who are at large, and who therefore may be supposed to be rich in blessing, to "rejoice in the Lord." It would appear as if the message came in the wrong direction: it would seem as if it ought to have gone into the prison as a message from the praying Church outside, instead of issuing from the prison from the very man who was feeling the power and humiliation of oppression. What is the secret of the eternal joy in the Apostle's heart? It would appear as if the Apostle Paul were in joy always, and not only in joy himself but that he was really desirous that other people should share his gladness and thus increase it. Religion and joy have been most unjustly separated; the sweet counte-

nance of religion has been elongated and marred; plunderers have taken away from the Church her very highest music, and have compelled her to sing some mournful and depressing strain, instead of blowing the trumpet of joy and singing the song of jubilee. The separation is unjust, and ought instantly and universally to be repaired. Life in the Lord should be joyous, because the Lord is God over all, blessed for evermore; he is essentially and unchangeably happy; without irreverence, we may say that he is the happy God. If we look to his handiwork in the very lowest form of life, we find that he lavished the conditions of happiness even upon the most inferior creatures. All nature is full of music, brimful of glee; in the summer time it would seem as if the whole earth were about to break forth into a loud and lofty song of praise. The birds awake, not with a dry mouth and a parched tongue, but with a bosom full of morning psalms to gladden the day with their sweet carolling. God baptises his new-born air, the land, the sea, with joy, and he admits them to full communion in his great Church, and permits no sparrow to fall to the ground without his notice. All young things join in the great hymn of praise; flowers appear to be embodied joys, as if they needed but a glance, a touch, a whisper, to make them fly to the heavens in sweetest offering of praise. Marvellous is the economy of God in the whole world. Even in the presence of the most overwhelming signs of sorrow and pain we are called upon to rejoice in the Lord, and to rejoice evermore. Even when Christians assemble around the sacramental board, and have before their eyes the memorials of the Lord's death, they are called upon to see the joy rather than the sorrow, the triumph rather than the defeat, and whilst the bread is in their hands, and the cup is lifted to their lips, they are expected to be songful, joyful, triumphant, in the spirit and comfort of God's grace.

Christians have received a true revelation of the Divine nature. They are not in the darkness of Pagan speculation, or in the starless night of heathen superstition; they believe that they see God as he really is in all his largest attributes, in all the perfection of his nature, in all the meaning of his fatherhood. They have left the idea of despotism, and oppression, and mere

sovereignty, and they have come to see that the sceptre which God waves over the universe has in it the pathos of the Cross of Christ. The heathen god looks upon all his victims with sourness; his lips, where he is at all represented by living energy, seem to be open that they may swallow human blood. Some of the earlier theologians too, even of the Christian sort, hardly saw God in his full-orbed love in Christ Jesus; they saw his sovereignty, his justice, the terribleness of his law, and the exacting character of his righteousness; but they did not see how, over all, above all, and better than all, there shone a redeeming love in the whole economy and providence of grace. Human genius has taxed itself to conceive the grimmest of symbols whereby to set forth the idea of God. Thunder, and clamour, and storm, and judgment, earthquake, and volcano, and howling tempest, and devastating whirlwind,—all these have been thought of in connection with the Divine economy. But in Christ we see that God's purpose has always been one of redemption, reclamation, renewal, and the investment of the world with eternal youthfulness. Christians hold a clear revelation of God in which they profess to have put their hearts' deepest trust. What is the meaning of that revelation? Jesus Christ came down to make the Creator more perfectly known to the creature, to teach all human kind to say, "Our Father in heaven": he dispelled the thunder-clouds, he threw off all the grotesque disguises with which men had loaded the idea of God, and he showed that infinite love glowed in the infinite heart. Jesus Christ spake familiarly of the Creator, and yet his familiarity was marked by that filial emphasis which shows that he had proceeded from the bosom of the Father. Jesus Christ would take us immediately into the presence of the heavenly majesty:—"I and my Father are one: he that hath seen me hath seen the Father"; and apostles who knew the spirit of Christ most intimately said, "Let us come boldly to the throne of grace." Now, as Christians, we necessarily profess to hold this view of God. We say that he is to us a Father; we see him in the seasons, and over our cup of cold water we bend to thank him for his simple gift; we have come to believe in him as a God of particular providences; we say the lily is his, and the bird, and the young lion, and great behemoth; we say also that

the very hairs of our head are all numbered, that he knows our downsitting and our uprising, our going out and our coming in ; and we profess that there is not a thought in our hearts, and not a word on our tongues that the Lord doth not know altogether. All this we say and sing. I hold that, if we believed this with all our hearts and soul and mind and strength, we should rejoice in the Lord, and rejoice in him alway, and would say with the Apostle, "And again I say, Rejoice." Is it nothing to have the assurance that God's arms are round about us for purposes of defence? Is it nothing to know that our bread shall be given and our water shall be sure? Ought not he to rejoice concerning whom God has said, "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper"? Is it not a spring of joy to feel in the soul that the word is true which God hath spoken, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee"? Have we not heard the sweet word and obeyed it—"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"? Have we not received the assurance that there is laid up for us an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away? Jesus Christ has brought all these good things to light, and has through our faith conferred them upon us ; he has told us what the earth really is ; he has brought us to feel the nothingness of time and space ; he has made us believe that his kind eye is on every grave that contains the dust of his redeemed ; he has even assured us that God is more pitiful than a father and more loving than tenderest mother. Jesus Christ has, therefore, given us the true idea of God : no longer is God covered with clouds and darkness, hidden away as an infinite terror, but he is brought near to us, and he shines upon us with the gentlest face of love, and speaks to us with the tenderest gospel of music ; Jesus Christ has cleared away our mistakes, he has strengthened our vision, he has turned night into day, he has filled the heavens with light, so that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper : I will not fear what man can do unto me. In proportion as we enter into these assurances, and gratefully apply them to our own necessities, are we enabled to respond to the exhortation of the Apostle when he exclaims, "Rejoice in the Lord."

We cannot shut out the fact that man is guilty, and wherever

there is guilt joy is impossible. All this is true—sadly, awfully true. Man is guilty in very deed. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” But in this connection arises the thought that we have through the Son of man the richest revelation of God’s mercy : we should not have known grace but for sin ; sin is the ground on which the brightness of God’s glory most perfectly discovers itself. God hates sin ; it is for ever offensive to him ; he cannot look upon it with the least degree of allowance ; but he meets great sin by greater love. The devil’s greatest feat is opposed by God’s greatest manifestation. When the devil created rebellion God did not create a brighter sun in order to show that he was still omnipotent : he might have torn down his universe and re-constructed it on a scale infinitely surpassing the lines on which it now stands ; having done so he might have addressed his angels and said, You see that my power is unimpaired ; I am still the Lord God omnipotent : what has happened in the world in no wise lessens my sovereignty, or throws into the shadow my authority. That was not the method of God. The immoral must be met by the moral. Evil must be grappled by good. Light must encounter night. This is the foundation fact in redemption. God does not redeem from on high, he redeems from below ; he goes down to the very lowest line of life, and from that he conducts his redeeming work. The story is told from the lowest position to which sin has driven man, up to the very highest height possible to Christian attainment and progress. We say, That man is guilty ; but it is to be remembered that God has specially addressed himself to guilty man. God has brought all the forces of his moral power to bear upon this question of growth. In one word, God has provided an atonement for sin. He so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him might not perish, but have everlasting life. He must make one grand demonstration of his view of sin, and consequently one of two things must be done : either God must offer up in one great slaughter all human kind as a sacrifice to himself, and see in the smoke of their torment an eternal proof of his own righteousness ; or he must go back into his own heart, and find there a method of crushing the rebellion without destroying the rebel. That was the problem. Never

was such a problem submitted even to the infinite intellect. What shall be done? Shall the earth be bathed in the blood of its inhabitants, and then relegated back into nothingness? Shall anger leap upon the petty orb and destroy it for ever from the brotherhood of worlds? Amid the awful silence which must necessarily follow such a question, a voice was heard saying, Here am I, send me: I will die, the just for the unjust; I will become the way back again to love and loyalty, to purity and peace; I will give my back to the smiters and my cheek to those that pluck off the hair. In this spirit Jesus Christ came into the world; we cast him out of it as an unclean thing: he said, "I came to save you"; we answered, "Save thyself": he said, "Believe on me"; we said, "Thou hast a devil": he said, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out"; we answered, "Thou blasphemest against God." All this we cannot explain in words; against all this indeed it would be easy for the intellect in many moods to urge objections of a very grave and complicated kind; but in the depth of our misery, in the agony of our despair, we have seen the Cross of Christ, and we have answered its appeals with the offering of our heart's deepest and tenderest trust. We know now what is meant, spiritually if not literally, by the words, "He was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification"; and therefore, seeing this, we feel burning within us the glowing joy which filled the Apostle with ecstasy, and turned earth itself into heaven. Had redemption still been a problem, we could have understood the sigh, the sorrow, and the gloom of those who have no joy; but the problem is solved, the question is answered: while a man is considering how he may be freed we may allow him to sigh the deep sigh of wonder and of mingled hope and fear, but when he is emancipated—when the testimony of his perfect and everlasting freedom is offered to him—the only sigh that should escape him should be a sigh of a deep and immortal joy. "Rejoice in the Lord"—rejoice in his pitying eye; rejoice in his redeeming sacrifice; rejoice in his protecting arm; "finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord; and again I say, Rejoice."

We cannot forget that we are still in the land of the enemy, and that the enemy is still pursuing us in a thousand subtle

ways. All this is true. Notwithstanding this we are also in the Lord. The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation. There hath no temptation happened unto you but such as is common to man. When Jesus Christ left us he did not leave us alone; he sent the Paraclete or Comforter to abide with us for ever. We are not living under the dispensation of sight; we are living under the dispensation of the Spirit. Only the young ages of the world needed sensuous and visible testimony: children must be taught by pictures; it is right that the juvenile world should be trained through its senses. The higher we rise in education the more thoroughly we comprehend the spiritual. The young arithmetician has to sit down and with his slate and pencil figure his way to conclusions, but the older head sees through the process and comes to results as it were by intuition. He does not require the material slate, or the material pencil, or even the material figure; he is so far independent of the flesh, that he has risen into the spiritual. All the world is being conducted up to the point of spirituality. Materialism will presently be thrown off like an outworn garment. The signs of the times point to this. Men are impatient of time and space; men who once would have thought six hours a short time are now impatient of the work that cannot be done in six minutes. Thus we are continually contracting the material. By-and-by we shall travel by thought, write by thought, do everything as quick as thought. That is the great ideal towards which we are rising: God is a Spirit; we too shall be spirits, and in the moral summer-time we shall be holy as our Father in heaven is holy, perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect, and being so like him in his perfectness we cannot be unlike him in his blessedness.

Mark the ground of joy: the Holy Spirit is our teacher, comforter, guardian, and sanctifier. The angels of God have charge over us. We know not what legions are marshalled at our very side. How little we can see even at the best of times! Our eyes are holden. Do not imagine that we can ever be the prey of the wicked one. Though we fall we shall not be utterly cast down: the saint shall stand on the mountain of the Lord: the Lord is our refuge and strength, therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed and though the mountains be carried

into the midst of the sea. Will God cast off his redeemed? That would be trampling under foot the blood of the everlasting covenant. Praise the living God; look up into his face smilingly, and tell him that he is the joy of your heart and your portion for ever.

It is not to be forgotten that this joy is to be "in the Lord." We have no occasion indeed to joy in ourselves. So far as I am concerned, I have every reason to mourn, but in the Lord I have nothing to do but to rejoice. I cannot pine for bread, because he has distinctly told me it shall be given. I cannot mourn on the ground of redemption, for this would be to question the power of God; I cannot mourn on the subject of protection, for he says that the everlasting arms are round about me. Still we are in the body; we are subject to pain, we are exposed to insults; we have to grapple with an unsympathetic and misapprehending world.

"These surface troubles come and go
Like rufflings on the sea:
The deeper depth is out of reach
To all, my God, but thee."

We are not forbidden to mourn but to murmur; we are not forbidden to weep, we are men and to the laws of our kind we must submit: but we are to rejoice in the Lord. I mourn myself, and am full of bitterness, but in God I often shout for very joy of heart: he draws me so closely to himself; he breathes such sweet and tender promises; he fills me with emotion. I understand what the poet meant when he desired to be "swallowed up in love." God speaks with infinite comfort and consolation. We may remind ourselves that Jesus Christ was often sorrowful. That is true. On one occasion he said, "my soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death," but at that time the work was before him; now it is behind him: he has endured the cross, he has despised the shame, and henceforth he reigns over the universe as its Redeemer and Lord. Some men may say that they have joy apart from religion. I deny it. It is not joy: it is excitement; it is a pleasant dream; it is a well-compounded opiate. Let me tell you that, if your joy is apart from Christ, it is but a poor wandering Hagar—a little water spent, bread all gone, and no angel to conduct her to the well, where she will find

water for her fainting child and say, "Thou God seest me." We may so employ these words as to take out of them all terror. Hitherto we have been inclined to regard the expression "Thou God seest me" as a judgment, a fire, a terrible scrutiny, under which our poor quaking life is spent. On the other hand, we may use it as an encouragement and a blessing of the highest quality; we may be able to say in our sorrow and in our want, "Thou God seest me"; and to know that the very fact that God sees us is the pledge that he will come to us and redeem our souls from despair. Speaking again to the religious, I would remind you that sorrow and gloom are not religion. Some of the old saints have said this life is all given to us for weeping and penance, not for idle discourses. But from all this monastic narrowness we have grown into the genial familiarity of reverent and loving fellowship with God, and henceforth we know that it is not by scourging and self-immolation that we attain heaven, but by trust in the Cross of Christ. We believe in philanthropy, in the love of man and the service of man; we gather flowers from the garden of usefulness. There is no cure for the world's woes but in Christ.

Christians are called upon to vindicate their Christianity by their joyfulness. If they persist in being sombre, despondent, dejected, heartless, then they persist in inflicting cruelty upon the Son of God: their despair does not end in itself or upon themselves; it exercises an evil contagion, which brings other men into bondage, and thus becomes a double curse. Men should fight against the spirit of darkness and of fear, as against an enemy that is personal to themselves, and that is general to the whole world. When we sing intelligently, when we rejoice with reason, when even in sorrow we can smile, when in the darkest night we can find some bright star, men will ask us how it comes that we can thus triumph over circumstances; in that hour of inquiry we may tell them that we are rejoicing not in ourselves but in the Lord, and that in so rejoicing we are acting an obedient part, for we have been exhorted to this joy, and can answer the exhortation with reason, and with all the fellowship and sanction of a diversified and sanctified experience.

THE EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE
TO THE
COLOSSIANS.

(ROME, A. D. 62.)

[NOTE.—“Colosse was one of the chief cities of Phrygia, which, at the date of this Epistle, was a very rich and fertile country; though now under the Moslem yoke, and is in a great measure uncultivated. Phrygia was twice visited by Paul, Acts xvi. 8; xviii. 23, but whether he reached Colosse is doubted. The tenor of the Epistle favours the conclusion that he did not (see especially ii. 1); but it is certain that he knew several of the Colossian Christians, of whom Archippus, their minister, and Philemon are expressly named. The Colossians having heard of Paul's imprisonment, sent to him Epaphras, their minister, to comfort the Apostle, and to inform him of their state. Epaphras, shortly after reaching Rome, was also imprisoned, Philem. 24.

“This Epistle was written during Paul's first imprisonment at Rome (i. 24; iv. 18); and probably at an early period of it, about the same time as those to the Ephesians and to Philemon; as they appear to have been all sent by the same messengers, Tychicus and Onesimus, the latter of whom was returning to his master, Philemon, at Colosse. The account given of the Church by Epaphras was on the whole satisfactory. There appears, however, to have been some danger from false teachers, who aimed to combine with Christianity the speculations of the philosophers (ii. 4-8), and superstitious observances (ii. 16).

“The striking resemblance between this Epistle and that to the Ephesians, indicates some similarity in the tendency of the two churches.

“The two Epistles must, in fact, be read together. ‘The one is,’ as Michaelis observes, ‘a commentary on the other.’ Both, moreover, are exceedingly rich in exhibitions of the glory of the Gospel.

“This Epistle was to be sent to Laodicea, and the Colossians were to receive from Laodicea the Epistle he had directed to be sent on to *them*, probably the present Epistle to the Ephesians.”—ANGUS'S *Bible Handbook*.]

Colossians i. 20-29.

20. And, having made peace through the blood of his Cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.

21. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled

22. In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouable in his sight :

23. If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven ; whereof I Paul am made a minister ;

24. Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church :

25. Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God ;

26. Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints :

27. To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles ; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory :

28. Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom ; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus :

29. Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.

CHRIST IN CHRISTIANS.

THE peculiar expression in the twentieth verse—"whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven"—opens innumerable questions. We always thought of heaven as not needing reconciliation. Is there a suggestion here that even in heaven there has been apostasy or any form of hostility, or any indication of unrest ? Does not the gospel enlarge itself here in a quite unfamiliar but a truly ennobling way ? Have we understood the expression "earth" and "heaven ?" Are we not always being chided and corrected for narrowing the meaning of Scripture, and not rising to all its comprehensiveness and dignity and pregnancy of suggestion ? Who authorised us to call this one little world "earth," and the sky above us "heaven ?" and then to say "In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth"—two objects, and only two ? Suppose "the earth" to be an expression representing all space, all time, all magnitude, all worlds, everything that can be brought under the designation matter, or material ; suppose the word "heaven" should be taken as meaning all spirituality : there you have a universe, there you have Christ at the centre of it and at the head of it, and all round about it ; there you have a Cross that reaches through the universe. I am not aware of any conclusive argument against this suggestion ; and if the

suggestion be true, how all things are altered, in proportion, in perspective, in spiritual balance, and relationship! Verily we have here a new heaven and a new earth. By this suggestion, "earth" will be a typical term, then, representing all materialism so-called; "heaven" will be a typical term, on the other hand, representing all spiritualism: In the beginning God created all matter and all spirit, and when Christ died he reconciled the whole universe, up and down, through all gradations, and that universe he reconciled to the wisdom and love of God. How far-reaching, then, the Atonement! Who knows where it stops? No man can tell where it begins; for origin we are told that the Lamb was slain from before the foundation of the world; for conclusion we are told, his mercy endureth for ever. When the Priest left the Cross he went away, we cannot tell whither he went: we hear of him in Hades, in Paradise, among the spirits in prison, in hell—we cannot tell where he was in the interval; certainly he was not holden of death—"Thou wilt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." We may have erred therefore in being too geometrical and too narrowly astronomical in all our outlook and purview. We have called this little handful of dust "the earth"; we had better call it "earth," that is what God called it; not "the earth," but "earth": and there is a universe full of it; all the stars are mud, all the suns are but blazing dust: behind, above, beyond, is spirit, soul, immortality, heaven: and Christ died, and by the mystery of shed blood he reconciled all earth, all heaven, all space, magnitude, time, eternity, glory; he reconciled it, unified it, centralised it, made it all into his Father's house. This may be now but in process: we need not interrupt the Divine constructor as he builds his infinite temple; when the topstone is brought on, and the completed edifice is hailed by those who have watched its building and who have been incorporated in its structure, then we may tell God how the miracle strikes our imagination and our gratitude. Meanwhile, here is a most remarkable expression—"by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven."

If we want to know what is meant by this reconciliation, the Apostle comes, in verse 21, to give us definite or concrete

instances—"And you . . . hath he reconciled": he has taken the hostility out of your soul, he has caused you to throw down your arms of rebellion, he has enabled you to open your lips in sacred praise, he has made your hearts glow with thankfulness: that on the scale of infinity he has done in all worlds, and a reconciled universe is the trophy, the triumph of the Cross.

There is an awkward "If" in the twenty-third verse—"If ye continue——." It is in continuance that we break down. How excellent we are for an hour, how almost angels for one sudden flash of time, and how instantly we forget our best selves,—fall away into the lowest grade of being. The Apostle always lays great stress on continuance; once he used the remarkable expression "patient continuance": he would refine the continuance; he would make the continuity perfect in quality; it should not be mere doggedness, it should be patient continuance, intelligent acquiescence, a full-hearted consent. Thus are triumphs wrought in God's great school. There may be those who have some burning gift of genius who can by a sudden inspiration or by a quick and incalculable movement pass from alphabet to literature, but the most of us need to study letter by letter and line by line; we need to proceed slowly, with almost contemptible slowness when looked upon by those who fly on the wings of genius and never trudge on the legs of industry. "He that endureth unto the end shall be saved." God has given us something to do in all this mystery of reconciliation; we are not occupying a position that may be regarded as passive, we are to be patient, industrious, painstaking, working steadily: not knowing at what moment the Lord may come to pronounce upon the scope and quality of our work.

What would the Apostle have us be? "Grounded and settled," so that we "be not moved away." If we could imagine a tree so foolish, that it was growing in one place to-day and moving itself off to another to-morrow, and on the third day climbing a hill to feel how the mountain air would suit it, and another day going down to the seaside to see what the ocean breezes would do for it, what would be the end of that tree? Yet some men do this very thing: they are here and there, and

yonder and back again, and they know not which is gospel, which is revelation, which is speculation, which is human, which is divine. And oh! the fraying away, the attenuation of manhood, the loss of quality, the downgoing in all spiritual dignity, what tongue can adequately tell?

Paul introduces himself into all his arguments as if by right. Paul never could detach himself from the argument. There are those to whom the deliverance is nothing; it does not belong to themselves in their veriest consciousness. It was not so with Paul. He was crucified with Christ; Christ was in him, he was in Christ; he was so thoroughly identified with Christ, that sometimes it was difficult to say whether Paul was speaking or Christ was speaking. Here is an instance in which in the sublimest argument—an argument Paul himself never rivalled, except in his Epistle to the Ephesians—Paul is referring to his own ministry, his own sufferings, and his own service, with a familiarity that does not for a moment impair the dignity of the great and sacred argument to which he has ascended by right of inspired power. It will be interesting to hear what he has to say about himself. He calls himself in another place “a minister of God”; in the twenty-third verse of this chapter he calls himself a “minister of the Gospel”; in the twenty-third and twenty-fourth verses he calls himself “a minister of the Church.” Look at these three aspects of his Apostleship:—A minister of God; that carries everything with it: a minister of the Gospel; that is hardly a change of terms: a minister of the Church; which means nothing, unless it first be rooted in the very spirit of the former relationships. Ministers of the Church may be mere officials; but when ministers of the Church are also ministers of God, and ministers of the Gospel, there are no nobler men in all the world. How lovely are the feet of them that bring good tidings, that publish peace, that say unto Zion, Thy God reigneth; break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem; for the Lord by his messengers hath comforted his people. This is the ideal ministry; that men fall short of it is not the blame of the ministry, but the fault of the men themselves.

Paul says he rejoices: What does he rejoice in? Who,

without reference to the book, could imagine the source or the subject of this Apostolic joy? None! "Who now rejoice in my sufferings"—every scar a medal, every wound a door opening towards some new vision of spiritual beauty, every inconvenience a revelation, every night in the wilderness a night in the sanctuary. Paul counted his sufferings. In his letter to the Corinthians he made a list of them, and then words failed him; on one occasion he spoke of them summarily, and he said, "I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation." Along that line there are miracles to be worked every day.

In the twenty-sixth verse, we come upon a revelation of Divine methods:—"The mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints." Here we have the apocrypha and apocalypse. Things which have been hidden—not necessarily concealed absolutely, but things covered up at the corners, almost wholly covered, and yet with certain elements peering out here and there, agitating the generations, so that they say, In that direction there is something yet to be discovered;—or, Just about here God has hidden whole planets; one day they will be visible like lamps in the sky, and shall burn with glory. These apocryphal or hidden truths have kept the attention of the world alive. There is always something beyond; evermore a sweet voice, angel-like in tender witchery of music, says, Excelsior! five hundred feet more, and you may rest, but only rest your strength to climb another five hundred feet: Excelsior! It is what is behind the cloud we want to see.

Then we come upon the contrary expression, "but now is made manifest"—the apocalypse, the throwing-back of the curtain, and the revealing of that which was partially or absolutely concealed. This is God's method of working. Is this the Divine method in theology only? Far from it; it is the method of God through and through: the economies of God are one. We have made our divisions into secular, and sacred; material, and spiritual; earth, and heaven; time, and eternity: and so have shown no little cleverness in balancing words. There is a deeper or more inclusive meaning, which we have to realise

if we would cause our lives to intermingle with the solemn and massive music of the universe. God has hidden everything. It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, to write apocryphally. It is so with science. Why did not science find out the steam-engine a thousand years ago? It could not; the eyes of science were holden that they could not see. There was the iron, there was the fire, there was the water: why did not science put these things together in proper proportion and relation? Because science could not. There is a time for everything under the sun. There was a time to discover the telegraph: there was a time to set up the Cross. There is a time of concealment, and there is a time of manifestation; he who conducts himself properly in the time that is apocryphal will also conduct himself properly in the time that is apocalyptic, the time of manifestation and revelation. Why did not men find out all about reading and writing, say thousands of years ago? Because they could not. Why did not Adam invent an alphabet? Because he could not. Why did not the first handful of men publish a book? Because they could not. So when we come into the realm theological, we do not come into such a great mystery, as if God had held back from the nations and the ages truths in theology, whilst in all departments of civilisation the very first man that lived telegraphed to the very second man that was born. Nothing of the kind. The universe is conducted on a plan. We have discovered nothing yet; we are mere grubbers in the dust, and we call ourselves scientific. We have little geological hammers and we go out with little geological bags, and we bring back at night some little geological specimens, and we appropriately put them under glass. That is scientific. But if a man should pray, and say, "My soul knows that the throne is beyond the sky, and my soul must find it," he is a fanatic. We accept the fanaticism. We abide in this spiritual confidence; we are expecting the Lord. Let him come in what form it may please him to adopt, personally, providentially, dispensationally, spiritually, by a great glow of love in the heart, by an intellect that shall make the understanding a medium of genius,—let him come as he will: but, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Thy Church feels almost widowed, she yearns, she pines, she cries in her heart for her Lord.

“But now,” saith the Apostle, “is made manifest.” Observe the word “now”: there are historical moments in time; moments when there are incarnations of spiritual thought; moments when all history is illumined; moments of transfiguration, when we see men as they are. Blind are they, and stupid beyond recovery, who see nothing but surfaces, geometries, planes, cubes, and things that can be handled with the fingers of the body. Blessed are they that have not seen with the eyes of the body, and yet have believed; they shall be rewarded; heaven shall not be withheld from them.

Now Paul goes on preaching, preaching the Gospel, “warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom,” warning man by man. Every man is a congregation. Do not speak of great congregations or small congregations; every congregation is great; if you have the opportunity of speaking to a soul, you have an opportunity of revealing God. “Teaching” every man, as well as warning every man,—warning and teaching; and it is a poor sermon that is not rich in spiritual suggestion and that does not burn with spiritual earnestness. The sermon is going out of fashion. The preacher soon will not be wanted. There is only one man that can be really popular now in the pulpit, and that is the man who preaches very briefly and very quietly; there are some who would not care about the quietness, if they could only reduce the length. It was not so in the Apostolic days. The old heroes of the Cross thundered day and night, and lightened like angels flying from the heavens, and men hungered and thirsted for the Word, and called him thief who would take their attention away to anything short of Calvary.

How does the Apostle represent the whole action? “Working,”—“Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.” A curious interaction: Paul labouring, Christ working in him, the Spirit working in him mightily, and all the inward might reproduced in public service. This was Apostolic consecration!

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou art called the Father of lights: may we be thy children in that we walk in the light and manifest forth the works of God; may our light so shine before men that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father, the Father of lights, which is in heaven. Thou dwellest in light that is inaccessible; we are blinded by the glory of God; we may not look upon God and live. Yet we may see Jesus Christ thy Son, who is the brightness of thy glory and the express image of thy person. He is God manifest in the flesh. We worship him as Immanuel, God with us; in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily; the Word was with God, and the Word was God, and the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. He is light, and in him is no darkness at all: may we follow him in the light, being children of the day, yea, of the noontday; and may our joy be full of hope. We bless thee that Jesus Christ revealed the Father: if we have seen Jesus Christ thy Son, we have seen thyself. We thank thee for this revelation. We ourselves have seen and tasted and handled and felt of the Word of Life: thou hast enabled us to bear personal testimony to the nearness and richness and the glory of thy revelation. May Christ be born in us the hope of glory; may the Holy Spirit take of the things of Christ and show them unto us; may he be revealed to us more and more, for the more we know thy Son the more we shall know of thyself: may the revelation be without a cloud. We bless thee for the years that are gone, wherein we have been enabled to turn them to good account; and now we pray that all the blackness and sin and shame may be forgiven and forgotten by God, yea, cast behind thy back for ever. Let the Lord hear the doxologies of his people, and answer their thankfulness with new blessings. Amen.

Colossians ii. 1-9.

1. For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh;
2. That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ;
3. In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
4. And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words.
5. For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the stedfastness of your faith in Christ.

6. As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him :
7. Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.
8. Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.
9. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

SOME DANGERS INDICATED.

WHY should Paul the Apostle enter into any "conflict" about people or concerning people whom he had never seen? It is to be remembered that the Apostle Paul is writing to persons who had never seen him in the flesh, whom he had never seen, and with whom he had only opened indirect communication by a fellow-labourer. Yet he says he has a "great conflict" for the Colossians and the Laodiceans and the dwellers in Hierapolis. Why this conflict? Why not let the people alone? Why not be concerned simply for those who are round about you? What is this passion in the sanctified heart that will go out to the ends of the earth, clothed in charity, burning with Christly ardour? If there be any persons who are strangers to this passion they cannot enter into the music of the Apostle's Epistle to the Colossians. They may call themselves practical people, they may find refuge in narrow maxims, such as, "Charity begins at home." Christianity knows nothing about such maxims. Christianity takes in all time, all space, all human nature; Christianity is not willing to sit down to the feast so long as there is one vacant chair at the banqueting table: Christianity never ceased to say, "Yet there is room"; specially is there room for those who least think of it, or who least suspect their fitness to occupy it. There is no room for the self-contented, the pharisaical; there is always more room for the broken-hearted, the self-renouncing, the Christ-seeking soul. Paul lived in conflict: on the other hand, we are amongst those who avoid everything like controversy, friction, and sharp, mutual confrontage. We love quietness. Yet we do not know what quietness is; we think that quietness is indifference, carelessness, indisposition to concern oneself about anybody's interests. That is not quietness, that is more nearly an approach to death: peace is not indifference, it is the last result of the operation of ten thousand conflicting forces.

We are only at peace after we have been at war, and after we have accepted the music of the will of God.

What is this conflict? The term would seem to mean battle, antagonism, decisive and unchangeable hostility in relation to some other object. That is not the whole meaning of the word in this connection. In another verse the Apostle defines the conflict—"striving," saith he, "in prayer." There is a conflict at the throne of grace, there is a time when man wrestles with the angel of God. It would seem from an outside point of view as if they were thrown together in deadly combat: which shall go down, the human or the Divine? the man or the angel? And the angel always allows himself to be thrown in that holy controversy, that he may bestow upon the successful combatant a new name, a new franchise, a sacred, blissful immortality. Until we so enlarge our prayers we shall not know what the privilege of prayer is. Confining our petitions to little concerns, to petty and immediate affairs, we shall never know the range and the sacred urgency and violence of prayer. We must pray, as it were, more for those whom we have never seen than for those who are nearest our personal love; there are so many things that may occur to our poor imagination to prevent our ever seizing with the right of Divine proprietorship all that lies beyond. Paul would not pray only for those who, like the Philippians, had been round about him and enriching him night and day; but for the citizens of Colosse and Laodicea and Hierapolis, for those who were far away from himself. But all men are equally near to God. Here we have Christian passion seen in its sublimest exercise; the man enlarging himself into a whole priesthood, a soul burning with love for souls he had never seen. Until the Church is thus large, inclusive, solicitous, involving the whole world in its prayer and its desire—until this miracle is accomplished, we shall hold small controversies about the answerableness and the utility of prayer. How can men who have never prayed argue the question of prayer? How can they who have limited their prayers to small areas know the meaning of intercession, which so stirs the soul that it can have no rest until the last wanderer has returned to his Father? Pray more, and argue less.

Here occurs the name of the city of Laodicea—the richest and proudest of the three cities in whose religious interests Paul is now most deeply concerned. Of the cities of Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis, Laodicea was by far the strongest, richest metropolis. What do we know of it now? Where now its fame? Laodicea has become a term signifying lukewarmness, tepid zeal, a condition of the soul which is neither hot nor cold. Laodicean wealth, pomp, festivity, are all forgotten, and Laodicea lives only to represent the lukewarmness of men who have lost their first love. So may fame perish! “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” The man who is to-day most famous for the highest powers and the sublimest influence may fade out of human recollection, or may be buried with a nameless burial. We cannot live in yesterday’s goodness, we can only live on to day’s active piety; not what we did years ago, but what we are doing now, determines our character, and settles our fitness for heaven.

What does the Apostle desire for those whom he had never seen in the flesh?—“That their hearts might be comforted.” What do we mean by the word “comfort”? Perhaps we know more clearly our conception of the word comfort than we can explain it in terms. Every one will naturally think that he knows what comfort means: when you comfort a heart you soothe it, pacify it, pronounce a blessing upon it; you cause it to nestle warmly in your own heart, that thereby it may be warmed and stilled, and be led into a sense of deep and sweet tranquillity. That is not the meaning of the word here. The English language deprives us of the force of the word which Paul employed. Almost everywhere in the New Testament when you comfort men you do not lull them or soothe them: a comforting preacher is a rousing preacher. We speak of a Boanerges and a son of consolation; we think of the Barnabas of the Church as a very quiet man, singularly unsusceptible to public excitement; a man who is always pronouncing beatitudes, and so exorcising the spirit of unrest as rather to bring upon the Church a spirit of slumbrousness, quietness, which sees God in his minor but not less tender aspects. That is not the meaning of the word “son of consolation.” Barnabas was not a quiet speaker, Barnabas

was not a man who pronounced beatitudes ; " the son of consolation " meant that he was an exciting, inspiring, rousing, dominant preacher ; encouraging the heart to new braveries, straining the soul to new tension, that it might give itself with larger and more perfect consecration to the service of the Cross. Thus words have been abased, impoverished, perverted ; and men have been called sons of consolation who ought to have been described as dead asleep. When the Apostle prayed that the people might be " comforted," he prayed that they might be encouraged, stimulated, excited ; that they might have all their faculties roused up. Put on thy strength, and thus be comforted.

" Being knit together in love." Who knows the meaning of " being knit together " ? Would it not signify close union, unanimous co-operation, perfect identity of feeling as between man and man throughout the whole Church ? There is no objection to that definition, but that is not the definition of the term which the Apostle Paul used. This is rather a logical than a moral term. Paul would have all the people carried together in a common persuasion, parties to a common agreement, consenting to the statement of truth, as being the best possible presentation for the time being of that truth, knit together like a closely compacted and finely reasoned argument : yet not argument in a controversial and exasperating sense, but argument with love at the basis, love at the heart, love at the crown ; the right kind of argument ; not that overwhelms by mighty appeals only, but that persuades so as to gain the consent of head and heart and hand in the establishment and propagation of truth. Paul would have an educated Church in the right sense of the term ; he would have all the Colossians " knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ ; in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." There is a full theology ; there is a part of the Scriptures we never saw before : to this men are called, to this complete equipment and satisfaction are men to be persuaded. This mystery of Christ is not an acquisition which any man can attain to in a moment, this is not an education that can be completed in a day or two. With Paul, Christian thought was not something

to be referred to once a week ; he did not keep his Christianity locked up in the Church. All the other things were little : Christ alone was great. As for our business, our commerce, our adventure, all our civilisation in its largest and most impressive aspects,—all that he reckoned among the *et-cætera* : the thing to be done was to be united to Christ, to God through Christ, to have Christ dwelling in the soul, and to be ready for all the elevation awaiting redeemed souls. We have inverted all that, we have made a classification of our own. If a man were to speak about Christ during the transaction of his business, he would be branded as a fanatic or a hypocrite. This is how we treat the greatest mystery in the universe. We appoint special times, and we abbreviate those times to the utmost possible extent, and we refer rather indirectly than distinctively to Christ as the Redeemer of the world. Paul could not live now. He would tear the Church to pieces. Nothing would surprise that ardent mind so much as to find certain persons calling themselves Christians. He would tear the Christian pulpit asunder, he would drive out many Christian preachers and teachers ; as for the Church-roll, what would become of it under those burning fingers ! Paul said, Christianity is all, or it is nothing. Paul said in effect, I can understand the man who curses God or denies God, or mouths the heavens in foul blasphemy, and I can understand the man who says, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ : for me to live is Christ : this one thing I do” : but I cannot understand the man between, who is neither the one nor the other, or the man who makes his piety an investment, his Christianity an element in his social progress.

To this passion we must come back, or the battle is lost. There is no doubt on my mind that the Christian battle has been lost by lukewarm Christianity. The infidel has done us little harm, the atheist has made no progress ; but the man who has undertaken to patronise Christianity, and who has choked it by his favours, has cost the Christ of God a thousand redoubled crucifixions. Why do you not give up Christianity ? why have anything to do with it ? Why crush it with your patronage ? why choke it with your embrace ? Renounce it, thus help it ;

curse it, and thus bless it. On the other hand, who can forget that to-day there are men as consecrated, as self-sacrificing, as probably ever lived since the days of the Apostle: missionaries abroad who are daily hazarding their lives for the Lord Jesus; missionaries who have no object in life but to exalt the Cross? A missionary is a continual rebuke to a domestic minister; the man who has gone out to the heathen to fight the devil on his own battleground, the man who has entered the densest darkness that there he might introduce the light of the Gospel, is a man who puts to shame ministers who study new adaptations of language to suit the perverted fancy and the perverted taste of persons who simply luxuriate in the intellectual enjoyment of Christianity. We need not humble our own age unnecessarily, yet he would be an unjust man who would assert broadly that the Apostle Paul would be satisfied with the representation of Christ which is to be found in the Christian Church this day.

Yet the Apostle has a word of warning; he sees two dangers ahead. The first is:—"And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words." He is not indicating an open hostility, he has no fear of the great battle-axe, it is not a battering-ram that excites his solicitude; it is a process of beguilement. What is the meaning of that term? A process of leading away little by little, a short step at a time; an assent, a casual suggestion, one small omission of duty; and especially that wicked practice of attaching different meanings to the same words. There is a sophistry that is ruining the soul by allowing the use of a double dictionary, so that a word shall mean this under some circumstances, and something different under a totally different class of conditions. The Apostle will have men simple-minded, frank-hearted, meaning what they say, saying what they mean, living the white life; candidates enrolled in robes white as snow. "Enticing words" are words that lead astray; words that say, Unquestionably you are on the right road, and not for one moment ought you to think of leaving that road permanently; yet how much you might learn it you would turn aside one little step, to see this new flower, to hear this new bird, to behold this new sight. We are only safe in our steadfastness. Only he who says, No! broadly, proudly, ringingly,

can be right. He would be called very narrow-minded, puritanical, pharisaical, self-righteous, legal, and so forth. He can bear all such descriptives because his own heart doth not condemn him. He says, I will not turn to the right hand or to the left, I will walk steadfastly towards the polar star. Happy he !
"My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not."

Another danger is indicated in the eighth verse :—"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit." What is the meaning of the word "spoil" in this connection ? Suppose we read the text thus :—Beware lest any man mar the beauty of your Christian simplicity or your pious excellence :—Beware lest any man should blight that which is fair, or disfigure that which is proportionate. The sense would be good, but it would not be the sense of the Apostle Paul in this particular connection. Here we have a military phrase :—Beware lest any man take you as spoil, take you at the spear-point, and lead you away the victim of philosophy and vain deceit. We might therefore read the text thus :—Beware lest in the battle of life any man should so far conquer you as to make you a victim of philosophy and vain deceit ; despoil you as an enemy besieging a town despoils its ramparts and takes its citizens in war. What is the spirit to which we may become thus subservient ? It is called "philosophy and vain deceit" Christianity is not a mere philosophy. The theologians of a certain school, narrow and mechanical, have nearly killed Christianity. They will make a system of it, they will map out the heart of God into private garden-ground ; it begins here, it ends there, and between the origin and the conclusion the life may be described thus. When men undertake to parochialise the infinite, they are no longer wise, they have become fools before God. Christianity is too big for any philosophy. Love cannot be scheduled. For want of knowing this the colleges, seminaries, and theological universities have very nearly blotted out the blood-stained ground called Calvary. We have now theories of God's love, systems and schemes and plans of salvation. What can stand against such mechanical treatment of the divine force of redeeming love ? It is not to be measured. I will tell you what you may measure if you like—measure the wind !

There will I leave you : buy tape enough, buy miles of it, and borrow all you cannot buy, and when we meet again tell me the extent of the wind that blows through the space occupied by the earth. I will tell you what to measure—measure the light! Make some new photometer that shall exactly, to one little inch, mete out the sunlight that fills the space round about us. Borrow and buy once more, and when we meet again tell me how much light there is in the space above and around. But do not measure God's love. Oh, the depth! said one; oh, the breadth, the length, the height! His arithmetic was lost, his geometry was dumb. Feel it; never attempt to express it adequately in words: respond to it as a passion; but never attempt to follow it as a decorated and erudite philosophy. Here is the greatest presence we know of, which comes every day and takes up no room. What a mystery is that! The greatest presence known to our senses takes up no space. A child requires his little inch of foothold, an insect casts its tiny shadow on the plant whose virtue is its food: but here is the greatest, sublimest, vastest presence known to our senses, and yet it takes up no room, does not rob the child of its foothold or the insect of its little area of operation. What is that greatest presence? It is the light. It is here and there and yonder, high as heaven, and yet it takes up no room, hinders no traveller, obstructs no progress, lives, moves, and blesses all, without asking for any hospitality or accommodation in return. So it is with the love of God. Measure the speech of man, fix its value, determine its limits; but when God speaks be silent that you may hear his music,—“The Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.” When a man becomes a philosopher, be sure he is nearly about becoming a fool. There is no word that plagues a man's vanity so much as “philosopher.” He thinks he would like to be a philosopher; he does not know the meaning of the word, but it looks such a very *very* important word: it is so roomy, so capacious, so hospitable, that he thinks even he may find at least momentary accommodation under its sheltering roof.

“A little learning is a dangerous thing,
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring.”

My lord Bacon saith, “A little learning inclineth to atheism, but

great learning bringeth men to the footstool of God." If we could have a complete philosophy or scheme of wisdom, that indeed would be welcome to all minds; but for any man to describe philosophy as having a beginning and end, is for that man to indicate in the plainest terms that he knows nothing about it. If Christianity were only a philosophy, it would be like ten thousand other propositions, schemes, or suggestions.

What, then, is Christianity? It is a life, an experience, a passion, a Cross. The men who are ruining Christianity are the men who are comparing it with other religions. They give Mahomet a place, and Confucius a place, and Buddha a place, and Christ a place, and Socrates a place. This is not the position which Christianity will accept. Christianity is distinctive, it is *sui similis*, it is like itself; "only itself can be its parallel." It exists in its own unity, personality, identity; not as a thing schemed out and scheduled forth by clever managers of words, but life that loves, and lives in sacrifice. Will you therefore come to the aid of the Cross by simply saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner"? When you tried to understand the Cross, you lost your salvation; the moment you said, Now I will put this into logical form, then you limited the Holy One of Israel. Yield yourselves to all the influences of God, and go whither the Spirit drives you, and you will find that in the end you have come into the summerland of heaven. There are those, of course, who are great in insisting upon definiteness. They will be ruined by the very definiteness which they adore. There is something grander than definiteness of the mechanical kind, and that is definiteness of assured love of Christ. Let a man say, I cannot explain Christ, I cannot argumentatively defend Christ against many cunning arts of words, but, my God, thou knowest that I love him—and he is a Christian; all the rest will come, by patient continuance in well-doing, by able moral self-discipline; by living in the spirit of the Cross of Christ, he will come little by little to know more of the doctrine of Christ. Thus will his education be completed.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we pray thee to show unto us more and more of thy truth ; then we shall know that our life is increasing more and more, and by the increase of life we shall be able to confirm and enjoy the increase of truth. Forbid that our information should exceed our enthusiasm ; may they both go together ; may all we know burn with a sacred ardour ; may our lives be as shrines of the Holy One, which men seeing may take knowledge of, and draw near, and hear from our lives some message from on high. We bless thee for all thy love ; no tongue can tell its amount, its tenderness, its spontaneousness ; we feel it, but cannot express it in words ; we can say with our whole heart, God is light, God is love, God is goodness. May we hold fast to these truths, and grow up from them as from roots, until we become great fruit-bearing trees, glorifying God, not only in the vastness of our growth, but also in the abundance and richness of our fruit. Our prayer we say in the dear, sweet name of Christ Jesus, Lamb of God, Saviour of man. Amen.

Colossians ii. 2.

“Knit together in love.”

UNITED LOVE.

THIS ought to be a commonplace ; the merest truism in Christian speech. The announcement of such a text should awaken no attention, or excite no curiosity or special interest, because the words themselves are trite. To be human is to love ; to be men is to be knit together ; to be alive is to be in brotherhood. So we should say, if we had no experience to go by : but all experience, alas, contradicts our theory, and instead of having a commonplace to deal with we are face to face with a miracle. That miracle will appear to be the greater and the more suggestive, if we think once more of what ought to be a mere commonplace in human history. When man meets man he must hail his brother ; two men cannot pass one another on a journey without recognition ; to be sick is to evoke the help of the whole neighbourhood ; to be in distress is enough to bring to our aid all who hear of it. So it would seem, for we are men—educated,

cultured, refined men. The priest will never pass a wounded man, nor will a Levite; they will say, seeing a wounded brother, All church systems must stand still until this man is once more upon his legs; there shall be no bell-ringing, or cup-washing, or ceremonial observance, until this man's wounds are healed, until this dying man can join the holy worship. This would be philanthropy, love of man, beautiful benevolence, most tender and helpful sympathy, and the world will be full of it as it is full of sunshine in summer midday. We cannot deny the testimony of experience upon these matters. When you were sick, and in prison, and naked, and an hungered, and athirst, who cared for you? Is not the world a great, cruel world? Has it time to cast but a brief and furtive glance at suffering men, and then to roll on in its cumbrous chariot to keep the feast-time or to enjoy the harvest of pelf? Why should Paul be in conflict about distressed hearts? Why should he desire that they should be "knit together in love"? The thing will come naturally. Where does it come naturally? The ground will grow wheat here, and fruit trees yonder, and rich meadows in a third locality, and every spot of earth will have its own flower-bed: let things alone. Where do these miracles occur? It would be as difficult to find them in Nature as it is to find them in human society. Behind all true appearances—that is, appearances expressive of reality—you must find cultured character, sanctified disposition, divinely inspired and controlled instinct and feeling.

This being knit together in love is not only a miracle, it is Christ's miracle. It is not a conjuror's trick; it is the miracle of God. Surprising, indeed, that we should require the interposition of Omnipotence to bring us together in love, in all its union and trustfulness, in all its sympathy and helpfulness. In reality, man hates man; in reality, there is no beast in the jungle so cruel-hearted as man: his cruelty is practised, not to satisfy an instinct that in itself is good, but an instinct that in itself is bad; it is not the necessary cruelty which must sometimes be perpetrated on savage beasts, but a calculated cruelty, set out upon an arithmetical basis, arranged by a calculus adapted to the anticipation of events and the possibility of bearing burdens; a mean analysis of life, and fact, and possibility; quite a triumph of

selfish genius. When we hear of man loving man, where are the facts, apart from the Christian religion? Let us go to some sunny land where man loves man, and study the amazing miracle. It will not be enough to show us a flag, red as blood, fringed with silver, and on it written, "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity"; we are not flag-hunting, we are in quest of the land where man loves man, and in a land where Christ was never heard of. It is the Christian contention that philanthropy is the practical philosophy of Christian doctrine. That is the plain, frank, generous issue. Until we love God we cannot love man in any profound and all-enduring sense: the whole prophecy of revelation, and the whole meaning of God, you will find in the two commandments—Love God and love thy neighbour.

There are many kinds of union, many circumstances under which men are knit together, without being knit together in love. Were we to omit the condition under which our hearts are to be knit together, we should omit the whole text. Men may be knit together involuntarily; circumstances may have brought them together for the accomplishment of a given purpose; they may have no liking for one another in any other relation, but they are necessary to each other in the carrying out of a certain conclusion. There is a being knit together in selfishness: we get more by being knit together than we could get in solitude: co-operation is profitable; union is an investment. Then there are unions that are but temporary; they are political, they are mechanical, they are constructed in order that a certain issue may be the more quickly brought about. In this case we have association rather than union. For proximity is not union, of necessity. There is no union in things that are brought together and are held together by some outside force. True union amounts to almost identity, to subtle, sympathetic, complete amalgamation. This union is to be a union of love. What other union is possible in the Church? There is a quasi-union possible, which is founded upon opinion. Upon opinion no lasting, vital, sacrificial union can ever be founded. Opinion ought, in a very large sense, to be independent, the outworking of individual thinking; it should indicate the personal accent of individual character. Who is the man that wishes that his opinion should rule the whole world,

and be accepted in the verbal form in which he states it? That truth can be stated in ten thousand ways is a tribute to truth itself, as well as to the fertility of the human mind. To write an opinion and demand subscription to it, what is that but stark popery without the name? We must not believe in authority unless we believe in it altogether. And besides, in whose authority are we to believe? Where is the man with the tiara on his head, which God set there in token of infallibility? Is the human mind intended to run in one mould and to express one set of convictions and opinions and thoughts? May there not be unity in diversity? May not one man see an aspect of the truth peculiar to himself, and other men see aspects of the truth equally vividly? And may not all the aspects be required to make up the sum total of truth? If we found our union upon opinion we shall have continual controversy of an angry kind, not the useful attrition of mind upon mind which expresses its utility in sparks and flashes of light; we shall have hostility, antagonism, opposing creeds and beliefs, and shall consider him the wise man who can talk most eloquently and obstinately in defence of his peculiar shibboleth. There is a kind of union, also, founded upon custom. That union is of no value. It is the union of meeting together under the same roof occasionally, and of passing through the same forms of worship and ceremony, as if unanimously; a union which comes of having been in the habit of going to this place or to that, and obeying certain behests, and passing through a definite ritual. That is not the union for which Paul prayed: there is no vitality in it; it may be association, proximity, a coming together for an occasion and a purpose, but real brotherhood there is none in such mechanical relationship.

Where, then, is unity possible? Only in love. What can love do? It can bear the greatest strain. Love never gives way. Men can be very hot about their opinions, extremely pedantic, and can claim very much in the name of infallibility without a distinct avowal of Papacy; but only love can stand all weathers, go through all the seasons blithely and hopefully, find flowers in the deserts, and pools among the rocks. Take away love from the Church, and you destroy the Church. Paul

says love "beareth all things . . . endureth all things"—beareth all things in the sense of a roof bearing the storm, that those who are under it may not be drenched with its waters; not bearing in the sense of enduring, for that comes in afterwards, but bearing in the sense of outputting; an outkeeping, precisely as the roof bears the tempest: so love bears all the brunt and storm and rattle and shock of things, and those who dwell under it dwell under the roof of a sanctuary, and enjoy an inviolable security and brotherhood. Love is not indiscriminate; love is critical, dainty, electric. Every heart has its own affinities. They are wise who follow those affinities without disparaging or discrediting other fellowships. Around some teachers we can gather as we could not gather around others. That is no reason for being angry or hostile towards those whose teaching we cannot receive. Some teachers seem to know us, to search us with a kind hand, to hold the light just where we dread it most, and yet we bless them for their fearlessness, for we say, The man could not be so critical if he did not mean in his degree to be equally redemptive; he searches and tries that afterwards he may make up, and heal, and bless, and crown. Love cannot make friends of every one in an equal degree. There is a law of affinity, both spiritual, and, in a more modified sense, social and physical. We know those whom we love at once. We do not require to know them long years, and bethink ourselves whether we shall at the end of a probationary period feel inclined to unite with them; we know the grip of the hand, the look of the eye, the tone of the voice, the whole character at once, and we say with the discernment of spirit which belongs to the genius of love, Accept our fellowship, and give us yours.

What is it, then, that we love in one another? As Christians, it is the Christ within one another that we love. We see him in various lights and aspects as we study one another. Christ does not reveal himself in the same way through every one of his children; he accepts the instrument and makes the most and best of it. Some seem to give but a very imperfect revelation of the Son of God; but they would give an imperfect revelation of anything else or any one else, for they give a very imperfect revelation of human nature itself. We cannot account for them;

how they came to be born we do not know ; as a matter of fact, there they are, and they have to be dealt with as entities and factors in human life. When we look upon them and wonder why they represent Christianity, we do injustice to Christianity itself if we do not go farther ; we should say, If these men are so ungainly and uninviting with Christianity, what would they have been without it ? If we could compare the two personalities, the non-Christian and the Christian, we should see that a miracle has been wrought in bringing up these very men, even to the point of attainment at which we find them, and which we regard with so positive a discontentment. So with the nations of the world. Christ will reveal himself according to national characteristic, temperament, culture, and opportunity. When the African is converted, his Christianity will not be like the Christianity of the long-cultured Hindoo, the man who represents ages of civilisation : in one case you may have frankness, mere surface, the kind of Christianity that can express itself in words of one syllable, and in sentences of the shortest and curtest kind ; in the other, there may be mystery, subtle eloquence, far-away thinking, great intellectual compass, and that kind of hesitancy which comes not from doubt, but from seeing so much that it is impossible to condense it into brief and epigrammatic periods. Thus we must learn that Christianity accepts the mould of the individual through whose character it expresses itself ; for the value is not in the mere method, or in the figure which that mould impresses, but in the fact that it is Christianity that is represented, how imperfectly soever.

“ Knit together in love.” Then they will never believe evil of one another ; they will never take any outside report about one another : they will dwell with themselves, they will live the life of brotherhood ; the world will have no right to pronounce any opinion upon any one of them. The merely worldly man, whose vision is bounded by the horizon and whose objects are served by the earth under his feet, will never be allowed to express an opinion about any Christian man : his criticism would be worthless ; he would begin at the wrong point, look at the wrong things, attach a false estimate to everything which he attempted to appraise, and all his judgment would be smiled at as would

be the judgment of a blind man who wrote a report about a picture-gallery: the man is not in the masonry, or music, or fraternity, or fellowship; he does not understand its passwords, tokens, signs, pledges, badges; he pronounces upon that which he understands not. "Knit together in love." Who can estimate the strength of the binding force? What has love not done? If we loved one another we should see the virtues rather than the vices, the excellences rather than the defects and infirmities. Take a mother's estimate of her worst child. She will allow that society has some right to criticise him, but if they knew him as she knows him they would be less severe in their judgment than they are. She may not be critically right, but she is redeemingly and sympathetically and divinely right; and she has a right to take that ground, because she can see farther into the case than any outsider can possibly do. Receive the interpretations of love gratefully. There is plenty of criticism in the world, pedantic, selfish, hostile, bitter, clamorous criticism. There is nothing so easy as to find fault; the veriest fool may take high prizes in that art. Some men, unfortunately, are cursed with a disposition which makes everything as sour as itself. It is most unfortunate; it is, indeed, unspeakably calamitous; still, we must show the strength of our love by even encouraging such to strive against themselves, if haply by the united force of the triune God even they may be saved in the end.

Christianity is nothing without love, and love is not a mere sentiment. We cannot sing it all and be done with it. Love sits up all night; love never accounts that anything has been given so long as anything has been withheld; love is inventive in sacrifice; it can always see another cross on which it may die in order that some poor sinner may live. It is recorded of a Catholic saint, of long life, and multifold and patient endurance, that he was visited by his Lord, the Son of God, whose countenance was marred more than any man's; and the Lord asked him what he would that should be done to him for his honour and comfort. The aged, all-enduring saint, seeing the image of his Lord and observing what suffering could do, replied with ineffable sweetness, "Lord, that I might suffer most!" What

can make a face like suffering? What can make a man like sanctified endurance? What can enrich and ennoble a life like sorrow accepted in the right spirit? It takes out every trace of the old Adam, it brings upon the human face the very lustre of God

“Knit together in love.” We must remember that love is to be cultured, developed, strengthened. Love does not come once for all as a mere sentiment or passion and say, I have come, and there will be no more of me: I will abide here just as you see me now. That is not the way the flowers come; the flowers say to the botanist and the gardener, You can make anything of us you like; you can bring us together, and we shall produce new colours and new forms; you can so treat us that we shall be miracles of beauty: do not disdain us, or allow us to live solitary lives, but study our characteristics and our botanical features, and we will answer all your tender care. So it is with Christ's sweet love: now it is a missionary asking for the widest sea and the stormiest water, that he may cross the deep to blow his silver trumpet in the hearing of those who have never heard it; and now it is a veiled angel, going stealthily about in the night time, knocking at doors, climbing creaky stairs up to the sick-chamber, where affliction and poverty are beating out their pulses in unknown distress; now it is a heroic enthusiasm of preaching, so that the whole land vibrates under the music of new voices and the resonance of new appeals; now it is domestic, going quietly about the business of the week so silently, unobservedly, unostentatiously, beneficently, doing a thousand little things of which nobody takes heed or puts down to the credit of love; still, they are all done, and the doing of them helps the floral beauty of the world. Wherever we find this love, we cannot be mistaken for a moment about its origin and its quality. Who can mistake fire? Who can be cheated by a painted ceiling to believe it is God's own sky, unrolled by his hand and studded with stars by his finger? Who can mistake the summer for aught but a Divine creation? It is even so with this Christian love: there is a reach about it, a subtlety, a mystery, a majesty, above all things a self-sacrificing passion in it and about it, which establish its identity beyond all

dispute. Where there is a heart possessed by anything but love, let that heart pray mightily all the day, all the night, that the demon may be killed : and not killed only, but twice killed ; and not twice killed only, but buried, not in earth, but in its native hell.

Dreadful is the life that is unblessed with love—a cold, mean, poor life ; its bread is unsanctified, its very prosperity is but the higher aspect of failure, and all its ambition is an irreligious prayer addressed to an irreligious god. Rich is the life that is full of love : it shall never want ; its sufferings shall be a new form of joy ; it will bless the little and the great ; it will be welcomed as light is welcomed after a long night of darkness ; it will never be discontented, critical, in any foolish or invidious sense ; it will see the very beginning of the day, and no sooner will the opal appear in the east than it will begin to declare that the day has come ; and even when it looks upon the grey, sullen, murky fog, it will say, This is but an underclothing of the earth ; the sun is just as bright as ever he was, and the heaven as blue as at midsummer, and as for all these under-phenomena they are but for a moment, they will pass away, and we shall forget them and never wish to recall them. Herein is the strength of the Church. Love will sustain every burden, see a way through every difficulty, have a happy answer to every enigma, and will hold out a helpful hand to every case of necessity. Say we are knit together in opinion, and growing minds will arise amongst us and alter the whole relation in which we stand ; say we are united in custom, and some great revival may occur which will throw the mechanical customs of the Church into desuetude ; but say we are knit together in love, and we say in other words that we are knit together for time, and for eternity ; for earth, for heaven : for love is the universal language, and love, like its Author, can never die.

Colossians ii. 10-19.

“And ye are complete in him” [ye are filled up to him] (ver. 10).

THE SCIENCE OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION.

MEN are of different capacities. No two men can contain exactly the same quantity (if that term may be permitted) of Christ: each man has his own portion. This is a fact which is overlooked, and in consequence of its being overlooked we have no end of conflict and soul-distressing controversy. We cannot all contain the same quantity of nature. The earth is enough for some; others seem to be able to take in the whole heaven; whether they are poets or mystics or rhapsodists or saints, we stay not to inquire; they shame us by a capacity which seems to extend every time it presents itself for new gifts from the Cross and from the throne. Let a man know what his capacity is, and let him rejoice that, according to the measure of that capacity, he is filled up with Christ, has all the God he can hold. What a doctrine is that, what a consolation, what an inspiration! The Lord has not started us all with the same intellectual or moral capacity. Some men have hardly any mental capacity, and some men seem as if they were doomed never to be morally right. We cannot understand these mysteries, nor are we called upon to explain them; ours is not the judgment-seat, it is God's.

“. . . which is the head of all principality and power.” Paul persists in extending the sovereignty of Christ beyond what we know as earth, time, space, and Church. He will not have Christ confined in his ministry to any one spot in space; wherever there is a life he will find a subject of Christ's crown; wherever there is a soul Paul will find a psalm of homage to him who bore the Cross and died upon it. We are not complete in one another, we are complete in Christ; yet we cannot do without one another, such is the action of sympathy, the comforting, sustaining, and animating result of trustful fellowship in Christ.

Now the Apostle turns to all things preparatory and symbolic, and speaks of them thus :—

“In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ” (ver. 11).

The meaning is that there was an earlier circumcision done with hands, a kind of surgical operation; nothing in itself, but very much in its significance; it was the mark of a Divine covenant. But in Christ there are no such marks; we enter into liberty, joy, transport, consciousness of the Divine presence, which enables us to judge everything, and to escape all criticism of a humiliating kind ourselves. Circumcision was not done away, it was consummated; that is to say, it was brought up to all its meaning, it realised all its significance; so we are now of the circumcision, not the circumcision of the knife or the sharp-edged stone, but the circumcision which is wrought by the Spirit: we, too, bear signs and marks and tokens, but wholly of a spiritual kind.

“Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead” (ver. 12).

What baptism was this? Not of water, for then Judas was baptised, and Judas rose again with his Lord. Said Christ, “I have a baptism to be baptised with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!” That is the baptism in which we are buried with Christ. Your self-conceited, pompous ritualism must be banished from the Church, whether circumcision or baptism, and the great spiritual thought must be realised in all the fulness of its glory. If there be those who imagine that being put into so much water they are buried with Christ in baptism, then they know not the spirit of the Christianity which has been given to them. We are buried with Christ when we are one with him, in spirit, in resignation, in obedience, in the consciousness that only by sacrifice can certain great spiritual results be realised. It would indeed be a cheap form of burial with Christ to go down into a reservoir, or to be submerged for a moment in some classic river: only they are buried with Christ in baptism who have been buried with him in Gethsemane; only they know the

baptism of Christ who have said in speechless, blanched agony, Thy will be done. It is at that point we must join Christ. We do not come in after the victory and enjoy all the fruits of triumph; we do not go up to a risen Lord and say, Now that the resurrection has taken place we will join thee in thy kingdom; we see now where the power is, and where the light shines, and where all the sovereignty will consummate itself in eternal dominion, and therefore we have come to offer ourselves to thee. That would be the worst infidelity, the meanest, basest patronage. We join the Church in Gethsemane, we become Christians where we sweat great drops of blood: we cannot have those who come in and say they will subscribe to a thousand dogmas; only they can come to this feast of victory who come through the garden, through Gethsemane, and over Calvary. We must be buried with him in his baptism of blood, we must be crucified with Christ. We are not to confer a favour upon a crowned Victor; we are to join a soul in paroxysms of agony. We, too, must pass through the valley of the shadow of death to the eternal city, full of light, full of summer, full of God.

Is there, then, aught of merit due to us? are we self-raised? Let the Apostle answer:—

“And you, being dead in your sins, and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him” (ver. 13).

The action is Divine. When we confess our sins we but obey a Divine inspiration; when we have lain down in all the deepest humiliation of soul, it is not that we have covenanted with ourselves to win a prize, but that we have seen the abominableness of sin, and have come to hate it in every aspect and issue. If we are raised again we are miracles of God: every new thought is a Divine gift, every aspiration that is determined to find out what is beyond the clouds is a creation of Divine power; whenever any soul said, “I will pray,” it was not the soul that said it, or only the soul as the medium of the Holy Ghost. The more we get rid of ourselves in all these particulars the truer shall be our humility, and the more rational our piety and our homage.

What then became of the old deeds?

“Having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of

ordinances that was against us, who was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his Cross" (ver. 14).

How easy to read these words! how impossible to comprehend this ocean of love! How easy to say "forgiven you all trespasses"! This was not the act of a sovereign, this was the act of a priest: here is no sovereign pomp, here is a suffering God. If God could forgive as a Sovereign, there were no need of the Cross. God needed the Christ as much as we did: he needed the Christ in relation to righteousness, holiness, law, the music and harmony of his universe; and we needed the Christ, because there are times in the soul's history when we want something to cling to, something to look at, something about which we can say, That is the hope of my soul. Into these mysteries there is no door through language: the door opening upon such glories opens in the consciousness of the soul, for which there is no adequate speech: we leave this mystery, and thus come to understand it in some degree. As to our omitted ordinances, the grace that is in Christ Jesus covers up all the past of our neglect; as for the handwriting that was against us, it is cancelled, it is removed by blood; as to the whole covenant that we had broken, it is taken out of the way, and nailed to the Cross. It is supposed that in ancient times the nailing of a bond meant its cancellation; a nail was put through it, the meaning that the bond was fulfilled, cancelled, or dismissed. To-day we signify such results by perforation in some cases. The figure is graphic, striking, and memorable: there was a written paper against us, we had written it and signed it with our own hand; it was ours, and we could not deny it without stultifying ourselves: how was it to be got out of the way? Christ took it, and nailed it to his Cross; and he only could do this.

"And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (ver. 15).

Having spoiled all wickedness, all diabolical presences, and ministries; having gone into the spiritual world, and searched out every foe, and killed him, his triumph was clean and complete. There is a singular idea in this word "spoiled,"—an idea of stripping, as if he had thrown off the body, the only thing that principalities and powers could get hold of in his case. They

could not touch that soul of purity, ineffable, impeccable, everlasting; they could make some assault on the flesh, so he stripped it, threw off all the medium and surface on which principalities and powers could operate; he said, Take the body, make of it what you will. So he worked out the mystery of reconciliation with God. So we may read, Having conquered all principalities and powers, either by discipline, or by sheer spiritual energy, or by ineffable holiness,—having proved himself to be master, he has given us all the advantage of his sovereignty.

What, then, are we to do now that Christ has risen and proved himself to be the Lord of all? We have to enter into and claim and justify a great liberty:—

“Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ” (vers. 16, 17).

All littleness, meanness of method, smallness of literal discipline, was to be done away in the liberty that is in Christ Jesus. We are no longer Jews, ritualists, observers of times and seasons; we have escaped the region of narrow and false criticism, and we have entered into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. We have not entered into licence; we have entered into certain rights of personal conscience, and in the exercise of those rights we are to realise what Christ meant by liberty. We have not done with meat or drink or holydays or new moons or Sabbath days, or with any shadows; if they can help us, let their help be made welcome: but no man is to come into the Church and say his way is the right way, and that if we do not submit to his plan we are aliens against the commonwealth of Israel. A new court of arbitrament has been set up, the conscience has been re-created; in every man who helps Christ there is a power of the Holy Ghost, by which he can judge all things for himself. Who art thou, then, that judgest thy brother?

“Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind” (ver. 18).

There had been a great scheme of morality and discipline and self-preparation, whereby the soul could draw upon God as if

by right of merit. "Voluntary humility,"—studied modesty; humility at the mirror, looking at itself and wondering how much nicer it could make itself, how much humbler it could make its humility, and in what attitude it might go forth, so as to attract the attention of others, who should say concerning it, Behold what beautiful modesty, what really exquisite humility is this! We are not brought into this kind of discipline, but into unconscious humility; sometimes into humility so unconscious that it is mistaken by others, who know not that an erect form may be perfectly consistent with a prostrate soul. Then the "worshipping of angels" had to be done away with. There has always been in the Church a sect which believed in angelology. They built their theories and hopes upon odd expressions in the Scriptures; they know that we receive the law by the disposition of angels; they say, Are not all angels ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation? There are innumerable passages of Scripture in which the word "angels" occurs; and these have been all brought together, and have been made to constitute what is termed angelology. All this has to be done away, and we are to stand face to face with Christ: the medium destroyed, the Lord himself immediately realised by every soul. So there must be no encroachment into things not seen, no spirit of trespass, no standing at the door, saying, I will enter here, or I will be outside for ever. There is to be nothing of that kind, but all other things are to be absorbed in "holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God" (ver. 19). Why do not men go immediately to the Eternal himself? Why palter with spirits when you might speak to The Spirit? Why wait for angels, however bright they may be, when you may speak to their Lord? Why the dark séance, waiting for vagrant spirits to talk nonsense to you, when you might hold communion with the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost? How much men are upset or beguiled by details! There shall be this possibility in human life, which is so laughable, so absurd, as to be incredible, that men will betake themselves to such association as they think will enable them to hear the goings of spirits, when they might

advance into the very centre of the sanctuary, and say, We have come to see God, God the Spirit—literally, God is the Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. Why this illegitimate spiritualism when we might have the vital association with God who is offered us in the Gospel of Christ? Why chaffer with the servants when you might banquet with the Lord? These are the great inquiries urged upon us by Christian doctrine and expostulation. But such is the littleness of man, that he prefers some little inter-communion of his own with anonymous spirits to the prayer that takes heaven by sacred violence. Do we then destroy spiritualism? Nothing of the kind: we qualify it, we lift it up to its right meaning and use. We should condemn the man who stands outside talking to the servants of the monarch, when the monarch himself is waiting to receive that very man and give him direct communications. What would be thought of any one who came to the metropolis, and had been assured that the monarch wished to see him, if that traveller contented himself with making external inquiries? What would be said of him when he went home again? Did you see the monarch? No: but I conversed with the monarch's servants. Did not the monarch send for you? Yes. Why did you not go? Because I felt that I would like to talk with the monarch's servants. A fool's answer, a fool's policy: such a statement as that would be received with ridicule, and the man who made it would be hooted out of society: he had the chance to confer with the monarch, and he went behind doors and chattered with the servants. Yes, all the angels are ministering spirits; yes, all the air is full of holy ones as it is full of light; yes, the wind is the sanctuary of immortals, creatures that have been with the Lord long and much, creatures that are watching over creation in his name and on his account, but I do not want to see one of them, or speak to one of them, or have any sign from one of them, if I can have an interview with the King himself. Take me to head-quarters! If you have access to the throne, to the throne I appeal. This is the offer that is made in the Christian Scriptures. We do not condemn any idea of spirituality or spiritualism, we think it is an idea in the right direction; but when men ask us to stop there we say, No; we will not sacrifice

the greater privilege for the smaller opportunity: if we can see God the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, admit us to that sacred Presence, that we may commune immediately, and not intermediately, with the God of our creation.

Thus does Paul speak in this Epistle, and thus does he make it out that Christian education is a kind of science. Read the verses through which we have gone up to this point, and see what Paul thinks of Christian culture. See how he asserts that Christian culture was daily, personal, searching discipline. How ruthless he is in his requirements that we should attend to every detail, as if everything depended upon the very least action of our lives. Hear what words he uses as to Christian progress:—"In all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (i. 9); "Increasing in the knowledge of God" (i. 10); "Every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (i. 28); "Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith" (ii. 7). Then the cautions:—"Lest any man should beguile you" (ii. 4); "Beware lest any man spoil you" (ii. 8); "Let no man beguile you" (ii. 18). This is Paul's idea of progress; this is Christian science. Surely there is a science of conduct. Is conduct, the end for which all means were made, to be spoken of generally, jauntily? or is it to be regarded as the sum of a thousand processes, every one of which is watched with an eager criticism? Let no man imagine that he can easily pass on to perfectness of character. He who would be perfect in Christ Jesus must work at the detail, at the habits of life, and at all the little excitements which make up the urgency of need. And he must omit nothing; the one element which he omits will be the element that will wreck him in the end. In Christian culture there are to be no omissions.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we bless thee that through Jesus Christ thy Son thou hast now spoken unto us. He is the last speaker. We know that these are the last times; thou wilt send no more vision upon us, for thou hast given us thy Son, the express image of thy Person. May we hear thy Son, and understand somewhat of his meaning. Thy voice unto us is clear, saying, This is my beloved Son, hear ye him. Oh, for the hearing ear! Thou wilt give us the hearing ear, thou wilt also give us the understanding heart. We have not heard thy Son; we want to hear all that he says: not only would we hear his voice, we would hear the hidden music of his tone, which is kept from all but those who listen with their hearts. We have heard the words but not the music; we have listened with the outward ear but not with the attention of the soul: may we listen to this Master of speech, and wonder at the gracious words which proceed out of his mouth; yea, may we notice their graciousness, their soft, river-like flow; may we hear what they mean; may they bring with them their own interpretation, may the tone that reaches us be such that no man must speak afterwards. We bless thee for the manner of the speech; now so mysterious, weird, ghostly, like voices in the wind at night-time; and now so simple, clear, childlike, and winning, as if all meant for little hearts and opening minds and childlike souls; and now so solemn with judgment and rebuke that the most dauntless of thy servants must exclaim, I exceedingly fear and quake! Never man spake like this man. He could speak to men, and to women, and to little children, and they could all understand him in their hearts, though not in their minds; they felt him to be the Son of God. May we look, therefore, for the eternal meaning; may we watch with continual and thankful interest all changefulness of method and form, and yet find under all changefulness the abiding thought of love divine. Amen.

Colossians iii.

THE HIDDEN LIFE.

THE Apostle is always practical. He was never so eloquent, in the noblest sense of that term, as in the Epistle to the Colossians, and the Epistle to the Ephesians. These two Epistles, which ought to be read one after the other, seem to show Paul in his amplest power, wisdom, and religious joy. He always had a short way back from the highest ecstasy to the most simple practical exhortation. He had wonderful command of voice:

when he was so vehement that the whole creation might have heard him, the next moment he was so quiet, yet without any violence of transition, that wives and husbands, children and fathers, masters and servants—all could hear him utter some words of practical wisdom.

His conception of the Church is that it is risen with Christ. The resurrection is not only personal, it is ecclesiastical; not indeed in any formal sense, but in the sense in which the Church is the very body of Christ. Mark here the close identity between Christ and his Church; it is his body: could he have any soul without it? would he not be lonely without the Church? The Church is the Lamb's Bride. Talk of identity as indicating somewhat of closeness of relationship, it goes infinitely farther; it indicates oneness, indivisibleness, mutual necessity, so that if the one shall be wounded the other shall be hurt; if there is disgrace in the one case, there is double dishonour in the other: no ingenuity has invented even an intellectual instrument fine enough to get between Christ and the Church, without hurting them both. But the exhortation belongs to us, and not to Christ. Here is a mystery of separation or distinction. None ever exhorted Christ; no Sinai thundered its commands upon him; no Zion encouraged him in the way of virtue, heroism, self-denial: all righteousness and self-sacrifice was in him; not a transplantation, but a growth in the paradise of his heart.

What is the exhortation addressed to us? "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above." What are they? That is the glory of it, that they cannot be catalogued. Yet they cannot be mistaken. Every soul knows what it is to aspire, to breathe up, to desire things that lie beyond the visual line. Who gives us assurance that there are such things? The assurance is in the heart itself; the heart is in every sense its own theologian, and its own philosopher, and its own adventurer. You cannot keep the heart at home, you cannot find the heart really satisfied with the whole earth; when it has taken in the very last inch of the globe, it says, There is another country, name it how you will; I want it all, and until I get it I cannot know the blessing of contentment. Why waste time in seeking

to define the expression "those things which are above"? We can know them without naming them. We know when we are mean. Sometimes, if any friend could speak one word to us, we should break right down, and ask to be admitted into everlasting darkness as the only proper place for us, because we need no witness against ourselves: a look will sometimes kill the soul. On the other hand, we know what it is to belong to the city of light, to the brotherhood of angels; we know what it is to have the liberty and the whole franchise of heaven and immortality; these are times of spiritual riotousness—that holy wantonness of soul which eats up whole festivals at once, and cries for banquets in endless succession. Then we are in our highest moods; our wings are no longer little buds of power, but great pinions of strength, by which we flap our way through the yielding air to our proper destination.

"Set your affection on things above": literally, Be heavenly-minded. We know what that is in experience, although it is difficult to express it in words. Sometimes we care nothing for the earth, yea, sometimes we look upon it with contempt that cannot be expressed; we lift up all its attachments as a slave might lift a chain, we shake that chain and long to escape its bondage. He who is heavenly-minded needs no label upon him to that effect: his smile is his certificate, his allusions are of the nature of aspiration, and of the nature of religious appreciation and praise; his rebukes are invested with terribleness, because they come, not from anger—a little spark that expires—but from wounded righteousness, the eternal flame. By what figure shall we express this flight towards heaven? The eagle is a bird much praised for soaring. Do not join in the eulogium without reserve. The eagle only goes up that he may look down. We should say in some frenzy of poetic feeling, Behold the royal bird seeking the sun! Not he; he does not care for the sun: but from some unmeasured elevation that burning eye of his can better see the prey. It is even so that some men go up. But it is difficult for us to be other than men: we are men, even in prayer. How can we be other than human? which means now broken, fractional, shattered, selfish. God knows us all, and he will account everything to our credit

that can be set down on that side. It would be well for us to write on the debtor side ourselves; fill up that page—do not heed about the other side; that will be written by another hand—and when we have written out our debts, and God has written out on the other side all that his love suggests and his wisdom discerns, when the statement is laid before us we shall find at the foot of it these words—“Where sin abounded grace did much more abound.” He knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust; he says of us, They are but a wind that cometh for a little time, and then passeth away. He knows what life is, what a furnace, what a hell: but he will redeem us from the power of the enemy.

See this great man, swinging his way rather than walking it,—he is seeking his father’s asses. He has had enough of the journey, he proposes to the servant to go home, on the subtle plea that perhaps his father will be thinking more of the child than of the asses. We are inventive when we are selfish. Saul never thought so much about his father’s solicitude as at that time; the reason was that Saul himself was tired of the affair, and wanted to get out of it. How considerate we are when we are selfish! The servant would make one more effort; he spake beautifully to his young master, and described a man of God as man of God was never described before, for fulness and beauty, massiveness and tenderness,—a perfect delineation of an ideal soul. When Samuel saw Saul he said, Think no more of the asses, they are found: on thee is the desire of Israel. And that huge Adam, baby-man, looked at the prophet, the seer, and was much bewildered. It is thus that one business is displaced by another, one desire by another, one pursuit by another. We come to points where there are sharp divergences; sometimes we curve our way gently into new paths: but there is always a moment of more or less stupefaction, blindness: another Saul was struck down by a white flame at the gate of Damascus, and was led away as a blind man. The angel has met you and me often, and said to us, Never mind the asses, the affairs of this world; they are found: seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. On you is the desire of heaven; let your citizenship be in

that city, and hence on know that you carry only a dead body waiting final interment. There is a temptation to go after small things. That temptation must be resisted. What did Cleopatra say to Mark Antony? She said, "It is not for you to be fishing for gudgeons, but to be taking forts, towns, citadels." She was indeed an eloquent preacher; we need her ministry every day, because we are always doing the things that somebody could do quite as well, and are neglecting the greater, grander task for which we have special faculty, for the doing of which we were called up from eternity and set on the platform of time. But men like gudgeon-fishing. There have been kings that have liked nail-making, and working with a lathe, turning square pieces of wood into round pieces. Blind fools! they were made to do far greater things. Will they be excused on the plea that they have been very busy, that they have never wasted one moment? whereas, they have wasted every moment. Yet not in the sense of idleness as commonly understood, but in the sense of doing things which there was no need for them to do. Every man should ask why he came into the world. No man ever came into the world to take up the room of another. Every man came into the world at God's call to do his own particular work in his own particular way. There are men who can do nothing but fish; by all means let them enjoy the heritage of river and sea. There are men who can only sing as blind Homer, and blind Milton, and night-interpreting Dante, and others; let them sing; they cheer the world, or affright it, or lure it from mood to mood in all the mystery of growth and progress. Let not the one worker mock the other; each has his call of God: but all men are called to aspire, to "seek those things which are above." This is the true advancement of men. If any one has said to you, even in the most pious tone, "Be content in that station of life in which it hath pleased Providence to place you," ask for a definition of the terms. The Lord never meant any man to stay where he was born. It would indeed be a neat economy if we could always keep every man just where we want to keep him: but the Lord will not have it so. Blessed be God for the spirit of unrest, when it is devout, trustful, beneficent; when it seeks higher things, not for selfish uses, but that it may taste the mystery of growth and the blessedness of enlargement. "It

doth not yet appear what we shall be." So said the stones in the quarry; when the quarrymen sundered them with gunpowder, and smote them with sharp iron, they said to one another, We are going to be part of a cathedral. Said the one to the other, What is a cathedral? and the reply was, We do not know, but we shall know presently; it is something better than a quarry: we shall express great ideas, and be associated with noble services, and enter into a kind of fellowship with beings higher than we have yet conceived. And the stones were thankful to be thus sundered, shattered, and shaped to new uses. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be": we cannot rest here, we cannot be holden of death; souls such as we sometimes realise cannot suffer corruption. In that high passion that only burns consciously now and then, read thy destiny, O child of time.

How can all this aspiration be realised? Only by realising our right relation to Christ. First of all, "Ye are dead"—dead to time, dead to sense, dead to the world, dead to everything that can give even a moment's enjoyment down here. "Ye are dead." We know what it is to see a man dead on one side; there he can feel nothing, and yet be very living and sensitive on the other side: so in a figure we are to understand the relation of the body to time, and the relation of the soul to eternity. If we are in Christ we are dead and buried. Said Paul, "I am crucified with Christ"; said he again, "I am dead unto the world, and the world is dead unto me." When he wrote his theology he only wrote it because he lived it; when Paul wrote he dipped his pen in the ink-horn of his heart. Secondly, "Your life is hid with Christ in God." First, there is a negative relation, indicated by the word "dead"; secondly, there is a positive relation, indicated by the word "your life is hid with Christ in God." How can that be illustrated so that a child may comprehend the mystic, measureless meaning? Perhaps thus. Here is a tree in winter: how leafless, how bleak, how almost ghastly, but for an anatomy that indicates in every fibre the touch of a master-hand! We say, Is this a tree? And the tree says, In outline. Can you be more than this? The tree laughs in all its branches, and says, You cannot imagine what I shall be. Where is your life?

Hidden in the root: if you were to take that root out I should fall wounded, but so long as the root is there I live. What is in that root you cannot imagine; you must wait until the developing spring has acted upon me, and then, when I have had dew enough, rain enough, air enough, light enough, I shall be a house beautiful. It is even so with this human life, properly understood and regulated: it is hidden with Christ in God; out of sight, but it has a root life. There may not be much to see on the outside, because this is winter; but who can tell what is in the root of the very simplest flower? You take the root out of the ground, and look at it, and say, There cannot be much here. We do not understand roots: give them their right place and their right relation to the world, and give them time according to God's purpose, and out of the blackest, humblest root there shall come a flower that only a child or an angel should pluck: so beautiful, so tender. So again and again we say, as if uttering the refrain of a song, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be."

Then the Apostle says, Now, brethren, after all this exaltation of mind, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth": keep on killing yourselves; whenever anything rises in you that ought not to rise, off with its head. If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off; if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out: mortify—make dead, and deader still, everything that does not belong to the soul's immortality.

The Apostle, by a beautiful exercise of religious imagination, often puts his correspondents into an ideal state, saying, as in this case, "But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communications out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." What a soul had this pastor! He almost looked the Corinthians into angels; and they were about as base a set of men as ever constituted a Church. He was like the Master, he always saw the man within the man. The Master never took up the shell and said, This is very poor: put it away. He opened the shell

and said, Under such a rough exterior see what an angel of music throbs and glows. He who could thus read human nature shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied.

How would the Apostle have us clothed? He would have us "Put on" "kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; and above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body: and be ye thankful." The great Spartan lawgiver said he would not write in his book any law against unthankfulness. On being asked why he would not write a law against unthankfulness, Lycurgus answered, "Because unthankfulness is impossible." So one would say. Yet it stalks the earth every day—weird, gaunt, soulless; it troubles every family under the sun. Christ knew human nature through and through; he need not that any should testify of man. Christ therefore makes a place for unthankfulness, and when he would magnify God, he says, "He is kind also to the unthankful." Who can define unthankfulness? We can define bareness, bleakness, barrenness; we can define dust wind-swept, and that never had root or flower in it; we can define a wilderness in which no green, lovely thing ever grew; but all these images would fall short of describing unthankfulness on the part of man. When was the grave thankful? When did the sea say to the cloud, Rain no more: I thank you for your showers, but I can take no more, the vessel overflows? Never. The great briny deep could swallow up all the clouds, and roll on as sullenly as before. When did the horseleech say, I am sated with blood. The unthankful heart passes through spring, summer, autumn, without singing one little song.

Then the Apostle begins to exhort wives, husbands, children, fathers, servants. All that comes as a matter of course. Get the soul right in its relation to Christ, and there will be no difficulty with wives, husbands, children, fathers, servants. Let God have his right place in the family, and all the household falls into music. Even the servants will know that there is a touch of heaven somewhere in the house. There were servants in Paul's days: there are no servants now. In the Apostle's

days the word "servant" meant bond-slave ; and to tell a man who was a slave to be right, and do right, and look up, required all the mystery and energy of the Cross of Christ.

Paul would have a singing Church, a self-instructing Church, a Bible-reading and Bible-loving Church. Here is Paul's Church in outline :—"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom ; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." There is music at home, there is wisdom of the highest type and quality. The people had to be "teaching and admonishing one another," not in lectures and exhortations and reproaches, but "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." We have never sung in the Church yet. Oh, what jingles we have had all over the Church-world ! poor little jingles : but the time shall come when music will be the chief festival. We have now in the churches, especially in some new countries and in some very old countries, what are termed "choristers." I do not remember meeting with that word in the Bible—"choristers"—what is the meaning of that term ? Paul says, "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs"—a musical riot. I would go farther than many in the uses of music in the sanctuary. There is a time when we can be profitably sung to, but there is also another time when we can profitably sing all together, congregationally, sympathetically, and enthusiastically. Any tune that everybody does not know, or cannot know in five minutes, is a bad tune ; it is a man-made tune, a rigid little piece of mechanism. All the great songs belong to everybody, and a child hears them as if it had heard them in some other world.

“HANDFULS OF PURPOSE,” FOR ALL GLEANERS.

“Paul, an Apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus our brother.”—(COL. i. 1.)

How was it that Paul wrote so many more letters to the churches than any other man? Does not Paul occupy quite an exaggerated position in the annals of early Christianity? Was he officious, meddlesome, papal, retaining enough of the Pharisee to give him delight in personal supremacy and dignity? I prefer to account for Paul's primacy rather by the shepherdliness of his heart than by his personal ambition. If there were any ambition in so great a man as the Apostle Paul, it was surely subjected to the severest trials by all the cruel processes through which he passed. Ambition never made a greater mistake than when it incarnated itself for the purpose of being stoned, hungered, beaten, reviled, and martyred. No: we must look for higher motives; nor need we look far, for they seem to discover themselves in every word and act of this heroic and devoted soul. “Paul, an Apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.” Paul never speaks in his own name. Had he written any Epistle in his own name, and by his own authority, he would have discovered a base motive. Whenever Paul writes he writes as an amanuensis

rather than as an original author; he has news to tell; he has doctrines to expound; he has consolations to offer; and all these he traces directly and vitally to his Master and Lord, the Son of God. There is infinite meaning in the title “an Apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.” All that is merely human, ecclesiastical, or official is purged away from the providence of God, and the Divinity alone is left in all its dignity and radiance. Paul lived, and moved, and had his being, in God. Paul did not accept his life as an accident, or something which he himself had made and controlled; everywhere he saw in it the shining of the Divine presence, and the directing of the Divine hand. The Apostle regarded himself in his Apostolic aspects rather as an incarnation than as a manufacture. Notice how beautifully he introduces the words, “and Timotheus our brother.” Though no official dignity or eminence is claimed for Timotheus, yet the whole is involved in the fact that he is described as a “brother.” The term here is more than merely natural or physical; here is what may be called consanguinity of soul, brotherhood of love, identity of purpose; here, indeed, are all the higher elements which constitute not only present, but unchangeable and immortal fellowship.

It is the glory of Christianity, not that it dissolves society, but that it constitutes a brotherhood all over the world.

"To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."—(COL. i. 2.)

There are messages which can be delivered only to such men as are here described. Paul has written nothing to societies of wicked men. The Apostles have nothing to say to brotherhoods of evil or confederacies of malice; they can only deliver their gospel to those who are prepared to receive it. The sun indeed has nothing to say to plants that are dead, or to trees that are plucked up by the roots: but how much it has to say to plants that live, and to trees that stretch forth their branches, as if in eager expectancy, towards heaven! A benediction pronounced upon wickedness would be the completest irony. Paul does not proceed upon the principle that because grace was once given to the saints and faithful brethren that therefore they need no more. We need daily grace for daily need. We must, indeed, never permit the soul to be cut off from the fountains of heavenly grace, because the soul is only safe so long as it maintains vital and deep communion with God. Paul does not communicate any grace of his own: he does not stretch out his hand in papal or episcopal benediction, as if to say that he alone was the medium of communication between heaven and earth. He draws grace immediately from the fountain of grace, and thus brings the Colossian Church and saints everywhere and through all time into im-

mediate contact with God himself. This circumstance is remarkable, especially when viewed in reference to teaching which would seem to shut out human priesthoods as necessary connectives between heaven and earth: Paul prayed for the Church, and that is all any priest or father can do: we ought to be indebted to those who represent our case to heaven, and mightily implore the blessing of God on our behalf. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Here is not a word about the priest; but here is a commendation, here is also an elevation, of the righteous man.

"We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you."—(COL. i. 3.)

The Apostle was made rich by his disciples; not by their money, but by their devotedness, their simple piety, their continual service for Christ. As the husbandman gives thanks for abounding crops so the Apostle gives thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, because of souls that were saved, and lives that were consecrated to the Cross. The Apostle did not pray occasionally for his friends, he prayed always for them; that is to say, he always had them in his thoughts, and he always desired for them the highest blessings. The time since the prayer began is indicated in the following verse:—

"Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints."—(COL. i. 4.)

Here is a faith that Paul had simply heard of. He does not venture to say that he had seen that faith, or had

been personally indebted for its exercise; he had simply heard of it as a report from far countries. Notice the union of the faith and love; the faith is in Christ Jesus, and the love is towards all the saints. If the former may be regarded as speculative, the latter must be regarded as practical, and therefore balancing it. Faith in Christ must always be proved by love to the saints. “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.”

“*For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the Gospel; which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth.*”—(COL. i. 5, 6.)

See how Paul magnifies the religious element! He will not confine himself even to moral behaviour or useful conduct, or those initial exhibitions of piety which we are only too glad to observe. Paul instantly lifts up the whole level from which his observation is so conducted, and from that level he surveys with delight and rapture all the heavenly blessings which have been treasured for those who love the Saviour. Paul helps earth by the ministry of heaven. The earth is blessed by the sun: why should not the earth be blessed by the light that is above the brightness of the sun? We must lift up our present life by the power of the life that is endless. If in this life only we have hope, we are of all men most miserable. In effect Paul says, You are tired, weary, distressed, or bitterly disappointed; lift up your eyes and behold afar beyond the clouds the shining of an

immortal hope: yonder is the city of your rest; behold it; draw yourselves onward towards it, and be assured that all the fatigue of present service, and all the bitterness of present disappointment, will be forgotten by one hour's experience of the world that is in store for saintly souls. Yet Paul will never be content unless he sees love to the saints and the “fruit” which is brought forth in the character. The salutation is a striking mixture of the metaphysical and the practical, the doctrinal and the experimental. In this salutation we have indeed a full-length portraiture of Paul himself. He sends to the Colossians a photograph of his soul. But if, indeed, he exaggerate the excellence of the Colossians, it is that he may encourage towards nobler endeavour. Lavish commendation coming from such an authority as the Apostle Paul would not be ill-expended sentiment, but would work as a new and noble inspiration in honest souls.

“*As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellow-servant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ; who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.*”—(COL. i. 7, 8.)

Everywhere Paul magnifies his fellow-labourers. Epaphras is thus lifted up into eminence, which otherwise he would not have secured. It belongs to the great man to identify his workers, and to mete out to them tributes of praise and positions of distinction. Here, as ever, Paul does not praise intellectual brilliance of mental grasp, or anything that is merely adventitious; he praises Epaphras because he is “a faithful minister of Christ.” And, indeed, Epaphras is only reaping what he had himself sown. It appears that Epaphras had

declared unto Paul the love in the Spirit which was enjoyed by the Colossian Christians. How he must have praised that love! how eagerly he must have dwelt upon it! and how the countenance of the Apostle Paul must have glowed as he heard what wonders and miracles were being wrought afar by the power of the Holy Ghost!

—
“For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.”—(COL. i. 9.)

The effect upon the Apostle himself is thus seen. Because he hears of the spread of the gospel he continues to pray more, and he desires that the work which has been begun may be perfected. Paul does not rest content with present attainments, saying, You have done enough for the time being, and by-and-by you may endeavour to do a little more if you feel so disposed. Paul never lowers the tone of his exhortation; he will have nothing less than the best that heaven can give, with which to enrich the hearts of the saints; he will that Colossians and Christians everywhere might be filled with the knowledge of God's will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. Here the Apostle is grandly metaphysical. He will not be alphabetic and elementary always; he will continue his processes of education until the soul is literally bathed and submerged in all the holiest influence which God can bring to bear upon it. Paul will not have literal Christians—that is, literalists, learning only in the letter; he will have his followers rich in “spiritual understanding.” That is one thing which

the churches most want—the churches of literature and science; they are consummately able in debate and controversy, but what have they of inward, vital, spiritual understanding?

—
“That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.”
 —(COL. i. 10.)

The Apostle returns to the practical line of his desire and exhortation. He has been continuing in prayer that the Colossians might be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, but the end of that prayer was to be a firmer and steadier walking in the way of righteousness and good-doing. Paul would have his followers walk worthily. He sets up no meaner standard. Herein he repeats the doctrine of Jesus Christ: “Be ye perfect as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” However much the mind might be enriched by spiritual understanding, the life was to be fruitful in every good work. Notice the inclusiveness of this desire. The Apostle would not be content with an occasional excellence, or with some incidental development of good morals; he would that the Colossians should be “fruitful in every good work”—a whole, complete, symmetrical and most useful character. These continual references to practical experience give us confidence in the wisdom and solidity of the Apostle's doctrinal teaching. He does not desire that anything should be in the mind that cannot be directly transferred to the life. However anxious he may be about creed, the creed with him will go for nothing, unless it be balanced and exemplified by conduct. Con-

currently with this fruitfulness the Apostle desires that the Colossians might increase in the knowledge of God; by this he does not exhort to speculative thinking or even encourage the habit of pious meditation; his mind is still steadfastly bent on Christian activity, spiritual culture, a clear and steady outworking of all the moral impulses of the Cross. But how was all this miracle of development to be accomplished? Was it so easy that it simply required an apostolic exhortation to set it in motion and give it almost a security of success? The reply to this will be found in the eleventh verse:—

“Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness.”—(COL. i. 11.)

So at once the soul is lifted up from its own dependence, and from all its collateral relations, to the very fount and origin of strength, to the very almightiness of God himself. We draw our strength from heaven. If we have any strength of intellect, it is nothing in itself, unless it be sustained day by day by special communications from God. The battle is not won by might, nor is the race won by swiftness; the whole scheme and outcome of life must be immediately connected with the might of God; then all goodness will come to fruition, and all evil will be withered as by an infinite blight. The “glorious power” of God is the strength of God’s glory. God’s glory is his manifestation of himself in love to man. In his letter to the Ephesians the Apostle uses the expression, “According to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.” But even the fact

of being strengthened with all might according to the glorious power of God, or the strength of his glory, does not relieve saintly experience from its more chastening and humbling aspects. All the strength that was derived from God was to be expended in patience and longsuffering. One would suppose that a direct and abundant communication of Divine grace would lift the soul above all trials, and, indeed, release the soul from any further spiritual probation; but, to our amazement, we find that the very omnipotence of God is to be turned into human patience and human longsuffering, as if almightiness itself must be weakened in human experience, in order to achieve the fulness of its own purpose. Nor is the Apostle content that patience and longsuffering should express the soul’s communion with God. Patience and longsuffering may be silent, simply resigned, quietly submissive and expectant; it may be very triumphant, not to resent or not to use the language of reproach; but far beyond this the Apostle’s desire extends; he will have the patience and the longsuffering of the saints expressed in “joyfulness.” Here again the Apostle touches the very line of the teaching of Christ. Jesus said to his suffering ones, “Rejoice and be exceeding glad.” Another Apostle says, “Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.” Is the Apostle in this exhortation simply rhetorical or sentimental? Is he describing an ideal state of experience, the kind of emotion which ought to be possible to those who live in the very raptures of piety? On the contrary, he is simply wishing the Colossians to realise what he himself had experienced in processes of chastening. He says that he had learned in

whatsoever state he was therein to be content ; that, indeed, may be regarded as a passive experience ; but in another instance he declares that he rejoices exceedingly in tribulations also. Throughout this prayer, therefore, the Apostle has never gone beyond the line of his own personal experience. He has done nothing to magnify that experience in the estimation of the Colossians, but those who are acquainted with the history of Paul know that every line of this noble aspiration has been lived in his own tragical experience.

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"Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."—(Col. i. 12.)

Wherever there is real joyfulness there will be consequent thankfulness. There may even be thankfulness for suffering itself, not because of what it is in itself, but because of what it works out in the experience of those who receive it as part of their divine education. The Apostle, however, as is not unusual with him, draws his encouragement from the fact that we see but little at present, and that the real inheritance lies beyond the cloud of time and the night of bitter experience. From the earth Paul sees the opening heavens. He sees the light, and he sees saints standing in the ineffable glory. To the Apostle heaven was not a possible state, an ideal conception, an effort in poetry ; it was real, solid, visible, the sublimest fact in the development of life. What is the heaven which lures us ? Is it but a bright cloud ? Is it but a gleaming rainbow arching the storms of time and earth, and quieting the soul with dreams and visions of beauty ? Paul knew nothing of any such heaven.

Beyond the river he saw the city ; he saw it enveloped in cloudless light ; the population of that city was a population of rejoicing saints, triumphing in the spirit and power of Christ.

— — —

"Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son."

—(Col. i. 13.)

So the first translation has been already accomplished : we are translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of Christ. By being "translated," understand that we are replanted ; we are brought from one climate to another ; we are released from bondage and settled in the land of liberty. This is the real meaning of translation. Can such a translation have occurred without the heart being sensible of its reality ? Can the slave have lost his chains and still imagine that he is manacled ? Christians have here the delight and the reward of perfect assurance ; they are not living tentatively or inspired by a spirit of doubt or fear, caution or suspicion ; they are able to say with holy positiveness that they are no longer slaves in the land of darkness and suffering, but are freemen in the kingdom of light and joy. The expression, "his dear Son," may be rendered "The Son of his love,"—a more sensitive and a more endearing expression. God himself is love. God calls his children his "beloved." Jesus Christ is the Son of God's love, the very expression and embodiment of his heart. Now we come upon a grand theological statement, around which controversialists have waged many battles ; without heeding the ruthless combatants we may gather much that is profitable from this wondrous out-

pouring of religious homage and spiritual aspiration.

"In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins. Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: for by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist."—(COL. i. 14, 15, 16, 17).

The Apostle has never ascended to a higher intellectual and spiritual elevation. Recognising Christ as the "image" of the invisible God, we are not to understand the Apostle as using the word "image" as equal to shadow or outline, but rather as a distinct representation of God himself. There may be likeness without embodiment. There may be the suggestion of a likeness without anything beyond. In this case, however, the word "image" is to be understood as expressing the highest degree of vivid and actual personality. To Paul, Christ was the embodied God. When the Apostle regards Christ as "the firstborn of every creature," or of all creation, we are to understand that he was begotten before all creation; that he was indeed the very reason of the creation of the universe; that without Christ the universe would have been an impossibility or an abortion. The explanation of everything therefore is, according to the Apostle's idea, to be found in the personality, the ministry, and the whole purpose of Christ. Christ was begotten, not created. Here we enter upon mysteries at which human language can but dimly hint. We

regard Jesus Christ as Emmanuel, God with us. We regard him as slain before the foundation of the world, and therefore as prepared for all the evolution of human sin, and all the need of human life. Christ is not to be understood as coming into history at a given point to meet a specific emergency: He is to be regarded as existing before all history, and is to be accepted as the key of the whole drama of human birth, development, and destiny. All things were created through Christ and for Christ. "For by him were all things created;" and again, "From him, and through him, and to him, are all things"; and again, "by whom are all things, and for whom are all things." Paul here gives us the key of the universe. We may approach the enigma of creation from various points, and we shall end all our investigations with a sense of chagrin and failure, if we neglect to associate the whole economy of things with the name and power of Christ. To be truly theological, therefore, is to be truly scientific. To have a clear conception of all that is meant by the term "Christ" is to have a correspondingly clear conception of all that is meant by the term "universe." Men persist, however, in working from the outside, instead of working from the centre. We can easily see the possibility of endless and ruinous mistakes by this inversion of the law of progress. Where we are not at first permitted to come upon the central mystery, we may reverently work from the circumference, in the hope that in due time we shall see the glory of the centre. In the case of Christianity, however, we are distinctly invited to begin with Christ; to begin with him at any point of his marvellous career; and we are assured that only in proportion as we look at all things through Christ can we

understand their unity and their meaning. Paul sets Christ not only above all divinely created glories, magnitudes, and splendours of every kind, but he sets him above all thrones and dominions, and principalities and powers, whether they are human, or whether they represent heavenly bodies, or stellar spaces and splendour. What a different view of the universe we have when regarding it from the Person of Jesus Christ! Now we see all things ordered and ruled as by a beneficent purpose. The Saviour is the Creator. He who suffered most rules most. The object of all this constitution and all this government is to develop man according to the divine ideal, to perfect him in all strength, stature, beauty, force, and excellence. Man is made but a little lower than the angels. We see him in the midst of his development, and it is like seeing a half-painted picture or an unfinished building; much there is that is rude, shapeless, provocative of hostile criticism, or suggestive of ill-natured and querulous interrogation; but here we have the promise that all things shall be made glorious and beautiful, as is the person of Christ. In this hope we suffer individually; in this confidence we toil collectively; in this blessed belief we offer every prayer, assured that the grand Amen will be realised in the ages to come according to the purpose of God. The Apostle now turns to a smaller theocracy:

"And he is the head of the body, the Church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence."—(COL. i. 18).

When the Apostle says, "He is the head," we are to understand that the

"he" is emphatic. It is also emphatic in the seventeenth verse, where we read, "He is before all things." We are indeed in this instance to read "he is" as if they were but one word, and that one word is the emphatic term in the statement: thus—he, and he only, is; really is; essentially is; is, according to the very nature of the being of God,—all else is called forth or created, or is in some sense an expressing of Divine and active power. When we read in John viii. 58, "Before Abraham was, I am," we are not to regard the word "before" as expressive of higher excellence or nobler dignity, we are rather to take it as a time-term, and as indicative of the fact that Jesus Christ lived before Abraham lived. It is beautiful to see how Paul associates what is, at present, the very small idea of "the Church" with all the glory and grandeur of the sovereignty and empire of Christ. Jesus Christ is the "beginning," or the firstfruits; he is "the firstborn from the dead," he is the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead. The resurrection was, in his sense, the second birth of Christ; the beginning of that phase of existence which, by glory, eclipsed all that had ever one before. We may start the earthly history of Christ from his nativity or from his resurrection. Each point is equally strong, but the second infinitely exceeds in glory. A marvellous idea it was to associate death with him who is the image of the invisible God, by whom were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. How daring the imagination to introduce the element of death into a panorama burning with such ineffable glory! Yet here is the sacrifice of the Saviour; here is the Cross of Christ; here the agony, the

shame, the weakness, the forsakenness of the Son of God! Yet it behoved him who is the captain of our salvation to be made perfect through suffering. Had he known everything but death, how could he have known men who were taken out of the earth, and shaped out into the Divine likeness, and made alive by the Divine breath? Jesus Christ became pre-eminent through suffering. Without the Cross, the chief gem in the crown of Christ would have been wanting. The Apostle makes this part of his statement even more vivid and poignant by specific references :

“For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell: and having made peace through the blood of his Cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.”—
(COL. i. 19, 20.)

When it is represented that this whole action was an expression of the pleasure of the Father, we are to understand that it revealed the Divine purpose: not one accident occurred in all the development of the suffering of Christ: every nail was foreseen; every pang was anticipated; the whole human history, though apparently a succession of surprises, was a development of what had existed in thought and purpose from eternity. The fulness of God dwelt in Jesus Christ. It pleased God that in him should all fulness dwell; that is, it was in accordance with the Divine pleasure, or the Divine thought; it was also in accordance with the consent and purpose of Christ. Because the fulness of the Godhead dwelt bodily in Jesus, he is adored not only as Mediator, but

as God; a great mystery in words, and not to be easily removed by the apparatus of grammar, but to be felt in its ineffable sweetness by those who live most deeply and tenderly the life divine. What a descent from “all things that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers,” to “the blood of his Cross”! Is there a more humiliating expression in all language? Yet we misunderstand the word “blood”; we think of it only in its literal signification; whereas we should think of it as the very expression of life, the very mystery of being, the symbol by which we get some insight into the heart, the tenderness, the passion, and the power of “all things.” Jesus Christ is not only the creator of glory, he is the maker of peace; he is the Prince of Peace; he came to give peace; the peace which he has made is between God and man; he has reconciled the sinner; he has provided the atonement. I am more and more assured that we err, and grievously impoverish ourselves, by endeavouring to reduce the atonement of Christ to words: where we use words at all, it should rather be to show that their very fulness is their emptiness, their very pride is their humiliation; for no words can touch the agony of the love of God. We see the atonement but once. We see it with the eyes of the soul. It is a flash, a blinding blaze; it is of the nature of the vision that smote Saul to the earth; yet we can never forget the out-flashing of that sacred glory.

“And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death,

to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight: if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister; who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the Church.—
(COL. i. 21, 22, 23, 24.)

Thus the Apostle continues in rapture, in sacred eloquence, utterly unable to express himself, so full is his heart of thankfulness and praise. Yet even in the midst of this ecstasy, how practical is this apostolic pastor! He will have the Colossians continue in the faith, grounded and settled; he will have them built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone. He does not commit the Colossian Church to the wind or to the clouds, or to varying moods of spiritual experience; he uses language which may be properly employed in describing the laying of foundations, and the building of ample super-structures upon bases of granite. How subtly, yet with what gracious palpableness, Paul introduces himself, his personality, and his ministry, into this whole rhapsody and argument! Here we find Paul doing what he exhorted the Colossians to do, namely, rejoicing in his sufferings; not only does he rejoice

in his personal sufferings, but he rejoices in suffering itself as an element of Divine revelation and progress. "Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all. For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me." He rejoiced in his suffering, not because of its own sake, but because he bears it for the sake of the Church. It was thus that Christ rejoices even in his own Cross; he endured the Cross, despising the shame, foreseeing the time when all its tragic purpose would be wrought out in the reconciliation of the world to God. Regarding himself as filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ, we are to understand that he fills up instead of his Master what is still left unaccomplished; he represents to the Church in fuller measure what Christ would have represented had he continued to live. The sufferings of Christ overflow to us, so that we seem to carry on the work which he began. All the suffering was not endured by Christ alone; the Church had to drink of his cup, and be baptised with his baptism. We do not share the Cross of atonement, but we share the suffering which exhibits the power of faith; ours is the Cross of struggling against sin, even unto death. We have to be crucified to the world. We have to show what is meant by the term Cross. Here again is a mystery not to be explained in words,—the mystery of fellow-suffering with Christ, that afterwards there may follow triumph with him in the power of his resurrection.

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE

TO THE

THESSALONIANS.

(CORINTH, A.D. 52.)

[NOTE.—“This Epistle is rather practical than doctrinal. It was suggested rather by personal feeling, than by any urgent need, which might have formed a centre of unity, and impressed a distinct character on the whole. Under these circumstances we need not expect to trace unity of purpose, or a continuous argument, and any analysis must be more or less artificial. The body of the Epistle, however, may conveniently be divided into two parts, the former of which, extending over the first three chapters, is chiefly taken up with a retrospect of the Apostle’s relation to his Thessalonian converts, and an explanation of his present circumstances and feelings, while the latter, comprising the 4th and 5th chapters, contains some seasonable exhortations. At the close of each of these divisions is a prayer, commencing with the same words, ‘May God himself,’ etc., and expressed in somewhat similar language.

“The following is a table of contents:—

“Salutation (i. 1).

“1. Narrative portion (i. 2-iii. 13).

- (1.) i. 2-10. The Apostle gratefully records their conversion to the Gospel and progress in the faith.
- (2.) ii. 1-12. He reminds them how pure and blameless his life and ministry among them had been.
- (3.) ii. 13-16. He repeats his thanksgiving for their conversion, dwelling especially on the persecutions which they had endured.
- (4.) ii. 17-iii. 10. He describes his own suspense and anxiety, the consequent mission of Timothy to Thessalonica, and the encouraging report which he brought back.
- (5.) iii. 11-13. The Apostle’s prayer for the Thessalonians.

“2. Hortatory portion (iv. 1-v. 24).

- (1.) iv. 1-8. Warning against impurity.
- (2.) iv. 9-12. Exhortation to brotherly love and sobriety of conduct.
- (3.) iv. 13-v. 11. Touching the Advent of the Lord.

- (a.) The dead shall have their place in the resurrection, iv. 13-18.
 (b.) The time, however, is uncertain, v. 1-3.
 (c.) Therefore all must be watchful, v. 4-11.
 (4.) v. 12-15. Exhortation to orderly living and the due performance of social duties.
 (5.) v. 16-22. Injunctions relating to prayer and spiritual matters generally.
 (6.) v. 23, 24. The Apostle's prayer for the Thessalonians.
 "The Epistle closes with personal injunctions and a benediction (v. 25-28)."—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible*.]

1 Thessalonians i.

THE PAULINE SPIRIT.

"PAUL, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians" (verse 1). Who were Paul and Silvanus and Timotheus? They do not say. In writing to other churches, Paul puts in generally a descriptive clause. "Paul, called to be an Apostle of Jesus Christ," he writes in his first letter to the Corinthians; "Paul, an Apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God," in his second letter; "Paul, an Apostle (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead)," he says to the Galatians; and now, writing to the Thessalonians, he says, "Paul, and Silvanus and Timotheus"—they are nobodies, so far as that descriptive clause is concerned—"unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ." Why did he not say "Paul, an Apostle"? Some say, because speaking in the threefold name, he omitted his own designation, out of courtesy to his two colleagues in the letter. But that cannot be so. Paul was an Apostle even when he did not openly and avowedly testify to his official status. There comes a time in a great man's life when he need not tell who he is or what he is; his look is his commendation, his voice is an unquestioned certificate in music. Who knows how much of the letter Paul wrote or dictated himself? This Epistle has luckily escaped a great deal of hostile criticism. It has been almost universally, if not wholly, avowed to be the letter of Paul. But in Paul's day letters were curiously written; if they were written thus in our day they would be called forgeries. We must go back to the atmosphere if we would understand the incidental circumstance. If you or I now wrote a letter and said it was by Lord Tennyson, we should be charged

with lying: it would not be so in the olden times. If ever anything was written in the Pauline spirit and with the Pauline purpose, the writer would not hesitate to call it an epistle of Paul; if any man could write in Tennyson's music, he would not be afraid to write openly upon his page that the poetry was by the great poet himself. The morality of one age is absolutely unknown in another age. We must not condemn men, therefore, by our parochial standards; there may be men quite as true and simple-hearted as ourselves, who are doing things in their own age and their own country, that would absolutely shock our modern and moderate piety.

The letter is interesting as showing the Pauline spirit. The letter is full of the shepherdly heart. Emerson has invented a word which expresses the enthusiasm of this noble Paul; he says that some men are charged with "over-soul," the word being a compound word, yet one. They have more soul than body, more spirit than flesh, more enthusiasm than cold logic; their soul flows over, they abound in soul. Other men have hardly any soul. Yet there is a notion that souls are like so many visible presences of equal stature and equal value, and are all spoken of as immortal souls. Ignorance is not discriminating. Ignorance can be dogmatic and positive, where large fine wisdom shades its eyes and says that it cannot see. It is a grand thing to be ignorant! it gives a man magnificent fearlessness, for he has taken no measure, formed no true conception; and, supposing himself to speak loudly enough, loudness is wisdom. This letter flows over with soul, with love, with tenderness; and it is wonderful how Paul every now and then stands right up above Silvanus and Timotheus, so that you need not ask which is which. It hardly suits Paul to write in the plural number; it holds him in too much. Paul never writes a letter of his own and calls himself "we." How shortsighted of the Apostle! He was no editor. Paul always called himself "I"; but his egotism was so rugged and noble, so massive and majestic, that nobody would care to criticise it in a hostile spirit. He had a right to do and to act in all things just as he did. Sometimes he separated himself from the others, as in chapter ii. 18, "Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul." Mark how marvellously the plural

and the singular are combined here, and how suddenly the Apostle remembers that the other two had nothing to do with it, that it was his own great lion heart that said he would go and see them; but the devil loomed upon him like an infinite cloud, and frightened him for a moment.

“Grace unto you, and peace.” Have peace. It is more golden than gold. Do not live with wolves. If, in your business, you have worries and cares and bitings and devourings, get out of them. A crust with peace is better than a thousand chariots with the tooth of care gnawing the heart. Peace is heaven. Probably this was the very first apostolic letter Paul ever wrote; it is interesting therefore to see how he begins his correspondence.

It the third verse he uses words that cover all other words of beauty and music, and that make one of his chapters the brightest star in all the heaven of his eloquence:—“Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope.” Pause there a moment; speak the main words slowly—“faith,” “love,” “hope.” Why, he was as great at the beginning as he was at the end. If he was born out of due season, he was born all at once, the Minerva of the Church, fully clothed and armed at every point as he leaped forth to do God's will. “Now abideth faith, hope, love” (1 Cor. xiii. 13); these are the very terms we have in the first letter. Read the other words that qualify these—“work,” “labour,” “patience”; read them now as they would be uttered by Paul himself—your faithful work, your loving labour, your patient hope or hopeful patience. Not a word about propositions, dogmas, tenets, creeds; it is all working, labouring, suffering, waiting; all believing, loving, hoping. This Church is significantly described in the first verse as being “in God.” There can be no Church out of God; there can be assembly, brotherhood, institutionalism, but not Church in the truest and deepest sense of the word: the relation of the godly is godly; the connection of the spiritual is spiritual: we are akin in heart more than we can ever be akin in blood. So out of this larger relation there shall come faith, hope, love; work, labour, patience; all the sweet retinue of virtue and grace.

“Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.” That word “election” has killed many souls. But the souls have been killed through ignorance. Paul does not use the term “election” in relation to the final state of the soul in this world or any other world. No man is elected to be destroyed. You take the fatherhood out of God, you take the crown off the majesty of God, when you suppose that he could fore-ordain or elect any soul to wander in darkness. If he did I should abandon his altar and hate him. This word “election” is always used in relation to the temporal, and the immediate, and the superficial, always in the sense of setting in a certain direction, investing with certain responsibilities, and giving chance of certain destinies. I will tell you what is elected to hell, and that is wickedness. Not personality, but character, is sentenced to everlasting burning. When you think that you are elected not to be saved, you are thinking far too much about yourself, you are in a morbid condition; you should get out into the fresh air, you should half-drown yourself in the salt sea, you should do anything that would shock you into a new consciousness. There is nothing more disagreeable and unprofitable than for a man to be continually considering whether he is elected or reprobated; he has nothing to do with such terms in the significance which he is then attaching to them. He has to put his confidence in the God of love, and rest there, and when the issue eventuates there will be no wilderness, no sea, no pain, no night, no death,—nothing but sweet, radiant, musical, immortal heaven.

“For our gospel came not unto you in word only”—which is a possibility. The gospel may be turned into a mere aspect of eloquence. There may be men so cunning and skilful in the use of words as to invest the gospel with peculiar charm as a rhetorical argument or conception of things. Even worship may be degraded into a kind of entertainment; even adoration may be lost in ritualism. So the gospel may be a word only, a form; and in this aspect it may be charged with peril to the soul. There are men who do not know the gospel except they hear a certain number of words. If they hear the same words in the same tone and at the same time by the same man, they think that

they have heard the gospel. The gospel can go into all kinds of words ; it has taken up all the languages of the earth. All lands in their own tongues have heard the wonderful works of God :—“ Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judæa, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene,”—all tongues, all men, may hear or have heard the gospel of God. There is a gospel of science, there is a gospel of rationalism, there is a gospel of Providence ; all the minor gospels lead up to the major. Seize what gospel you can. If you can understand nobody but your mother, she shall be to you a priestess of God. Hold on somewhere.

How then did the Gospel come to the dwellers in Thessalonica ? —“ in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.” We are not to understand by “ the Holy Ghost ” in this connection the third Person in the Trinity ; in the Greek the article is omitted : we are to understand, “ in ” passion, enthusiasm, earnestness, over-soul, so that we bubbled and boiled up and were filled with holy frenzy as the sacred music poured its eloquence over our hearts. They were a mad Church, mad divinely. The Bereans were in a sense more respectable ; they always went to church with a Bible in their hand. Some people go to church thus to-day. They think it would not be going to church if they did not take the Bible with them. The Bereans were “ more noble ” than those of Thessalonica, in the sense that they were more careful. They tested even the Apostles ; they said to them, Stop : what is the chapter and what is the verse (as we should now say) you are quoting from ? what is the name of the prophet you are now citing ? They would go home and dig into this matter and compare passage with passage, and doctrine with doctrine, to find out for themselves what the gospel is, and what it means, and what it requires. You must provide for people of all sorts. There are people who must walk to every place : why should we oppose them ? There are men who really could not go from one city to another except they went the way they always went and in the chariot they always did ; or they must walk the whole distance, because they always walked it. So be it. As long as they get there what does it

matter? especially as nobody is waiting for them, either in one city or in another. Other persons must do everything enthusiastically. Paul praises the Thessalonians that they received the word "in power" and in holy enthusiasm, so that every man burned, glowed, and spake with his tongue. There must be all sorts of men to make up humanity.

"Ye became followers of us," literally, Ye became imitators of us: you watched us, and what we did you did. This is called imitation. There is a base imitation, and there is an imitation that is worthy: there is an imitation in form, and there is an imitation in spirit. The Chinese labourer, or artisan, or mechanician copies the letter; if you were to write him a copy which he had to duplicate, and you put in a wrong letter and struck it out, he would put in that very letter and strike it out the same way. It would never occur to the Chinese genius to correct a mistake; whatever you do, the Chinese must do exactly as he has seen it done. That is a slavish imitation. But there is another imitation that takes its range from the spirit, and tone, and purpose of the life, and then comes that reduplication which is approved in heaven.

Did these people, then, live a merely excited life? Was it enthusiasm of the lowest kind? This question is answered definitely in verse 7—"So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia." They themselves were imitated. There is an imitation that terminates in itself, and there is an imitation that sets other people to work so that the imitation goes on and on unceasingly, and the whole world is doing the same thing to the same end. Did the Thessalonians keep the gospel to themselves as we do, making it quite a piece of synagogue property? Did they share their hymn-book with anybody? Or did they corner themselves in some sweet green place, and say, Other people may do and go as they please, this is our angle, and we mean to flatter one another into heaven? Certainly not: what they did is defined in ver. 8—"For from you sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad." They were an evangelising Church, they were

a missionary Church ; they said, What is good for us is good for everybody ; we must not keep this music at home : commit it to the winds of heaven that everywhere this music may work its miracle of reconciliation. So that the apostles had no need to speak anything about the Thessalonians ; wherever they went the Thessalonians were praised ; people told the story to the apostles, instead of waiting for the apostles to tell the story to them. Over all Roman Greece these people made their influence felt. Where does our influence begin ? how does it operate ? where does it end ? Does every man consider himself to be but a medium through which the gospel is to sound to some other man ? If so, then every man in the Church will be a preacher, every woman will be an apostle of Jesus Christ, every child will tell in his own simplicity of the love of God.

Were the Thessalonians really converted ? Apparently so, according to ver. 9, in which the Apostle describes them as "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." There is hope of people who worship idols : there is no hope of people who worship themselves. Only get a man anywhere, whether he be black, white, red, yellow, what colour you please, if he is only looking to something outside of him you may convert him ; he has got the right idea, he is looking beyond ; that is evangelical, that is the beginning of the kingdom of heaven in the man's soul : but find a man who is turning within himself, and writing highly paid leading articles from out of his own consciousness, and you will never convert him. It must be difficult to convert any man who is a writer of leading articles ; he worships within the sanctuary of his own consciousness, he says, How great I am ! what a wonderful being is this ! what would the universe be and do without me ? I wonder that the universe can get through one night whilst I am sleeping ! That man can never be converted ; there is nothing to convert. The Thessalonians were worshipping idols, and who ever worships stock or stone, bird of the air, or star of heaven, has something in him that the missionary can appeal to ; he says, I know what you are seeking, this is the Christ of God.

"Your faith to God-ward is spread abroad." The word "faith "

in this connection does not mean creed; it means trust, confidence, their outgoing after God; they lived, and moved, and had their being in God: they would be content with nothing less, they would not have God shut up in words or creeds, or forms; he was larger than heaven, because he made the heavens. They served the living and true God, and they waited for God's Son from heaven. Observe these words—to "serve," to "wait." Is there anything more in Christian philosophy and Christian action? He waits best who serves best. When a man is serving the living and true God, he is not calculating on a slate when the Lord Jesus may possibly come according to the arithmetic of the prophet Daniel. Once let a man get a slate, and begin to calculate what he finds in Daniel, and he will break all his appointments, he will forget all his arrangements, he will lose all control over his own affairs, and he will go steadily down into bankruptcy. Let a man keep working, and Christ will keep coming. To work!—there is no time, no tediousness. Let the soul burn with a purpose, and, oh, stop the clock! it is flying; the man is busy, and time seems to mock his poor slow action. Give a man nothing to do, and he says, I am puzzled; it is only so much after twelve; I thought it must have been nearer one. The clock is hard upon laziness. Approach a company of men who are supposed to be working on a building or in a field, and in proportion as they are interested in their work they will let you pass; but in proportion as they are lazy, and want to get out of it, they will trouble you to tell them what time it is. What have they to do with the clock? The workman has nothing to do with the clock; the shepherd has nothing to do with the watch, let him watch by the sun; the preacher has nothing to do with the clock, let him serve until real hunger tells him that nature, too, has her necessity. Thus we are to live—serving, waiting; waiting, serving: but in all things having faith, hope, love; these are the boundaries of the Christian universe.

1 Thessalonians ii.

THE APOSTOLIC ALBUM.

WE have our albums now. We put one another, in picture, into appropriate cases, so that we can remind ourselves of each other when not face to face. They had no albums in apostolic times. What would we give for a likeness of the apostle Paul, that most heroic and Christlike of all souls? Yet, broadly and imaginatively speaking, these epistles are albums of the apostles and of the churches and of the times in which they lived. They bear looking at again and again. No man has seen all the picture; no man can see all the portraiture: every eye sees its own delineation, and every age creates its own gallery of beauty and vitality out of these marvellous sketches. We may see the Apostle and we may see the Thessalonians vividly photographed in this second chapter.

How did the apostles preach? What were they like when they stood up? Did they apologise for their existence? Did they stand cap in hand, and say, If you please, gentlemen, we will speak, if you will allow us? The Apostle says, "We were bold in our God to speak unto you." They were bold speakers; not in the sense of being physically violent, they were bold with a courage grand enough to be quiet. They were not to be moved. When the Apostle saw bonds and imprisonments, and all manner of insult, and tumult and danger, he said, "None of these things move me." The word "move" is full of varied suggestion; it is an action itself. These things do not even create in me a momentary spasm; I care nothing for them, I challenge them, I despise them, I defy them; nay, I will not anger myself sufficiently to speak about them in emphatic language: I will simply say, none of these things cause me a moment's flutter. Bold men must have bold messages to deliver, otherwise there will be a disparity between the preacher and his gospel. Any-

thing feeble delivered with violence aggravates its own imbecility : it should never thunder but when it lightens. Men should pronounce great gospels with great earnestness. There is more in human nature than there is often supposed to be. Sometimes flippant critics say, It was largely in the manner. But what is the manner ? The manner is the man ; it is the attitude of the soul, it is the native expression of God's eternal purpose. There is but little "bold" preaching now : there is much bold hearing—that is to say, there is much bold scepticism, bold criticism, bold indifference ; everything has lost its first blood-flush, and has become of a pale, neutral tint. Is it the Sabbath day ? it has not been destroyed, but all its edges have been clipped. The Church has not been burned with fire, but it has been left to rot with mildew. Scepticism does not hide its head : why should Christianity peep and mutter in the twilight ? If you have a gospel, do make it known ; if it is not a gospel, say nothing about it. The Apostle was not afraid of "contention." That is the word he uses in the second verse—"we were bold in our God to speak unto you the Gospel of God with much contention" : everybody was contradicting us ; men were spitting upon us, smiting us upon the face, scorning us in every possible variety and tone of satire and sarcasm. But through all the tumult there sounded that wondrous voice of tenderness and love and pity and persuasion. Let us be bold men in Christ if we would be apostolic.

Then the Apostle need scarcely have said that his "exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness," yet it was well for him to say, "nor in guile" : for guile is a peculiar word with peculiar meanings. If the Apostle had known our English and had written in it, he would have said, Nor was our exhortation by the use of tricks. There are pulpits that are built upon nothing else. But woe unto the apostle who would seek to make a mere trick of the Gospel of Christ or any of its issues and uses. There are men who do not openly despise the Bible who yet make as little use of it as possible even in the pulpit. The only thing that is wanting in some discourses, is the Bible—the living word, the only word worth speaking. Hence we have our discourses upon earthquakes and shipwrecks and imperial circumstances and all manner of political change and action ; and

this is called preaching to the times : and it is wisely called such preaching, for with the times it dies, there is nothing of eternity in it. He preaches best even about momentary incidents who preaches eternal words : the greater includes the less, the profound eternal principle carries with it the local, incidental, transitory incident. Do not let us be pulled down by those who want so much preaching to the times. We should sometimes be enabled to get away from that which is momentary and local and irritating, we should get into the quietness which soothes and heals and renews the soul. Blessed solitude, companionable loneliness, I would be much with thee : when most alone I am least alone. Said Christ, "I am alone, yet not alone, for the Father is with me." If we would have in the Christian sanctuary wise masterly handling of the affairs of life our teachers must come from the sanctuary of eternity to tell us how to live out our little day. The minister who lives by tricks shall perish by tricks : he who speaks the eternal word with a faithful heart and a fearless tongue shall have a great harvesting. Cheer thee, O brother ; it is not to be conceived that God will allow his faithful to return with empty hands and disappointed hearts.

The Apostle might be followed up to this point, but he leaves us here wondering how he could do what he did, for he boldly says that he spoke "not as pleasing men." There he stands alone, as a celibate could, a man who has nor wife, nor home, nor child, nor kith, nor kin, nor silver spoon, nor chariot of gilt. You cannot do him any favour ; your favours would oppress him, your "How-do-you-do ?" would interrupt his prayer. Is there not a temptation to live so as to please men ? Is there not an easy road to popularity by saying to men, You are right, you are good, and you are wise ; continue in the course which you are now pursuing, and at the end you will enter into God's heaven as if by right of claim ? Men must be offended before they can be saved ; men must be trampled upon before they can stand erect ; men have to be depleted, utterly impoverished, before God can do anything with them. Said the Founder of the kingdom, the Peasant-Sovereign, the Peasant-Prophet, "I am come to send fire on the earth, and a sword : " we have come to quench the fire and to sheathe the sword.

The Apostle makes this still more clear, for he says, in verse 5, "Neither at any time used we flattering words." Have you ever seen an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile, try for one little moment to put a misleading colour upon something? He contradicts himself by his very face; his eye says, I am trying to deceive you, and you know it. It would have been interesting to have seen the Apostle Paul trying to use a flattering word, to lie by compliment. Yet he was courteous, he was a gentleman of the olden type; every turn of that old body, so bruised and crumpled, was the curve of poetry; every address he made to high office and dignity was the address of a king. Courtesy is perfectly compatible with candour. A man need not be rough and violent in speech, in order to be truthful. In Paul, see how gentlest courtesy wedded frankest candour, and how the strongest speaker in the Church could lower his voice into all the subtleties of minor music. Do not imagine that when you insult a man you treat him candidly. Candour—fair, white-faced, blue-eyed candour—child of the morning, child of summer, is not to be wedded to brusqueness and violence and madness of speech. Men can be very candid, yet very courteous: oh, that some men would try to work that miracle!

The Apostle, working and talking so, was able to add, in the sixth verse, "Nor of men sought we glory." That is a word we ought to take pains to understand. Christ says, "How can ye receive me or my word who receive honour one of another?" The word "honour" is the wrong word, it should be "glory"—"How can ye receive God's word who receive glory one of another,"—not respect, not courtesy, not grateful recognition; all that is right and necessary: but we must take care that we do not make even the Apostle equal to God. Glory belongeth unto the Lord. Literally, the Apostle will read thus:—Neither sought we recognition of our splendid position. That is the full meaning of the word "glory" as here used. Give your ministers all the respect that is due to their sanctified humanity and their useful ability; love and honour and cherish them, because of spiritual benefit: but remember that glory belongs to God only. Let us take care how by conferring exalted title we may seem to divide the sovereignty of God. There be those who can say with

an honest heart, "Our Lord God the Pope"; there be those also who count such speech profanity.

This is the negative aspect of the Apostolic relation to service and to ecclesiastical life. Is there anything more positive and direct? The following verses answer the inquiry:—"We were gentle among you." The servant of the Lord must not strive, but he must be gentle, easy to be entreated; he must be a mother, a nurse, as well as a shepherd and a soldier. He must be a many-sided man. When the strong man is gentle even women adore him: there is a strange, weird, fascinating quality of tenderness about him; when his great strength bends over us we feel a sense of security; his arms represent a still higher strength, and his lower voice affects us by its pathos. "Even as a nurse cherisheth her children"—yes, a mother-nurse. There be nurses that are paid for their love, and there be mother-nurses no gold could ever pay for tears and tenderness, and sitting up through the weary night, and watching every change of the countenance, and administering even to wants that are beyond the uses of words. That was apostolic life. The apostles lived in their work; they did not do something else six days in the week and play the nurse on the seventh: a child so treated would die.

Paul makes the matter still more broadly conspicuous by the use of these words: "So being affectionately desirous of you," wanting you, crying for you, saying, Come to us! Oh, these outstretched arms of apostolic solicitude and interest! are they not the shadow of other arms? Are there not arms stretched out over all the universe that it may be secured and saved and sanctified? We cannot do without that element in life. We cannot live on thunder and storm. We could not live on Mount Lebanon. It would be a halting-place to be desired for a day, but when we want to live we come down to the corner field and the garden, the simple beauties and tender hospitalities of nature. So we need the Church amongst us, that mother that wants us, that hugs and kisses, embraces and protects us; we want the quiet sanctuary, never so pleasant to any man as to the man who has hurried in from the market-place where he has

been worried and fretted by a thousand contentions, and who feels that quietness is healing, and silence the noblest speech. We need the altar, the sanctuary, the quiet book full of healing, soothing, psalm, and doctrine; above all we want that "affectionateness" which cannot rest until the very last wanderer is at home.

How did the apostles conduct themselves? Honest men are not afraid of egotism; honest men are not afraid to speak about themselves: hypocrites and pedants are. Hypocrites and pedants are always trying to blot themselves out. Whenever you find a man who wants to blot himself out, do not lend him any money, do not invite him to your house, do not introduce him to your children—he is a liar! Believe the honest man who knows his stature and his weight, his bulk and his force, and who speaks of himself modestly before God, but with a right stern dignity towards men. How did the apostles behave themselves?—"Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe." We ought to be able to say these very words. This is a marvellous character for any man to give himself, even though he be an apostle of Jesus Christ. The words are worth repeating—"how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe." This is possible in purpose. Let us never forget that the purpose is the life. As for conduct, it is always breaking down; otherwise we should not need to be continually praying, confessing, and supplicating God's forgiveness: but purpose may be everlasting, consistent, irrefragable, a thing not to be broken, perverted, the constant prayer of conscious want. We are what we are in purpose, not what we are in little incidents. Yet it is dangerous, as we have often said, to say this, because there are those who will take licence to sin in the incident who will not be careful to maintain the integrity of the purpose. This is the interruption to a Christian ministry which often enfeebles it. The minister has to pause that he may make parentheses, exceptions, and reservations: whereas he ought with a bold fine fluency to pour out his solaces, comforts, and inspirations so that all might take them and turn them to honest uses. It is the same in civilisation. Every honest man

has to lock his door before he can go to bed. That would seem to be absurd. Watch your household life, and see if you too are not always making reservations. You concluded your nocturnal eloquence after a hearty supper by declaring that the world is in your estimate getting much better, and that on the whole life is very good. Then you rose, and before extinguishing the light you fastened the window. What did that fastening mean? It meant such a parenthesis as the preacher is obliged always to use. You had just taken an optimistic view of society, and, having done so, you punctuate your eloquence by bolting the front door. How inconsistent, how flagrantly inconsistent is mankind! The preacher must of necessity do this. He, good soul, wants to believe well of everybody, and he proclaims that all men may be saved; and yet he has to cool his own passion by reminding himself that in every church there may possibly be an Iscariot.

How did the Thessalonians receive this word?—"not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God." We have lost that genius of hearing. We now listen to every speaker with the view of contradicting him. There never was a sermon delivered yet, but the churchwarden, or the deacon, or the hearer of some other kind, thought it could have been better. Even preachers sometimes find fault with their own brethren. That must be a modern practice, it surely never was discovered in the book of Genesis; yet even there, methinks, there was a case in which a man who had a dream was sold by his own brethren into Egypt. "Not as the word of men." The difficulty is to keep the man out of the speech, in so far as he is a mere artist or a mere inventor of words. The word is within the word: how is it that we have no understanding? The nut is in the shell, the shell is not in the nut; yet we cannot do without the shell, we want the shell, but he who takes the shell and chews it and tries to masticate it is a foolish man: the shell was made for momentary uses—throw it away, and eat the kernel. So within the discourse you must find the object of the discourse. Do not find fault with words, phrases, plannings, and sentences, but say in your soul, What is it the man is driving at? and if you can answer the question in these words, He is trying by

some means to do me good, seize that purpose, and forget all the rest.

The Thessalonians were more than hearers, they "also" had "suffered." Until a man has suffered the word he cannot understand it. Every man must pay that penalty before he can pray really; he must have his prayer choked in his throat before he can really and truly take the kingdom of heaven by violence. If our Christianity has become our chief luxury, we have lived an inverted life, we have taken down the Cross of Christ and set up some velveted throne in its place. He that will live godly shall suffer persecution even now. The honest man shall have a hard time of it in this world. The man who wants to eat bread unleavened by dishonesty will not have much bread to eat, but it will be sweet, vitalising, nutritious bread.

What was the relation between the Church and the Apostle, the Apostle and the Church? "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy." (Verses 19, 20.) The true minister cares for nothing but his work. What does he do? He lives in the work, he prays at the altar he lives for his people; every time he rises he is as a fruit tree in the midst of the Church. A tender, beautiful, mutually-helpful relation is this: let pastors and churches, apostles and communities, live together in reciprocal trust and honour. We should seek our whole satisfaction within the sanctuary. So the apostles had their summer-times, even churches in the earliest era of our Lord's epoch had their festivals and banquets of love. Brethren, let us love one another: "We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren." Are some of you ministers, and do you see but small fruit of your labour? It is not for you to look for the fruit or to measure the result; God will see that you do not die of hunger. You cannot tell to whom you are ministering, whom you are helping and sustaining by prayer and speech and patience that watches over the salvation of the soul. There be some in the Church who are not in the outward register of the ecclesiastical body. I

find as I go along in life that there are souls hovering around us ; they want to alight upon this church-tree, but they do not know whether they will be welcomed ; they have peculiarity of view, singularity of opinion, difficulties in matters of speculation, and they wonder whether they would be received with open love and trust if they came amongst us : and to such I say—In proportion as you are honest you will be received with entireness of love. If we are setting up little rules and tests and standards, and saying, "Let us measure you by these," they will never come ; they must be given a wondrous, sometimes inexplicable, sense or consciousness of welcome.

The Apostle welcomed men ; in this very chapter he talks of Jews who would have forbidden him to preach to the Gentiles. These Jews still live. They are to be found in every church. They do not want everybody to be preached to and everybody to be saved and everybody to be blessed, but Jesus Christ himself does. If there are any souls here, odd, peculiar, eccentric in thought, difficult to manage, I would not have them driven away with contempt or despair, or even with cold indifference, I would say to them, If in your heart of hearts you want God, and Christ, and truth, and heaven, you may have them all, and you may have them in your own way : not in my way ; your way is not my way ; I do not like your way, but your way may be right, it is at all events right for you ; what I want you to do is to take hold of Christ wherever you can. Where can you get hold of him ? He is talking to a woman who is a sinner : can you seize him there ? Here he is taking up little children and blessing them : does that melt your heart ? seize the child-Christ. There he is doing mighty miracles : does that action effect your imagination, appeal to your wonder, and draw you forth in reverence ? Then along the line of miracle go to him. Only by this way or that, or your own way, or some way—go to him, go to him.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, teach us the value of things, for we know them **not**. Give us the spirit of discernment; may we be wise men. If we be wise we shall redeem the time, we shall know one season from another, we will work diligently, faithfully, expectantly. The Lord enable us to know what true wisdom is; the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; in wisdom may we grow, and in understanding may we become men. Open our understanding that we may understand the Scriptures; open our eyes that we may behold wondrous things out of thy law; open our eyes that we may see the inner circle of fire, and angel, and chariot of glory. Save us from folly; save us from self-trust, which is the beginning of unwisdom: may we live in God, and in God may we move and have our being. Thus shall we be truly as God, perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect, holy as our Father in heaven is holy. Oh, the mystery of this growth—the pain, the change, the tumult, the agony, the peace, the joy, the wondrous combination of emotion and experience. What tongue can express that miracle of discipline? Show us that all things work together for good, if in our hearts there be the love of God; show us that there shall be no contraries in thy dispensations that shall not be reconciled into music. When the burden is too heavy, increase our strength; when we are blind with tears, may the eyes of our soul be wide open; when the cloud fills the frowning heaven, may we hear a voice in the cloud, always the same voice, calling us to thy Son, thy Son, thy Son. In him may we find the cradle, the Cross, the crown—all in all. Amen.

I Thessalonians iii.

APOSTOLIC APPREHENSION.

WHEN the Apostle says, in the first verse, “we could no longer forbear,” and in the fifth verse, “I could no longer forbear,” he uses a very intense expression. He represents himself as boiling over; we are to think of him as restraining himself for a long time, reining himself in as with both hands; then the enthusiasm or desire becomes too strong to be thus kept back, and it overcomes everything; the enthusiasm conquers. If it was an enthusiasm opposed to reason; then there would have been simple loss of self-control: Christian enthusiasm is reason at its best, reason on fire, reason conscious of wings and higher kinships and desires that cannot be satisfied with time and space. These words give us insight into the Apostle’s quality of character.

He was not one of those uniform persons who are always alike, because they are always nothing. The Apostle rose and fell with the occasion ; he represented the times that were passing within his soul ; all the weather of his heart was written on his face, so that men could go and look at him as at a barometer, and know exactly how matters stood. He was responsive, sensitive : everything that touched him elicited replies from his soul. It is interesting to observe how often he was mistaken for a madman. Christians have outlived that enthusiasm. There are few mad Christians now, except in the newer sects, the formative communities. All young life begins in a species of excess or madness, then it settles down into respectability, and from respectability it works its easy way into oblivion. The Apostle never outlived himself. Many of us have to mourn the days that are gone, saying, Oh, that it were with me as in the days past ! oh, that I could pray as I did pray in those early times ! The Apostle was a growing Christian. He prayed most vehemently at the last. He never struck so boldly at heaven's door as when he smote it with a dying hand. We should live upwards.

To what intent did he send Timotheus ? We wondered, in reading the first verse, that Paul did not designate himself as an Apostle, and that he did not by some descriptive clause indicate the status of Silvanus and Timotheus : but in the second verse we have Timotheus set forth in full figure—"our brother, and minister of God, and our fellow-labourer in the Gospel of Christ." You can add nothing to that ; addition would be subtraction ; he who paints the lily kills it. Thus armed with Apostolic recognition and certification, Timotheus went forth—to what end ? "to establish you." It is not with Christians that they can be made once for all and left to grow as they may : Christianity requires continual attention. Christians need to be confirmed, and re-confirmed, and spoken to every day. There are works which once done are done for ever, but Christianity is not one of them ; we have to watch until the end, our very last action may be an action of resistance as against evil. The devil never gives up any man until heaven's door is shut upon him. "Call no man happy until he is dead." We then want established Christians, men who have foundation of faith, basis of conviction,

doctrines upon which they can rely, and for the truth of which they risk everything. To some minds it may appear to be a risk to go right through to the last darkness with nothing to rely upon but a Cross, yet there are countless millions of men who have faced the final gloom in that tender light. Not one of them was ever heard to complain. Innumerable testimonies have risen up in the darkness to the effect that it never was so light as in the valley of the shadow of death, it never was so glorious as when all time-lights were put out and the eternal radiance smiled upon the soul. "Let me die the death of the righteous; let my last end be like his."

Not only to establish the Thessalonians, but "to comfort you concerning your faith." Again we come upon that equivocal word "comfort." What does it literally mean, as we have often seen, in these readings? It means, encourage you. Not comfort in the sense of an opiate; the Apostle is not narcotising the soul, giving it something which by its fumes shall lull the soul into semi-consciousness and give it opium dreams: to "comfort" often means in the New Testament, almost always indeed, as we have seen, to spur, to encourage, to vivify, to cheer, to say, Go on! That is a very different idea of comfort from that which many persons entertain—to sit down in self-luxuriation and suppose everything has been done, and now they are only waiting to blossom into heaven. We go into heaven under impulse; wanting at the last to do something more, we are at the last hurried on to rewards inconceivable and unspeakable.

The Apostle, then, had a fear. What was his apprehension? That the Thessalonians might "be moved by these afflictions." Note the word "moved": it is full of suggestion, it is a most pictorial word; it is the action of a hound that fawns upon its owner, a hound that wags its tail, that licks the owner's hand, that paws the owner's knee, and would allure the owner. It is not a mad wolf running into the house and devouring the inhabitants, it is the attitude and the action of a fawning dog. Thus variously are men led away. Some are smitten, as if were, squarely on the forehead, and they fall down unable to recover themselves, and so are left behind among the wounded, if not among the dead. Others are the subjects of subtle spiritual

declension. They do not know when they ceased to pray, for in very deed they are not sure that they have even now quite ceased; one knee has been taken from the altar, but they are still bending on the other; yet a spirit of reluctance is stealing over them; they have no hostility, no argued unbelief which they thrust in the face of heaven, but a general sense of decadence and self-loss. They cannot be fired up as they were wont to be enkindled once; one little spark would set them aflame, so that they would have burned down mountains in their holy ardour: now the powder is damped, and the whole soul is aware of an encroaching reluctance. Others are seduced from the right way, fawned from the altar, by those hounds who would say, Come with us, we know where there are pleasures that would just suit you, delights fitted to your very soul's capacity, flowers evidently grown for man: come with us; we do not invite you to profanity, to violence, to robbery, or to murder; we invite you to quite another line of action: come! "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." Then there is a moving which is done by cross-providences. All things seem to go wrong, afflictions come in great numbers, and prosperity seems to be a vanished bird of plumage; God for ever gone, the soul therefore loses heart and says, It is vain to serve the Lord, and what profit is it that we pray to the Almighty? Paul said, all this must be attended to; in effect he said, You Thessalonians are a warm-hearted people, energetic, responsive, impulsive; you are gifted with the spirit of sympathy, and therefore you expose to the enemy a point of supreme peril. The best natures fall first; the finest natures go down most deeply. They are not all the best natures that never get wrong, they may often be the poorest, meanest, shallowest natures that God ever made—if he made them at all. You Thessalonians are so ardent and sympathetic that you easily may be led astray: now, whether it be by fawning, by seduction, by violence, by cross-providences, take care; I send Timotheus down to you that he may encourage you in the upward way.

"For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain." After the word "you," in

verse 5, omit the comma, and read the sentence in a hurry, fusing all the other words into one syllable; otherwise you will miss the grammar and the meaning—"I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you and our labour be in vain." The Apostle is principally thinking now of the labour which had been expended upon the Thessalonians; and that all this should be turned to nothingness was to the apostolic heart a great grief. "Lest by some means"—that is a characteristic expression. The Apostle used it before concerning his own ministry; he said, "Lest by any means," or some means, "I might save some." He would indicate that the tempter is wily, fertile in suggestion, most inventive, fitting his devilhood to every degree of sight and every extent of capacity. The Apostle would not fear one temptation only but all temptations, every kind of means at the disposal of the devil. Men do not all fall in one way, but they all fall when they do fall into one place—call it darkness, or call it hell. We think we shall get no harm from the tempter, whilst all the time he is poisoning our minds. Sometimes we almost challenge the devil to an encounter. That is always foolish. Never address a challenge to your spiritual enemies. When they do come, resist them, let them come on their own bidding and not on yours; and when they do come, pray all heaven to take up your cause and fight your battle. You do not know what you brought with you from the enemy's land. You think you brought no harm, you got no contagion, and that you are just about as you were before you went into unhallowed relationships. Do not so delude yourselves. A man sent the great Darwin the leg of a red-legged partridge, and within the little claw there was a portion of innocent-looking mud, quite a little piece of soil; but that little piece of soil was taken out and put into water and set in growing condition and out of it there came eighty-two different plants. You cannot tell what you have brought away from the devil's ground on your foot, in your hand, in your eyes; your very voice may have changed. Life is subtle, life is tremendous. Do not play the fool and say you can challenge the enemy, and do with him what you like, and be a stronger man for the tussle, the wrestle. We know not what we do; we are only safe in God: "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." Give me the

quick-wittedness of heart that sees the devil in every guise, and that holy scorn of all wrong that hates the devil even when he robes himself with the stolen garments of light.

When Timotheus came back again he brought what ought to be called a "gospel"; it is called, in verse six "good things," which is the same word. Read—"Now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us the gospel of your faith and charity." That is all the Apostle wanted to hear from Thessalonica. Said he in effect, Are they still strong? are they as firm as ever? do they stand the stress of weather well? do they break down easily before the tempter? how do they pray? with what breath do they address the heavens? in whose name do they wage their wars? and Timotheus said, They are a brave folk, they are praying night and day; and as for the apostles, and especially as for thee, O Paul, they never cease to think about the ministry they have enjoyed; they picture you in every possible situation and attitude; they recall your every tone and manner of speech; they live in you, they have nothing else to live for; and as for the questions they asked, they were ceaseless and numberless. What did Paul then respond? In the seventh verse, he says—"Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith." That is the medicine the apostolic heart wanted. The Apostle wanted to know that his converts were doing well, that they were growing in knowledge and in grace, and that they were deepening in all their spiritual conceptions and relationships; then he was young again, then he gathered himself up and said: I have hardly begun my work yet; I must do better than ever I have done before.

In the eighth verse he gives us this wondrous statement—"For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord." What a self-revelation! Now we know the Apostle Paul as we never knew him before. We can invert this sentence, and thus get out of it its true meaning—For now, if you do not stand fast in the Lord, we shall die: if we hear that your faith is giving way, our life will give way too: we live in our converts, we live in our Churches. The Apostle has nothing to live for but for those who are his children in the truth. "For now we live, if ye stand

fast in the Lord": you will be living arguments, we can point to you wherever we preach this gospel, we can say, If you want to know what the gospel has done and can do, go to Thessalonica, there you will see men who rise above all affliction and distress and who pray the louder the more the storm roars around their lives; men of honesty, honour, simple-mindedness, chivalry of heart, and likeness to the Lord Jesus Christ: but, brethren, the Apostle would continue, if ye give way, and we have nothing to point to, then we are left to mere argument, to shadowy metaphysics, and the world will not believe our statement, but will reject it and scorn it as a self-defeating and self-disappointing theory.

Still the Apostle would look upon the Thessalonians as requiring perfecting in their education—"Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith." The action here indicated is a mechanical action, yet necessary. It is the action that may be performed upon a ball after it has been moulded. Here, for example, is the mould into which the hot metal is poured; as soon as that metal has cooled, the ball may be declared by some to be perfected, but the smith says, No, now I have but the ball to work upon; it must be filed, it must be polished, it must now be brought under another kind of detailed action, so that there shall not be found upon it one point of asperity. So the Apostle says, You are moulded, you have your shape, you are Christians, but you want filing, refining, perfecting; there will be something to do upon you to the very last, and I want to come and help perfect that which is lacking in your faith—not lacking by way of defect, but lacking for want of service that must be performed upon it. There is a lacking which means deficiency, and there is a lacking which means attention concentrated upon certain points that require careful, skilful treatment. So faith is not that rude thing which it is sometimes represented to be; nor is it a mere assent that costs neither mind nor heart much pains. Faith is at first a grand impulsive act, a sublime effort, the very miracle of the soul; then, when it has passed into that form, it requires to be perfected, line upon line, precept upon precept. There are those who would seek to be Christians all at once,

and they succeed. But the oldest Christian still requires one more prayer, another cheering discourse, one more long interview with Christ. Christian perfecting is never done, but in the doing of it, it is full of charm and reward and promised glory.

“To the end”—what is the end? That is what we want to know. For what purpose is all this operation? “To the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God.” The end of the whole Christian thought, the whole Christian economy, is character—in Biblical language, holiness. What does it matter, what you believe, if you are as bad as ever you were? You are not a living soul, you are a mere receptacle filled with certain dead dogmas. What does it avail that you have the most orthodox creed, if there is not a soul that knows you that can believe your word? What does it amount to that you know the whole creed from beginning to end, and would fight for every comma in its punctuation, if you are such a churl at home that nobody wants to see you in the home? Your creed is as hateful as yourself. You an orthodox man. You are an infidel, and I mean henceforth to call such people the infidels—men who theoretically know what is orthodox and sound and good, and who think that all has been done when they have acknowledged it with their lips. We must have orthodoxy of conduct, orthodoxy of soul, orthodoxy of heart. “To the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness.” There are speculative minds you cannot bring into line; errant, wilful minds that will state their own thoughts in their own way. They are not the infidels: the infidels are those who know the true doctrine, and who obstinately maintain it in argument, and who flagrantly contradict it in practice. Some of you may be odd thinkers, you may have been blessed or oppressed with an eccentric action of mind, it may not be easy for you to fall into old ruts and conventional beats. You are often mistaken as heterodox and as dangerous. I would simply ask, What are you in character? Simple, pure, noble, charitable? Can a little child lead you? Are you always desiring to be more Godlike and more Christlike? Do you want to be really so good and tender that all souls may come to you for help? I would like to hold hands with you when we stand before the Judge.

PRAYER

ALMIGHTY God, it hath pleased thee to build thy house upon the earth, and even here thou hast a living Church ; amid all the darkness and tumult, thou hast still a hiding-place for those who love thee, and an open way to thy heavens for those who put their trust in thee. The tabernacle of God is with men upon the earth : thy house supports our dwelling-places ; our dwelling-places derive their security and their light from thy tabernacle. Thus may we see thee in all our lives, near us, without us, within us, above us like a sky, and beneath us like an eternal rock ; thus shall our lives be no longer accidents, varying and passing away as clouds that have no resting-place ; they shall be strong in God, they shall be centred in eternity ; they shall derive all light and sustenance and hope from the upper places yea, from the hidden sanctuary of thy love. May we understand the meaning of thy providence in having thy house here ; this is the beginning of a revelation, this is the opening of a promise ; thou wouldst not have turned our poor stone into an altar, if thou didst not mean to symbolise the existence of an altar that is within the veil, to which broadest access has been created and established through the blood of him who was slain from before the foundation of the world. Thou dost make common bread into Christ's living sacrificial flesh, and thou dost turn the stones on which we tread into sanctuaries and temples and refuges, in which we may gather strength, and in quietness we may pray, and in the secret battlefield we may win victories over God. Thou hast been pleased to allow our weakness to prevail against thee ; thou hast given to our necessity and wondrous power, so that hunger can move thee, and our thirst can cause thee to turn upon us fountains of water, and our ignorance challenges the revelation of thy wisdom. These are miracles of love, these are triumphs of grace ; explain them we cannot, we would not ; it is better to rest in them, to accept them as thy gifts, as tokens celestial and pledges of brighter things yet to come. Comfort our hearts whilst we journey through the wilderness ; mile on mile of sand wearies us ; the hard stones try our feet ; sometimes the very absence of rain and darkness and storm troubles us with a strange monotony. But the wilderness is measurable, the Canaan to which it leads is infinite, enable us therefore to look beyond, and by fixing our attention upon the power of an endless life may there be created in us an indestructible and triumphant fortitude, that cannot be bowed down by gathering difficulties. We bless thee for what we have seen of thy goodness. Truly the vision was lovely to look upon, tenderer than the morning light, brighter than the noonday glory, richer than all the pomp of the westering sun. Thou hast led us, and cheered us, and nursed us, and made us strong when men said our day of hope was gone ; yea, thou hast brought us back from sinful

wandering, and made us pray the sweeter for an absence of heart from thyself, which was but for a moment; thou hast enriched our supplications with new music; when we remembered how we had turned aside from the living name thy festivals gathered around our returning prodigality; thy house was never so bright and glad as when we came back from the darkness of alienation. Thou wilt not allow our sins to condemn us; thy grace is more than our sin; thou wilt disappoint the enemy; thou wilt break his teeth, and put out his eyes, and smite his arms that they fall down in pitiable weakness; and thy saved ones shall be redeemed with an infinite redemption; yea, in heaven we shall see what was greater in us, thy grace or the evil's evil seed; and when we are there we shall praise thee none the less sweetly because of remembered thanklessness and hardness of heart. Help us to know what to make of our life; it is a mystery, it is a burden; sometimes it is a pain; sometimes it is a song that brings with it no consciousness of weight; sometimes our life is all night, and sometimes it is all summer, and we are sure we know nothing of it as it is yet to be known: prepare us, therefore, that we may calmly wait, spiritually rest, and assure ourselves that that which begins in mystery will end in grace and glory. Comfort those that mourn; say unto them, Mourning is but for a night, joy will come with the dawn, and never go away. Make up to those who are bereaved—suddenly or after long affliction—the sense of loss which they now tremble under, and feel to be intolerable. The Lord himself hath comforts, solaces right tender, deeper than life, and he will not withhold these consolations from hearts that mourn for him with lamentation and strong desire. Help us to do wisely, bravely, well: help us to be economical, thrifty, calculating, where our temptation is towards expenditure, extravagance, and folly; help us to be pitiful, tender, clement, helpful to others, where our tendency is to be hard, critical, severe, and reproachful; enable us to pray where our tendency is to doubt, and when the doubting man tries to pray surprise him into new breadths of supplication, and charm his own ear as with thine eloquence from above. The Lord have us all in his holy, mighty keeping; the Lord every day meet us at the Saviour's Cross, Saviour crucified for us; Saviour, not of us only, but of the whole world; whose grace is larger than sin, and whose arm was never stretched out but to win some great victory. Amen.

1 Thessalonians iv., v.

APOSTOLIC PRAYERS.

“**B**UT as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you” (iv. 9). We have just heard the Apostle express a wish in prayer that he might see the face of his friends in Thessalonica, that he might perfect that which was lacking in their faith. Here he says there was nothing lacking in their love. Why, this is the supreme test of faith and righteousness: “We know that we have passed from death unto life”—not

because we can answer many questions, or hold high and wordy disputations, but—"because we love the brethren." "If a man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love." These people had reached the very highest line of spiritual education. Perhaps something of this progress was due to the circumstances under which they lived. There were circumstances of persecution; daily affliction was the lot of the Christian life: these are circumstances which try the quality of men, and which bring them more closely together. The light disperses men, the darkness gathers them together; in the morning we leave one another; at night we all come home again. More persecution would mean more affection. In the darkest days of the olden time "they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written," and they who conversed with one another were reckoned jewels of God.

How did they come to this high level of education? Were they taught by the Apostle? Partly. Did this come from their natural dispositions? for we have seen them to be humane, genial, and enthusiastic. Perhaps, in some degree. But what is the deeper and larger interpretation of this mutual loyalty, this sacred fraternal affection? The answer is given in this same verse (iv. 9): "for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another." This is the teaching that fills the heart, that illumines the mind, that constrains the soul, that perfects the miracle of holiness. If we are not taught of God we are not taught at all, we have not got beyond the point of information—and machines may almost be stuffed with intelligence. To be taught of God is to be filled with the Spirit of God, to enjoy the inspiration of God, to think God's thoughts, and to live with God as if actually partakers of the Divine nature. Thy children shall be all taught of thee, thou holy Father of the universe; they shall know thy voice, they shall distinguish it from the voice of strangers; the voice of strangers they will not follow, but when they hear the tones of thy voice they will respond instantly, unanimously, and passionately. What have we been taught, if we have not been taught the mystery of love? Our religion is foam and our

professions are vanity and our prayers are lies. Test the whole progress, as the whole purpose, of Christianity by this growth of love. How do we stand in this line? Have we large forgiveness? Are we ready to pardon? Have we a genius for overlooking infirmities? Are we inspired to detect and magnify one another's excellences? Then we are taught of God, and we magnify the Cross, and we are worthy followers of Jesus Christ: but if this cannot be said of us, then all our profession is a bubble, glittering perhaps, but hollow certainly. He who loves man loves God. We cannot love man until we have the higher love, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself": we cannot begin at the neighbourly end; if we do even apparently begin there we do really begin with the end that is Divine. Many men act under Divine inspiration who are not aware of the fact, who would almost resent the suggestion: but wherever you find sacrifice, love, true condescension, rich and self-sacrificing sympathy, you find God, if it be in paganism heathenism, or in the finest civilisation in the world. Wherever you find light you find the sun: wherever you find charity you find the Cross.

It is interesting to observe how, in the course of this letter, the Apostle is now profoundly theological, now passionately consecrated to high pursuits, and anon minute and detailed in practical exhortation. For example, he urges upon the Church in Thessalonica "that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you." The Apostle was not conscious of any violence of transition from theme to theme. We are the victims of uniformity; we think it is a long way from heaven to earth—so it is to some natures—but heaven and earth ought to be equal terms to those who are really and externally in Christ. There ought to be no earth, no time, no space; all these details should be lost in the overwhelming and sublimating thought of eternity, then out of that thought we could come to do the day's plain work with both hands, simply, industriously, faithfully. The idea of the Apostle in exhorting the Thessalonians to "study to be quiet" is beautiful as a picture,—"*Covet the honour of quietness*": where other men can see no honour but in fame, you see honour in quiet,

simple, domestic obscurity. This is making the best of the smallest occasions. It is not, Study to be quiet and to obliterate yourselves; but, Covet the honour of doing so: count it a worthy ambition; do not allow the shade to be undervalued or the little corner to be dispraised as if it were unworthy of recognition: magnify obscurity, and count it fame to have a quiet resting-place with God. "And to do your own business": do not go outside seeking to attract attention by interfering with things that you do not understand; keep to that you were born to, trained to, prepared for. If you understand your own business, you will find room enough in it for the exercise of your energies. "And to work with your own hands," or with your own brains; for brains are hands. We are not to understand the word "hands" as if it were limited to the portion of the body thus commonly designated, but, Work with your own faculties, earn your own livelihood, make your own bread, establish and confirm your own social and personal position; do not be loafers in society, do not accept what other men are doing for you, but by genius, by invention, by suggestion, by patient industry in some way or other, render an equivalent for every mouthful of bread you enjoy. Society would thus be constituted on a large and secure basis. Christianity can handle all the affairs of life skilfully and successfully. Ignore the supernatural if you please, but in doing so you ignore the only power that can get hold of the entire occasion, and use it with sovereign and beneficent mastery.

We now have an illustration of the Apostle's instantaneous method of transition. Mark with what amazing, almost blinding, suddenness, he turns to speak of the great subject of the Lord's coming, and the awakening of those who sleep in Christ, and the being caught up in the air to meet the Lord around his invisible but infinite throne. I cannot read the words that follow without feeling that the Apostle Paul was under the impression that the Lord would come in the most literal way in a given period, and that period not remote. I am aware that there are arguments on the other side, but I cannot read these words and other words of kindred import without feeling that the Apostles were looking for the almost immediate appearance

of Christ. Whether that advent took place in the destruction of Jerusalem, who can decide? That was a tragic and momentous era in human history, and in point of moral sublimity and political *éclat* it was enough to cover the whole suggestion of the Second Advent. I prefer rather to think that God has always trained the world by promises that have larger meanings in them than those that were obvious. He trained Abraham in this way; he said, I will show thee and give thee a country flowing with milk and honey, and Abraham rose and obediently followed the Lord: and when all came to all he said, I do not want anything on the earth, I seek a country out of sight. But if the Lord had promised him a country out of sight, a land celestial, the appeal would have been too great and sublime for his then mental condition: God promises us something that is measurable and visible that he may train us towards that which is infinite and unseen. Paul is the Abraham of this greater covenant. The Apostles were promised an advent, an all but immediate and visible appearance of Christ, and yet they were trained to see that Christ is always coming, that the universe exists as a highway along which he may advance so as to redeem and sanctify and educate and perfect his Church. Providence has thus been magnified and sanctified, so that events are no longer mere occurrences, they are epiphanies, they are revelations of the Lord, they are pages in an infinite book of revelation: blessed are they who have eyes to see these wonders: yea, thrice blessed are they who see the Lord in every sunrise and in every sunset, and who behold him on the whole circle of the year. We are straining ourselves after what we supposed to be sublime appearances; whereas Christ is appearing around us every moment; every event is a chariot in which he rides, every consecrated epoch of time is a throne on which he sits. Why do we not enjoy the immediate, continual, spiritual revelation of Christ?

Having indulged in this anticipation of the Lord's coming, the Apostle returns with a fine grace, more than rhetorical, to practical exhortation and stimulus—"Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober" (v. 6). The Apostle would have us constantly awake; the Apostle made no provision

for sleep, at least for sleep of a slothful kind. He lived this theory of wakefulness. There never was a man so entirely and absolutely awake as was the Apostle Paul. Nothing escaped that eager attention. It is said of great men, notably of Aristotle, that they would lie down to rest with brazen balls in their hands which would drop into metal vessels at the side of the couch, and thus moderate their sleep. If they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, shall we be slothful who profess to be in quest of a crown eternal? If men subjected themselves to this painful discipline that they might attain the highest intellectual capacity and faculty, shall we do nothing who ought to be training ourselves to the higher wisdom and the nobler communion? The sluggard gets nothing, the sluggard has no harvest: this is right. When you see the sluggard returning with bare hands, do not pity him; say, This is the Lord's doing. If you could see the sluggard coming home with laden wains, so that his horses could hardly draw the rich harvest, you might then begin to suspect that the universe is an orphan left to itself, blind, helpless, wholly ironical in all its impulse and issue, a mischievous and pestilent lie: but so long as you see a man who has been over-slumbering, succumbing to want as to an armed man, then know that behind the little blue film or veil there is great beneficent Sovereignty overruling all things, smiting the wrong, and preparing to reward and honour, enrich and satisfy all faithfulness.

Now the Apostle continues his practical exhortations, saying many things that might be commented upon to our spiritual advantage; notably, saying (ii. 14) two things. "Warn them that are unruly." We cannot do without that word "warn": that is a great bell-word; ring the alarum, tell men of penalty, speak to men of hell, do not keep back the terror of the Lord. There be men who are gifted with this genius of warning; their voices are terrible, their aspect confirms their dreary exhortation. "Support the weak": literally, Put your shoulder to and shore-up the weak. Your shoulder was not made for epaulettes; your shoulder is not to be the seat of ornament, the point of decoration: if, O man, thou hast a brawny shoulder, it belongs to thy weak brother. You have seen buildings propped up: that is the precise idea of the Apostle here: shore-up the weak, let the weak

man feel that he can rest upon you until he recover himself or until he have time to reclaim his position. He who has wealth holds it as a trustee, he who has strength holds it as a steward ; he who counts his own gold shall have no heaven but the chink of his own metal, and that, thank God, shall be taken from him, and he shall hear no music evermore. But he who supports the weak and is patient toward all men, he who is kind, gentle, charitable, is never out of heaven ; he cannot go to heaven because he is never away from it, he breathes its balmy air, he sings its exquisite music, he breathes the very spirit of the father-home.

From verse 16 to verse 22, the Apostle speaks as it were in separate lines ; that, at all events, is the mechanical form given to this exhortation by those who constructed the Authorised Version. For example—"Rejoice evermore" : literally, Fare you well : cheer yourselves : drink God's wine, have a banquet of love, let the spirit of high festivity be the spirit of Christian hearts and Christian families. Now what detailed instruction ! "Pray without ceasing," and "In everything give thanks." These two should go together. Praying without ceasing means, be always in a prayerful spirit. The bird is not always flying, but how long does it take a bird to spread its wings ? It should take us just so long to begin to pray when we see the fowler lift his piece, when we see the enemy stoop for a stone. Keep at it, be importunate, is the idea. There was a woman who stirred up the unjust judge to answer her ; she left, literally, a spot in his face. If you keep on with ever so small a tapping upon one place, you will make an impression ; a continual dropping wears the stone. The woman kept appealing until she made a spot in the man's face, until where her finger smote there burned a fever flush, and he said in his heart, Curse her ! What wants she—eh ? Hear what the unjust judge said. Sanctify this method of appeal, and as it were live on God's promises, until, using the language of the illustration and using it with reverence, God would blush to deny his own covenant. "In everything give thanks"—in affliction, in darkness, in winter, in the time of snow and ice and north wind ; when there is no herd in the stall, when the fig tree doth not blossom : "in everything give thanks" : the darkness is best, the winter is but another name for rest, bereave-

ment will but whet the appetite for reunion. So live in God and for God as to give thanks to him with, as it were, equal breath and emphasis, whether he give you great broad sunshine or make the whole sky a cloud.

“Quench not the Spirit.” Let inspiration have free play : speak out of your hearts what God puts into them : let the Spirit work in his own way and at his own time ; sometimes the action will appear to be eccentric, sometimes it will be wholly incalculable, but do not quench the Spirit. Quenching may be done in one of two ways : first, by withdrawal of fuel, the fire dies when the fuel is not replenished ; secondly, by drowning with water, pour on the stream and the fire dies. Neglect the ordinance of grace, and you quench the Spirit ; invite the action of those who hate God and Christ, and they will pour cold water upon your flaming zeal. The Apostle says, “Quench not the Spirit” : you should live in the spiritual, the supernatural, the eternal, the invisible ; you should live in the large, the glorious, the celestial. And if you do this then you will “Despise not prophesyings.” These two should be bracketed, namely, “Quench not the Spirit,” “Despise not prophesyings,” literally, preachings, utterances, all kinds of utterances ; so that if a man shall come and speak to you in an unknown tongue do not laugh at him or scorn him, but say, What is this new revelation ? is this a new departure in accustomed providences ? let us hear the man, if he speak loudly, or if his voice be low ; if he shall speak uniformly and in consistency with what we already know, so be it ; if he shall say something quite novel, startling, and contrary to practice, still let us hear him. That was the apostolic spirit. Paul was not an exclusive but an inclusive teacher : he was not a shepherd who drove away parts of the flock, but he looked among the wolves if haply he might find a sheep that was missing. Let us hear all voices. This has not been the rule of the Church. The Church has been foolish ! The Church has loved to keep a place for martyrs, a fire for heretics, a block for those whom it hated because of supposed false doctrine. The Apostle would first have a sublime constant action of the Spirit, and then he would inquire reverently and intelligently into the quality of the preachings or prophesyings. What wondrous

things have been done in the name of orthodoxy! The youngest are familiar with the story of Sir Isaac Newton, sitting in the garden, the apple falling upon him, and his discovering from that circumstance what is called the attraction of gravity, or the law of gravitation, and formulating an almost new economy of the universe from that one simple circumstance. Who could suspect anything wrong in that? Yet a man, a great man, called Leibnitz, charged Sir Isaac Newton with propounding a doctrine (I quote the words) "subversive of natural if not of revealed religion." Poor Leibnitz! great Newton! If you have a truth, out with it. Who are they that keep natural and revealed religion? Who are these ecclesiastical constables? Who are those proud, mighty people who know everything and revel in their own omniscience? Despise not prophecy.

Now two more things—"Prove all things:" test all things: having heard the prophesyings, do not necessarily believe them, but test them, sift them, probe them. Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God, search into the whole case; call for proof, for illustration, for simplification, and see the reality of things; then "hold fast that which is good," that which is proved, that which is established. "Abstain from all appearance of evil," which is absurd and impossible; it should be, literally rendered, Abstain from every form of evil, abstain from every species or kind of evil. Many a man is apparently doing evil who is really doing good. This translation therefore cannot stand; it is not "Abstain from all appearance of evil," because the appearance is always superficial and changeable, but, Abstain from every form, species, kind, quality, of evil—abhor that which is evil.

Now the Apostle, having exhorted his Thessalonian friends, begins to pray for them (v. 23).—"And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it. . . . The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you." Paul, great, heroic, longsuffering, magnificent Paul—how he writes, how he speaks, how he exhorts, how he prays! This is the very genius of Christianity: this is the miracle of Christ.

THE SECOND EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE
TO THE
THESSALONIANS.

(CORINTH, A.D. 53.)

[NOTE.—“This Epistle appears to have been written from Corinth not very long after the First, for Silvanus and Timotheus were still with St. Paul (i. 1). In the former letter we saw chiefly the outpouring of strong personal affection, occasioned by the renewal of the Apostle’s intercourse with the Thessalonians, and the doctrinal and hortatory portions are there subordinate. In the Second Epistle, on the other hand, his leading motive seems to have been the desire of correcting errors in the Church of Thessalonica. . . .

“This Epistle, in the range of subject as well as in style and general character, closely resembles the First; and the remarks made on that Epistle apply for the most part equally well to this. The structure also is somewhat similar, the main body of the Epistle being divided into two parts in the same way, and each part closing with a prayer (ii. 16, 17, iii. 16; both commencing with *αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ κύριος*). The following is a table of contents:—

“The opening salutation (i. 1, 2).

“1. A general expression of thankfulness and interest, leading up to the difficulty about the Lord’s advent (i. 3–ii. 17).

(1). The Apostle pours forth his thanksgiving for their progress in the faith; he encourages them to be patient under persecution, reminding them of the judgment to come, and prays that they may be prepared to meet it (i. 3–12).

(2.) He is thus led to correct the erroneous idea that the judgment is imminent, pointing out that much must happen first (ii. 1–12).

(3.) He repeats his thanksgiving and exhortation, and concludes this portion with a prayer (ii. 13–17).

“2. Direct exhortation (iii. 1–16).

(1.) He urges them to pray for him, and confidently anticipates their progress in the faith (iii. 1–5).

(2.) He reproves the idle, disorderly, and disobedient, and charges the faithful to withdraw from such (iii. 6–15).

This portion again closes with a prayer (iii. 16).

“The Epistle ends with a special direction and benediction (iii. 17, 18).”

SMITH’S *Dictionary of the Bible.*]

Chapter I.

1 *Saint Paul certifieth them of the good opinion which he had of their faith, love, and patience: 11 and therewithal useth divers reasons for the comforting of them in persecution, whereof the chiefest is taken from the righteous judgment of God.*

1. Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus [there is no Apostolic title given in this salutation, which would certainly have been assumed by a forger] unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

2. Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. We are bound [morally obliged] to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth;

4. So that we ourselves [spontaneously, on our own account (cf. 1 Thess. i. 9.)] glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure:

5. Which is a manifest token [in apposition with what precedes. Their faith and patience was the token] of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer:

6. Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you:

7. And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels [Gr. "the Angels of his power"],

8. In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

9. Who ["inasmuch as they"] shall be punished with everlasting destruction [shall suffer as punishment eternal destruction] from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;

10. When he shall come to be glorified in his saints [all them that believe], and to be admired [the word is used in the archaic sense of being "wondered at"; not as the feeling of joyful appreciation with which we contemplate beautiful objects] in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day [the day referred to in "when he shall come" at the beginning of the verse].

11. Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would [vouchsafe] count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power ["that our God may count you worthy of the calling, and fulfil all good pleasure of Divine goodness, and faith's work in power."]

12. That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

NOTE.—The annotations are taken from *The Speaker's Commentary*. (London: John Murray.)

Chapter II.

1 *He willeth them to continue stedfast in the truth received, 3 sheweth that there shall be a departure from the faith, 9 and a discovery of antichrist, before the day of the Lord come. 15 And thereupon repeateth his former exhortation, and prayeth for them.*

1. Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him,

2. That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled [with a view to your being not quickly shaken from your sober mind, nor yet be troubled], neither by spirit [supernatural impulse], nor by word [ordinary instruction], nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.

3. Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day shall not come, except there come a [the] falling away [the word is often applied to desertion of the true religion and true God] first, and that man of sin [patristic expositors impress upon us the individuality of the lawless one. Mediæval writers bring out the idea, not only that there are many Antichrists, each a type of the perfect incarnation of Lawlessness (which is a Scriptural and patristic idea), but that such types may be found in isolated popes] be revealed the son of perdition [see St. John xvii. 12. One by his crimes fitted for death, and sure to be destroyed];

4. Who opposeth and exalteth himself [exceedingly] above all that is called God or that is worshipped; so that he [taketh his seat in the temple of God] as God [omit "as God"] sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself [off] that he is God. [The ambitious self-designation of the Man of Sin is indicated (see note at the end of this chapter).]

5. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?

6. And now ye know what withholdeth that I might be revealed in his time [his own season—not before].

7. For the mystery of iniquity [lawlessness] doth already work; only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.

8. And then shall that Wicked [the lawless One] be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit [breath. Cf. Isa. xi. 4] of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: [Cf. the half line of Milton: "Far off his coming shone."]

9. Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,

10. And with all deceivableness or unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

11. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie [the lie: referring to ver. 9]:

12. That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. [That they might be judged, all collectively, who have not believed the truth, but have taken their pleasure in the unrighteousness (*sc.* of the Man of Sin).]

13. But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth :

14. Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

15. Therefore, brethren stand fast and hold the traditions which ye have been [were] taught, whether by word, or our epistle.

16. Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself [Chrysostom invites the special attention of those who deny the co-equal divinity of the Son, because he is named after the Father in the baptismal formula. Here he stands first], and God even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace.

17. Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.

NOTE.

"The most striking feature in the Epistle is this apocalyptic passage, announcing the revelation of the 'Man of Sin' (ii. 1-12). . .

"The passage speaks of a great apostasy which is to usher in the advent of Christ, the great judgment. There are three prominent figures in the picture, Christ, Antichrist, and the Restrainer. Antichrist is described as the Man of Sin, the Son of Perdition, as the Adversary who exalteth himself above all that is called God, as making himself out to be God. Later on (for apparently the reference is the same) he is styled the 'mystery of lawlessness,' 'the lawless one.' The Restrainer is in one place spoken of in the masculine as a person (*ὁ κατέχων*), in another in the neuter as a power, an influence (*τὸ κατέχων*). The 'mystery of lawlessness' is already at work. At present it is checked by the Restrainer; but the check will be removed, and then it will break out in all its violence. Then Christ will appear, and the enemy shall be consumed by the breath of his mouth, shall be brought to naught by the splendour of his presence.

"Many different explanations have been offered of this passage. By one class of interpreters it has been referred to circumstances which passed within the circle of the Apostle's own experience, the events of his own lifetime, or the period immediately following. Others again have seen in it the prediction of a crisis yet to be realised, the end of all things. The former of these, the Practicists, have identified the 'Man of Sin' with divers historical characters—with Caligula, Nero, Titus, Simon Magus, Simon son of Giora, the high-priest Ananias, &c., and have sought for a historical counterpart to the Restrainer in like manner. The latter, the Futurists, have also given various accounts of the Antichrist, the mysterious power of evil which is

already working. To Protestants for instance it is the Papacy; to the Greek Church, Mohammedanism. And in the same way each generation and section in the Church has regarded it as a prophecy of that particular power which seemed to them and in their own time to be most fraught with evil to the true faith."—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible*.

Chapter III.

He craveth their prayers for himself, 3 testifieth what confidence he hath in them, 5 maketh request to God in their behalf, 6 giveth them divers precepts, especially to shun idleness, and ill company, 16 and last of all concludeth with prayer and salutation.

1. Finally [the word used by one who is rapidly proceeding to the end of what he has to say], brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified [a delicate reference here to the Psalter], even as it is with you :

2. And that we may be delivered from [the] unreasonable [Gr. absurd] and wicked men : for all men have not faith [for it is not all that have faith].

3. But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil [guard you from the Evil One].

4. And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you.

5. And [but may] the Lord direct your hearts, [another instance of prayer to Christ] into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ [or "the patience of Christ."]

6. Now we command you, brethren [omit "brethren." This passage is important as bearing upon Apostolical authority] in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves [means "to abstain from habitual conversation with," "to keep at a distance from" "to treat with studied distance and coldness"] from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.

7. For yourselves know how [it is better to teach by one's life than by one's sermons] ye ought to follow us : for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you :

8. Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought [gratis, *i.e.* from a low, material point of view. Assuredly, the missionary or pastor does not get his bread without giving return, even when he pays no money for it. Cf. St. Luke x. 7; St. Matt. x. 10]; but wrought with labour, and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you :

9. Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us.

10. For even when we were with you, this [the A.V. well marks the emphatic position of the pronoun *this* in the original] we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat [a favourite proverb in the Jewish schools].

11. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies [busy only with what is not their own business].

12. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ [Chrysostom notes the softening tone of the Apostle here], that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread [*their own* is very emphatic, *not* other people's].

13. But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing [Bishop Ellicott well translates—"lose not heart in well doing."]

14. And if any man obey not our word by this Epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.

15. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

16. Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace [Now he, the Lord of the Peace, give you his peace, a reference to the peace which Christ promised (St. John xiv. 27). Again a prayer to Christ] always by all means. The Lord be with you all. [The old liturgical form, Latin and Greek, which took the place of Numbers vi. 24 in the old rite. It most probably refers to the great promise ("I am with you always," St. Matt. xxviii. 20), and implies, "may that promise be fulfilled!"]

17. The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every Epistle: so I write [suggests a security against the possibility of forgery].

18. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. [With some slight variations in form, the "Grace" closes all the Pauline Epistles (and that to the *Hebrews*), and is peculiar to them. "Such a preacher of Divine Grace was Paul!" (Estius).] Amen.

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE

TO

TIMOTHY.

(MACEDONIA, A.D. 64 OR 57.)

[NOTE.—“The two Epistles to Timothy and the Epistle to Titus have been called pastoral Epistles. They abound in instruction relative to the oversight of the Church and other duties of the Christian ministry. They also abound in instruction suited for the churches themselves.

“Timothy was an inhabitant, perhaps a native, of Lystra, Acts xvi. 1, 2. His father was a Greek, his mother and grandmother pious Jewesses, by whom he was carefully trained in a knowledge of the Scriptures, 2 Tim. iii. 14. He was probably converted by Paul on his first visit to Lystra, Acts xiv. 6 (see 1 Tim. i. 2 : 2 Tim. i. 2 : 1 Cor. iv. 17); and on his second visit was chosen to be the companion of the Apostle in his journeys and labours. He is everywhere spoken of in terms of high praise, 1 Thess. iii. 2 : Phil. ii. 20, and is a noble instance of eminent gifts and grace in one young in years and feeble in health (iv. 12 : v. 23).

“It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to determine when this Epistle was written. It was evidently addressed to Timothy at Ephesus, and when Paul was either in Macedonia or on his way thither (see i. 3). From Acts xx. 1, we learn that Paul left Ephesus after the uproar caused by Demetrius, and went to Macedonia; and some learned critics have supposed that this Epistle was written at that time. There are, however, several serious difficulties in the way of that supposition.”—ANGUS' *Bible Handbook*.]

1 Timothy i. 4.

“Godly edifying which is in faith.

EDIFICATION.

IT appears that at Ephesus there were some who taught another doctrine than Paul had expounded in the name of Christ. Paul, on that account, besought Timothy to abide at Ephesus, to do his utmost to check the progress of error,—to “charge some that they teach no other doctrine, neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions,

rather than godly edifying which is in faith." The Apostle teaches that there is no edification, or building up, in fables and questions and fancies and controversies, however clever they may be, or fascinating; he says that the true edification is in *faith* alone, that is, in a positive and unquestioning act of the mind; not in speculation, but in trust; not in doubt, but in belief; not in hesitation, but in certainty and assurance. The Apostle's aim was to build up character, not to distract the mind; and his teaching is that, if character is to be built up and the soul to be made strong, it must be by *faith*—simple, earnest, hearty trust—and not by the pranks and antics of a curious fancy.

First of all then, the Apostle's object was obviously good; it was neither more nor less than the building up of man's highest nature. The word to be strictly kept in view is the word "building,"—edification, structure, uprearing; anything and everything that meant solid masonry with a view to completeness and accommodation. The Apostle did not want to make men clever at asking questions, but to make them strong and valiant in all the highest and purest elements of the soul. Paul called men to strength; his motto was—"Quit you like men, be strong." He wishes his followers and colleagues to "endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ." There was nothing artificial or merely decorative about this man. He wanted solid foundations and strong masonry up to the very top and finish of the building. He was particular about the quality of every stone, and about the exact position which it filled in the moral structure. He would have nothing done in confusion; however ample the materials might be, and however valuable in themselves, they must be set in regular mechanical order, and brought to the completion of a purpose by the hand of master-builders. He pitied those who were driven about by every wind of doctrine, and repeatedly called upon them to be rooted and grounded in the truth and in the love of God. The figure changes, but the purpose remains the same. If Paul uses the figure of a building, he will have deep and immovable foundations; if he uses the figure of a tree, he will have a deep and broad root, assured that in the root alone was the security of vitality and growth on the part of the tree itself.

A man is not necessarily a genius because he can put hard questions and suggest very serious doubts. A kind of grim respectability is now in some quarters attached to unbelief or scepticism. A man who says he knows nothing—especially if he describe himself by the term *agnostic*--is supposed at once to be an advanced thinker and room is made for him in respectable circles. A man who does not go to church is supposed to be spending his time in lofty contemplations, and to be threading his dim and perilous way through firmaments of undiscovered stars. It would be a curious study to find out the philosophy of this estimate of character. Let a man announce himself to be orthodox or sound,—that is, to be satisfied with great doctrines and well-tested propositions—and he is instantly regarded as in some way and degree behind the age: but let him begin to doubt, to deny, to cross-examine, and to hint at unbelief, and instantly he is supposed to be a man of might and of mark, and to be deserving of a high seat in the synagogue of progress. If it be a mark of genius to doubt, then why should we not all become geniuses at once by each man doubting his own existence? That would give a man an air of sublimity; he might say, How do I *know* that I exist? I have never seen myself; I may have seen parts of what I have called myself, but my whole self I have never seen. If it be asked in amazement by those who hear the statement, What! have you not seen yourself in a looking-glass? the answer would be—No; that is not myself; it is at best but a reflection of my bodily presence: and why should I be a disciple of the looking-glass? The looking-glass itself was made, and I must know who made it before I will believe it: perhaps a better reflective medium may be discovered some day, and therefore I will wait and not trust myself to this imperfect instrument which you call a mirror: what business had any man to discover the art of making mirrors? Shame upon him, I say, to try to improve upon nature: nature evidently did not intend that we should see ourselves, and any man who has discovered a medium through which he proposes to show himself, part of himself, is guilty of an act of impertinence. The foolish man might continue his speech thus:—It will be time enough to take a house to live in when I am perfectly assured of my own existence: so also it would be time

enough to buy myself a suit of clothes when I am sure that I really do live, but until that matter is proved beyond all dispute I intend to remain without clothing and without habitation.

In the most ordinary affairs of life the very thing that is accounted grand in spiritual matters would be not only impracticable but ridiculous and insane; in other words, men dare not apply their religious negativism or agnosticism to commercial matters or to the affairs of general social life, because instantly they would break down under the pressure of practical requirements. What merchant, for example, dare write a letter to Australia: he might very well reason with himself that the man to whom he is writing may be dead; the distance is many thousands of miles; life is very uncertain and at the best is of short duration: long before the letter reaches him the man may be dead and gone and forgotten. Or who would venture upon going any considerable journey: the engine may break down, a hundred accidents are always possible: the man for whom the journey is undertaken may be travelling in the other direction at the very moment that he is being sought for: in short, the whole arrangement is so full of possibilities, dangers, difficulties, that no man in his senses would venture to undertake any considerable journey in quest either of business or of pleasure. Or who dare venture to act upon a written order for goods? Who wrote the order? May not the man who wrote the order have repented of having done so? May not some circumstance have occurred entirely to alter his mind? Here again the element of uncertainty is so distinct as to render any acceptance of the written order altogether out of the range of reason. These illustrations show that the ordinary business of life could not be transacted if doubts, fears, questionings, suspicions, and distrusts were not kept within certain limits. In other words, there must be faith in business whether there is faith in religion or not. It is idle for men to speak contemptuously of religious faith when their whole life is built upon a structure of trust and is inspired by the very sentiment of confidence. It is faith that builds up fortunes as certainly as it is faith that builds up character. Yet when it is thought of in connection with fortune it is supposed to be indicative of sagacity, farsightedness, great shrewdness and

enterprise ; but the moment this very selfsame faith is applied to religious matters, it is thought to savour of intellectual vanity at the best, and possibly of intellectual imbecility.

In the great matter of human salvation we are called, in the first place, to believe in Jesus Christ. That is the beginning. The mistake often made is that the inquirer meddles with things that do not belong to him. I offer a piece of bread to a hungry child, but the hungry child, instantly assuming the rights of a rational creature, demands to know the processes of germination through which the seed passed before it became bread : who sowed the seed ? what right had he to sow it ? how did he know the world would live long enough to need the fruitage of such sowing ? was it not highly impertinent on his part to presume that there would be a future ? The child who could ask such questions as these would prove that he was not in real hunger, or he certainly would have first eaten the bread, and then have undertaken the unprofitable business of philosophic speculation regarding the mechanics and chemistry of nature. So when we present the bread of life to a hearer of the gospel he says, Answer my doubts, and then I shall believe what you say ; but so long as my doubts exist it is impossible for me to lend my whole attention to your appeals. How do we treat the case of the hungering child ? Our answer is distinct and experimental— I have been hungering myself, I have eaten part of the very same bread which I offer to you, and the result of my eating has been the recovery of strength and energy, and therefore, because I have had experience of the goodness of this food, I offer it to you, and I even venture to press it upon your acceptance. The answer is good, and would be accounted good in every other sphere of life. Whenever a man can speak from his personal experience he has a right to be heard and to be believed, unless there be some flaw in his character which may be considered as destructive of his credibility. The fact that there are enemies, assailants, controversialists, and sceptics, or the fact that there are some things unknown and others doubtful, ought not to interfere with our diligent attention to things of practical and unquestionable importance. Suppose a farmer going down to the seashore should look at the lighthouse, the coastguards, the

telescopes, the cannon, the fortresses, which he will find there, might he not reason within himself concerning these things, and draw very serious conclusions regarding them? Might he not say—I am an agriculturist in the Midland counties, and I have been carrying on my occupation these many years, without ever so much as knowing that the coastline of the country required all these defences: I see now what a very doubtful and hazardous position I have been occupying: all these things betoken enemies, dangers, possibilities of invasion; and how can I tell but that to-morrow, or the day after, there may be such an invasion of England as shall result in the destruction of all property? I awake to find myself in the interior of a land whose edge is protected by cannon and by fortress, by soldier and by sailor: knowing what I now do of the dangers which beset the country, I shall certainly give up all processes connected with the tillage of the land. Now this would be no more irrational than the reasoning which is often indulged in respecting the preaching of the gospel, and the propagation of Christianity by all usual means. A man goes down to the coastline of theological speculation, and he finds there doctors, critics, learned men of every name and degree; apologists, controversialists, men who are gifted in the use of words, and he says, How can there be truth in religion so long as all these coastguards are needed along the line of the sea? If theology were true, it would need no such defences as these; the very fact that there are theological soldiers and sailors and coastguards shows to me that the whole land of religion is in a most unsafe condition. So long as those coastguards are there, says the farmer, I will never till a field, because I may never reap the fruit; and so long as these coastguards are there, says the theological inquirer, I will never believe in Christianity, because they may be overpowered by the enemy and I myself may be brought to spiritual ruin.

The fear is that we may encourage doubts, questionings and vain fancies of the mind, only that we may have more liberty to commit sin. Here is the infinite danger. Sometimes we are apt to dismiss our conscience under the plea of having a difficulty with our intellect. Every man must examine himself in this department, for it is impossible for any public teacher to conduct

the scrutiny. All who know human nature will be ready to admit that the moral difficulty is the supreme obstacle in the way of progress. A man becomes wrong in his heart, and then he attempts to suit his intellectual conditions and convictions to his new feeling. A man disputes the possibility of the commandments having been given at Sinai in order that he may indulge unlimited moral licence. There is an awful block in the way of the man who wants to sin, and yet to do it with some measure of respectability, and that great block is the Bible. That Book will never allow a man to sin without criticism and condemnation. Whatever difficulties may gather around the intellectual side of the Bible, there remains its sublime moral aspect, its continual appeal concerning righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come. Paul will therefore have us fix our attention upon things that are solid and substantial, upon the things which are well understood and thoroughly established amongst us : he preaches temperance, meekness, charity, godliness, all the moral virtues and graces, and he would have us cultivate these, and incorporate these into our character, and through our love of these he would have us approach the intellectual difficulties which seem to gather around the altar of Christ. Too often we reverse the process, and we hinder ourselves from moral blessings by asking unanswerable questions in theology. We ought to begin at the other point, accepting the great moral teaching of the Book, believing devoutly in the character of our Lord Jesus Christ, assured of the wisdom and beneficence of his motive and purpose, and then we should proceed gradually, very slowly indeed, but very surely, to the contemplation of those awful mysteries which seem to lie at the very heart of truth. The question which we have to put to ourselves is—*are we being built up ? is our character larger ? is our manhood assuming shapeliness and proportion ? and is there in it a spirit of hospitality, welcoming those who are outside to partake of such spiritual riches as we ourselves may have gathered ?* Do not let us seek to be built up in cleverness, in great mental agility, in a kind of exercise which ends in beating the air ; but rather let us seek to be built up in truth, in love, in confidence towards one another, and especially in that trust in prayer which enables us to increase the volume of our petitions and to press them upon the attention of heaven with all the intensity of complete and unchangeable love.

1 Tim. i. 15.

“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”

WHAT CHRIST CAME FOR.

THERE need then be no mystery as to why Christ came. When a man has only one purpose it ought to be ascertainable. How many men are able to realise a double purpose? “A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.” He is now here, now there; we know not where he is or what he is at. Unity of purpose is the secret of strength, and the key of success. Ask Jesus Christ when you may, where you may, what he came for, he never changes the substance of his answer: ask him what he goes away for, and he says, “For your sake.” Yet there are those who profess not to understand why Christ came, or what he sought to do in coming. This must arise from a false tone of mind; its motive must be found in a divided and mischievous heart. We can understand the foundation facts of the gospel sufficiently to begin their happy experience. That is a terrible statement to make. It is nothing in words, but when you apply it to the whole line of your life it makes the disbeliever a liar at every point. Christ will not have collateral questions raised as if they were essential or central. There are men who are making cloudy theologies all round about the line of his motive. He disowns them. He will have it stated in every language and in every tone of the human voice that in coming he came to be the Saviour, and to be the Saviour of sinners.

The text is associated with a very curious commentary. The introduction is this:—“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation.” The commentary is this:—“of whom [sinners] I am chief.” Let us throw aside the introduction and the conclusion, both of great consequence, for one little moment, that we may fix our mind upon the central “saying”—“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” No other man ever did

that. He is always unique ; his purpose has no divided fellowship. Other men think they were sent into the world to do divers good works, and so they were—initial, reformative, ameliorative—but this Man says he came into the world to work fundamentally, to get at the core of things, to “save sinners.” Who is the author of this “saying?” We cannot tell. It is not Paul’s. Paul quotes it, refers to it, cites it. So much the better. There ought to be certain great outstanding, all-inclusive truths that are anonymous ; if they have a signature, it must be divine. Paul seems to be here in the attitude of one who is quoting the common substance of the faith : as who should say, This is not my saying, or Peter’s saying, or the saying of John ; it is the spiritual, ghostly, ineffable, ever-present thought and truth of this Christly kingdom ; without it the kingdom has no existence. A very wonderful thing it is to trace a great many of these anonymous sayings. “It is more blessed to give than to receive” ;—“Then remembered they the words of the Lord Jesus.” They had been forgotten, but they came up again in connection with certain infinite developments and possibilities ; they recognised the Name in the vastness and beneficence of the issue. There are great truths that need no signing. Blessed be God, we cannot say, This is the ink of the prince, the bishop, the primate, the council. Let these talk about things ; the things themselves are let down from heaven. We are authors of commentaries ; we are not authors of revelation.

What is the relation of the Apostle to this so-called “saying” ? It is a two-fold relationship. First, he accepts it as a fact ; secondly, he illustrates it as an experience. Sometimes we can only get at certain truths through certain personalities. For the time being the personalities are the truth to us. The truth is larger than we can fully comprehend, but we see it in some degree incarnated, personified in great saint, in holy father, in pure, gentle, much-enduring mother ; and we say, Though we cannot build a firmament, we can build a tent, a house ; we can put up a visible and measurable sanctuary, within which we may see many forms and expressions of ineffable and incomprehensible truth. Paul pre-eminently represented certain of these great truths. Here he represents the greatest of them all. He

has met a saving Man ; he has been overmatched by the strength of gentleness ; he has seen One whom he can never unsee. There are some lives we can never forget. We forget a thousand men in a day, but there comes up a Personality the sight of which we can never obscure or obliterate. Hence on, Paul will talk about nothing else. He will say, Have you seen him ? have you heard him ? do you know him ? will you come to him ? Of whom speakest thou, madman ? I am not mad, I speak my life's love ; I have seen a Man, who has taken me into his heart and cleansed me in the fountain of his blood ; and hence on I see no other sight ; for that glory I live for ever. How can the pulpit succeed if it have a thousand topics ! The pulpit must have one theme, and that one theme must include all others that are its kindred in range, in nobleness, in beauty, in spiritual usefulness, and as meeting all the daily necessities of life : for is not life one long cry, the utterance of one sharp poignant pain ? There is but a step between any text in the Bible and the Cross on which the Saviour died.

Paul accepted this statement as a fact. He said, it is to me true ; I have no misgiving about it ; this fact covers my whole life ; this fact is an answer to my felt but unuttered prayer ; this fact unites, centralises, and glorifies human history : this fact is a key ; with it I unlock the mystery of human evolution and progress : this fact is a promise : I see in it morning and summer and growth and harvest : I accept it as true. If true, it is characteristically true. By that I mean that without it Christianity has no existence. It is the note of Christianity ; it is the very pulse of the Divine thought. It is not a fact amongst a thousand other facts, it is the fact that centralises all other realities, and glorifies them, and shapes them into a highway to the heaven. If true, it is unreservedly true. There are some lamps that want all heaven to shine in. Sometimes we almost feel as if the sun were complaining because the firmament were not large enough, and some great summer day when he revels in his strength, when he rejoices as a strong man to run a race, it seems as if he could light ten thousand firmaments. So with certain " sayings," doctrines, revelations ; they do not belong to one country ; no one country could hold them all. Nor can

they be condensed into any one language ; they say, Express me in all western tongues, in all eastern dialects, in all ancient speech, in all modern statement and eloquence ; I want all your instruments and mediums of communication, and I want ten thousand-fold more than you can give me : I come, say these truths one by one, from eternity, from God.

It is "worthy of all acceptance." That is, of the acceptance of all ; or, worthy of all acceptance—undoubting, centralised, intense, indivisible acceptance. Christ occupies the whole man. Reason accepts him ; imagination welcomes him ; conscience hails him King of Righteousness ; the broken heart says, Come to me, O thou Physician of eternity ! The whole nature keeps open house for this one Saviour. Take it either in the one way or in the other, the acceptance is "all." Have you who profess this great Christian thought received Christ with "all acceptance ?" or do you keep him out of some chambers of your life ? Does he own the whole course of your being ? Let the question press itself ; let no man, preacher or teacher, urge it, lest it fail by some subtle influence which involves the condemnation of himself. If true, it is pregnantly true ; that is, it includes and involves other truths. See how many we have here. "Came into the world"—where was he before ? With the Father in eternal places, in the heavenlies in the hidden nameless sanctuaries. He "came"—the gates flew open to allow his progress ; he "came"—then it must have been voluntary, spontaneous, an action with his own consent. He was not murdered ; he was the priest as well as the victim. "To save sinners" : what a view of human nature, what an estimate of the general human condition ! "Sinners"—lawbreakers. If the Apostle were to go into detail, he would say, Unholy, profane, murderers of fathers, murderers of mothers, manslayers, whoremongers, man-stealers, liars, perjured persons ; that would be the detailed catalogue, the bill of infamous particulars. But he takes up the word "sinners," and says, that is the most pregnant word in human language. And Jesus Christ came not to save in detail, but to save in principle, in the spirit, in the innermost reality of things.

If true, it is beneficently true. "To save." Sweet word ! a

child's little word, a word that a minor may touch, a word that God may use. "To save"—not to save from consequences only, but to save the soul in every thought, element, motive, capability, and issue. "To save"—that is what the physician is trying to do. "To save"—that is what the mother is trying to do when she sits up at midnight rocking the poor little fading, dying infant in her warm lap. "Save"—he must be more woman than man; he must be all heart; he must be God. How grand the word is when unqualified! Not the worst of sinners, partial sinners, ignorant sinners, unwilling sinners. We befool ourselves by the use of epithets; often we linger on the qualifying word, and forget the substantive. That substantive is "sinners"; it wants no side word to light it up: it is simply "sinners." If that word, therefore, shall include us, any of us, the text is ours. Should it not include us all? It does include us: all, but I am referring to man's own consent and view. Christ himself did this, for he said, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." If any man suppose himself not to be lost, the Cross has no message for him. The gospel can only find entrance where there is conscious, self-condemning sin.

The Apostle illustrates this fact as an experience—"of whom I am chief." What was he before? He gives his character here:—"Blasphemer, persecutor, injurious": and Christ saved me. Did he do it easily, off-handedly, as if with a wave of his hand? No, "The grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus": I seemed to be so bad as to require the whole Cross to myself. "Chief"—can there be more than one chief? Yes: in this judgment each man is chief of sinners. The more we grow in holiness, the more we grow in conscious unworthiness. Things that before were crimes have now become sins; offences that were merely in the letter have become criminalities of the soul. Increase of sensitiveness is increase of self-condemnation. "Of whom I"—Timothy, now teaching thee, writing this fond love-letter to thee, wanting thee to be a minister of Jesus—"I am chief": the publican had not half the need to say, God be merciful to me, that I have; the penitent thief was not so near loss and ruin as

I feel myself to be ; but, Timothy, let my very remembrance of shame add to the pathos of my appeal : “ This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy ”—hold thy faith, hold it with a good conscience ; love thy Saviour, do thy work in the spirit of the Cross. The gospel reveals man to himself. Paul did not know how bad a man he was until he became a good one. We do not know how much we have neglected prayer until we begin to pray. There are times when we see ourselves as we really are : oh, how we hate the sight and abhor ourselves in dust and ashes !

The gospel addresses itself to our supreme experiences :—“ Of whom I am chief ” : the worst man that ever lived, the sinner that taxes the very energy of omnipotence, the proud rebellious heart that can hardly be melted by the tears of God. The gospel does not deal with our little offences, our shortcomings, our infirmities ; it does not say, Let these be forgotten, and let us henceforth remember to do somewhat better. The gospel addresses the world in its incarnate sin ; for the devil is certainly as incarnate as ever Christ was. They meet each other in face-to-face, tremendous conflict. Sin is embodied, sin darkens the earth ; sin throws its shadow upon the shining of the sun. The gospel is not afraid of this ; the gospel in the person of the Son of God meets Satan, Satan bruises the Son’s heel, but the Son treads upon the serpent’s head, the greater victory,—the one a bruise, the other a destruction. Go forth, thou Son of God, thou Son of man, and win the glorious victory ! Christianity has always had its facts at hand as its most patent and conclusive vindication. Said evil-minded men upon one occasion, What is to be done in this case ? what is to be done ? shall we frown upon these men ? shall we sentence them to prison ? shall we lay them under a succession of penalties ? We can do that, but there is the healed man ; that is the difficulty we cannot overcome : Peter and John we could deal with, iron and darkness, hunger and pain, might overcome them : but there is the healed man ! Always testify on behalf of your healer. If the men to whom Christ has revealed himself would speak about him we should need no higher argument, no subtler, nobler eloquence. What sayest thou of him ? He is a sinner. Whether he be a sinner or no, my lords, I know not : one thing I know, that

whereas I was blind, now I see. That is the testimony we want. We want a testifying Church; not blatantly, aggressively, offensively, but quietly, constantly, and livingly. The examples are the best arguments.

We have been dealing with a saying pronounced to be true, full of faith, worthy of all acceptance, but there are men who are making it their business to deny this gospel. What have I to do with them? Here is a man who has a positive statement to make, who has experienced this love and devoted his whole life to its revelation and its attestation. What am I to do? Why believe the denier when the confessor is at hand? Why believe the layman when the expert testifies? How do I do in business? How do I do in all the ordinary routine of life? This is my course: believe the man who has had experience, who testifies upon the basis of that experience, whose life is a daily confirmation of that experience, who dies in the triumphant power and glory of that experience, who longs to be with the Lord he has served with so much ability and zeal. That would be in consonance with what I do in the commonest and simplest things in life. I bring the builder to put up my house, and the larger his experience the deeper is my confidence. Why should I bring the man who never built a house and who does not believe in house-building? I cannot waste my money so. If a child wants educating, do I take him to a person who cannot read or write, or to a person who is skilled in letters? Certainly to the latter. With whom would I entrust my life on the open sea—to a man who never saw a ship, or a man who has made it the one business of his life to understand the law and practice of navigation? There I should have no difficulty. So will I be reasonable here. When a man like Paul—for his whole life is before us, and we can judge him by all its lines—says that Jesus Christ can save the chief of sinners, I will believe him in preference to any witness who first of all denies his own sin and rejects the notion that he needs a Saviour. On this reasoning I would base my life. This reasoning I would turn into an altar before which I would fall down in attitude of prayer, and there day by day would say with all my heart's desire and deepest love, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, how can we thank thee for this sweet light of the Sabbath day? We would accept it as thy benediction, and as a call to ourselves to arise and shine, for our light is come. From the glory of thine own eternity thou dost clothe the morning with brightness, and the evening with the lustre of stars. Thou art light, and in thee is no darkness at all; and where thou art, there is no night. Thou art the glory of the heavens. We would remember that thou callest thy children to be children of the light and of the day; we would hear in the voice of the day a call to our own moral lustre and peace. May we remember that as Christ is the Light of the world, so hath he made us also to be lights of our generation! may we not put our light under a bushel, but so set it before men, that they may see it and be blest! Teach us the responsibility of having light; teach us that they that walk in the day should not stumble; and enable us to be sober, abandoning the darkness of the night, and walking as those upon whom a great light has risen. O Sun of righteousness, mystery of fire, and light, and beauty, may we dwell under thy wings, and shed forth in holy reflection thine own brightness! We find it easy to thank thee for light in the summer morning; our mouth is filled with laughter; in the time of unshaded glory, we find it easy to sing; thy light makes us tuneful; the fulness of thy blessing stirs our praises, and it is easy to say, in the noontide of honour and prosperity, "It is the Lord." Thou knowest how we shrink from the shadows which are gathered oftentimes in the firmament of thy providence. When thou dost gather the thunder-cloud around thee, then do we tremble, as if thou hadst forgotten to be gracious; and if thou causest a storm to arise upon the sea, then we fear as those who have no Father. Lord, help us to show a Christian, filial love, triumphant in the time of shadow and darkness, and trouble and loss, and in the night of our suffering do thou give us songs of hope. Thus shall the light and the darkness be full of God, and the morning and the evening shall be as day; and whether we are praising thee for thy goodness, or bending with trustful submission under the chastisement of thy rod, thy glory shall be revealed in us, and men shall know us as the sons of God. We have occasion to bless thee for every shadow which thou hast sent us. If we had always lived in the heat of summer, we should have become full of plague and full of death; but thou didst attempt the light and the air, thou didst constitute thyself the minister of our souls, and even when thy winds have been cold and bitter, and thy presence has been far removed from us, thou wert teaching us lessons which could not be learned in summer, and which no joy could ever teach us. We remember the hardness of the discipline by which we have been trained; we remember our disappointments, our sufferings under the strife of tongues, our hidden sorrows in the chamber of affliction and in the sanctuary of death; we

remember the blighting of our hopes, and the unexpected hushing of our songs; we remember when the staff broke in our hand, and when our poor strength gave way, as we lay down under the juniper-tree, desiring rather to die than to live. We said in such dark hours that our days were vanity and our nights a torment; we said, the Lord hath forgotten to be gracious, and there is no song in our mouth. Yet now we bless thee for the stormy day and the starless night; we thank thee that many a staff has broken in our hand and pierced us: we thank thee that thou hast occasionally barked our fig-tree; we bless thee for the darkness thou hast sent, for we have heard thy voice in the cloud. So are we to-day stronger and nobler and truer, by reason of thy providences alike of judgment and of mercy, and we have come as a trained band, smitten and bruised, and yet blest with innumerable benedictions, to make a joyful noise unto the Rock of our salvation. We should have lifted towards thy throne faces unstained with sorrow, unmarked by traces of weariness, but for our great sin. God be merciful unto us sinners. O mighty Prince and Saviour, Son of God, Lamb of God, only Begotten of the Father, thou lovest sinners, thou receivest sinners still; thou wilt not drive us away from thy mercy-seat when we cry, "Lord, forgive our sins!" Amen.

1 Timothy iii. 16.

"God was manifest in the flesh."

GOD REVEALED.

THIS simplifies the whole mystery of the Godhead, as far as simplification is possible. We know now what to do: when we want to know what God is, what God does, what God thinks, what God wishes, how God governs the world, we have to look at Jesus Christ. This gives a new value to the biography of the Son of God. He is not only an historical character, he is a revelation; he was God manifest, made clear, visible, simple, intelligible. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." We have seen more than the Christ—the measurable, living, personal Christ; we have looked upon Jesus, and therefore have looked upon God. If this be not the meaning of the words, we cannot tell what that meaning is. "God was manifest in the flesh": God was revealed in the flesh; he condescended or came down from heaven and tabernacled with men, and was as a man among men: we ourselves have seen and felt and handled of the word of life. The idea would seem to be this: we have been familiar with the idea of God, a God reigning in eternity, concealed by clouds and darkness; a mysterious yet benign, a judicial yet gracious, Providence: but what that power is we know not. We

have believed it, for we seemed to need it all ; it alone filled our imagination, and satisfied our aspirations, and gave us religious equanimity and contentment ; but beyond that we could not go ; we had no light, no definition, no intellectual apprehension, that could be stated in terms : but now all that has changed ; the screen has been taken down, or the veil has been rent, or all the intervening circumstances have been set back for a little time, and we have actually seen the whole economy of God ; yea, we have seen God himself ; we know now the strings and the keys of the instrument over which he presides ; and we have seen his whole action, so far as it may be brought within the limits of time and space and sense. How the story of the Evangelists changes under this conception ! We have to deal, not with the Son of Mary, the Son of Joseph, but with the Son of God, and God the Son. Let us fearlessly accept the words in that sense, and at least see how they bear the strain and test of actual experience, of concrete positive life, as shown in the history of Jesus Christ.

The great challenge may be thus stated : if you want to see the Father, look upon the Son ; if you want to see God, look upon Christ ; turn away your intellectual imagination from all transcendental thinking and speculativeness, and fix the whole attention of mind, heart, and soul, upon the life of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. That life is, within its own limits, the biography of God. We make the statement thus boldly and frankly in order to show that we are about fearlessly to approach the grand test. If the life shrink from this test, then we have been deceived by a cunningly devised or a clumsily constructed fable.

Our first thought naturally turns to God's greatness. Observe how it is that we have come into the New Testament : we have come into the New Testament through the pathways of the Old. We have not broken in, as it were, rudely and unexpectedly upon the Sanctuary of the New Testament ; we have been Scripture students up to this moment ; we have finished the last syllable of Malachi, we have waited all the intervening centuries, and now that the God of the Old Testament, as the God of eternity, as seated on the circle of eternity, as inhabiting eternity

and the praises thereof, is before our imagination, any one who presumes to represent him must not disturb this idea too rudely. Who can read the Old Testament without being overpowered with a sense of the Divine Majesty? He is the high and the holy One; the clouds are the dust of his feet; he taketh up the isles as a very little thing; all the nations are as the drop of a bucket before him; he orders the stars like servants that must obey his will; he is clothed with honour and majesty: can we see him? Yes. Where? God manifest in the flesh, in the person of his Son. Is that seriously affirmed? It is. Then turn to the life at once: "Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." We are expecting grandeur, blaze after blaze of glory: we expect to hear great thunderings and trumpeting; we are looking for a figure brighter than the midday sun: now, can we see the God we have worshipped? We see him in Jesus Christ of Nazareth. But is it grandeur that we see in him? Yes. It does not meet with our ideas of grandeur. No, because our ideas of grandeur themselves are wrong; we have been mistaking the true definition of grandeur all the time. Analyse our thought of grandeur, and what is it?—bulk, brilliance, pomp, dazzling glory. But all this is timidity, and weakness, and error. The true grandeur is simplicity. Give us an idea of grandeur, say in the fields of earth: now choose your symbol. Who would not hunt in all the gardens and paradises of time to bring forth the largest, most glowing flower? But Jesus Christ would not choose thus. Fix upon some personage in history who should represent the idea of grandeur as we view that term: probably we should fix upon Solomon; the like of him never appeared on the thrones of the ages: but Jesus Christ, acknowledging Solomon's outward pomp and grandeur, said that the lily excelled him in glory, for "Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." The sacrifice, therefore, we have to make at the first is a sacrifice of false definition. Life is grander than any accident that can attach to it. To be is more than to be clothed upon, adorned, decorated, enriched, handled by generous art. The glory of a man is to be a man, how poor soever, or lost, or driven before a cold wind, houseless, homeless; still, to be a man is to eclipse the stars, when it becomes a question of comparative value and glory. The tiniest child is greater than the vastest sun that burns

in boundless space. This is the teaching of Jesus Christ himself regarding humanity. Yet, this simplicity must itself be well guarded from rude and exaggerated interpretation. Jesus Christ was most simple: he brought the grandeur, he did not receive it; he conferred the honour, he never accepted it; when he sat down at a feast he made it a sacrament; when he went into the poorest house, by the grandeur of his personality it flamed like a palace built by God; he transfigured, transformed, all things, and by his use he made them sacred. If Jesus Christ is so simple as this, then we may make free with him? Do not tempt him! There were men who ventured to make themselves familiar with him, but they never repeated the rude offence. He was hedged about with a mysterious sacredness. If we would meet him upon a common level, one look would set us back upon our proper ground; if we thought ourselves his equal intellectually, able to discuss current questions with him upon equal terms, he would put one inquiry which would make us feel that we had not begun to learn. In all things Jesus Christ taught us to understand the greatness of simplicity; to find in so-called little things the mirror of the Deity. Never did he speak in the language of Oriental poetry, but always in that simple language which yet is the last symbol of profundity. He spake not to a class, but to a world; not to a school, but to a household—to the oldest member, and the last-come little child; and they all understood the music of that tender brotherhood. So then, though we started at first with expecting that the Hebrew idea of God would perfectly disable Omnipotence itself from coming into the flesh, yet we begin to see, by a close study of Jesus Christ's life, that the true grandeur is simplicity, and that the thing which we aforesaid accounted without value is in the sight of God of great price.

Then we have become accustomed to another idea, namely, the providence, rule, sovereignty, guidance. We have said that God watches all things; we have said, he knoweth our downsitting and our uprising, our going out and our coming in; and we have said, There is not a word on our tongue, there is not a thought in our heart, but lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Do we see the economy of Providence in the life of this mysterious

Christ? If we study him, shall we see how God governs the world? The answer is, Certainly we shall: the veil is taken down for a few brief years, and we see the action of the whole machinery of Providence, so to say; the face is taken off, that hid the inner working of the instrument, and now we see it in all its anatomy. Would you see Providence? Look at Christ. Let us then watch him. What is he caring for? For the body. How extraordinary! He will have people healed, he cannot be easy whilst there is a diseased man in his presence: he himself is healthy, and health must make others healthy. See how he has brought round about him the deaf, and dumb, and blind, and halt, and leprous; and how he heals them all! Is this the God we have worshipped in Old Testament terms of pomp and grandeur? Lo, this is the God of gods, the Lords of lords; a mother-God, a physician-God, a healing, nurturing, restoring God. We thought of him in connection with thunders, and trumpets, and constellations, and thrones, and princedoms, and hierarchies. Again we must correct our definition of greatness and grandeur. Probably, from a human point of view, God is never so great as when he is stooping over some one who needs his care. The Son of Man—God in the Son of Man—is come to seek and to save that which was lost. Why dost thou hasten over the mountains and stony places, thou Shepherd of the universe? He answers, I so hasten because one lamb is lost. Is this the providence of God? This is the economy under which we live. He will not have one vacant place at the table, if love can help it; he will not be content that there are ninety-and-nine in the fold, it is the one who is not there that gives him heartache. Does God suffer? Truly! and on what scale he suffers, our imagination can never conceive. He is not an ivory God, tipped with gold; nor a golden God, seated upon a throne of ivory: but a great heart, a father-mother-sister-brother heart; a great sensitiveness that responds to every cry of need. But Jesus Christ associated with sinners; he went in unto them, and ate and drank with them: does God do so? This is the very thing he has been doing all the ages. God associates with sinners; he eats with them. This may startle us for a moment, but pause and think what it all means. Who spreads the table at which the world takes its daily repast? Are the harvest fields of the world

godless, atheistic ground, swamps that are only recovered from sterility by human industry and human skill? Doth not the goodness of God lead thee to repentance? When thy feast is spread, O thou hard-hearted publican or sinner, it is God that spreads it for thee, and he sits at the head of the table and would have thee feel that thou art at the sacramental board. God clothes our bodies, supplies our necessities, constructs and guards and sanctifies our home; and herein Christ was God manifest in the flesh. Has the worst man any sign of God's presence about him? If so, then is he not forsaken: sometimes through his grimmest misery there comes a smile as if a lamp had been lighted within him; then he is not in hell. God associates with sinners—in providence, in opening doors for them, in making friends for them, in creating for them opportunities of settlement, advancement, progress, comfort. Do not suppose that redemption stands apart from all the current of human life: providence is redemption along the lower levels of human experience: he who cares for the body must by that very fact care for the soul; he who protects the lamb in his arms must seek to save the spirit from destruction. If we once grant providence we cannot escape redemption: once allow that God sent the loaf to the table, and having allowed that, we cannot logically or consistently rest until we see him planting the Cross on Calvary—tree of life, tree of healing. But Jesus Christ, as we now see him, has tears in his eyes: is he in that moment of weakness to be regarded as God manifest in the flesh? Yes, pre-eminently so. He is to me less God when he thunders in the ear of the grave and makes it yield its prey, than when he makes the company sit down, and breaks bread to travellers and weary ones in their hunger; he is to me less God when he orders the storm to be quiet, than when he takes up a little child and blesses it. God pities the world. God sheds tears in heaven. This is the necessity of the case, if Christ represented him. He did not create a body that he might cry through it or break his heart in it; he created a body to show what he has been doing ever since man came upon the earth: the body was but a temporary accident, or medium—was but the substance which the eternal silence broke into audible and articulate sound; the Eternal himself was not changed, the manifestation was ordered upon a

scale and upon lines which suited human weakness and human blindness.

When Jesus sits over against the city and weeps over it, he is God manifest in the flesh ; for God sitteth in his eternity and weeps over the erring children of men. This is grandeur, but of another kind than that which we had thought about once. What is so grand as love ? Yet who has ever called it grand ? We have kept such words as grand, glorious, amazing, for war, for destruction, for the burning of towns and the slaughter of populations ; but we are gradually being so spiritually refined and educated as to see that love is the great triumph, love is the great glory. When our education is complete we shall begin to see that our first conceptions of grandeur were mistaken conceptions, and that the true grandeur is in being good, and doing good, and making life simple in its motive and simple in its issues. We have been accustomed to trace names up to their highest meanings. That has been the usual course of human reasoning. We have already in these Bible readings traced Time, until we reached the point where a man said, "For ever and ever." His arithmetic failed him, and his imagination became the algebra by which he worked his way to the thought of a further and unutterable duration. We have carried the word Space up through the air into astronomic fields, until we began to say, We have no more numbers whereby to represent the extent of faith, and therefore we constructed a symbol and said it represented infinity. We have also traced Love in the same way up through courtesy, civility, kindness, sympathy, honour—on, and still farther on, until all our epithetic resources were exhausted, and then we wrote the word Sacrifice. So with the word Man. We began with man, and carried our ideas of man through genius, capacity, statesmanship, philosophy, prophetic gift, until we reached angel, seraph, cherub, archangel, God. With that process we have become familiar ; but we have forgotten that the process may be reversed, and therein may bring us to the manger-cradle of Bethlehem. Show us eternity ! is the cry, as Philip's cry was, "Show us the Father." Now, when we would show men eternity, what do we show them ? We show them time ; we ask them to consider time, to extend

it, continue it, make so much of it, that they can make no more, and thus we take a downward course of reasoning, from eternity to time. When men say, Show us infinity, and it sufficeth us, all we can show them is space, and ask them so to treat space, quantity, figure, geometry, until they have become lost in the vastness of extension. So when men say, Show us God, we show them Man—not a man only, not all men, but Man; the Man, the second Adam, the Lord from heaven, Immanuel; and we say, “God was manifest in the flesh”: he who hath seen Jesus hath seen God. All the great words are in Genesis, first chapter, first verse:—“In the beginning [of eternity] God [the undefinable name] created [incarnated] the heavens [all height] and the earth [all homeliness and utility];” and the remainder of the chapters in Genesis are devoted to detailing these gross terms, these infinite expressions. So “in the beginning” becomes in the other parts of the chapter “days,” and “weeks,” and “months,” and “years”: thus eternity was time manifest in succession. “Created” becomes detailed in the work of “the first day,” “the second day,” “the third day”; and so we see all the panorama of incarnation take place; and creation was energy manifest in bird, and beast, and fish, and living thing, on mountain and in meadow. Then the heavens and the earth were brought near to us in many a measurable shape, in many an alluring and symbolic figure. And then God himself remained to be detailed: how did he express himself at this point? “Let us make a man in our image, after our likeness.” A man who has seen himself has seen the image of God. A man who has seen Christ has seen the very God, the Father.

What is God's purpose of judgment? God is high in heaven, and we believe he rules the nations, takes an interest in all the people, and associates himself with all the economy of the worlds: will he bring all things to judgment? or will he let them break away, fall off into nothingness and oblivion as they may? Jesus Christ was God manifest in the flesh in this matter. What said he about judgment? He said:—If any man has much given to him, from him shall much be expected; if any man has little to begin with, little only will be looked for in the issue of his probation: He said:—If a city be exalted to heaven with

privilege, and neglect its opportunities, it shall be cast down to hell—the depth shall correspond with the height: if any one have but few privileges, one box of spikenard, two mites, one cup of cold water, he says, Let him, let her, alone: poor creatures they have done what they could. Is this the way in which God has been judging creation all the time? To this inquiry we return a final affirmative. He knows the dowry of each; the starting-point of each is known to him: he will judge us by what he first gave us. When we say this, we sanctify reason, we glorify conscience; and we say, Verily the universe is settled on foundations of equity. We need not press all these illustrations too far; we have already spoken of the necessary limits of incarnation, and we must judge the manifestation of God according to the conditions which he himself elected. We cannot see all eternity in time: as we see the sun reflected in the dewdrop, so we may see eternity flashed back from the moments of time, rightly viewed, rightly interpreted.

The practical application is this, and it may well make the stoutest afraid, that the flesh may be filled, inspired, sanctified by God; it may be the house of God: know ye not that your bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost? Here again we are limited by the necessities of incarnation. The common body is to be made like unto Christ's glorious body. We must therefore always limit our judgment by our present condition. We can in our way be God manifest in the flesh. Jesus asked us to follow him, to be his imitators, to do what he did so far as we are able; and now by his incarnation we are expected to incarnate God ourselves. So we may be able up to a given point—by loftiness of thought, by self-sacrifice, by pitying the poor, the lost, the weak, the helpless, by sweet, eternal charity. We may so work upon men that they may say, These Christians have a life the world never gave them; they have a peace not time-born; they work by motives which do not come from the science of leverage as it is understood in social economies: they are moved from eternity; their countenances shine with a light acquired on mountain heights by long communion with God. To this we are called. From this we shrink in the letter, yet we understand it somewhat in its spirit and sweetest meaning.

THE SECOND EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE

TO

TIMOTHY.

(ROME, A.D. 65 or 66.)

[NOTE.—“This Epistle was apparently written when Paul was a prisoner at Rome (see chap. i. 8, 16; iv. 6); and probably during his second captivity, not long before his martyrdom. That it was not written during his first imprisonment may be gathered in part from the absence of several who were with him then (see Phil. i. 1: Col. i. 1: Philem. ver. 1: Heb. xiii. 23; compare also chap. iv. 10, 11, with Col. iv. 10, 14); and from the difference in the Apostle's expectations, which were now fixed upon a speedy decease (compare chap. iv. 6, with Phil. i. 25; ii. 24; Philem. ver. 22: Heb. xiii. 23); as well as from his circumstances of increased restriction and greater solitude (compare chap. i. 17, 18, with Acts xxviii. 30, 31, and Phil. i. 13). But more decisive evidence is afforded by several incidental allusions to events which had clearly occurred not long before this letter was written. Mention is made of a cloak and books left at Troas (iv. 13), which Paul had not visited for five years before his first imprisonment at Rome; of Trophimus, who had been left sick at Miletus (iv. 20), but who had been with the Apostle at Jerusalem at the time of his first apprehension, Acts xxi. 29: of Erastus, as having stayed at Corinth (iv. 20), where Paul had not been since his visit there five years before, accompanied by Timothy, Acts xx. 4. All these circumstances seem to show that this Epistle must have had a later date, probably about the year 65 or 66; two years later than his First Epistle. The interval between his two imprisonments he seems to have spent in Asia, Philem. 22: Phil. ii. 24: i. 25: Macedonia, 1 Tim. i. 3; wintering in Nicopolis, Tit. iii. 12. Why he returned to Rome we are not told, but he was soon imprisoned as an evil-doer, 2 Tim. ii. 9; and among his accusers was Alexander the Judaizing teacher of Ephesus, ‘who did him much evil,’ (iv. 14).

“If this view be correct, and this Epistle was the last which the Apostle wrote before his martyrdom, it is invested with peculiar interest, as containing the dying counsels of one who was not ‘behind the chiefest of the Apostles.’”—Angus's *Bible Handbook*.]

2 Timothy i.-iv.

PAUL'S LAST LETTER.

"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus, to Timothy, my dearly beloved son: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day; greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy; when I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also. Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God" (i. 1-8).

"Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things. Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel: Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound. Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (ii. 1-3; 7-10).

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (iv. 7, 8).

THIS is the last letter, by general consent of all Christian students, that the Apostle wrote. It has been called his last will and testament. To read the will of Paul! what an advantage, what an honour, what an opportunity! This is our privilege to-day. How will Paul conclude? cannot but be an exciting question. What will Paul do at the close of his last letter? will he be weary? will he write like an old man? will he modify any of his doctrinal positions? Will he say, If I had my time to live over again I would not be so bold, so self-sacrificing; I would take more care of myself; I would live an easier life?

Or will he at the last be as ardent and soldier-like and tremendous as ever? Paul was always great. He could not help this quality. There was something in him which he did not create and which he cultivated and studied to express on the largest lines with the most graphic definiteness. Perhaps Paul could not write like an old man, because he was writing to a comparative child. It is wonderful how he loved the young. Because of his love of the young he himself was never old, except in years: never in feeling. The man who knows that he is going to be born into heaven at any moment cannot be old. This is the spirit of the New Testament. There is not an old thing in it; it is verily New—new because it is old: a contradiction in words but a fact in experience. Old, old time always has had and always will have a new morning. No man ever saw this day before, and it is just as bright and sweet a flower as the Lord ever grew on the acres of time. So the New Testament is always up to date. You cannot out-pray it. Though you bribe genius to write some new supplication it falls back from the effort, saying, It was all done before I was born. No man can add anything to the New Testament that is of the same quality. He can expand it, but the plasm must be found in the book. Men can grow flowers, but they must grow them out of something they had to begin with. So this Paul and his Testament are always writing to oncoming Timothies: it is a great speech to the coming men, a mighty military charge to the infant soldiers of the world. To read the last will and testament of Paul! Let us hasten to it; every word will be music.

After the "Amen" of Timothy, tradition, not history, follows Paul away, sees him fall down before the execution, sees the uplifted flashing sword, sees the venerable head rolling in the dust. It was a grand Amen—"it may be that only in heaven we shall hear the grand Amen." How stood the old man at the last? Bravely? Tell us, ye that saw him, how he looked: did he tremble, did he apologise, did he ask for mercy? The account is before us. It never could have been such an ending, but for the great ribwork of principles round about the man, and in which he lived. This Epistle is full of doctrine, great ideas, solemn principles, burning convictions. He is not drinking out of some

silver goblet of scented sentiment; he refreshes himself at the fountains of divinest blood. Oh, ye white-faced, weak-kneed believers! believers in what? ye shifty speculators, stealers of prophetic mantles! go, drink yourselves to death, and go to your proper devil: ye are not the Church of Christ, might well be the speech which ascended Pauls might deliver to us, as we re-shuffle the theological cards, and rearrange our credenda, and modify and dilute our doctrinal positions and enthusiasms.

We have Paul in this Epistle in all the wondrous undulation of his personality. How he rises, falls, rises again; and again, like waves, falls and breaks and returns!—all the while in the sublimest action. He will write a letter to Timothy, “my dearly beloved son”; he will have a family page in the letter. Paul was no loose thinker; all his thought, how tumultuously soever it was expressed, went back to centres, to fixed points; tethered to these fixities, he allowed himself almost eccentric liberty. He is an unhappy man who is not fixed anywhere. Paul turned over Timothy’s history, and he remembered Timothy’s grandmother, and Timothy’s mother, and said, you are as good as both of them put together: you seem almost to be an inheritor of faith. Some men are born in libraries: what if they should turn out learned students? Some of us were not born in a library, we must not be blamed because we have not any literature; we would have read, but we had no books to read. Some men are born in gardens: what if their raiment be odorous with the fragrance of choicest flowers? Some were born in the wilderness, and never saw a flower until they were quite grown men. The Lord will judge us accordingly. Do not be down-hearted because you had no grandmother and mother in Christ. You may start the new generation. God knows where you began and how, and he will reckon it all up at the last, and many are last that shall be first, some are first that shall be last. Yet Paul will have a hand in this family history. Our pastors come into our houses; our bishops are part of our family genealogy. The pastor is a member of every family; no family is complete until its bishop is there; if not in person, yet in remembrance and in love. This is the wonderful charm of the true ministry, that it is free to every honest house. Paul says,

“Stir up the gift of God, which is in thee, by the putting on of my hands.” Literally, Fan the flame; or, fan the little spark: it is only a little red spark indeed, but breathe upon it, softly, more quickly, very carefully; blow again—yes, see how it brightens, whitens, glows!—blow again—stir up the gift that is in thee. All fire is of God. There is no earthly Pentecost; the earth will not grow fire. How was the gift communicated? “by the putting on of my hands.” Dear hands! speaking hands! clean hands! There is a touch that makes us men: there is a handshaking that haunts us as a misery,—cold, pithless, soulless,—and we say, Would God we had never seen that man! There is another that makes us forget ten years in a moment, and recover all our lamps and lights, and makes us strong. There is a magnetic touch: every bishop ought to have it; every minister of God truly called and divinely elected has it.

The mystery of touch has never been explained. Jesus touched the leper; Jesus touched the sightless eyes: Jesus touched the little child: Jesus touched the bread which he broke. In his touch was life. We can so touch the Saviour as to get from him everything we want. He said, “Somebody hath touched me.” The disciples said, “Seest how the people throng around thee, and sayest thou, Who hath touched me? why, we are all touching thee.” No, said Christ, you are not: somebody hath touched me. Do not imagine that approximation to Christ is enough. Do not imagine that formal prayer is sufficient. Never give way to the sophism that because you have been to church, therefore you have been pious, or good in any sense. A man may go to church, and get nothing there, and in the proportion in which he gets nothing will he blame those who minister in the church! it will never occur to him that he is a dead dog, and even the lightnings would not touch him.

What is Timothy to do? He is, in the first place, not to be “ashamed.” Appearances are against him and against Paul. Virtue is in gaol, Nero is on the throne, Rome is alive with the devil: Paul says, this is a time, my son, when we must look up

in confidence and love and hope. In the next place, Timothy is to "Hold fast," grip well, make every finger serve,—“keep” something. What? “That good thing which was committed unto thee.” The action is that of a child who having a very precious toy or treasure is going to rest or is going from home, and says to the strong father or mother or friend, Take this and keep it for me. What has the child done? The child has committed the treasure to the custody of tested strength. Paul says to Timothy, “Hold fast . . . that good thing which was committed unto thee by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us,” for if we can commit our souls to God, God can commit his truth to us: what we have to do is to “hold fast.” It would be a poor account to give, if we told the Holy Ghost at the last that we were busy here and there, and some thief came and took the casket with the jewel. The Apostle was an eccentric writer; his was a rough-and-ready style in many instances. He came down from the mountain at a bound, and went back again at one stride. Nobody could ever tell where he was. He is no favourite with the critics. So Paul comes down now from all these high charges, and says, I do not only remember those who have gone away from me, but I remember one who was always kind to me, an Ephesian merchant, Onesiphorus by name—“he oft refreshed me”: literally and singularly, he often poured cold water on me. That is to say, the Apostle was footsore, and Onesiphorus came to him with the cold refreshing water and bathed his feet, or the Apostle's head was burning with fever, and Onesiphorus dipped his generous hands into the cool stream, and bathed the throbbing temples. “He oft refreshed me, and was not afraid of my chain;” some of his kind water fell upon the iron. “When he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently,” therefore he wanted to find me, “and found me.” We can always find our friends if we want to. You went out to give some dole to the poor, and the impression was made upon your mind that the poor soul was out, and therefore you went no farther. You could have found him if you wished. What would Paul have done to this merchant of Ephesus? “The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day:” he found me—may the Lord find him! This was not an occasional attention—“in how many things he ministered unto me

at Ephesus, thou knowest very well." Why, Paul, hadst thou such a memory of detail? What about saintly passion, apostolic enthusiasm, the holy fury that absorbs the soul? All that, saith Paul, is perfectly consistent with remembering every cup of cold water that was given to me. If so wondrous a thing to serve Paul, what must it be to serve Paul's Master?

What more is Timothy to be or to do?—"Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." A wonderful, double expression: "strong in the grace"—mighty in the beauty—valiant in the gentleness: grow flowers on the rock. And not only so thyself, Timothy, but keep up a good succession of men:—"The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also,"—a very delicate business; quite a refined profession. No. What, then? This:—"Thou, therefore, endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." This was a wonderful ministry in the matter of complexity: now so severe, now so gentle and enjoyable; now a ride behind fleet horses on a summer day, now a climbing of rocky mountains where there is no path, and where one has to be made by the poor toiling climber himself. "Endure hardness:" what right had Paul to say that? The right of chapter ii. 10—"Therefore I endure." This was Paul's right. We have no right to say, Go: we have some right, where we can use it, to say, Come. Timothy was young; Timothy therefore was exposed to intellectual ambition and temptation. Paul knew all this, and he said, "Shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness": shun old wives' fables; have nothing to do with mere word-splitting, it tendeth to more and more ungodliness: keep to great principles. "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his:" Timothy, keep to that which is sure. The word "sure" has been etymologically traced to a Hebrew word which means rock; therefore Paul would say to his dearly beloved son Timothy, Stand on the rock: I do not say do not sometimes launch out into the deep, and see what is beyond the rolling waves, but have a rock to return to.

Now he passes on through various exhortations, almost

military, always episcopal, always noble and generous, and then he says at last, Now hear me : I want you to come ; I would like to see some young life. An old man gets sometimes almost tired of his own shadow. "Do thy diligence to come"—put off anything that can be put off, and make haste to come to me : I want to shake hands with young life, one look at thy young face would make me forget my old age. "Come before winter ;" winter is bad almost anywhere, but oh ! how wintry is winter in gaol—a great fortress like this. And bring the old skin with thee, the cloke ; it gets cold about the time of the year when I expect thee : I like the old skin, it is an old friend of mine ; it has stood me in good stead ; I do not know that I should care for a new coat : bring the cloke. And the few books : a man like me cannot do without something to read ; bring the parchments, the notebooks, the student's memoranda. To have these to-day ! Paul's very notes, Paul's lines written by his own hand. He never did much with his own hand in the way of writing, for he was a man who suffered much with an affliction of the eyes ; but he did write some little pieces of parchment, and nobody perhaps could read them but himself. He wanted them all with him. It was not much—young life, poor old skin to keep his shivering body warm, and the books and the parchments. What did he care for anything else ? He said, I am done, so far as this world is concerned ; I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith : henceforth there is laid up for me a crown. In the meantime I only want a young soul, and an old sheepskin, and a book or two.

THE EPISTLE OF PAUL

TO

TITUS.

(MACEDONIA, A.D. 64 or 57.)

[NOTE.—“Of Titus nothing more is certainly known than we find in the Epistles of Paul. From incidental allusions to him we learn that he was a Greek by birth, Gal. ii. 3, who had been converted to Christianity by the instrumentality of Paul, Gal. i. 4. He went up with Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem, Gal. ii. 1, and afterwards accompanied Paul on his travels; and is repeatedly mentioned by him in terms of approbation and affection, 2 Cor. vii. 5-7, 13-15; viii. 16-24; xii. 17-21.

“Being the son of Gentile parents, and therefore in different circumstances from Timothy, he was not circumcised. Circumcision in his case would have involved, as Paul reasoned, a compromise of principle, Gal. ii. 5.

“At the time when this Epistle was written, Titus had been left by the Apostle in the island of Crete, that he might establish and regulate the churches there (i. 5). It is not easy to determine when this occurred; no opportunity for it having been afforded by the only visit to Crete, recorded in Acts xxvii. 7, 8; for he was then on his way to Rome as a prisoner, his stay was short, nor could he then expect to spend the ensuing winter in Nicopolis (see iii. 12).

“Some have supposed that Paul may have been at Crete on his voyage from Corinth to Ephesus, mentioned in Acts xviii. 18; and have written this Epistle subsequently from Ephesus, having formed the intention of spending the winter at a town named Nicopolis, between Antioch and Tarsus (see iii. 12). Others have placed Paul's visit to Crete between his leaving Ephesus for Macedonia and his second visit to Corinth, mentioned in Acts xx. 2. But the more general opinion is that the visit to Crete here referred to was upon a journey which Paul took after his first imprisonment at Rome, when he sailed to Asia, taking Crete in his way, and leaving Titus there; and that he wrote this Epistle from Macedonia, when on his way to Nicopolis.

“It is further supposed that Titus, according to Paul's desire, joined the

Apostle at Nicopolis, and afterwards accompanied him on his last journey to Rome, being with him there during part of his second imprisonment, 2 Tim. iv. 10; and having then gone into Dalmatia, probably to preach the gospel, or to visit churches already formed there. What became of him afterwards we are not informed. The tradition is that he returned to Crete, and died there at the age of 94.

"It is very observable in this Epistle, that those of the *humblest* rank are exhorted to *adorn* the gospel (ii. 10), and that while our salvation is ascribed exclusively to grace (ii. 11), to the 'kindness and love of God our Saviour' (iii. 4), this fact is made the ground of most urgent exhortations to holiness (ii. 14; iii. 8).

"On the duties Christians owe to civil government, Titus iii. 1, see Rom. xiii. 1-19; 1 Peter ii. 13-17; 2 Peter ii. 10; Jude 8."—ANGUS'S *Bible Handbook*.]

Chapter I.

1 For what end Titus was left in Crete. 6 How they that are to be chosen ministers ought to be qualified. 11 The mouths of evil teachers to be stopped: 12 and what manner of men they be.

1. Paul, a servant of God, and an Apostle of Jesus Christ [in the other two so-called Pastoral Epistles addressed to Timothy, St. Paul simply styles himself an Apostle of Jesus Christ], according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness [more accurately rendered "and the full knowledge of the truth which is designed for godliness"; or, "which leadeth to godliness"].

2. In hope of eternal life [better translated "resting on the hope of eternal life"], which God, that cannot lie [possibly this singular and strong expression was chosen with reference to the peculiar vice of the Cretans, over which church Titus was then presiding (see ver. 12)], promised before the world began [more accurately rendered, "from eternal ages" (see 2 Tim. i. 9)]. The promise of eternal life was the result of a divine purpose fixed from eternity].

3. But hath in due times ["but hath in his own seasons"] manifested his word [that is, his gospel. See Rom. xvi. 25] through preaching [or, "in the preaching"], which is committed unto me [*lit.* "with which I was entrusted"], according to the commandment of God our Saviour:

NOTE.—The annotations are taken from *The Commentary for Schools*, edited by C. J. Ellicott, D.D., Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol. (London, Cassell & Co., Limited.)

4. To Titus, mine own son [alluding no doubt to their relation in religion] after the common faith : Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour [the expression is a rare one. We find it only in these Pastoral Epistles].

5. For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee [or better, "as I gave thee directions].

6. If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful [believing] children not accused of riot [dissoluteness] or unruly [that is, disobedience to parents].

7. For a bishop must be blameless as the steward of God ; not selfwilled, not soon angry [not soon provoked, or not irascible], not given to wine, no striker [not a brawler], not given to filthy lucre ;

8. But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober [self-restrained], just [or righteous], holy, temperate ;

9. Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught [more literally, "according to" the teaching], that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.

10. For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision :

11. Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthily lucre's sake.

12. One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians are alway liars, evil beasts [referring to their wild, fierce nature, their ferocity, their love of cruelty], slow bellies [*rather*, idle bellies. These terms point with sharp accuracy to another of the evil characteristics of the Cretan peoples—their dull gluttony, their slothful sensuality].

13. This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke [confute ; set them right] them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith ;

14. Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth.

15. Unto the pure all things are pure : but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure ; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.

16. They profess that they know God ; but in works they deny him, being abominable [this is the only place where this strong expression is used in the New Testament. It signifies that the life and actions of these men, who professed to be his servants, had made them hateful in the sight of God], and disobedient [opposed to law and order], and unto every good work reprobate.

Chapter II.

1 *Directions given unto Titus both for his doctrine and life. 9 Of the duty of servants, and in general of all Christians.*

1. But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine :
2. That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate [discreet, or self-restrained], sound in faith, in charity, in patience.
3. The angel women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becomes holiness, not false accusers [not slanderers], not given to much wine [this warning was probably called for owing to the evil habits and customs of the Cretans], teachers of good things [or, "what is good"];
4. That they may teach the young women to be sober [better rendered, simply, "that they may teach (or, school) the young women" omitting the words "to be sober"] to love their husbands, to love their children.
5. To be discreet, chaste [not only in act, but also in look, in speech, in thought, even in dress], keepers [workers] at home, good, obedient to their own husbands [more accurately, "submitting themselves to their own husbands"], that the word of God be not blasphemed.
6. Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded.
7. In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works : in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity.
8. Sound speech, that cannot be condemned ; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.
9. Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things ; not answering again [not gainsaying],
10. Not purloining, but showing all good fidelity ; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.
11. For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,
12. Teaching [disciplining] us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world [or, "in the present course of things"].
13. Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing [the Greek should here be rendered "looking for the blessed hope and manifestation of the glory"] of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ ;
14. Who gave himself for us [see Gal. i. 4; Eph. v. 25], that he might redeem us from all iniquity [that he for us might pay a ransom, the ransom being his precious blood], and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.
15. These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.

Chapter III.

1 *Titus is yet further directed by Paul, both concerning the things he should teach, and not teach. 10 He is willed also to reject obstinate hereticks: 12 which done, he appointeth him both time and place, wherein he should come unto him, and so concludeth.*

1. Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers [rulers and authorities], to obey magistrates [the temporal power], to be ready to every good work [cheerfully, to aid all lawful authority, municipal and otherwise],

2. To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers [not contentious], but gentle, showing all meekness unto all men.

3. For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived [for we were once ourselves foolish, disobedient, going astray], serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.

4. But after that the kindness and love [or, pity] of God our Saviour toward man appeared,

5. Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

6. Which he shed on us abundantly [Gr. richly] through Jesus Christ our Saviour;

7. That being justified [freed from the future punishment and consequences of sin] by his grace [by the favour and kindness of God the Father are we restored to his love and friendship], we should be made heirs [Rom. viii. 17] according to the hope of eternal life.

8. This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.

9. But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain.

10. A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject [shun or avoid]:

11. Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself [is perverted and sinneth, being self-condemned].

12. When I shall send Artemas unto thee, or Tychicus, be diligent to come unto me to Nicopolis: for I have determined there to winter.

13. Bring Zenas [a name contracted from Zenodorus] the lawyer and

Apollos [a distinguished Alexandrian scholar and a disciple of John the Baptist. This famous teacher appears often in the New Testament records, in the Acts, and several of the Epistles] on their journey diligently, that nothing be wanting unto them.

14. And let ours also learn to maintain good works [*or*, profess honest trades] for necessary uses, that they may be not unfruitful.

15. All that are with me salute thee. Greet them that love us in the faith [an inclusive greeting, embracing each member of the Cretan Church whose love to him (St. Paul) was based upon the common faith in the Lord Jesus. Greet all who love me, as the earnest preacher of their faith and mine]. Grace be with you all. Amen.

THE EPISTLE OF PAUL

TO

PHILEMON.

(ROME, A.D. 62.)

[NOTE.—“The Epistle of Paul to Philemon, is one of the letters (the others are Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians) which the Apostle wrote during his first captivity at Rome. The arguments which show that he wrote the Epistle to the Colossians in *that city* and at *that period*, involve the same conclusion in regard to this; for it is evident from Col. iv. 7, 9, as compared with the contents of this Epistle, that Paul wrote the two letters at the same time, and forwarded them to their destination by the hands of Tychicus and Onesimus who accompanied each other to Colossae. A few critics, as Schulz, Schott, Böttger, Meyer, maintain that this letter and the others assigned usually to the first Roman captivity, were written during the two years that Paul was imprisoned at Cæsarea (Acts xxiii. 35, xxix. 27). But this opinion, though supported by some plausible arguments, can be demonstrated with reasonable certainty to be incorrect.

“The Epistle to Philemon has one peculiar feature—its *æsthetical character* it may be termed—which distinguishes it from all the other Epistles, and demands a special notice at our hands. It has been admired deservedly as a model of delicacy and skill in the department of composition to which it belongs. The writer had peculiar difficulties to overcome. He was the common friend of the parties at variance. He must conciliate a man who supposed that he had good reason to be offended. He must commend the offender, and yet neither deny nor aggravate the imputed fault. He must assert the new ideas of Christian equality in the face of a system which hardly recognised the humanity of the enslaved. He could have placed the question on the ground of his own personal rights, and yet must waive them in order to secure an act of spontaneous kindness. His success must be a triumph of love, and nothing be demanded for the sake of the justice which could have claimed everything. He limits his request to a forgiveness of the alleged wrong, and a restoration to favour and the enjoyment of future sympathy and affection, and yet would so guard his words as to leave scope for all the generosity which benevolence might prompt towards one whose condition admitted of so much alleviation. These are contrarieties not easy to harmonise; but Paul, it is confessed, has shown a degree of self-denial

and a tact in dealing with them, which in being equal to the occasion could hardly be greater.

"There is a letter extant of the younger Pliny (*Epist.* ix. 21) which he wrote to a friend whose servant had deserted him, in which he intercedes for the fugitive, who was anxious to return to his master, but dreaded the effects of his anger. Thus the occasion of the correspondence was similar to that between the Apostle and Philemon. It has occurred to scholars to compare this celebrated letter with that of Paul in behalf of Onesimus; and as the result they hesitate not to say that, not only in the spirit of Christian love, of which Phiny was ignorant, but in dignity of thought, argument, pathos, beauty of style, eloquence, the communication of the Apostle is vastly superior to that of the polished Roman writer."—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible.*]

Philemon.

"Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ."—PHILEMON 1.

"There salute thee Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus."—PHILEMON 23.

"Aristarchus my fellow-prisoner saluteth you."—COL. iv. 10.

"Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellow-prisoners."—ROM. xvi. 7.

PRISONERS OF WAR.

WE have only one word where Paul had two. In all these cases we say "prisoner"; Paul did not use the same word in all cases. Paul used two perfectly distinct words; he had therefore two perfectly distinct meanings. "Paul, a prisoner, a δέιμος of Jesus Christ": this was literal. There was not any doubt that Paul was oftentimes in the most literal sense a prisoner, a man locked up, a bondsman in chains, and his address was the city gaol. "My fellow-prisoner," "my fellow-prisoners": the word which he used in the first instance is not used in these later examples; it is a larger, tenderer, sweeter word, fuller altogether as to thought and music and blessedness of experience. This is the infirmity of language: we speak roughly, we lose much for want of critical discrimination. There are persons, we are told, who are colour-blind, to whom, therefore, the rainbow is nothing; there are others who are indeed word-blind or word-deaf, they do not distinguish between terms, and all voices are alike to them; if they hear the mere sound it is enough, without studying its quality and its suggestiveness. Let there be no doubt about the literal imprisonment of Paul. As a simple matter of fact he was often in gaol. There is no

need to disguise that fact. Paul rather magnified it, dwelt upon it with singular complacency, and got out of its bitterness something sweeter than the honeycomb. But Paul never consented to live within the literal meaning of the word "prison." To that term he added others, and thus he glorified it. It is not "Paul, a prisoner," it is "Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ"—where is the gaol now? "My fellow-prisoner in Jesus Christ"; "I Paul, the prisoner of the Lord." How much richer we might be, if we drew more heavily upon the bank of the riches of Christ! There would be those who called themselves mere prisoners; they saw nothing but the prison walls, they felt nothing but the prison chains, they spoke of nothing but the prison diet and deprivation of companionship and many of the advantages of civilisation. Paul never talked in a whining tone. He enlarged the gaol by taking Christ into it, and when they were both together, though in prison, they were in heaven. The Apostle Paul always looked beyond the gaoler; he said to him in effect, You are but an instrument; you carry the keys, and yet you are only a key yourself; you do not know what you are doing; I bear you no resentment or animosity, you are in the hands of the king. Men do not come to that high estate of spiritual interpretation and spiritual comfort without undergoing many a drilling process, many a stripping and laceration, many a disappointment, and without much experience of the subtlety and strength of the vanquished enemy. Young Christians need not suppose that they can leap into this high and ennobling ecstasy; it is only to be attained by patience, suffering, sanctified disappointment, and battle.

What was the effect of this magnifying of the prison by associating it with the name of Jesus Christ? It gave Paul all strength. Even his weakness became an element of power. Turning over his chains in the prison, he said, I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me: these are not chains, they are feathers in wings; these are not bonds when properly interpreted; these outside people, Cæsars and kings and rulers and procurators and magistrates, they are only so many pieces which the King himself is moving: all this is educational, it is to have an effect upon myself, and it is to have an effect upon after

ages: I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me: I even sang at Philippi, and sang, not in the morning dawn, but at the midnight hour. It filled the Apostle with joy. On one occasion his rapture was so great that he said, Yea, we exceedingly glory in tribulations also: we would not be without them; those elements of blackness greatly help the picture: we could not have a complete year without the winter: we have gone so far in the spiritual life that even tribulation itself is one of the black servants in our Father's household.

Then Paul never looked at anything in its simple individuality and solitariness. He did not deal in bonds but in horizons; he said, All things work together for good to them that love God: this prison is one of the "all things"; without this prison experience my education would not be complete: this will sweeten me, this will soften me, this will give me mellowness: I am conscious of a kind of rude strength to be obtained in the schools, but I did want the suppleness, the exquisiteness of humility, and the beauty of chastening which such afflictions alone can give, and now my education is being perfected. No man's education is perfected who has not been stripped naked and left in the wilderness to do the best he could for himself. You cannot pamper a man up to the completeness of his education; he must be left out all night among the rocks, and in the morning you will discover a new tone in the gamut of his utterance. "I have learned," said Paul, making long emphasis upon the word "learned," as if it were a seventy years school-time, "in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." It was not an inspiration, it was a learning; it was not a triumph of genius, it was a result of experience. This is the royal road to contentment, repose, and triumph.

But this is not the only meaning of the word "prisoner." There is a larger word. Paul, by dwelling in the larger prison, made no account of the smaller gaol. What then, is the higher and wider meaning? See a Roman general going forth to war: are his victories counted only by his slain? By no means. His victories are also counted by his prisoners of war. Watch him returning home: see how vast a procession is formed with him-

self at the head. Who are these men constituting this procession? They are prisoners of war, men who have been taken at the point of the spear. That is the literal meaning: they are not slain men, they are not necessarily wounded men, but they are men who have felt the point of the spear, and have said, We yield: the battle, the victory, is yours. Watch them marching after the great conqueror: he is proud of them, he exhibits them in the city as trophies of war, spoils of a mighty hand. Thus we come to the larger meaning of the term prisoner. Always remember the first and vulgar meaning of a man being haled to prison and shut up with criminals, and chained as if he were a wild beast; that fact must never be lost sight of as one element in the experience of the apostles: but sometimes Paul calls himself a man taken at the point of the spear. Saul was breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the Lord, and the Lord held his lightning spear to his breast, and he said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" He was a prisoner of war, he was captured by the Lord.

Jesus Christ is represented as going forth to war and bringing back his spoils. Imagine the scene: Paul was mad against the Lord, and he went forth to war; there was a tremendous shock of battle, but the Lord conquered at the gate of Damascus, and he who but yesternight was full of storm and fury and tumult was led to-day by the hand into the city, a prisoner of war, one who had fallen beneath the spear of the Saviour. Paul therefore delighted to speak about his fellow-prisoners, not men and women who had necessarily been in gaol with him; they might have been in the literal prison with him, but he uses a totally different word in speaking about this imprisonment, and he says to his fellow-pilgrims on this journey, Brethren, we are fellow-prisoners, we were taken at the point of the spear, we were rebelling against Christ, and defying him, and he conquered. We are fond of speaking about our fellow-students, and our fellow-passengers, and our fellow-travellers: Paul was fond of speaking about his fellow-prisoners, and they went on behind the triumphant Christ, calling him Lord and Master; for in fair fight he had vanquished them, and they were now prisoners of war, spoils of battle. Unless we take in this element we shall lose a

great deal of instruction, and shall fall far short of the right conception of Christian relationship and Christian responsibility. Where are the prisoners of war now? Men walk into church supposedly through the gay, brightly coloured door of reason, custom, hereditary habit; men now in a conceited intellectuality accept the Cross. We do not want such acceptance, and the Cross will not take it; it is a battle question, it is a question of man against God, creature against the Creator, self against sacrifice; and every man who is in the right church, and, by right of Christ's sovereignty and permission, was captured at the point of the spear. Here is the heroic element in Christian experience. True Christians are conquered men. They do not walk in with high port and patronising dignity, as who should say, We are willing to accept certain propositions, and to sustain certain relationships. They come in broken-down, captured—bound hand and foot, not a limb their own, not a breath their own, spoils of war. If you could have conquered Christ, why did you not carry on the fight to the point of victory? No man can overwhelm omnipotence: everything goes down before the weakness of the Cross, for it is the power of God. So we must relieve the Church of an infinite pile of patronage, and intellectual assent, and respectable endorsement; we must strengthen the Church by thinning its numbers; by reducing the quantity we must get at the reality of the true nature of the Church: quality will conquer. If we have not been conquered by Christ we are not Christians: if we have one pulsation of our own will left in us we are as bad as we ever were. We never can tell whether we are Christ's or not until we have come to the point of absolute bankruptcy of self-trust. If we can utter one wish or will, or signal of desire, and make a point of it, as who should say, Beyond that we cannot go, we know nothing about the Cross. If a man should say to Christ, "I accept the Cross because it is the way to heaven," he does not accept the Cross. There is no bribery in this holy sanctuary of truth. If a man should say, "I will be a Christian, because, if the worst should come to the worst, I have nothing to lose, and if Christianity should be true, I have all to gain," he knows nothing about Christianity: what he says is a fact, but must not be used as a reason; this is trading with heaven, this is proceeding upon the principle of equivalents.

A man who says, "I will give you my heart if you will give me your heaven," has no right to speak, and his vain words are not heard, his abominable prayer either dies among the clouds or falls back into his own heart as a burden that will distress him.

If we are prisoners of the Lord in the true sense of the term we are prisoners of love. That is to say, we want to be the Lord's bondsmen, we say, This captivity is freedom; we never knew what it was to be free until we were the slaves of Christ; this is glorious liberty; we have been introduced into the realm and music of the Divine movement; we are now no longer outcast, and alien, and rebellious, and self-idolatrous, we are part of the great scheme of God, let him put us in our places that we may fulfil his decree, and his sovereignty. He who is a prisoner against his will will suffer night and day; the darkness will be oppressive to him, the silence will be an added punishment, his withdrawal from social routine will weigh heavily upon his soul, but he who takes Christ with him into the innermost prison into which Paul and Silas were thrust will sing at midnight. Any man can sing at noonday; he who sings with the soul at midnight is always in summer noontide.

If we are prisoners of the Lord we are no longer our own. The cry of Saul must be the cry of man to the end of his experience—"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" The very utterance was a sign of conversion; such words were not natural to such lips. Saul was not the man to give himself over to any other man in heaven or in earth: Saul was a man who relied upon himself; he issued fiats, he did not obey them; he gave orders; when he breathed he breathed out threatenings and slaughter. We must contrast the two utterances if we would know the reality, the depth, and the grandeur of the change: Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter—Saul, who said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? When the spear of this Infinite Cæsar was pointed at his heart, when the next stroke meant death, Saul said—Lord, Thou hast conquered, I am thine. There is so little of this conquest-experience now; let me repeat, there is far too much intellectual assent, and acceptance of propositions, and endorsements of written orthodoxies: what we should desire is

that we should be overwhelmed, overpowered, conquered, and one print of that spear should be the only order of dignity we ask for. Our prisonership in Christ is attested by our scars, and not by our opinions; by our wounds, and not by our intellectual conceits.

Prisoners taken by the great Roman generals had no will of their own which they dared express: prisoners taken by Jesus Christ have no will of their own; it is not a suppression wrought by fear, but a suppression, an annihilation, wrought by supremest, sublimest love. We must in all things consult the Captain of our salvation. He has written his law—"He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me, and he shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself unto him." What are the commands of the Captain? What does the conquering Captain want us to be, and to do? Read his Book, study his spirit, invoke his inspiration, and then go forth and fight on the side we once opposed. This is what Saul did; he was no sooner taken captive by Christ and instructed in the Divine way than he began to fight on the other side, and people heard only this about him, that he who once persecuted the Church was now preaching the gospel. A glorious inconsistency! Not an inconsistency representative of intellectual pedantry, but inconsistency equivalent to transformation, conversion, resurrection. There will be great inconsistency between the risen body and the flesh that was laid in the ground, but we must accept some inconsistencies as necessary developments in education, and in spiritual progress. Are we fighting for Christ? Not, Are we talking over him? Are we disputing about him? but, Are we really fighters? Are our blows battles half-won? Do we strike timidly? Do we whisper where we ought to speak in thunder? We are called upon to be soldiers of Christ—"Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ"; "Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye should be able to quench all the fiery

darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." The image is military—"We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world," wherefore God's panoply be yours. Go out in no leathern armour of your own, but in the solid steel of heaven. The world would then soon become aware of the higher military element that never yet was vanquished, but ever yet came home at night laden with spoil. Christ has never been worsted. He has been in gaol, he has been in hunger and thirst and nakedness, in cold, and weariness; he has not had where to lay his head; he has been houseless when the foxes went home, and the bird nestled in its little house in the tree: but he has never been conquered, he never gave in. Not once did he say, The world is stronger than I am, and I must be overwhelmed by it, and I resign my trust as infinitely beyond my strength. He must reign till he hath put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. The one great voice that brake upon the attentive ear of the listening seer was a voice of thunder and tempest, whirlwinds, and oceans pouring out their thunder-music, crying, Hallelujah! the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth; the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ. There is no craven tone in all the Christian statement. When Christianity has gone back it was but the reflux of the wave that it might return in prouder strength, and assert the sovereignty of God.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we thank thee that thou hast spoken unto us a little at a time. Thou hast given us portions of thy Word in different ways, as we have been able to bear them. Thus hast thou broken bread for our souls, and thus hast thou prevented or satisfied the hunger of our Divinity. We thank thee for all thy music; it is all thine,—the great solemnity and the tender whisper are both the Lord's. Give us the listening heart; forbid that thy music should die in our ears; may that music find its way into the soul, and redouble itself according to our necessity and growth. We bless thee for thy Word,—a lamp, a glory round about us, a sweet voice within us, a friend, a companion, a counsellor, an angel; all blessings in one great benefaction. May we read thy Word eagerly, may we fix our

eyes upon it intently, looking steadfastly, pryingly, penetratingly, into the law of liberty, lest anything should escape our attention. May ours be the steadfast look, the eager expectant glance; then thou wilt show us thy goodness, and that shall be in itself meanwhile as thy glory, thy mercy shall be the pledge of thy majesty. We thank thee that since we have known thy Word we have cared for none other; thou dost fill our souls, yea thy presence doth overflow the vessel of our life, so that we have no more room to contain thee: Lord, withdraw not thyself; increase our capacity. We gather always at the Cross, for there alone may men pray the great prayer of confession and sorrow and self-renunciation and expectancy of redemption. At the Cross we have liberty in our prayer; at the Cross the heart may make its greatest speeches; at the Cross thou didst never deny pardon to any broken heart. We have done the things we ought not to have done; we ask thee to forgive our lawlessness: we have left undone the things that we ought to have done; we ask thee to forgive our neglect. We have sinned against thee thus with both hands: we have broken thy law and we have left it a dead letter: the Lord pity us, the Lord behold us at the Cross, and by the power of the priesthood of Christ come to us and say to each contrite soul, Thy sins which are many are all forgiven thee. Thus shall we have new childhood, new youth, a new glad summer morning, alive with light and music, and we shall run life's race hopefully and successfully. Teach us the meaning of thy providences: we are always misunderstanding God; we affix our interpretations to thy providences and mistake the one for the other: save us from annotating the way of God; may we wait for it, rest in it, be thankful for it, commit ourselves wholly unto it, and save ourselves from the destructiveness of our own opinion. Thou hast done great things for us whereof we are glad. Thou knowest the treachery of the heart; it would count the little things, the adversaries, the disappointments, and add them up to a great charge against the love of God: may we beware of the enemy when he would thus tempt us, and may we turn ourselves to the bright things of life—our reason, our health, our friendship, the rivers of life that flow through the meadows of our experience: and thus may we say the Lord hath done great things for us whereof we are glad. Teach us that gratitude is the secret of joy; show us that if we be trustful we shall be successful: teach us that disappointment is an angel of God sent to bring the soul into closer friendship with heaven. Thus give us dominion over the things that should be under our feet; may we keep them there, when our heads are lifted up in the modesty of perfect faith, whilst we see the dawning light which is the beginning of heaven. Amen.

THE EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE

TO THE

H E B R E W S .

(ROME, A.D. 63.)

[NOTE.—With regard to the condition of the Hebrews, and scope of the Epistle, SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible* says:—"The numerous Christian churches scattered throughout Judæa (Acts ix. 31; Gal. i. 22) were continually exposed to persecution from the Jews (1 Thess. ii. 14), which would become more searching and extensive as churches multiplied, and as the growing turbulence of the nation ripened into the insurrection of A.D. 66. Personal violence, spoliation of property, exclusion from the synagogue, and domestic strife were the universal forms of persecution. But in Jerusalem there was one additional weapon in the hands of the predominant oppressors of the Christians. Their magnificent national Temple, hallowed to every Jew by ancient historical and by gentler personal recollections, with its irresistible attractions, its soothing strains, and mysterious ceremonies, might be shut against the Hebrew Christian. And even if, amid the fierce factions and frequent oscillations of authority in Jerusalem, this affliction were not often laid upon him, yet there was a secret burden which every Hebrew Christian bore within him—the knowledge that the end of all the beauty and awfulness of Zion was rapidly approaching. Paralysed, perhaps, by this consciousness, and enfeebled by their attachment to a lower form of Christianity, they became stationary in knowledge, weak in faith, void of energy, and even in danger of apostasy from Christ. For, as afflictions multiplied round them, and made them feel more keenly their dependence on God, and their need of near and frequent and associated approach to him, they seemed, in consequence of their Christianity, to be receding from the God of their fathers, and losing that means of communion with him which they used to enjoy. Angels, Moses, and the High-priest—their intercessors in heaven, in the grave, and on earth—became of less importance in the creed of the Jewish Christian; their glory waned as he grew in Christian experience. Already he felt that the Lord's day was superseding the Sabbath, the New Covenant the Old. What could take the place of the Temple, and that which was behind the veil, and the Levitical sacrifices, and the Holy City, when they should cease to exist? What compensations could Christianity offer him for the loss which was pressing the Hebrew Christian more and more?

"James, the bishop of Jerusalem, had just left his place vacant by a martyr's death. Neither to Cephas at Babylon, nor to John at Ephesus, the third pillar of the Apostolic Church, was it given to understand all the greatness of his want, and to speak to him the word in season. But there came to him from Rome the voice of one who had been the foremost in sounding the depth and breadth of that love of Christ, which was all but incomprehensible to the Jew; one who feeling more than any other Apostle the weight of the care of all the churches, yet clung to his own people with a love ever ready to break out in impassioned words, and unsought and ill-requited deeds of kindness. He whom Jerusalem had sent away in chains to Rome again lifted up his voice in the hallowed city among his countrymen; but with words and arguments suited to their capacity, with a strange, borrowed accent, and a tone in which reigned no apostolic authority, and a face veiled in very love from wayward children who might refuse to hear divine and saving truth, when it fell from the lips of Paul.

"He meets the Hebrew Christians on their own ground. His answer is—'Your new faith gives you Christ, and, in Christ, all you seek, all your fathers sought. In Christ the Son of God you have an all-sufficient Mediator, nearer than angels to the Father, eminent above Moses as a benefactor, more sympathising and more prevailing than the High-priest as an intercessor: his Sabbath awaits you in heaven; to his covenant the old was intended to be subservient; his atonement is the eternal reality of which sacrifices are but the passing shadow; his city heavenly, not made with hands. Having him, believe in him with all your heart,—with a faith in the unseen future, strong as that of the saints of old; patient under present, and prepared for coming, woe; full of energy, and hope, and holiness, and love.' Such was the teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

"And this great Epistle remains to aftertimes, a keystone binding together that succession of inspired men which spans over the ages between Moses and St. John. It teaches the Christian student the substantial identity of the revelation of God, whether given through the prophets, or through the Son; for it shows that God's purposes are unchangeable, however diversely in different ages they have been 'reflected in broken and fitful rays, glancing back from the troubled waters of the human soul.' It is a source of inexhaustible comfort to every Christian sufferer in inward perplexity, or amid 'reproaches and afflictions.' It is a pattern to every Christian teacher of the method in which larger views should be imparted, gently, reverently, and seasonably, to feeble spirits prone to cling to ancient forms, and to rest in accustomed feelings."]

Hebrews i. 1.

"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past."

"DIVERS MANNERS."

FOR want of knowing this, people are ignorantly charging the evangelists and even modern Christian teachers with inconsistencies and paradoxes, and even high treasons. It is

wonderful what ignorance can do. Falsehood can always be more fluent, if not more eloquent, than truth. The liar has no difficulties. He can say what comes uppermost; he has so depleted himself that he has no memory, so that when he is accused he does not burn with shame. We cannot even get Christian congregations to know the same thing under different aspects. Some earnest men have been trying for a long time to get a congregation to know the gospel under twenty different phases; and the congregation does not know it except under one phase. Give me the jingle of words I heard in the nursery, and I will say, This is the gospel; tell me the very self-same truth under different language, namely, in the words of the current time, the new, fresh, young, audacious words, and because the words have changed I cannot see that the gospel remains. What is to be done under such circumstances is the question of despair. The people cannot be educated: you cannot take them up out of the old ruts and set them upon new courses. But the courses are not new; it stands upon the open page of Holy Writ that the same thing is said "in divers manners." Every man tells the tale in his own way; every narrator sends his own blood through the stirring narrative. Yet having to deal with such an infinite mass of folly the teacher is discredited because the student only knows the truth, as he calls it, under one form, and unless you ring the same peal upon the same bells he says you are not preaching the gospel. Some learned men have been at the pains to collate instances in which there is an apparent difference and yet a real agreement. We are indebted to such searchers into coincidences and contrasts and reconciliations for very much of our Biblical knowledge and our spiritual stimulus. Some of these we may now consider, expressing our indebtedness to those who have done the quarrying work, and have set us thinking upon new lines, and have brought us by their consecrated industry to see how contrasts may indicate similarities, and how similarities may become identities. After nineteen hundred years of teaching Christ's Church will only look at Christ in one way: whereas he could be seen in a thousand aspects: but the Papist has his point of view, and so has the Protestant, who is as big a Papist under another name; and every chapel-guest as well as every cathedral-haunter has

his own way, his own rattle; and if he hear not the same things under the same forms he cannot believe that he is hearing about the same Lord. We must sustain great loss before we can have solid gain.

The writer to whose researches we are principally indebted for instances of the kind indicated would have us bear in mind first of all that Matthew wrote for Jews. Now, the Jew is always a man by himself; he never mixes with anybody; when he sits down beside a Gentile he is miles and miles away from him. Matthew, therefore, had to write to Jews and for Jews; therefore he must adopt a Jew's manner. Luke did not write to the Jews; Luke wrote for Gentiles and to Gentiles. Luke tells the same story of the kingdom, yet he hardly says one word that Matthew says; he hardly ever comes upon the lines of Matthew's observation. This is intensely interesting; this should excite our souls with holy wonder; into these things we should dig, for along this line we find the inspiration of the narrative,—not in similarities but in dissimilarities, not in coincidences but in contrasts. Still the infinite story moves on with infinite dignity; even when the men are apparently telling the same things in contradictory terms you will find the holy reconciliation at the other end. Matthew has to select an expression under which he will bring all his remarks. What is the expression which Matthew chooses? He chooses the expression "kingdom of heaven." Luke has to choose a formula under which he will set forth the Christian idea, what is the formula chosen by Luke? "Kingdom of God." Even in this choice of terms there is inspired genius. The Hebrew could never have understood the expression "kingdom of God": if he had once seen that expression in connection with the Gospel of Christ, he would have fallen at once into his favourite error, namely, that this kingdom is visible, pompous, magnificent, unrivalled,—the Kingdom of kingdoms, the kingdom swallowing kingdom. This was the habit of his grammar. The Hebrew language, as we have seen, had no superlative; the Hebrew language eked out its superlative expressions by the name of "God": so it was "city of God," "cedars of God," meaning the very finest city, the very noblest trees, cedars of unrivalled beauty. If Matthew had said, "I am

coming to tell you that Christ brought the Kingdom of God," the Jews would have said, This is what we have been expecting: now shall the empires of the earth quake, because they shall see a kingdom grander than any other. So Matthew would say, under Divine inspiration, We must keep from the Jew this expression "Kingdom of God," or he will misunderstand it and misapply it, and get into no end of fallacies and sophisms. So Matthew said, "the Kingdom of heaven,"—the spiritual kingdom, the moral kingdom, the empire heavenly, that has no form, magnitude, proportion that you can see and appreciate, but that is a kingdom of the soul. Luke had to address a different audience, and therefore he takes the name "God"; he is a theist, a monotheist, and he pictures this kingdom as the divinest empire.

When Matthew would tell the Jews a miracle, what miracle will he choose to begin with? What would be Matthew's first miracle? Not Luke's, and not John's; nor does Luke take John's, nor does John take Matthew's. Now Matthew shall write to his Jew readers, and what will he tell them first of the miracles? Here is inspiration: no sooner does Jesus Christ come down from the mountain where he has been teaching the multitude than, "Behold, there came a leper." How the Jew's eyes round with wonder! This matter of leprosy has been a serious matter to him through all the ages. Matthew therefore instantly brings the new Teacher into contact with a leper. Nor does the inspired genius end there; Matthew proceeds, "And Jesus put forth his hand, and"—mark his ingenuity—"touched him,"—the unheard-of, the impossible miracle! Nothing could have so struck Jewish attention. Christ might have been the prince of necromancers, and have done many wonderful things, and the Jew would not have listened to any one of them: but to tell the Jews that this man came to a leper, and touched the leper, and healed the leper, and sent him away a clean man! Oh, the power of genius, the master-touch, the wisdom of God! Luke had a first miracle, too; what will Luke say? What will Luke give the Gentiles as the first miracle? Something about a leper? No. Gentiles know nothing about lepers in that sense:—"And in the synagogue there was a man, who had a

spirit of an unclean devil" (Luke iv. 33). Why, this is the very subject of Gentile speculation,—demon worship, demon possession, how to get rid of the demon. Luke says, I will tell you all about that: this Kingdom of God deals with the kingdom of the devil, and shatters it. Luke could have begun at Matthew's point, but did not. Mark the operation of "the divers manners." This religion means to handle the world, and it must know the ways of the world and the speeches of all men. Gentiles were interested in demonology in every aspect, and Luke says he can tell them about their favourite subject. That is the genius of Christianity; it always knows what a man thinks about, what a man likes best, where a man can begin. Christianity says, I can talk your language: you are most interested in lepers, hear this; you are most interested in demons, hear this. John has his first miracle, and like himself, all social affection, tender love, and sympathy, he begins with the wedding and the water made into wine. Each of the men could have begun at the same point; each took his own point to begin with; each was justified in the selection of his starting omen.

Turning to another aspect, you see the same thought. Matthew says (xxiii. 27)—"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness." No Gentile could have said that. If Matthew had written his gospel to the Gentiles they would have left it as an unperused letter. "Whited sepulchres": there is no such word in all Gentile speech. The Jew understood it in a moment. And you must write to men in their mother-tongue. If a Jew crossed a grave he was ceremonially defiled; even if he walked over a grave without knowing it was a grave he contracted ceremonial defilement. How to prevent this, then? The Jews had recourse, we are told by learned inquirers, to this method, that when a grave became so worn on the greensward as to be practically obliterated the place was whitened, a line perpendicular, and a line horizontal were drawn upon that grave; so the Jew knew and kept away from it, and walked at some distance, because if he had crossed that spot he would have been ceremonially defiled; and if the whitewash had been taken

off by the rain, and he walked across the grave he would still have been defiled: therefore the Jews instantly knew this metaphor. But Luke could not well pass over such a statement without some observation. How, then, did Luke manage to put his case?—"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are as graves which appear not, and the men that walk over them are not aware of them" (Luke xi. 44). What a beautiful Gentile speech! There is nothing here that is local, Jewish, peculiar; the reference is set in a general and universal form: and yet, both Matthew and Luke professedly report the same sermon! What a wonderful contradiction it would be to some minds! How they would trip up the so-called inspired writers, and say, Behold! Luke hears the discourse, and reports it thus: whereas Matthew heard the discourse and reported it otherwise. Is there any contradiction? Not a tittle. There is always a meaning within the words: why do men not get into the interior meaning, the esoteric and eternal thought? Why are they such pedantic purists as to quarrel about the verbiage, the words, the literal, symbolic form? If Matthew had reported in Luke's form it would not have been Jewish; if Luke had reported in Matthew's form it would not have been Gentile: each man reported in his own way because each man had to report to his own people. You write to your readers.

We might take another instance. Matthew xxiii. 23—"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith." The Gentiles would not have understood this; they would not have known what Luke was talking about if he had put it in that form. The law? the Gentiles would say, what saith this babbler? The law—what law? whose law? we know not what he saith. Now let Luke report in his own way:—"But woe unto you Pharisees! for ye tithe mint, and rue, and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment, and the love of God,"—the law without mentioning it, the substance without the literary reference. Thus the Gentile is smitten squarely. He is not allowed to run off at the tangent of inquiry as to what the man could mean when he refers to the law. Yet he is lifted into the law eternal without passing

through the law literal. But my lord the pedant says, Behold, Matthew says one thing, and Luke says another, yet they both profess to be reporting the same discourse. So they are, but not phonographically; they are reporting the soul of things, they are interpreting the heart of Christ. Why will men not come into the larger interpretation, the nobler construction, and see what peddling, and embarrassing things words may be when they are employed to set forth the infinite, the spiritual, the Divine?

Other instances could be given in handfuls; these must suffice as indicating a very fruitful course of thought. The New Testament will bear a searching into. From what I can understand there are men associated with the interpretation of the New Testament, who on the whole are not fools. They have examined the documents through and through, and although they may not be millionaires at the bank, they are millionaires in heaven,—in literature, in the higher thought, inspired scholars. Why should such men cling to a document that is full of lies, contradictions, and romances? Yet the document lives, and bears sway over the thought and feeling of men, expanding as necessities increase, illuminating in proportion as the darkness defies its glory. We are taught, then, by these instances and others which learned students have pointed out to us, that we are bound to study our audience. Why write in Hebrew to people who cannot read a word of it? Why write in long words to little children? So with preachers: I say to a man, If you have a congregation of slow-heads, and people who never read a word about anything, then you are bound to be infantile in your style of speech; you must speak to these overgrown babies of yours in a way they can understand. You are right in doing so; it is the Christliest of tempers to make yourself as they are, that you may lift them up into a higher level. To another man, who has an audience of another kind, quick, who can begin with him at the very first sentence, another style is appropriate. There are audiences that start the moment the preacher breathes; they are with him, not a tone do they miss. With such an audience you may be as concise, terse, pointed, as you can. Such men want telegrams, not elaborate details; they can understand the words, for they

open all heaven to their eager attention. You must have your own way of addressing your men. Your brother would probably taunt you with being something which he is not : take care that you do not taunt him with being something that you once were. Each man must address his own audience. Blessed be God, Christianity can adapt its facts to every audience. When you go into a nursery the children say, "Do you know any tales?" but if a fullgrown man were to say to you, "Do you know any tales?" you would naturally begin to wonder, and probably your estimate of the man might considerably go down when you reflected upon the meanness of his request. Christianity says in effect, You would like to hear about lepers, hear my statement; or you would like to hear about the dispossession of demons, hear my statement, I will tell you some of the most wonderful things about that subject you ever heard. Christianity says to contemplative, philosophic minds, You would like to hear the beatitudes, the outward miracles turned into spiritual mysteries and wonders, I can tell you what Jesus said on the high hill; he said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." This man does not care about lepers and demons, but when you touch what I may call the spiritual nerve he is alive all over; he wishes to hear the gracious words that proceeded out of the young Teacher's mouth. In every case there is an audience within an audience. Every congregation is several congregations. The wise teacher therefore may have in the same discourse to tell about lepers and demons, about raising the dead, and uttering the beatitudes; because as a wise teacher he must distribute to each a portion of meat in due season. The difficulty is for the one guest to wait until the other guest has been served. Where is your socialism? where your fine theory of human rights? The man sitting next to you could not understand about the demon, but he is entranced about the leper; therefore he must have his representation, and whilst he is having his you must wait for yours, because, you know, you are a Socialist, a fine human-brotherhood man: show it, and talk less about it! Omission may not be denial. The preacher may want to say many things, but for want of time he may not say them; he has not therefore neglected or denied them. A ministry

is not an affair of one little hour : a ministry stretches across the breadth of a lifetime, and must be judged in its variety, and in its totality, and not in its isolation. We do not want an inflexible method, we want an unchangeable Christ. This is the lesson, to revert to the opening of the discourse, which the Church needs most to learn. Matthew spake of the same Christ that Luke magnified. When John related his miracles they were different miracles, not a different Lord. There was variety, yet there was unity. Every man saw the aspect that pleased him most, or struck him most, and yet all the men are talking about the same sweet, dear Lord. That is the secret of preaching ; that should be the mystery of the power of the Church. If it were so we should get rid of endless foolish criticism. When we see the learned canon going forth with his elaborate essay to read to a prepared audience, we would say, God bless thee, thou man of God : go and tell all these glittering things to an excited intellectual audience, and receive thy reward of grateful applause. When we see the Salvationist going out with his drum and trumpet, we should say, God bless thee, ardent comrade : go and work miracles in the name of thy Lord. Thus there would be great community of feeling, true sociality of sympathy amongst the hosts of heaven ; no man would be attempting to do another man's work, every man in his own way would be doing the work of Jesus Christ ; and thus unity would express itself in variety, variety would reconcile itself in unity ; and when all comes to be told it shall be found that in a thousand voices men have been uttering the same music.

Hebrews vi. 4-6.

"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."

1 Corinthians xi. 27, 29.

"Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. . . . For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body."

CONDITIONS OF RENEWAL.

THERE are some few passages of Scripture which have caused a great deal of difficulty and heartache. There are others which have kept away from the altar, yea, from the Cross itself, many a young, timid, reverent spirit. The question is whether there is any need for this? I think not. I do not know of any passage of Scripture that ought to keep any soul from God, from God's house, from God's ordinances. We are so differently constituted that some of us can only be nursed for heaven. We want continual encouragement; we are soon made afraid by shadow, by unexplained and sudden sound, by incidents uncalculated and unforeseen. We must take care of that section of society; they must be encouraged, consoled, stimulated, comforted; whatever lies in their way of progress towards the Kingdom of heaven must be resolutely removed. Others are very courageous by nature: are extremely robust, words of encouragement are misspent upon them; they have a fountain of encouragement within their own hearts. Whether they are physically so strong, or intellectually so robust, or spiritually so complete, we need not stay to inquire; suffice it to say that they have no shadows, no spectres, no doubts, no difficulties.

There are two passages of Scripture which seem to have kept

a good many men in a state of fear and in a state of apparent alienation from the Church. It may be profitable to look at these passages. If the difficulty can be taken out of them by fair reasoning, and by established laws of grammar, and the philosophy of language, a great point will have been gained. One of them is that remarkable passage already quoted in the text—“It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.” This has been a great battle-ground; innumerable Calvinists have slain innumerable Arminians within the four corners of this most solemn declaration. There was no need for the fray. All the energy was misspent. All the high debate about election, reprobation, apostasy, was utterly in vain, so far as this particular text is concerned. There is nothing here to cast down the heart of any man who wants to come back again. One version of the Bible has put in the word “difficult” instead of the word “impossible.” This little contribution of clemency we have received from the sternest of all languages, the Latin. We do not need the contribution. The word “impossible” is better than the word “difficult” in this connection. It is clearer, more to the point: it comprehends the case more entirely; let it therefore stand in all its tremendous import. There can be no doubt as to the characters represented by Apollos or Paul, whoever the writer may have been. He is urging the great doctrine and duty of progress; he wants the Church to get on—“Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith towards God,” and many other things. The Apostle was a man of progress. Speaking thus of baptism, he says, “It is impossible for those who were once enlightened”—literally, for those who were really baptised: we say really baptised, because he is not referring to water-baptism, he is referring to the inner, the spiritual baptism, the chrism of fire, the visitation of the Holy Ghost upon the soul. It is impossible for those who have been baptised by the Holy Ghost, and have

tasted of the heavenly gift, and who were not only baptised by the Holy Ghost, but have been made partakers of the Holy Ghost,—it is impossible for them if they fall away, to renew them again unto repentance. What construction can we put upon these words but that if we once leave Christ for one moment we can never get back again? If having been in Christ we do wrong, we commit one sin, we must commit a thousand more, for we are on the downward road, and we cannot be arrested in the infinite descent. There is no such reading in the text. We cannot stop the text at a given point, and say, “That is the doctrine, and certainly it would appear to be such.”

But the text proceeds to give a reason why it is impossible to renew certain persons again to repentance, and that reason is this—“Seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.” Is not that a final reason? Yes, it is: but it is not a correct representation of the Apostle’s reasoning. The English is to blame for the ruin it has brought. Over this false grammar have men fallen into despair. The Revisers were timid, because they were conservative. I blame them distinctly for want of courage. They had learning enough, prestige enough; they could have encountered momentary prejudices in a dignified and successful manner: but who ever got twelve or twenty Christian scholars together without their devouring one another, so courteously as sometimes perhaps in some degree to fall short of the point of courage? The tense changes in the latter part of the statement. “Seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame” should read thus:—“It is impossible for those who”—then read the description—“If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance, whilst they are crucifying the Son of God afresh, and putting him to an open shame.” The latter tense is present, it indicates an immediate and continuous action, something that is going on now, at this very moment; and the Apostle says, Brethren, if you continue to crucify the Son of God afresh, you can never get back again to your original state of acceptance, you can never recover your sense of adoption; the very act you are doing is fatal. Why then, should you be discouraged, if you really want to come back to Christ, and if you are endeavouring

to lead a good life? If you are bethinking yourself, and trying to say the old sweet prayer, and if it be really your heart's desire to be recovered from your backslidings, there is nothing in this passage to hinder you coming home now.

The passage thus rendered is supported by all the experience of life. It is impossible for any man who has fallen from sobriety to be renewed again to temperance, so long as he is debauching himself night and day with the drink which overcame him; if he will set it down, and retire from it, he shall yet be a sober man, but if he mean to recover his sobriety by drinking more deeply, then manifestly he is perpetrating an irony that is ridiculous and shameful. If any man have fallen from honesty it is impossible to recover him so long as he continues to steal. He must drop the action, he must feel burning shame on account of what he has done, and when his felonious hands would go forth to repeat the nefarious deed, he must draw them back and say, No: I will cry mightily unto God if haply I may yet be an honest man. Thus talking there shall be no doubt about his honesty. The Apostle's reasoning then is simply this: that if we continue to sin we cannot repent; whilst we are in the very act of crucifying the Son of God afresh, and putting him to an open shame, it is impossible for us to repent, to pray, to return. This is the noble teaching of the Apostle, this ought to be a comfort to us all. We sin every day, and yet if we do not want to sin, and if the sin be followed by heartache, confession, contrition, and mighty prayer at the Cross, we shall be renewed again unto repentance every eventide; but if we think we can, by simply confessing the sin, gain a new licence to recommit it, then our confession is a lie, and the very act of contrition is a trick which aggravates our guilt. The action must be *bonâ-fide*, the soul must mean what it says, the reality must be equal to the profession. We have therefore to declare this sweet gospel—would God we could declare it in adequate music! There is no soul that has gone so far away from God to be unable to repent: and we have to declare this solemn truth, that any man who talks of repentance, and is at the same time crucifying the Son of God afresh, continuing to love his sins and to wallow in them, is a liar in the sanctuary. Return, O wanderer, to thy home:

come back, poor soul, made afraid by backsliding. We have all been guilty of backsliding; the oaths are lying round about us like a million withered leaves: but if we really do not want to crucify the Son of God afresh, if we are really earnest about desiring to return, we can return. "Return, ye backsliders, and I will heal your backsliding!" is the cry of the Old Testament, is the gospel of the Cross.

Now, nearly immediately connected with this passage is one which the Apostle has written in connection with the administration of the Lord's Supper. The two passages may fairly be said to have a distinct and almost vital relation. How many people have been kept back from the Lord's table by these words:—"Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. . . . For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." Timid souls by the hundred have been kept away from the Lord's Supper by these words. Yet there is nothing in them to keep away any soul. We have been frightened by shadows. We cannot but admire the timidity which says, I am so conscious of unworthiness that I dare not touch the sacramental bread, and sacramental cup. But such unworthiness is not referred to in this particular passage; therefore this passage must never be quoted when that sense of unworthiness is felt. When that sense of unworthiness is most deeply upon us, then should we come most reverently and hopefully to the Lord's table. What were the circumstances under which this declaration was made? Everything depends upon understanding the circumstances of the case. We must penetrate the atmosphere, if we would understand the admonition. Everything was debased in the Church at Corinth. That early Christian Church seemed to have a genius for deprivation and perversion and all manner of wrong. The Lord's Supper was instituted there as in other churches; the people came together to partake of the Lord's Supper, and instead of making a distinctly religious festival of it, they turned it into a carnival, holiday-making, feasting, rioting; so much that the Apostle says, "Have ye not houses to eat and drink in?"—why should you come to the Lord's table to have a saturnalia, to feast yourselves

in this way, and to debase yourselves in this riotous manner? Understand, therefore, that the Corinthians were not recognising the Lord's body in this matter but were simply feasting together and rioting together, eating bread and drinking wine together, until the religious consciousness was lost, and the whole ceremony became one of simple social festivity. Addressing himself to such circumstances, the Apostle said, Beware: you are contracting a guilt you ill suspect: if the light that is in you be darkness, how great is that darkness!—the Lord's Supper was meant to be a religious festival, a time of solemnity, a time of heart-inquest, a time of memory, so that all the pages of the Lord's earthly story might be recalled and felt in ever-deepening emotion; instead of this, you are making that holy feast a riot: whoever eateth this bread, and drinketh this cup, unworthily, irreverently, debasing the whole action into its very lowest forms, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself. And that is right.

Then will you not come to the Lord's table? Shall there not be a great inrush upon the holy scene? Men have been afraid lest their unworthiness would keep them back. The unworthiness was not in reference to the individuals but in relation to their want of discernment as to the meaning of the feast. No longer was the Lord's body present amongst them, but a mere ceremony of eating and drinking. Will you then stand back any longer? Will you not come in, it may be timidly, and say, I, too, would like to touch this bread and this cup of memorial? Thus two classes are addressed, the backslider who says, "I once could pray, but I do not pray now"—if he can add, "but I want to pray," then the first passage need not stand in his way; secondly, the timid, self-distrustful, and self-renouncing, the passage in the Corinthians has no reference whatever to you. If you say, "This feast is holy," and wish to observe it with becoming reverence, the doors are thrown wide open, and God's welcome is as broad as God's love. Why stand ye then outside? Come in! Come now! See me, or your own minister or friends in your own locality immediately, and say you wish to come to the Lord's table. That means making a profession without ostentation, doing a deed the sanctifying effect of which ought to flow through the whole life. Will you not say Yes? Then this will be your birthday if you will.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we bless thee for the uplifted Cross, whose light fills creation. We see a Cross everywhere ; its great shadow makes the night and the morning of the world ; without that Cross there is no security. It is in everything ; where anything lives something else has died. We found this in the garden, and in the nest of the birds, and in the jungle of the wild beasts, and in our family life, and in our spiritual and educational life ; that some may live some must die. Thou hast put death upon thy table, and made thy sacrament and oath and immortality even in the grave and in the presence of death. God forbid that we should glory save in the Cross ! If men would lead us to the throne may we go to it by the Cross. Inasmuch as we have been called by thy love to see the Cross and know somewhat of its holiest meaning, if we be risen with Christ may we prove our resurrection by the heavenliness of our love, by the heavenliness of our citizenship, by the heavenliness of our service. O Christ, the Living One, thou didst come to take us to the Father. Show us the Father : may we know that he is close at hand, though we cannot see him ; that if we could but open our soul's eyes we should see the Father in every little child, in every broken heart, in every budding flower. Oh, for eyes to see, heart-eyes, soul-eyes, the vision of the inner life, penetrating all cloud and darkness, and seeing the Shining Glory. Then should our life be rid of its burdens, its pains and its sorrow and its fear, and we should live the life of liberty. If any man is foolish enough to be making his own gospel, do thou chastise him with many disappointments day by day, until he shall begin to pray at the right altar. Thou hast sent thy Son to save us, to seek and to save the lost, to call sinners to repentance : help us to hear the music of his inviting voice, and to answer it because our sin is exceeding great. Oh, hear thou in heaven thy dwelling-place the prayer thy servant prayeth, and when thou hearest, Lord, forgive ! Amen.

Hebrews vi. 9.

“ Things that accompany salvation.”

THINGS THAT ACCOMPANY SALVATION.

IT is quite right to be interested in a salvation that is central ; that is essential, but salvation is not solitude. Salvation represents a great sociality. Salvation is the heart of a noble fellowship. Many writers and preachers have, no doubt, set forth the text as conveying the idea of a procession ; salvation

red as blood, bright as light, tuneful as embodied music, at the head, and then all the retinue, a thousand or ten thousand strong, following, their very march music, their very look an expectation and a prophecy. It is a beautiful picture. Every man's life is to be such. If we have regarded salvation as monasticism, loneliness, one little or great idea dissociated from other thoughts, and especially dissociated from active and expressive character, we have done injustice to its first, midst, and last idea and purpose.

There may be too much said about salvation when that term is too narrowly interpreted. No selfishness is so selfish as pious selfishness. No cruelty is so cruel as Christian cruelty. The bite of the wolf is nothing to the lie of the soul. What if your salvation and mine are of infinitely less consequence than we have supposed? If we have been looking on that term as simply expressive of that comfort, individual certainty of going higher and higher, and doing less and less, and enjoying the indolence of doing nothing, some strong man may one day arise who will tear that idea of salvation to rags and tatters. It is not true, therefore it is not healthy, therefore it ought to be put down. "Are you saved?" may be a wicked inquiry. Some will not understand how this can be, because some are only at the alphabet, and some have not begun to study their letters. There are children in the world who have never heard of the existence of the alphabet. We do not consult them upon higher statesmanship or the higher mathematics. In another sense there is no greater question than, "Are you saved? are you a new creature, a liberated soul, a mind on which there shines the whole heaven of God's light? Are you a soldier, a servant, a helper of the helpless, a leader of the blind? Are you akin to the soul of Christ?" It is impossible for us to get at Christ in any sense of acceptance, assurance, and identification, except through one gate. Can we not climb up, pierce the roof, and enter by a way of our own making? No. What is the name of the only gate that opens upon the presence-chamber of the Saviour? The name is the Cross. Have you ever heard it? That you have heard it as a name, we know, but there is hearing and hearing. The Cross may be a word, or it may be a sacrifice; a literal fact,

or a suggestion infinite in its resources as the heart of God. It is in the latter larger, truer sense that the Cross is a gate, the one gate and the only gate to the presence and favour of the King.

Many men are saved who do not know it. I have known so-called bad men whose disposition I have coveted. I have known them more largely than they have known themselves, though their breath is burned with unholy suggestion. I have known that their souls have been fruitful in noble and kindly thoughts. Let God say who is saved. "Lord, are there few that be saved?" No answer. Christ takes the statistics, but he does not publish them. He says in reply, rather than in answer, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate; do not be inquiring so much whether there be few or whether there may be many that be saved. Strive ye yourselves to enter in at the strait gate." We may be asking questions about others when we should be executing duties on our own behalf. There is nothing meaner in all God's universe, so far as we know it, than a pious miser, a miser by self-thought, self-condolence, self-flattery, self-regard, as though he should shut himself into his own garden and his own banqueting-hall, and should say, "What a wicked world it is, and how few that attend to religious ordinance and ceremony, and how much men are to blame themselves for the evil they are in and for the suffering they endure!" Talk of a man so, he is the devil's hired servant.

What are the things that accompany salvation? To the youngest, let me say, to accompany is to go with—as we should say, "Are you walking to-day in the field? if so, I will go with you." Things that accompany salvation are things that go with salvation, keep it company, belong to it, have a right by kindred and by quality to be there. But what things can accompany salvation when salvation is interpreted in its higher and deepest sense? Is it a virgin beautiful with ineffable loveliness? Oh! were it not better she should walk in her fine linen alone on the green hills, in the flowering gardens, in the laden orchards? No. She will have with her a thousand little children, multiplied by ten thousand more, and cubed up into an unimaginable

number. That virgin is social, friendly, a great housekeeper, and she goes forth, not in vanity, but in a natural expression of kindness accompanied by others akin to her own soul.

Sometimes you see a procession and not the head of it. Did that sight ever deceive you? Never. Beholding the retinue, the procession, you say, Who is this? Not, Who are these? but, What is this? as if it were a single and not a plural explanation. Who is it? One soul. What is it? One event, yet not a soul alone, not an event dissociated from a common history. Are you satisfied to look upon the procession, upon the retinue, to see nothing besides? You know you are not. You want to see the leading figure, the main idea, the life of which these are the lives. Is the child satisfied to see the tail of the kite? The dear little child rounds his eyes and looks for the kite itself, and with joy he points it out, saying, "There, I see it." Dear little child, was it not enough to see the floating tail of the kite? No! the child will see the chief image itself. In that little figure, homely enough, and therefore all the better, we see the whole idea of this conception of a procession, a retinue.

"Things that accompany salvation." That word "accompany" might be made much larger and much more vital. Sometimes the procession is abreast of the king. It so happens that in this march sometimes the things do not accompany in the sense of following behind, but in the better and the excellent sense of going along with, as if arm in arm, placed so that it shall be difficult to say who leads so far as the mere stepping is concerned, and yet not difficult to say who leads so far as the larger life and regnacy of will are concerned. Some men make places for themselves. You say there is no room, these men soon find room enough. They do not claim it, it is conceded to them. There may be momentary opposition or envious interpretation, but all things give way before sovereign power, before supreme and noble character. At the last, confidence is promoted, integrity is crowned, but who has the deepest, clearest, largest, best ideas will always lead the empire and make republics into sovereignties.

What are the "things that accompany salvation"? There are

some things that would not accompany it. There are some things that through the very force of shame would decline to be in the retinue. Can a poor, tattered, ragged, dishonoured, self-discredited vagrant join the procession of the king? He says, "No, it is not my place, put me out of sight, let me die in darkness." Among the "things that accompany salvation," we find first of all purity of character. But does purity of character mean perfection? It does not. There is no perfect man. This cold space, this cage of time, could not hold him. Perfect man can only bloom in heaven, where the climate is pure and where the day has no night. By purity of character let us mean a real, honest motive, a just and noble desire, a wish to be, not in heaven, but heavenly in mind, thought, life, speech. This definition enables me to include a great number of persons in the Church who do not include themselves. It is sad to see how things are always placed in the Christian kingdom. There are some pedants who will not come in, and therefore ought always to be outside. Pedantry has no status in the New Jerusalem. There are some conceited persons who think they have attained all that is desirable; they do not come in, and in very deed they ought to be kept out. Self-complacency is not a virtue anywhere; in the New Jerusalem it is a blasphemy.

There are, however, men who are getting wrong seven times a day who ought to be in the Church. They are Christ-like and do not realise the fact. I have seen in their eyes tears which must have travelled to their eyes by way of the heart. Yet they blunder; I know it well; they fall flat down in the devil's mire. I have seen them many times; they are inflammable, passionate, wanting in self-control. Surely. But they are pressed and driven by five hundred ancestors who were worse than they are. The five hundred ancestors are smiting them as with scorpions. Blessed be God, it is not ours to judge. Christ will shut out no one that he can bring in, and he must be a son of perdition whom Christ cannot bring into his own feast of love and eternal fellowship.

Among the "things that accompany salvation" I give a foremost place to unselfishness of service; the service that

never looks at itself in the Church mirror ; that never dresses itself to go out to be seen ostentatiously in public ; the service that is crowned with self-unconsciousness ; that does good things by stealth and blushes to find them fame ; the service that does things as a monarch does them, not knowing that they are being done, without any sense of taxation, and sacrifice, and painfulness. There is a doing that would rather do than not do. There is an action that must take place because the suppression would be not only unreasonable but intolerable. Love must serve. Many are working in that way who have no earthly fame. The Apostle recognised all such in the very text in which we find the words on which we are discoursing, for he says, "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love." Here is one of the things, therefore, which accompany salvation. Doing, always doing ; doing simply, doing kindly, doing lovingly, doing in the Christly spirit. There are some actions that are oppressive to the very individuals for whom they are performed. Why ? Because the manner of doing them is burdensome, aggressive, oppressive. Some people help you and therefore hinder you. Some people do for you things little or great with such self-effusiveness and self-display and with such an unreasoning expectation of gratitude, that the receiver of such services would gladly dispense with them. There is an action subtle as the atmosphere, silent as the night, always operating, never displaying, or demonstrating, or self-magnifying.

What shall we say of charity of heart ? Does not that also accompany salvation ? That is the larger love, that great mother-love which says, "If the house will not hold you, we must add another wing to it." Great love never takes out a two-foot rule and says, "There will only be room at this table for thirty," but love says, "You must find another table." But the room will not hold it. "Then take down the wall, and go into the garden." Love keeps pace with necessity. When the great feast was spread those who went out to call in the unfamiliar guests said, "Lord, it is done as thou hast said, and yet there is room." It was Christ who spoke that parable. He is great in finding room, but never was prevented from doing anything because there was nothing, or because there was little to begin with.

“Five loaves” would do to begin with. The prodigal said, “There is bread enough in my father’s house and to spare.” All the evangelists who went out to call the hungry people to the supper said, “Lord, we have searched everywhere, and brought in everybody we can find from hedge and ditch and hole and rock, and still there is room.” Who ever exhausted God? Who ever overthroned his heaven?

This must be the spirit of the individual Christian also. But here is a poor heretic who does not see his way clear to several of the dogmas of the Church. Oh! tell him to speak nonsense no longer, but to come in at once. Here is a soul greatly troubled because his experience is different from other experience that he has heard of. Tell him to come in this very instant, for there is a chair set on purpose for him at the corner of the table. Here is a man who rather revels in his infidelity, and gets drunk on his unbelief. Then keep him out. If a man is proud of his scepticism, we do not want him inside the Church, or out of it. He is not wanted anywhere. But if a poor soul should come in and say, “Oh, sirs, it is so dark; which is the way? Will a little child take hold of my hand; and if any wise man is here, will he kindly tell me where I ought to begin, what I ought to do, and how I ought to begin?” make room for him. You need not make room for him; the King, in drawing up his list of wedding guests, set a chair for him next himself.

Where there is this charity, Christ is. Where, then, charity does not exist, there is no Church. Unutterably do I hate a man and the disposition that would keep out of the Church any poor, maimed, bruised soul that wants to be in it. “But he does not think as we do.” And who are we that should do the superior thinking and set up a standard theology? I will not be one of the number. I was born yesterday; to-day I am groping and struggling and wandering and stumbling in prayer; and to-morrow I shall not be here. Does the poor soul want to love Christ? If so, here is a seat for him at the Lord’s table. “Is not the Lord’s table set up for perfect people?” By no means. For then would it be a banquet in a wilderness far from any human heart.

There is another accompaniment to salvation which must not be forgotten ; let it be named as final in the list, but only as initial in its suggestions. And it is evangelistic zeal. What is the meaning of evangelistic ? It means that some soul has a truth, a gospel, which he says he must go and tell everybody all over the world. That is the meaning of evangelistic. The truth burns him until he tells it. The gospel that fills his soul is the gospel for every creature. And he must talk about it, propagate it, publish it, circulate it. He must breathe it on every wind, and send it to every sea to be carried to every golden shore. What did the Apostle mean when he said he was a debtor to the barbarians ? This has often been misinterpreted, and the Apostle Paul has been represented as a very humble person, because he confessed his obligations to everybody, to the Jew, to the Gentile, to the Greek, to the barbarian, to the bond, and to the free. And the favourite pulpit idea has been that Paul was so willing to acknowledge that everybody had been favourable to him, and kindly disposed towards his life, and had contributed something towards his service. Nothing of the kind. Paul's idea was the evangelistic idea. What I hold, said Paul, belongs to the very first man I meet, and the man beside me, and the man behind me, and all the world, Jew, Gentile, Greek, barbarian, bond, free. Wherever there is a man, I am his debtor. "Oh, sir, come, I know this truth, and therefore I owe it to you"—that is the Cross of Christ in eloquent action. Not, "I have received something from you, poor barbarian, and therefore I must give something back." "I never received a thing from you in my life, but I know a truth that would make a man of you, I know a gospel that would serve you, therefore I am your debtor. Come, and I will pay it. This truth I do not hold as mine only, but as yours also." Fly abroad, thou mighty gospel, go forth, thou queen of truth and love, and be thy retinue more in number than the sands upon the sea-shore, brighter than the stars that beam in the diadem of night !

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we have heard that thy mercy endureth for ever. All the great houses of history have said this. We know it of a truth ; we take up the great song and sing it with our whole heart ; for we have tasted and seen and handled of the Word of life. Thou hast saved us. Thy mercy has been near us all the day and all the night ; thou hast come to us in the darkness of our despair and in the humiliation of our weakness, and thou hast breathed great gospels into our sinking hearts. Oh, how loving is thy voice, how majestic and tender in music ! Behold, thou canst speak a word in season to him that is weary, and thou canst order the armies of heaven. We rejoice in thy love ; we draw near to thy pity ; because there are tears in thine eyes and thou didst look upon sinful men, we dare come quite close to thee and say, Have mercy upon me ! Thy mercy endureth for ever ; this we will say in the morning and in the evening ; when we awake in the night-watches we will say, Thy mercy endureth for ever. Teach us that we live in thy mercy ; because thy love faileth not, our life is permitted to add to its days. We do not live because of thy greatness or thy justice, thy power or thy majesty, but because of thy tenderness and love, and pity and gentleness, and fatherly-motherly care. What are these great, sweet words thou hast sent unto us to live upon, to hide in our hearts, and turn into daily life ?—Like as a father pitieth his children ;—casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you ; last of all he sent his Son ;—God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son :—these are thy words ; we cannot mistake them ; these voices are not earthborn ; behold these great utterances fall from heaven, and bring all heaven with them. Help us to answer their grand appeal, that we may be broken in heart, humble in spirit, meek of disposition, obedient in will, and abounding always in the fruits of the Spirit. Amen.

Hebrews xi. 3.

“ Things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.”

TYPES OF THE UNSEEN.

THEN they were made of things which do not appear, and if they were made of things which do not appear they must be in some way types of things unseen ; that is to say, the thing moulded must be like the mould out of which it came. From this view of the case let us try to find our way at once to the truth, that the things which are seen may help us in some

degree to understand the things which are not seen; if we pay attention to what is visible, we may get at least a dim hint of the things that are not visible; time may help to give some hint of eternity; earth may be a dim symbol of heaven; man may be the figure through which we may see something of God. This will be found to be a truth of very wide application. As children need toys, so men need helps to get at things unseen. The whole realm of the invisible must come to us by type and symbol. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto——." The kingdom of heaven is not that, as a mere matter of literal fact, but it is like it, and yet unlike it: for the finite cannot be wholly like the infinite. The danger is that we mistake the literal for the spiritual, or that we force parables and signs into exaggerated uses. Our object should be to seize the spiritual intent and meaning of the parable, and to leave all that is of the nature of drapery or accessory quite in a secondary place.

Let children take it in this way: The other day a very small bird heard me talking about Westminster Abbey, and the little creature asked me what the Abbey was like. So I said to the bird, "I think I cannot tell you better what it is like than by asking you to look at your own cage; now think that the roof of your little house is about fifty thousand times bigger than itself——," but the little bird stopped me, and said it was too much for its tiny head to do. That is just the way with ourselves, We try to multiply thousands of billions of ages by thousands of billions of millenniums to get an idea of eternity, and we become lost amongst the endless and bewildering figures. Yet the truth symbolically lies along that line, but oh, how far along! In another sense it does not lie along that line at all, for arithmetic utterly perishes in its attempts to convey any idea of the Eternal. Still, that is the only help which we have at present. Our arithmetic is in that regard a Bible. If we had no arithmetical figures we could do nothing in the way of computation, and yet when we have done all that is permitted by arithmetical figures we leave eternity untouched.

Let children a little older take the truth in this way: A young man whose sight was nearly lost asked me to describe heaven to

him as a place. He was nearly blind. On a very bright day he could distinguish a bed of flowers from a plot of grass, and dimly see the outlines of the trees. I took him one summer morning to see a lovely garden, with soft green meadows stretching far away beyond; and I said, "Think of this emerald being spread all over the world, and over a world millions of times larger than ours, and think of all these colours never fading, this bloom never perishing, this odour never lessening, this sky never clouding, these bird-songs never ceasing,"—but he stopped me, and said, "How can I?" He was lost in amazement. He exaggerated the poor little fact before him until it became an impossibility, and fell to pieces under the torture of his imagination. Yet this is the only way in which God can, so to say, get access to our minds. We have no adequate powers with which to take hold of spiritual realities; we need help; and the best help is poor; so we see but parts of things, and the parts we do see are upside down and discoloured. The danger is that we mistake the type for the thing typified; that we seize the letter and miss the spirit, and that thus we stand amidst forms and shadows, and do not enter into the inner and hidden sanctuary, where the sacred Truth sits in infinite beauty and infinite calm.

Let a still older class of students take the matter in this way: we can only think of God through our own individuality as men. The very idea of God brings with it at once the human form as its only possible expression. It is, too, the greatest help we can have: for man was made in the image and likeness of God. Yet God protests against the abuse of this help again and again, asking if he is a man that he should do this or that; he is not a man that he should lie, he is not the Son of Man that he should repent. But try to think of God as a conscious, merciful, righteous, holy Being, and you must, by some necessity, hardly to be explained in words, think of him as an infinite man, an almighty man, an effulgent and magnificent man. What is his form? You think of it as human. You speak of his eyes and mouth, his hands and feet; he rises, he sits; he walks, he rides, he comes down, he calls, he grieves, he rejoices;—all these are human expressions, and are limited by human uses, and they bring with them subtle and tremendous dangers. God is a

Spirit; there is no similitude with which he may be worthily compared; no image represents him; no imagination can encompass the fulness of his might and glory: yet he says he is a father, a king, a shepherd, and a man of war.

With the poor illustrations and terms accessible to us we have to work; they are blurred and misty lenses through which we have to look at the sun. We could better think of Lebanon through a withered leaf, of the sea through a drop of putrid water, of landscapes inexpressibly beautiful through one handful of barren soil. Yet we have no other image and likeness of God; through this, or through nothing external, we must see our Creator and Lord. So with heaven. We want to know what it is, and we cannot be fully told. We think of fair lands gleaming in everlasting light, of angelic hosts, throng upon throng beyond computing, of the friends we have parted from waiting for us on a golden shore, clothed in pure linen whiter than snow, of trumpets and harps, of anthems and peans of victory, of crystal streams, of gates lustrous with precious stones, of crowns that vie in splendour with all that we have ever seen or imagined; and when we have thought of all this we have but seen a landscape with the light of a candle, or looked upon the sea when hidden under an impenetrable cloud. We know nothing. We are thrown back upon an inextinguishable hope, and we must die to see what heaven is.

The practical lessons which come out of these reflections are clear and simple: for example, that the movement of life is from the less to the greater. We are moving towards something that is exaggerated by symbols, but towards something which is imperfectly expressed by them. "The half hath not been told us." "To die is gain." "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." "Hereafter ye shall see." We are thus called upon to live a life of hope. We thank the flower for its beauty, and tell it how nearly it sets forth the better flowers not seen just now. We err vitally in supposing that the earth shows us the end of anything. What is the earth but as a board on which diagrams are drawn by an invisible hand, giving us some rude outline of things that are yet to be shown to us in all their sweep and grandeur? All

nature is a parable. Blessed are they who have the seeing eye and the hearing ear, that all the beauty and poesy of the parable may be secured. The four seasons are four gospels to the man who can read them with spiritual intelligence. Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, what God hath prepared for them that love him. Whatever may be the spiritual meaning of this, and however much it may have been revealed to us by the indwelling Spirit, yet in relation to all the great disclosures which God has to make, the words are to be taken as showing that here and now we know nothing in its reality and in its completeness. Here we have no continuing city, yet the city in which we dwell gives us some hint of law, order, security, and the harmonious operation of all manner of ministries and agencies. Here we cannot see the celestial paradise, but every cluster of flowers that we do see may be taken as the beginning of a line which continues itself throughout infinity. In the best sense of the term, to-morrow shall be as this day, and more abundant—more abundant in visions, in light, in music, in opportunity of service, and in opportunity of study. All the longest days have yet to come. We are moving towards them through tunnel and cloud and difficult pathway, but beyond—how little beyond, who can tell?—lies the land which knows no winter, shines the day which knows no night. Our motto is, *Excelsior*; or our motto is, *Beyond*—always beyond—farther and farther beyond. What has been seen is as nothing compared with what has yet to be revealed.

Then the second lesson is that we must allow for different ways of expressing our ideas of invisible things. We do not express ourselves alike about things visible: how then should we use the same words about things that are not seen? The vital thing is to believe in the invisible, to endure as seeing the invisible, to clothe the invisible with such features and attractions as shall commend it with supreme fascination to our hope and our loyalty. "If in this life only we have hope, we are of all men most miserable." The Kingdom of Heaven does not reveal itself to all men in the same aspect or in the same degree; consequently we have endless differences of expression in words, regarding the nature, extent, and obligations of that Kingdom

Out of this difference of conception and expression comes all that we mean by Christian denominationalism. That denominationalism is urged to mischievous uses when it is set up as being the only orthodoxy; but it may be used with great advantage when the truth is recognised that every man sees God for himself—that is, in a way in which no other man sees him; that no one man is the whole Church of God, but that all sections and communions must be brought together in their totality in order to represent the revelation of the divine kingdom as it has been apprehended by the human mind. If we cannot agree as to a form of words regarding the substance of nature, the operation of law, the uses and bearings of facts, events, and circumstances, which make up what we call the story of daily life, how can we be expected to speak the same words, in the same number, and with the same emphasis, and with the same accent, regarding things invisible, spiritual, and eternal? Here we must have room for variety of expression, and here we must hail every man's utterance as a distinct contribution to the sum-total of God's revelation.

Another lesson is that we shall know that we are making a right use of the invisible by the effect it produces upon our use of things visible. Are they diminished in importance? Does the invisible make our sorrows seem as light afflictions which are but for a moment? Does it bless us with a spirit of glad solemnity? Does it enable us calmly to remit all present tumults and controversies to a grand arbitrament, that shall be merciful and just? Does it spread itself over us, over our yearning and expectant souls, like a firmament full of stars—stars that may be homes of the good and true, washed in the infinitely sufficient and precious blood of God the Son? Does it encompass us like a sky, star-rich, with hospitality written over its immeasurable expanse? Does the grave look like but a black speck when seen in its glory? If this be our view of the Invisible, truly it is to us a tender and blissful revelation of Heaven.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we have offended thee with manifold offences; we have been cruel to thee, as if with malignant determination to wound thy gentle heart. We have been cowardly in our Christian testimony, poor in our Christian service, selfish even in our religious considerations. But for thy mercy, broader than the earth, higher than the heavens, more enduring than our own life, we should surely die; but the blood of Jesus Christ, thy Son, cleanseth from all sin. That we may now feel its cleansing power is our heart's desire unto God. Thou wilt do exceeding abundantly above pardoning us; thou wilt even make us holy after thine own perfection; thou wilt take our sins away as if they had never been, and cast them for ever into the depth of the sea. This is our joy and this our triumph over sin. Thou wilt make us without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, so that the signature of the devil shall not be found upon us at all; our sins will be forgotten, and thy great mercy will shine in our imperishable holiness. Sanctify us then, O Holy Spirit, and we shall be holy. Teach us the mystery of holiness; we know nothing of it; we have but heard of holiness. Do thou lead us into understanding what is meant by the purity of God. Help us to hate sin with infinite and unquenchable hatred; may we abhor that which is evil, and may all evil men find our presence a judgment upon them, and feel that we torment them whilst we are in their sight. Help us to torment with infinite torture all evil spirits, all devils, all hellish dispositions; may those who have them and suffer from them cry out to us by reason of our holiness, "What have we to do with you, ye sons of God?" Thus make us preachers of the truth, signs and testimonies on behalf of righteousness, and may those who are doing evil fear us, and those who are doing well be made glad in the light of our countenance. We all want blessings; there is hunger in every heart; there is a void in every nature. O thou dear, gentle Christ, who didst carry the fulness of the Godhead bodily, fill us with thy fulness, and we shall be satisfied. Amen.

Hebrews xii. 1.

„Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.”

THE EUPERISTATOS.

THIS text has often been used for the purpose of cheering discouraged and faint-hearted saints, by the doctrine that we are all watched by the living dead; so to say, they are

gathered in infinite circles around our earth, and are watching our conduct in the race of life: and the very fact that we are being looked upon by such a cloud of observers should stir our energy, illumine our hope, confirm our purposes, and turn our very weakness into strength. That animated exhortation is full of truth and wisdom: but it is not the truth or the wisdom of the text.

What are we to understand by "a cloud of witnesses"? certainly not a cloud of observers. Men say they witnessed such and such an event: that is to say, they looked upon it, they beheld it, they took note of it: but that is not the sense in which the word is used in this verse. The verse has no reference whatever to observance, inspection, or criticism of what other people are doing. The word "witnesses" is a right word, but it must be understood in its right and definite meaning as here employed. The right word would be "martyrs": "wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of martyrs"—that indeed is the literal word: *μάρτυρ* is the word which designates the witness as in the Epistle it was originally written. The witness therefore, in this case, is one who bears witness, who testifies, who (so to say) stands forward and declares that he is prepared to make declaration concerning certain doctrines, truths, practices, claims, and demands. So the witness is not an observer, but a testifier, and a man so earnest in his testimony that he would die for it rather than contradict it. Time would fail me, saith the Apostle, to tell of all the martyrs, of all the witnesses; nothing could silence them; they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented: they could have changed the whole situation by a word, but they were steadfast in their testimony:—wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of firm men, who made oath and said, and kept to their word with inflexible fidelity. Or we may vary the criticism, and still retain the same point. It would be right to read the text thus:—"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of Protestants." When you are asked to define the word "Protestants" you instantly think of popery. Protestant, originally, has nothing whatever to do with popery. Men say, We

are Protestants, and by that they define a sectarian position. But that is not the original, rich, large meaning of the term Protestant. The word Protestant occurs in the Book of Chronicles, long before pope or popery was ever thought of: and the word is so rendered in the Vulgate translation of the Scriptures, which is acknowledged by the Vatican to be a valid and authoritative translation. There we read of Protestants—*quos protestantes*—who being Protestants took such and such a course. The word Protestant comes from a word which signifies to bear witness, to protest and say. The word Protestant has an incidental, may be an accidental, but certainly not an essential, relation to popery; in that connection it was invented about the early part of the sixteenth century, when certain men protested against acts that had been done; they were sneeringly called “Protestants.” That name has clung to all liberal thinking, to all expressions of mental enlargement, and to all persons who throw off trammels and chains, and claim liberty, and right of private judgment, and right of personal conscience. But though the word was applied in derision it has been turned into an honour. The word “Christian” was so used. The disciples were first called “Christians” at Antioch. The word was pronounced derisively, contemptuously; the people to whom it was applied were designated “Christ’s-ones,” “Christ-ones,” “Christians.” The name has been taken up and is now the brightest of all designations. The Church would not part with it. It accepts the contempt of the enemy, and transmutes it into the gold of the sanctuary. Thus the text might read: “Wherefore seeing we also are pressed about with so great a cloud of martyrs, Protestants, men who had conviction, principle, and stood by it: they were men of backbone, they were not gelatinous men; they were vertebrate, upright, massive, powerful men, of whom the world was not worthy; they wandered about in deserts, and in dens and caves of the earth, and found the cold rocks warm, because their hearts were true; they sang in the fissures of the rocks and in temples not made with hands, they feared nothing—nor king, nor priest, nor law—because they had the commendation of God. Wherefore seeing we also at the latter end of history are pressed upon by a great cloud of Protestants, let us——” That is the argument. It is not an abstract appeal, it is not a fine

essay in words. Christianity comes down to us in Christians, and Christian argument is a Christian army. Men are called upon to be firm ; and the proofs and the confirmations of the appeal are to be found, not in the inventiveness of metaphysical or poetical genius, but in the realities and the conquests of men who were sons of God.

“Let us lay aside every weight.” The idea was that the racers were enfolded in long, flowing, highly-coloured robes, which attracted much attention, but were liable to interfere with the ease and agility of the racer. Wherefore let us, in order to be worthy of our historic relations, lay aside every weight ; strip, that we may run ; throw off all coloured things, all decorations, all entanglements, that we may properly execute the race. “And the sin which doth so easily beset us.” This has been interpreted as referring to peccadilloes, or small offences. We say of a man that his besetting sin is avarice, censoriousness, selfishness, indolence, the love of physical satisfaction, and we guard men against the sin that seems to have the greatest hold upon them. All that is right ; all that is true to spiritual experience, and to actual conduct : but it is not the right criticism of this particular text. In order to represent the word we should have to coin an almost grotesque expression. This is the translation of a word which occurs nowhere else in all Greek literature. Not only does it not occur in the New Testament, a little book you can handle within finger and thumb ; but it does not occur in any department of Greek literature. In its negative form it occurs only once, so far as scholars are able to inform us ; but in the form in which we find it here it stands alone in this verse. In order to represent it we should have to make some such word as this—the well-stood-arounded sin ; the sin that is backed by a million backers, the sin that men delight to own and to proclaim, the popular sin that commands the suffrages of a world. No need to exhort men to keep away from the sins that bite, and that sting instantaneously, and that we are ashamed to mention or name ; all these sins may be taken as amongst the drawbacks and offences and inequalities which men would never own. But there are other sins, which, as we have said, are well-stood-arounded,—first the circle of admirers, then a concentric circle,

then the circle multiplied by three, by thirty, by three hundred, by thirty thousand; sins that men are proud of, proverbs that they quote when they sit by the fireside, and are in jovial mood; maxims which they write at the head of their letters, and with which they adorn their crests; shallow philosophies that cheat the heavens, and mock the God of eternity, and fritter away all human life. Let us lay aside the well-stood-arounded sin, the popular damning sophism.

This being the reading of the text, the light which comes from it falls back on that historical chapter which immediately precedes the text, wherein we read of Abel, and Enoch, and Noah, and Abraham, and Moses, and the illustrious dead: they laid aside the well-stood-arounded sin, the sin that has fame, and the sin that is supposed to bring popularity to the sinner. Thus the whole chapter is lighted up with a new illumination; old meanings are shed off, and the right idea burns and glows before the reverent imagination.

Take instances. Is there a better-supported sin than the sophism, "one world is enough for me"? A man would say that in company, and think he was uttering a profoundly wise saying. He would not speak it under his breath, as if he were taking a great liberty with truth and history; but he would boldly utter it, and punctuate it with a laugh that meant defiance to theologues and churches, and altars. That sin will kill him; it will deprive his soul of fresh air, of liberty, of the expanse which is needed for truest, largest culture. It looks harmless enough; it does not look as if it were a poisonous reptile; but it is, notwithstanding all appearances to the contrary. No life can thrive upon it. First of all, it is false, and being false it eats the soul like a canker. Abel stands up, and says, I forsook that at the beginning of history; I laid aside that idea; I offered a sacrifice which meant larger things, a mysterious sacrifice of blood: I studied the colours of things, and I found them stained through and through with living vermilion; I sent up a sacrifice to God, and as I was doing so the earth dwindled into nothing; I had barely a foothold, hardly an altar, so small the world seemed when I got hold of the reality of things. Yet this is a popular and well-stood-arounded sophism. "One world is enough for me." Let us say,

So it is: but first of all find the one world. There is your difficulty; there is your impossibility. There is no one world. Where your laugh, where your jibe, where your foolish jest, now? You cannot find the world to play with, to trifle with, to spoil: God's universe is a well-compacted house: world speaks masonically to world; star unto star speaks light; world unto world repeats the password of the universe. Who is entitled so to mutilate the worlds, the continuity of God's building? By what authority do we detach a star, a planet, a little world called Earth, and say, This is enough? First get the world's consent to be detached and mutilated. Where is the one world? You call it the earth. There you are wrong. The earth is a member of a household; it has family relations; it has a place which it could only hold because other worlds are holding places in relation to it. Find the one world, and it will be enough for me, too. Produce it! Where does the one world get its light from? where does the one world get its rain from? where does the one world borrow its summer? How is the one world kept in motion?—not a vibration, but a motion that melts into infinities. There is, believe me, no one world. We may have opportunities in one world with a view to our relation and action in another, but the solitariness of the opportunity is within it, and in no wise involves the relation of the rest, which must of necessity be a relation of continuity and consolidation. Once get rid of this sophism; then you ask what worlds there are; you take some measure of things, you have an idea of the locality where you stand, of the dimensions of the things that are above you and around you; and he who does not proceed upon these fundamental principles will bring his life to a miserable issue. When you study any great question get hold of its boundaries, if you can, its great main lines; do not fret and vex the mind with the immediate detail, but ask for the principal line, for what may be termed the geometric figure: what is it—square, triangular, circular? then begin to come down into detail; but always hold the thing in its entirety, so far as you can secure possession of it. So with the worlds: consider that there is no one world, that each world is related to some other world, that all the worlds are strung upon an invisible thread, and so strung they constitute the wealth of God.

Another man says he has made this his creed—"A short life and a merry one." Let us lay aside this well-stood-arounded sin. Here Moses stands up and says, I forsook that; I had the temptation offered to me, but I said, No. So Moses is amongst those who laid aside every weight and the well-stood-arounded sin, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. The very sin has been complimented—"the pleasures of sin for a season." The pleasures perish in the use; when we are about to seize the prize we grasp a bubble. There are pleasures that taste well in the mouth, but when they mix with the life they give it torture, they inflict agony upon it. "The pleasures of sin for a season." Do not be led away by those foolish teachers who would ask you to have a short life and a merry one. That is impossible. There is no short life. He who talks about a short life does not know what he is talking about: for every life is related to all other life; time impinges on eternity; the frailest pulse of man speaks in some whispered tone of the thunders of immortality. "A short life"—to what ignorance are we indebted for the false expression, to what blasphemy? Because God lives we live; and who has taught us that he cuts life into fragments, and lets the fragments drop as if they were of no account to him? Life is his jewel; life constitutes the uniqueness of God:—"I AM"—the eternal verb; the verb out of which all other grammar grows; without which all other conjugation would be impossible.

Then there are those who say they have determined their creed in the light of the philosophy that "seeing is believing." Moses says, I got away from that early in life, and I began to see that it were better to endure as seeing the invisible—or him who is invisible—I kept my eye upon the eternal. But let us say that seeing is believing; then we should have to ask, What is seeing? Who sees? Nobody. Seeing is impossible! There is the error of that well-stood-arounded sin. What can the eyes of the body see? If they look up to the sky at night-time they see nothing but spots of amber; they have to assist the eye to catch sight of the largest world that flames in the empyrean. We do not trust the naked eye in things of a comparatively trivial nature; we have our microscope, or our telescope, or our magnifying

glass, or assistance of some kind, and we regulate the lights in order that we may see this or that more perfectly. Who is he, then, who with brutal ignorance wishes to drag young minds down to the base and devastating creed that seeing is believing? "Lord, open his eyes, that he may see," said the young prophet. The young man might have said—Open my eyes! My eyes are as open as yours: there should be no difficulty about the situation; I see the hosts of Syria coming round us, coming nearer and nearer, and making escape impossible: why talk about my eyes not being open? the old prophet simply said, "Lord, open his eyes, that he may see." And the Lord opened his eyes, and he saw; then he believed. The larger seeing is the larger believing. True sight is true faith. But at present, in our physical conditions, in our murky atmosphere, in our limitations, no man can see anything beyond mere figure, form, transient colour. We are indebted to revelation for all we know of the innermost secret of things. Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with the mighty army of men who protested against these sophisms, who died rather than be bewildered and puzzled by them, let us also lay aside every entangling robe, everything that is of a cumbrous nature, and the well-stood-arounded sin, the popular sophism, the silly, foolish, superficial talk that has reduced itself into proverbs, and let us get hold of the deep, eternal philosophy of things. How can we do so? Christian teaching has a ready answer to that inquiry:—only by acquainting ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ. He claims to be before all things, and above all things and to hold in his hand the organisation and administration of all things. He is the only begotten Son of the Father, who alone knoweth how eternity throbs and burns. Lord, open our eyes! When we meet thee on the wayside, we say, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us! And when thou dost say, What will ye? We say, Lord, Lord, that we may see! We meet thee at the point of need. Our pain inspires our prayer.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, we bless thee for all the great men who have spoken to us the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. May we never forget the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; may we learn all our prayers there; there may we receive pardon, release from the perdition and the torment of sin, inspiration to study deeply and serve well. Glorious Cross! a tree, the leaves of which are for the healing of the nations. May we go back to thy Word for all truth; thou hast revealed all things to us in Christ Jesus: Lord, open our eyes, that we may behold wondrous things in the Son of thy love. He fills the earth, and he fills all heaven, and he is the Head of all things to the Church. If we have forgotten aught of his beauty, bring it now to the recollection of our heart; if for a moment we have forgotten that he is fairest among ten thousand and altogether lovely, may we see him as we have not seen him before, with the vision of our love, and may we ourselves become transfigured into the likeness of his glory. Wonderful is his name, wonderful in might and wisdom and truth and love,—all wonderful. Men heard the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth, and said they had heard no such music before; men beheld the wonderful works which he did, and gave glory to God in loud, sweet song. May we be worthy of such an ancestry; not caring for the form, may we strive after the power of godliness; may we know that the word of God is with power, may we be assured that we have known Christ by the renewal of every disposition, and the heightening and glorifying of every purpose. We thank thee for good men, as we thank thee for the salt of the earth, and for the light of the world, for the freshness of spring, for the abundance of summer. O Christ, thou wilt always have a generation to call thee blessed; thou shalt see of the travail of thy soul and shalt be satisfied; Calvary shall not stand for nothing, it shall be the very centre of heaven. Help us to live wisely and well during the handful of days allotted upon the earth. We were babes yesterday, we shall be dead and gone to-morrow; oh, may we spend the intervening moments having great care lest we lose one of the jewels of God. Amen.

Hebrews xii. 3.

“Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself”; “such gainsaying of sinners against themselves” (R.V.); *or*, such gainsaying of sinners against each himself—in their totality, against themselves.

“SINNERS AGAINST THEMSELVES.”

WE are accustomed to talk about sinners against God, and we too frequently lose ourselves in the sublimity of the confession. Here we have it brought before us in another and

more direct and simple but not truer form, namely, "sinners against themselves." A man can understand what that means, where he cannot understand what is meant by sinning against God. You must begin with the selfish. Man can hardly ever get beyond himself. This is beneficent as well as embarrassing; all depending upon the circumstances. Self-projection properly conducted becomes an instrument with which we more perfectly understand the mystery of the divine nature. It is difficult to think of God other than as infinite man; it is almost impossible to think of God except under human form. Angels are but glorified human creatures; even their wings do not destroy their human look: and it has pleased God to allow us to climb up the ladder of self-consciousness and self-study, so that we may touch at least the edge of his garments. When men begin to understand that sin hurts themselves, they may begin partially to comprehend what is meant by sin offending, grieving, hurting God.

Take the first meaning of the words, to which there is no objection—that there was a gainsaying of sinners against Christ. He was encountered on every hand by obstinate and cruel hostility. That sense of the text is not disputed. It is, however, only part of a larger and truer sense. Whilst the gainsaying was proceeding against Christ, the view which Christ took of the gainsaying was, These poor fools are hurting themselves. We have not only to do with the view taken by outside observers of the action of men, we have to do with the view which Christ himself took of the whole set of circumstances. From our point of view the hostility was against Christ: he was reviled, despised, rejected of men, encountered with fiercest antagonism: he was seized with cruel hands and murdered; the Prince of Life was killed: all that is perfectly and literally true; but it does not interfere with the view which was taken of the occasion by Jesus Christ. Looking down from his Cross he said, "These poor fools are committing suicide; they do not know it: they are crucifying themselves, stabbing themselves, ruining themselves." Nor was this a merely philosophical interpretation of human history: this is one of the most affecting circumstances in the life of the Redeemer:—"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I

have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" and again, "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves." "Saul, it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks": thou canst not make one little mark upon the eternal throne, but thou canst bruise thine own hands, and breed mortification in thine own flesh. The sinner is not only a criminal, he is a fool.

Have we any phrases in our common speech that will throw some light upon this view taken of human hostility by Jesus Christ? When do we most deeply and sincerely pity some people? When we come to the point of saying, "They are blind to their own interest": not only are they annoying other people (as if that were a trifle), but they are "absolutely insensible to their own interest." That is thought to be a very condemnatory accusation: because it reduces the people to a position, not only of hostility which may have some dignity in it, but to a position of absolute stupidity and folly and madness. Let us take care what admissions we make along this line; because some keen-minded preacher may gather up all these admissions, and hurl them upon us when he comes to make his final indictment. What do we say of some young men? Speaking of their immorality, speaking of what we foolishly term their minor immorality, such as their want of punctuality, their want of scrupulousness in statement or in personal habit, we say, Such young men are "injuring their own prospects." Or, when young expectants are not sufficiently dutiful to relatives or friends, we seem to sum up all the pith and range of our compassion when we say, They are so foolish, because they are "standing in their own light." Take care! All these admissions are profoundly theological. They are not little maxims which apply only to the transient occasion and the immediate figures; they are Bibles not fully opened, and they contain judgment and wrath and hell. It is impossible to be other than theological. The term has now become a term of derision; there is a limited sense in which perhaps the derision may be well expended. Wherever we are we are touching eternity. We could not drink the draught of time except out of the goblet of eternity. Wherever we are and whatever we are doing, if we be other than the veriest fools,

we are touching God, and we shall awake to say, Lo, God is here, and I knew it not : this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven, and a little trifling admission I made in the market-place is magnified into a canon by which I may be condemned. Thou wicked and slothful servant ! out of thine own mouth will I judge thee. Man cannot open his mouth without condemning himself. His cleverest admissions are but the most craftily drawn impeachments of his integrity. Man has not a little maxim in the market-place that may not stab him through and through, and will not do it in the final make-up and settlement of things. The preacher need go no farther than the maxims of the market-place to find a Bible. If you took away the written book from the preacher, you would not take away his texts : his texts are in the life of men, they are in the moralities of society, his texts are in the little canons by which conduct is partially regulated. All these grow on the edges of the Bible proper. They may not grow right in the very middle of this revelation, down where the Tree of life stands heaven-high, but all these little floral maxims grow on the edges of God's revelation garden. The point, however, to be held steadfastly in view is this, that we do admit that we often simply pity men who are so blind to their own interest, who stand in their own light, who blight their own prospects, who foolishly, madly strike the rock from under their own feet. That we take to be the very supremacy of madness.

Jesus Christ, looking upon all the gainsaying of sinners, said, This is meant to be against me, and it is against me ; it has a distinct bearing upon my personal feeling : but if these people could see the thing in its reality, they would see that every time a man strikes God he puts a sword into his own heart. Sinners are sinners against themselves ; they stand in their own light, blight their own prospects, and cut the ground from under their own feet.

To sin is not simply to break some outward law. It is to injure ourselves. For example, a man sins against the outward law of health : what happens ? His own health goes down ; in his own illness he writes his own condemnation. Health is not a figure

outside a man issuing decrees and fiats, man saying, "I will read these and see what they are; if I like them I will obey them, and if I dislike them I will throw them aside," and having read them says, "I will none of you." Can that man live as if he had not resented the appeals of the spirit of health? Certainly not; he is playing a losing game, he is fighting a losing battle: no man can fight the angel of health and win. He may abstain from food, he may abstain from the cleansing bath, he may decline to take renovating and stimulating exercise, he may take himself into his own hands and say to the genius of health, I will not take my legislation from your court. What happens? Nothing to the genius of health; that radiant figure still lives, rules, and dictates the true *régime* of physical development. What happens to the fool that ran away in a spirit of disobedience? This happens to him—ruin. And the spirit of health says, The poor soul is a sinner against himself. Suppose a man should say he will not submit to intellectual discipline: he will not read, he will not open a book, he will have no subjects assigned for study; he will simply live upon himself, and as for consulting other minds and following an educational programme, he will do nothing of the kind: what happens? Narrowness, mental feebleness, want of a large, round, all-inclusive sympathy; sectarianism happens, bigotry happens, little miserable prejudices are bred in the heart that is so ill-treated: and the genius of mind says pensively, The man is hurting himself: he might live in the sunlight, and he has locked himself up in the darkness; he might have read many books and have seen how difficult it is to pronounce an opinion upon everything, because in every question there are numerous considerations that require balancing, shading, colouring, weighing, and he might have learned to be modest. But hear him how he chatters, what little maxims he has, what small, paltry pedantry: where is freshness of thought, clearness of judgment, massiveness of understanding, geniality and charitableness of criticism? The man has killed his soul. Suppose a man should say he will not use his right arm any more, he will bind it to his side, he will do what he can with the hand on the left side. He has a kind of liberty to do so; this he might practise for a long time: what becomes of the right hand? Paralysis, loss of strength, feebleness, or some other calamity. Unbind the limb

at the end of seven years; now stretch it out. It cannot be done; the man is a sinner against himself. Christianity is the sublimest protest against selfishness, and the sublimest inspiration in the direction of true, large, complete self-culture. To oppose Jesus Christ is not simply to be on the wrong side of an argument. There are those who talk as if Christianity were simply argumentative, and as if one man has as much right to his opinion as any other man. That is perfectly true, but Christianity is not an argument only; health is not an argument, mental cultivation is not an argument, the proper discipline of the limbs is not an argument, only: there is an argumentative side; in Christianity there is an argumentative side, large and sublime: but Christianity is not an argument merely, only, or exclusively. That is where men get so far wrong. Hence we have this wonderful little Vanity Fair, on the base as large as a fourpenny piece, that one man should get up and say he has as perfect a right to his opinion as any preacher in the world. So he has, perhaps; that depends upon a number of considerations which he has not mind enough to take in: but even if he could establish his right to his opinion he would not touch the real measure of this sublime inquiry. Christianity is not only an argument, it is a morality, it is a science of conduct, it is a philosophy of spiritual training, it is a sublime endeavour to bring errant minds into harmonic line, to lift up that which is bulging into perpendicularity, and to put that which is off colour into the right music of shade. Christianity is not an argument, it is a redemption. You admit this in all the lower levels of life, why do you hesitate about it in the sanctuary? Suppose a man should rise and say, With regard to health and cleanliness, I have as much right to my opinion as you. We say, Very good: what is your opinion? My opinion is that a man has only to let his body alone, and it will take care of itself. If we had a whole eternity to debate in, we might contradict him. Some persons must be allowed to utter their inquiries and pronounce their judgments, and there the matter must be left. To oppose Christ is to injure one's own soul: the soul is no longer what it was. Contact with Christ gives sweetness to the soul, fineness of temper, nobleness of charity; contact with Christ makes men simple, sincere, modest, kind-hearted; contact with Christ lifts the life to a

higher level. To sin against Christ is to sin against the innermost philosophy, the divinest science, the first thought of the eternal impulse, the essential fire of the universe. Whoever sins against Christ bears no more fruit; he is as a withered fig tree, and hungering men passing by and seeing leaves thereon will say, Let us appease our hunger here, and lo, the fig tree is without figs: men curse it, hunger curses it, just expectation curses it, and it withers away. To sin against Christ is to go down in the highest regions of the soul; to sin against Christ is to lose quality of mind and heart and thought and purpose. This is not always incidentally evident. Yet such decadence in fine quality is observable, if we look at the person implicated at sufficiently wide intervals of time; so we say about some men, He is not somehow what he used to be: what is the difference in that man? The difference is subtle, and yet it is all but palpable; it hardly admits being stated in words, and yet it stands before us like a wall of adamant. If you can trace that man's inner history you have the explanation: he has ceased to pray; once he prayed always, now he prays seven times a day only; once he prayed seven times a day, now he prays but twice; once he prayed but twice, now he does not pray at all. Can he keep up the fine bloom of the soul? No. A man cannot cut himself off from God, and be as good, and great, and wise, and kind as he was during a period of intercommunion. Let experience answer, let the facts of the market-place and the fireside testify: where prayer dies the soul withers, where love of religious communion ceases to animate the man the soul soon takes up with minor engagements, and quickly tells in its loss of bloom and radiance and pith the tragedy of its fall.

This is the view which Christ himself took. He said, They are plotting their own ruin. This deeply affected him; this was one of his keenest agonies—that men do not see the reality of their conduct. They will live such a little life, they will take in so little field, they will build walls around themselves instead of living in the enlarged liberty of God's horizon. When the nation goes down in its best religious feeling, it goes down politically, commercially; every enterprise is a new phase of gambling, and every promise is a new form of investment. The

view which Christ took of the condition of society is that all wrong doers are hurting themselves. When this view is taken we shall get rid of a good deal of narrow selfishness ; we may become less metaphysical, but we shall become more human, and therefore more sympathetic. Can any enlightened man look upon a youth who never reads a book, and feel that he may be after all a very good and a very capable young man? It is impossible. We live on books. There is a temptation to live without such aids, but it is a temptation to live on stones instead of bread. If you could see that youth in the proper light you would say, Poor soul, how he dawdles away his time ! how he fritters away his opportunities ! how he might be strengthening, enlarging, and equipping himself ! There are young men who to-day boast that they never open a book : what becomes of those young men ? That is one of the unanswered questions of history. They can come to nothing really useful, and they can do nothing really good ; unless indeed they make up for want of consultation of books by some other kind of equal or superior study : but study there must be ; otherwise the mind goes down, the soul languishes. How we cry out against the man who starves his body ! we sometimes indeed threaten men with mechanical appliances if they do not sufficiently partake of food to recruit their animal strength : it would be a crime against the state for any man to starve his body. How anxious we are to keep the flesh, the bone, and the sinew in good condition. But if we were true to our own argument, and saw it in all its last and just issues, we should say, If it is a crime against the state to deplete and ruin the body, what must it be but high treason against the universe to starve a soul ? But this is the continual difficulty of all intellectual teachers, all day-school teachers, all Sunday-school teachers, all pulpit teachers, and all men who undertake to assist the development of the human mind, that men will instantly acknowledge the argument as bearing upon the body, but when it is lifted to its higher applications they fall away from the monition, and go on feeding the flesh and depleting the mind. What can be God's feeling about sinners but that they are self-lost, self-ruined, self-condemned ? O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself. There is a suicide other than that of the body. A man may never have made "his own quietus" "with

a bare bodkin," and yet his soul may be lying within him a blanched corpse: he may be a living sepulchre, a walking grave, the completest, the saddest, the most humiliating of ironies. God pities the sinner because the sinner hurts himself. God's hell is not a fire kindled by mere anger, it is a fire kindled by sin. Do not blame God for having dug a hell in his universe, he did not dig one inch of it: sin dug it, sin lighted it, sin filled it with its fire and brimstone. It is so in the matter of health, of intellectual cultivation, of social relationship, and it must be so in its highest spiritual and theological applications. Suppose a man should shut out the sun from his dwelling: does he hurt the sun? He hurts himself, and the sun might say as it gazes upon the barred shutters, O poor fool, dwelling in that darkness, I am here with a gospel of light; I am here to make thee a gardener; I am here to show thee new mysteries and apocalypses of colour; I am here, representing the music and the harmony of the universe: why wilt thou not open these shutters, and let me work for thee all the miracles of light? I pity thee: thou hurtest thyself. Suppose a little flower should say, I will not live outside any longer, I will not have anything to do with what is called the course of nature, I will live wholly by myself, I will have nothing to do with the sun, or with the dews of night or morning, or with the former or the latter rain, or with the breezes roaring like a whirlwind, or whispering like a zephyr: I am going to live altogether by my little self,—does the flower hurt the sun, or the dew, or the living breeze? No. Poor hermit, poor cut-throat, it hurts itself. All living roots are in the sun; all colour is the child of the sun; all beauty is an adapted sunbeam. Turn ye, turn ye! Why will ye die, rot away, lose rootage, and be cast out as unprofitable servants? Turn ye, turn ye! As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in death, I do not want that servant in the household of my universe: but to be men you must have certain liberties, and to have such liberties involves the possibility of suicide. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! I called, but ye refused; ye will not come unto me that ye might have life. This is God's complaint, and it hurts him, not so much that we are rebels against his throne, as that we are rebels against ourselves.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, we pray thee mercifully to direct us in all the way of life ; then shall perplexities become means of grace, and our embarrassments shall give us deeper cause for thought, and turn our wonder into reverence and expectancy. Look upon thy servants who have to toil for bread : teach them that there is pleasure in labour, that the heaven of our reward is in the getting of our bread, not in the eating of it ; may we know the pleasures of the chase ; may we know that we are called to the fresh air that comes from the hills of heaven, and to the exercise which warms the blood of the soul. We thank thee for all thy care and love, thy patience. Thou dost sit down with us at the common meal and make it a sacrament ; thou dost go out with us on our daily errands, and when we come back we glow with holy fire, for we have touched the Lord. Sanctify our bereavements and losses and cares ; show us that every grave we dig is another acre in our heavenly estate ; show us that every loss is but an aspect of some great gain. May we be gentle with one another, patient, forbearing ; reluctant to strike, unwilling to divide and quarrel ; may we seek out reasons for reconciliation rather than excuses for continued hostility. Rebuke our selfishness ; pity the man who is laying up for himself pile on pile, and then telling lies to God and to man, saying that the claims upon him are so many that he can do nothing more. The Lord forbear to smite the liar, or the earth would be too small for the tombs of those who tell falsehoods. The Lord direct us, keep us, guide us in the way of life : open the doors which open upon liberty and the way of progress ; explain to us enough for the cultivation and ennoblement of our faith, and may we in all things glorify the living Father. Let Thy Spirit dwell within us—mighty Spirit, holy Spirit, loving Spirit, that every evil power may be cast out of us, and every vain imagination may be destroyed, and our whole soul become as an immortal temple inhabited by the King of eternity. May our heart be pure, and our voice eloquent in all speech of wisdom and charity ; may we open our lips for the dumb, may we plead for others as we cannot plead for ourselves, in all faithfulness, nobleness, and trustfulness ; and when the end shall come may we find that it is but the beginning, that in Thy universe there is no end : the sun sets to rise again. Thou art moving all things by a law of revolution : we ascend as we revolve. May we enter into all the double motion of Thy great dominion, and feel whilst we are upon the earth we are in heaven, whilst apparently making no progress we are surely though imperceptibly ascending. When heaven opens, and we see the first glimpse of the garden-land, the summer-country, where the flowers bloom for ever and the music never ceases, we shall forget the burden, the pain, the toil, the fear of life : so shall we ever be with the Lord. Amen.

Hebrews xii. 16.

“ . . . who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.”

THE PRICE OF BIRTHRIGHTS.

YOU pity Esau. You think that he was driven by necessity to make this poor bargain. You say that, if he had been less hungry and weary, he would have stood for higher figures. That is the common mistake of men. There is only one price that can be had for a birthright, and that is “one morsel of meat.” There are no higher figures; there are no better bargains. If he had received ten thousand worlds they would have constituted but one morsel of meat, when in the other hand there was a birthright. Now what becomes of your clever compromise, your sharp sight in trade, your keen sagacity? If you have been so foolish as to sell your birthright, I know what you got for it—you got “one morsel of meat,” and nothing more. It is very desirable to impress this upon young minds, who may not yet have fully completed the momentous transaction. The devil has no more on his counter; the enemy has no more at the bank; he pays you all he can pay you when you sell your birthright,—one gulp, one morsel, one flash of pleasure, and then hell! Nothing more is possible. Then why haggle with the old serpent, the devil? Why ask for three-half-pence more for your soul? The whole transaction totals up to one morsel of meat. That is all he gave to the mother of the world. She and he struck the first bargain about birthrights. When she saw that the tree was good for food, pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took fruit—how much can a woman hold in her hand?—and she did eat: and then she knew that she was naked. So it comes and goes, age after age, the same temptation, the same bargain, the same price, the same perdition!

See if these things be not true in experience, in every degree of the circle of life's tragedy. You will have pleasure, you will gratify a passion: do it; having done it, what have you got in your hand, in your mouth? In the very indulgence of the passion you consume the compensation; when all is over there is nothing left but fire, shame, reproach, the sting of hell. This

is inevitable ; this is the law of providence, the law of experience, the law of justice. Never gratify a passion, for thus you would take the pleasure out of it ; never gratify an ambition, otherwise you will be delivered over to the misery of reaction. Never take the poor man's one little bit of garden ; whilst you do not get it you may have some little pleasure in considering how you may obtain it, but the moment you lay hold of the deeds, the sunshine dies on the hill, the landscape is gone. This is the gospel that needs to be preached through all the market-places, and through all the sanctuaries of unbaptised and unholy commerce. You must feel this, or we cannot go profitably one step farther. You have made your fortune : now what of it ? You cannot enjoy it if you bargained for it with the wrong party ; if you gave your birthright for it, if you gave anything for it more than honest labour and a fair proportion of your time, I defy you to enjoy it. If you tried to enjoy it, it would reduce itself to one morsel, and you would swallow it in one act, and it would be forgotten for ever. You are not the clever man that you were thought to be. God hath no greater fool of your inches in all his universe. You are rich, and you have so many horses that you never can get a ride, and so many coachmen that not one of them is ever well enough to take you out. I know you have both hands quite full ; now lift them to your mouth ! You cannot. Oh that men were wise, that they understood these things ! that they would conduct commerce and bargain-making on the right lines, and that they would never sell a birthright for one morsel of meat, which, I repeat, is all they can ever get back in that unhallowed transaction. Or you may be serving a bad cause, giving up to it all your energy and thought, all your solicitude and emotion, and you may have won the cause ; now let us join you in the feast you are going to make in celebration of the victory ; spread the table ; what have you by way of banquet ? The cause was a rotten one ; it meant oppression, corruption, selfishness, sharp practice ; it meant falsehood, it meant the surrender of your manhood, which is the surrender of your soul : now spread your feast ! Where is the feast ? Blessed be God, the bad man has no banquet ; he does not know what it is to be content, quiet in soul, joyous and filial in aspiration and reverence. The man who has paid his birthright for his victory has no feast, no joy,

nothing to show for his folly : and this is true the world over, and the ages through ; and until we drive this into the heads and the hearts of the people our metaphysical preaching amounts to nothing, and our pity may but help men to gild their lies.

The highest rights can be parted with. A man can get rid of his birthright. A man can deplete his soul of itself. One would think it would be impossible to part with anything but that which is material, commercial, arithmetical ; but history—and may we not add personal consciousness?—testifies to the fact that we sell our souls. Why do we not say so to ourselves plainly and frankly ? Why not confess the crime of suicide ? This is the intolerable agony of remorse. If we had sold a hand we could make it up again in some form, but when we have sold the brain, the heart, the soul, how can we recover such birthrights ? We have often said that God has given to man the power of committing suicide, but never the right to commit it. A man can put, so to say, the instrument of destruction to his own soul ; across immortality he can draw the razor of destruction. “In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” That word “die” has never been explained. We have given to it narrow meanings, and therefore have sought to found upon it narrow theologies. Only God knows what it is to die. No traveller has returned to tell us what it is to die. It must be terrible beyond the power of language to express, for God hath no pleasure in it ; and if he of the infinite heart cannot make room for death, who shall describe it in words, or figure it in sufficient symbols ? There are possessions without which we could not be men, without which we could not begin to live, and without which we could not receive the ministries of nature. Is a man deaf ? then he cannot receive the ministry of music : see how he looks ; mark the vacancy, mingled with expectancy, in that strange aspect : the face is a note of interrogation,—Is something going on ? Is something being said that I ought to hear ? You all seem to me to be rapt and transfigured, and yet I cannot understand what it is that is operating upon your souls : Oh, tell me ! But you cannot tell a stone. Is a man blind ? then he is excluded from the ministry of light and colour and form and all that peculiarity of distributed magnitude which constitute the

very apocalypse and wizardry of form. And you cannot represent to blindness what a beam of light is like. So you may have got rid of your religious sensitiveness, and now you may say about the hymn-book out of which you used to sing that you can find nothing in it. You are right; not for a moment do I dispute the fact that you can find nothing where you used to find so much. The book is not dead, but your spiritual sensitiveness is extinct. So with the divine revelation. You were once accustomed to delight in it, you meditated therein day and night, and now any last critic who is dealing in the vapourings of critics who are already ashamed of their folly can tempt you to leave the Church. Has the Church changed? Not at all. Is the Bible so revised as to have ejected its own wisdom and made room for some man's folly? No. Then, what is the explanation of it? The birthright is gone, the soul's power of vision, the soul's responsiveness to appealing heavens and all the nurturing ministries of nature. You can exhaust yourselves. You have sold your birthright.

What things are there that may be called birthrights? Carlyle says there are no natural rights. He does not say who told him so; not even in a footnote does he indicate his authorities, and Carlyle seldom indicated any authorities except by footnote, by some awkward vindictive kick. I do not go to a learned dyspeptic, in order to learn whether there are any natural rights. A recent interpreter has declared his acceptance of the doctrine that there are no natural rights. Who told these men so? There are birthrights; they themselves acknowledge that there may be moral right: but all this action on their part may amount to a mere play upon words. We need not discuss what is meant by natural rights, if it be granted that men have certain moral rights; it is enough for the Christian teacher to know that he is dealing with people who have a moral nature, who have moral aspirations, moral aversions, and moral preferences, and who are governed by these moral ministries. That is the basis upon which the Christian teacher proceeds. There are some birthrights that are moral, others that are intellectual, and others that are social. Surely we come into something; surely there is some law of inheritance, and some law and discipline of succession.

What the ancients did and left behind them did in some sort suggest that sons would be born to them, who, improving the estate, would hand it on to the generations following. It would be difficult to persuade a child that it has no right in the sun; it would be difficult to persuade the very poorest little girl in the poorest quarter of London that she has no right in music. Hear the Orpheus: how plagued your ear is! but, see, every little girl in the neighbourhood is on tiptoe, is alive; she has found an old anonymous kinsman and they are holding revel together. Let them! If some crabbed philosopher should say to these dancing, pirouetting children there are no natural rights, of course they would cease and stare and wonder and bless the bearded prophet! We cannot get rid of instinct, much older than logic; we cannot get rid of aspirations that have no words, God's own songs in the soul. Let us one and all take care lest we part with our birthright on any terms; and let us especially remember that, whatever the terms may be in figures, they total up into one morsel of meat in reality. It is a morsel, and it is one morsel, and it never can be more under any circumstances. When you in that wicked gambling transaction made ten thousand pounds you only made one morsel of meat, and you are afraid to eat it; you wish somebody else would eat it, you would be glad to get rid of it: the money has an ugly look, the image of the sovereign seems to be in the wrong place, to be humiliated and disgraced so long as it is in your coffers. You know this. When you went out the other night to gratify your evil desire you came home like a whipped hound, afraid because there was something behind you; a leaf stirred and made you feel that all heaven had come down in judgment. You sneaked into the slumber which you did not deserve. Through and through, I repeat, all the ages long, this is true, that Esau parted with his birthright, and never got more than one morsel of meat.

What is the relation of Christ to these Esaus? Has Christianity anything to say to such poor merchantmen? Christianity first begins with a revelation of their folly; Christianity shows them that, if a man should gain the whole world and lose his birthright, he has gained nothing, he has profited nothing, he is a loser by the transaction. What is a man profited if he gain the whole

world and lose his birthright? Christianity is never afraid to sit down and talk men into shame, talk men into remorse. That is one of the initial elements in the Christian ministry, that it makes men burn with the spirit of self-reproach. If that spirit be permitted to conduct its ministry aright, its action will end in the discipline of contrition, repentance; the eyes will not be steely with defiance, but moist with repentance; the voice will no longer be hard, it will be mellowed into the music of "I am no more worthy to be called thy son." Then Christianity advances from this point of the revelation of folly, and sets up its method of restoring lost rights. In Christ we get more than we lost in Adam, or more than we lost in ourselves; we get our highest selves, our highest manhood, our noblest, saintliest identity; in him we are vitalised, by him we are clothed, and through him we shall be crowned. More than our first parents lost we find in the Second Adam. Have you come to him? Have you thrown yourselves upon him by faith? Have you said, Lord Jesus, I will not let thee go until thou dost give me again the birthright which I squandered: herein prove thy deity: with man this is impossible, with God all things are possible: thou canst recover even my birthright which I sold for one morsel of meat, and now I ask thee with tears in my eyes and conviction in my heart and penitence in my soul, God, be merciful to me a sinner, and recover the rights which I have lost? Above all and including all, God the Holy Ghost comes to the soul with—hear it—the new birth, and therefore the new birthright! This is the mystery of the Cross; this is thy miracle, O Calvary, when it is translated into human experience. Men, brethren, and fathers, let the time past more than suffice! We have sold our birthrights with less than Esau's excuse; we have forfeited our standing before God, we have unmanned ourselves; and to me the Cross of Christ has no meaning, unless it mean redemption, recovery, rehabilitation; and the action of God the Holy Ghost is but a dramatic action, if it mean not the regeneration of the soul, the new birth, the new birthright, which held in Christ we should hold for ever. O earth, earth, earth! hear the word of the Lord!

Hebrews xii. 17.

“For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected : for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.”

FORFEITED BLESSINGS.

THIS seems to be hard. Is it possible that a man can cry his heart out, and be no better for it? Has it come to this, that, notwithstanding all the healing and redeeming ministries of life, there is a possibility of a man repenting to the point of tears, many, hot, and bitter, and yet the whole penitential process coming to nothing? We must examine this apparent state of the facts, because, if it is as real as it is apparent, we ought to be filled with sadness. This is a poor account to give of a man's life : first he sold his birthright, and secondly he could not recover his position. Is it possible to condense life into two points? Is it possible that we may say of some man at the last only two things, leaving all other things, many or few, to be included or suggested in the pregnant summary? It is not in all cases a pregnant summary; it is, contrariwise, a barren void summary, and there is nothing in it beyond the first line and the last. Thus men may disembowel life : this miracle of evisceration may be wrought by any man. It rests with us whether our life should be full of glittering points, indicating brightness of mind, fearlessness of spirit, love of intelligence, devotion to progress, and consecration to the service of the world; or whether we shall have for an epitaph, Born—Died—. To be born ought to have tragedy in it; to die ought to be a fact redeemed from contempt by suggested immortality. Yet how nearly possible it is for a man's story to be comprehended in two words—Born : Died;—or, Had his opportunities, lost them; or, Started well, and soon came to a pitiful end. Of Esau we hear but these two things : yet what fresh air there was about the man! How like a living mountain he was! He might have been the flower of the family, yet history, even written by the eloquent pen of Paul or Apollos, says of him, He had a birthright, and he lost it.

How unavailable was his repentance. What does crying amount to? Everything depends upon what we are crying for, or crying about. There is a crying that is simple selfishness. A man breaks the law, finds himself in prison, and cries. Why does he cry? Not because he broke the law, but because the law found him out, and is punishing him: crying for punishment is not penitence. Crying because of sin, the hatefulness of sin, its offensiveness to God: that is real contrition, and that penitence avails everywhere and through all time. What did Esau seek? We hear that he sought something "carefully with tears." He did not seek repentance, he sought a blessing. Insert the word "blessing," instead of the word "it," and we read:—Esau found no place of repentance, though he sought the forfeited blessing "carefully with tears." He wanted to have it back again, and he could not secure it. "Place of repentance": what does that mean? Does it mean room to cry in? No; that would be a fatal mistake. "No place for repentance": was he seeking a mountain where he could be alone, and where he could pour out rivers of tears before God, but was unable to find a solitary hill? No; there is no such meaning in the text. "Place of repentance" is an expression which does not refer to locality or to space; its meaning is infinitely larger, both in depth and width. He found no room for repentance, no room to prove his better desire, no sphere or scope in the use of which he could establish before God and man the reality, the sincerity, and the completeness of his contrition. No doubt he was penitent enough in a selfish way. But do not let us mock him; the devil wins all his triumphs in a moment. If he took months we might turn round and smite him on the face, and when we have thrown him down by great violence, we might run away miles before he could recover himself. The devil puts a man into hell in one act. If this were a tragedy in three acts, men might escape from it, but no sooner does the devil come, than the man is gone. Consider the suddenness of temptation, the violence of temptation, and consider how unprepared men are for fatal results. So much depends upon one act, one word, one condition. The fall of man was not a tragedy in ten volumes: it was a word, and then death; it was all over in one morning, in one interview, in one action. Nor are men to be mocked herein, but rather pitied. A man is an hungred: who

but one ever refused bread when the wolf of hunger bit him? Consider the hunger, pity the hungerer. We do not know whether a man can make up his mind to a long course of dissoluteness, but we do know that many a man goes out in the morning, fresh in spirit, happy in domestic relation, and at night he is brought back worse than dead. How was it done? By a long, tedious process? No; by a stroke: one whiff from the devil's garden, and self-control was lost; the man was felled to the earth, the man was unmanned.

This was the case of Esau: he was cruel, he was supplanted, he was victimised; and yet having done the deed, having lost the blessing, he could not recover that blessing, because he never had opportunity in which to develop and prove his penitence. Nor need this be any mystery to us, because it is written on the first page and the last, and all the intervening pages, of every man's practical experience. A man has neglected his early education: can he ever recover it? Never. He may be venerated, he may be painted and decorated and certificated, but in the soul of him he has no culture, he is no scholar. But did he cry over his want of intellectual capacity, culture, and refinement? Will that not help him to scholarship? Not a whit. A man cannot go back to his youth and repair fully and enduringly the vacancies which marked his opening days. You never can recover your youth; you never can go to school again, in the same sense in which you go when the brain is young, and all the susceptibilities are keenly alive and are responsive to every appeal; you cannot be a boy again. Mark how the man whose early education was neglected halts, how he lacks confidence, how he is devoid of conscious power: he stumbles, hesitates, blurs his words so as to give them helpful ambiguity, that he may have the benefit of a doubt, if there is one, as to how he uttered the word. Why all this trickery of expression? Because the man's soul does not know the secret of the word; he has never been within it, behind it, above it; he is not its master. Will not crying do something towards retrieving the position? We need not answer the inquiry. The man has no opportunity of showing his repentance in any availing sense, because a man cannot live two days at a time; he cannot be living as a man of maturity

and as a boy who is acquiring education. He has lost the one period, he has come into the other, and no man can be living two contemporaneous lives—the one young, and the other old; the one in business, and the other at school—with any adequate and blessed effect. Redeem the time, buy up the opportunity: while you are at school take out of that flower all the honey that is in it.

A man has neglected seedtime, he awakes to a consciousness of the fact, and he begins to cry: will that bring him an abundant harvest? It will not add one ear of corn to his field. But the man is very sorry. True, but the time has gone by. The man tears his hair, and cries night and day, and says, Oh, fool that I have been! if I had my time to live over again! Exactly: but that is just what you have not. Do you understand that? Life is one journey. Does that fact get into you, stir you, and make you sensible and wise? But a man ought really to get something by repentance—not by the way of harvest, not in the way of neglected opportunity. There comes to every man—shall we personalise it and say—a fair, sweet, hospitable angel, whose name is Opportunity. The angel says, Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation: I love you, I have come for you, I want you to go with me; here is the chariot, here is the king's welcome, here is the divine authority: come! We are sullen, obstinate, perverse; if we answer, it is in a negative; we reply surlily or loudly, but in either case repellently, No. The angel has gone: will crying, repentance, bring that angel back again? No, though we seek her carefully with tears: she is gone. A man has been unkind to his parents. He sees it now. Every man is sure to find that out sooner or later; there is a spirit parental in the air that punishes all domestic cruelty. The man is now in his better mind, and he says, "If I had but the old folks back again." True: but we cannot have them back again, do you see that? do you feel it? do you acknowledge it? Now is the accepted time: they are with you, love them. Your parents are dead and gone, what will your repentance do? You neglected both of them, you rejected their counsel, you declined all their persuasions, you sneered at their prayers, and even in some cases their poverty did not draw out your energy—you lived upon them like a vampire: pray do not add insult to

dishonour by saying what you would do now if you had the chance. You would do nothing now unless your heart is born again.

These illustrations will show how possible it is for a man so to allow opportunities and rights and duties to pass without improving them or accepting their responsibilities, and afterward to cry and howl and weep, the whole tragedy coming to nothing. We deny the doctrine of eternal punishment, but we practise it. Man is a contradictory creature, self-contradictory, perpetrating the most glaring and palpable ironies, all the day long. A man will stand in quite a philosophical and theological attitude with a Bible in his hand, and will prove to you that eternal punishment is nonsense. Yet that man is practising the very thing that he denies. And he cannot help it. There is more than the letter on this subject, there is the spirit. The forger is never forgiven. Hear that! What, never? Never! not by society. But one man may forgive him? Yes, that is possible; it just shows you what one man is, namely, nothing, in relation to the settlement of all the deeper and greater questions of life. Not what one soft-hearted, kind-hearted soul would do, but what constituted man—society—will do is the question. There are many units; there is the unit of the individual, there is the unit of society, there is the unit of God. The unit of society is much larger than the unit of the individual, and that larger unit never forgives. How long a punishment would you assign to a forger? He has suffered five-and-twenty years' imprisonment, now he is at liberty again, and you have a very large commercial establishment in the city, will you forgive him, reinstate him, and treat him as an honest man? Or, if you advance towards him, will you do so without inspection, without keeping your eyes open, without watching him night and day? Suppose there should be one kind, loving soul that would even go so far as that; yet let it be told to a number of men who have not heard the circumstance before, that there is a forger in the house, and at once the atmosphere is changed.

What shall come hereafter we cannot tell. With men many things are impossible, with God all things are possible. It is not for us to tell God when his mercy should begin or when it should end; we leave that with him: but do not set up any theory of

punishment that will enable you to sin with impunity ; do not get up any theory of the universe that will enable you to be a greater criminal than you have been under another theory. Suspect any philosophy that licenses you to serve the devil. The other philosophy is more likely to be right, the philosophy that says, Take care, take heed, beware : for sin croucheth at the door. That was what the Lord said;—sin and punishment crouch like couchant beasts, wolves at the door. Believe the philosophy rather which says, The wicked shall be turned into hell and all the nations that forget God : The way of transgressors is hard : It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks : Our God is a consuming fire : It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. These are terrible words, and men are now confectioned and pampered to that degree of refinement that they do not like these words. Not to like them is not to disprove them. Why make a risk of it ? Why say, All will turn out right at last ? It did not in the case of neglected early education, it did not in the case of neglected seedtime, it did not in the case of neglected parents : why should it at last prove to be an artifice, an invention, a trick, that comes right at last, do what you may in the middle ? The repentance spoken of in the text has no relation to moral and spiritual repentance. Every soul may repent and live, or the Cross of Christ is the supreme mistake of the universe. That Cross means, The worst man may repent, and live ; that Cross says, “ Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts : and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him ; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”

The case of Esau was the loss of an earthly blessing, an earthly relationship, a temporary supremacy, and that could not be recovered by repentance ; but, blessed be God, this is the gospel of blood : “ Return, O wanderer, to thy home.” Do not be discouraged by the case of Esau, for that was local, temporary, and superficial. The Gospel of Christ proclaims that there is no man living who is really sorry for sin, that may not come back to his father's house, and be jewelled, and robed, and readopted, as if the apostasy had never taken place.

THE GENERAL EPISTLE

OF

J A M E S.

(JERUSALEM, A.D. 61.)

[NOTE.—“There were two Apostles named *James* or *Jacob*; one of whom was the son of *Zebedee* and the brother of *John*, and was put to death by *Herod*, as related in *Acts* xii. 2; and the other, called *James the Less*, or the *Little* (*Mark* xv. 40), probably in allusion to his stature, was the son of *Alphæus* or *Cleopas* (see *Matt.* x. 3; *Mark* iii. 18; *Acts* i. 13; *Luke* xxiv. 18); and being a near kinsman of the Lord, is called his brother (*Gal.* i. 19, etc.) The latter of these is commonly supposed to have been the writer of this Epistle.

“This Epistle is supposed to have been written after the Epistle to the Romans—*i.e.*, not before A.D. 58, and probably in 61, the year before the Apostle’s martyrdom. Neander, Davidson, and others, give an *earlier* date, about A.D. 45. The whole strain of the Epistle, however, indicates a state of degeneracy, both degrading and extensive, such as could hardly have existed at the commencement of the gospel.”—ANGUS’S *Bible Hand-book*.]

James i.

GOD’S GIFTS.

JAMES is always thought to be a very stern man. We think of him as never smiling, never bending in familiar and companionable intercourse, but always standing upon a crag of granite, and telling men what they ought to do; and telling men their duty in a voice that indicates no disposition to be trifled with. We have done wrong by some of these men. They are not so stern when we come to know them. It would be impossible for a preacher of Christ to be stern in any sense that drives men away in fear and distrust and shame. We shall find on reading the whole Epistle of James that there are some tender

words in it. Even James recognises the possibility of some people being "merry." I do not know that his exhortation would be acceptable to all kinds of merriment. When a man says, "Is any among you merry? let him sing psalms," he may seem to the frivolous to fall very much below the occasion. Psalms are all Hebrew—grand, rolling, majestic utterances, befitting the expression of reverence, adoration, and a kind of fearsome loyalty, before an infinite throne of ivory jewelled with finest gold. Yet there are hymns for those who cannot sing psalms; lilting, tuneful, happy, bird-like hymns, fit to be sung from the branches of blossoming trees in the springtime. Take up such music as will best express your tender and happy emotion. James is only anxious that mirth should have its expression, as certainly as sickness should have its medicine. If James had lived in our day he would have indicated certain pleasant and beautiful home hymns instead of saying "psalms." Not that he would have ignored the psalms; he would have said, Some voices were not made for psalm-singing; they have not compass enough, they are not gifted with that subtle, peculiar emphasis which can take up the sublimity of the psalm and express it. So some of us have to go to little hymns; they suit our youthfulness, they stoop down to our weakness, and we may by their gentle and adapted ministry rise from one elevation to another, until we are able to take our share in the utterance of that thunder which rolls so songfully around the eternal throne.

James comes before us, not as a stern man, but as a slave. What a pity we do not put the word "slave" instead of "servant" in the text. "Slave" is the English equivalent of the word which James himself used. "Servant" is an ambiguous profession; yea, it is now in many relations a profession. When a man calls his work a "profession" you may be quite sure he has fallen from grace. Why do we not call it work? Why do we not recognise it as honest industry? When a preacher talks about his "profession" leave him. James was a slave, and therefore at full liberty. Only a slave in the right sense of the term can be a free man—"If ye know the truth, the truth shall make you free." We must be slaves if we love.

Love does not stand upright in any posture of conventional or mechanical dignity; love says, What can I do for you? can I run an errand on your account? can I pluck you some flowers? can I sing you a song? can I hand you what you require? make use of me. Love is never so happy as when stooping to do some work which will indicate the reality and completeness of its own intensity and devotion. There are some persons who love us so much that they never write to us. There are others who are so deeply in love with us that we never hear a word from them in any way. That is a mysterious kind of love; that is a sort of absorbed contemplative, self-involved consecration of heart that ends in nothing. We want love to be another name for service, helpfulness, sympathy, co-partnery in prayer, a marvellous companionship of the soul. James never did anything without first saying, Lord, may I do it? When the Lord gave him commandment to do it, none could work with a steadier hand than James. He had his own way of saying things; crisp, epigrammatic, always *ad rem*, so that his style cannot be confounded with the style of any other man. There are certain persons in all climates and ages who have a wonderful faculty for hitting the nail everywhere but on the head. James had the other faculty. It was a smith's arm, and a smith's hammer, and when it came down, the nail knew it. It is not enough to have industry, the industry must be rightly directed. There are persons so continually busy that they never actually do anything; they are always going to do it, they are in some unnamed and unnamable mood of the verb To do, and in conjugating that energetic verb they never come to issue or conclusion; they are in a perpetual swelter, yet they never gather any harvest. In order that our work may be rightly directed we must say to the Master early in the morning, Lord, I am thine, what wouldst thou have me to do? I do not want to do anything except under thy command; I shall not be content with thy permission; I would have an order from the throne: If thou dost say, Go! none shall hinder me, for I know thou wilt not bid me go, unless thou hast first decided to come along with me. He who is thus the slave of law is the free man of the Father. Never believe in any liberty that has no bounds. Liberty that is not bounded is blasphemy, is licence, is madness.

This humble, devoted slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ sends a letter to the twelve tribes, which were scattered abroad. Who thinks of writing to wanderers? Who thinks of telegraphing to people who have no address? That would seem to be a ludicrous act, and yet there are persons who have risked messages by committing them to the sea. The ship has struck, there is no hope for her; men have sat down and written messages on slips of paper, put them into bottles, corked the bottles, and thrown them upon the wide sea, if haply they may some day be cast upon the sands far away, and may thus come to express not intelligence only, but affection and devotion to aching hearts. We should often speak to people who are not present with us at the moment. Our words may be reported, they may be quoted, and when they are quoted some persons may listen to them with sacred amazement, and without saying much may feel in their hearts that such gospels were meant from the very first to be theirs, for encouragement, for welcome, for assurance of the possibility of pardon, and therefore renewed, and therefore immortal, life.

The twelve tribes scattered abroad were not accosted as prodigals or wanderers, though there was probably hardly a good man amongst them. James would get at his people by calling them "My brethren." People will listen to the voice of a brotherhood: there is a masonry in the Church, by which sign true hearts know one another; without unbecoming or undue familiarity they hold the key of each other's heart, and can enter into the sacred places, the very sanctuary of the soul. Men who are a long way from the Church may be our brethren still. Your son did not cease to be your son because he ran away from your house. The prodigal need not be excluded from your prayers because he has excluded himself from your hearth and home. When you speak of him let it be under some gentle designation; he may hear of it, and the very fact that you called him child, son, loved one, may shape itself into a gospel, and may indicate the point and certainty of his return.

What were the brethren of James to do? To "count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations." We cannot do that,

it is impossible; no man can go into the wilderness for the purpose of being glad. It is not in the human heart when it comes into stony and inhospitable places to say, This is what I want. But that is not what the Apostle bade you do, you have broken off his exhortation at a semicolon; he gives you a reason for your counting it all joy when you fall into divers temptations, namely, "Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience." We are not to be glad on account of the pain; we are to be glad because the pain works out a mystery, the sweet, quiet, gentle name of which is patience—the quality that suffers without a ruffle; the condition of soul that accepts the providences of God, whatever they be, thankfully and hopefully. Until we have attained patience we have not touched the crown of orthodoxy. There are many orthodox people who are not patient. There are some people who judge of their own orthodoxy by their own patience; they get so angry with other people that they forget to pray. They think that anger will serve the cause of God, whereas it is plainly written on the portals of heaven that, "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." We want more patience, more hopefulness, more of the spirit which says, The man has gone away from our hold and companionship for a time, but he will come back again. We want the spirit which says, Some mistakes have been made, but mistakes are often the first letters in the lessons of life: experience is a dear school, but experience turns out fine scholars. We should never speak impatiently about any earnest man, wherever he may have wandered and whatever he may have done. Earnestness—burning, religious, pious earnestness—is the guarantee of its own integrity, and of the happy issue to which all sincerity is brought by the Spirit of the living God. We cannot be men until we have had cruel trials and mockings and scourgings, yea sometimes even bonds and imprisonments: but every man must be tried by fire, or he cannot trust himself. The fire has a work to do that nothing else can ever effect. How are we off in this matter of fire? Here is an artist who brings to me some beautiful piece of work upon porcelain or other ware, and I begin to lift a finger, and the artist exclaims, "Do not touch it, if you please." Why not?—"Because it has not yet been fired." What has the fire got to do with this beautiful painting? The fire has got to

fasten it, to so work upon it that the ware can be touched, or handled, or used, and yet the figure sustains no loss of outline or beauty. It is even so with young Christians. Some of you have just been, as it were, fashioned and outlined by the Divine artist, but you have not yet undergone the firing process—process of trial—and therefore some people come to you and want to touch you; and some would touch you with the finger of scorn, and others would touch you with the finger of curiosity, and others would touch you simply for the sake of touching you, and finding exactly how deeply the work is done; and the voice of God says, Hands off! these are but young Christians, they have not yet been fired; after they have been in the oven of experience and in the furnace of affliction, I will hand them out of the mould for the world's using. There are some persons who think that the moment you become a Christian you may become an experienced Christian, and therefore they will try you and mock you and put you to severe straits, not knowing that every soul requires to be tested by fire and to be completed by trial. We must not expect from the young that which is appropriate only to the old. Do not go out in April to pluck the apples: wait until September. Do not shake the tree and scorn it because in April it is only white with blossom: wait till the harvest month, and the tree will bid you welcome to its juicy, luscious fruitage. Every man in his own order; every soul in its own time. God hath appointed these things, and according to the administration of this discipline will be the completeness of our character.

“But let patience have her perfect work.” Patience is beautiful. But even patience wants perfecting. There is a partial patience. If endurance be represented by ten points, there are some people who are good for seven of them, but at the eighth they break down. Having tried them with three points, and three more, and then with the seventh, you say, Surely now these people may be allowed to pass as completely patient, and yet when you try them with the eighth difficulty or test they completely break down, and all the other seven points go for nothing. James says, “let patience have her perfect work.” That is what we say about the seasons; we say, let spring have her perfect work: let summer

have her perfect work : let harvest have her perfect work. We know what perfect work is in nature : who would cut down the wheat when it is all green ? The green is of a lovely hue, and every stalk seems well formed : why not thrust in the sickle ? Yet nature says, Let the seasons have their perfect work : cut the corn when it is yellow, crisp, golden, when it seems in a gentle breeze to nod its head to the sickle, and say, You may cut me now. So many of us fail about half-way. So many fail, too, at the point last but one. Let us construct a bridge over, say, the river Thames ; let us say that the Thames is at the point in view 300 feet wide : here is the bridge, and we have to put it up. And the bridge is 295 feet long : now what are you to do ? Nothing ; 295 feet of a bridge can never be stretched into 300 feet of a river. Yet it is good as far as it goes. Yes. And how many men there are who are content to be good as far as they go ? If one boy were owing another twenty shillings and gave him fifteen, would the creditors say, You are good as far as you go ; thank you : all is now settled ? I think not. The boy who wanted the twenty shillings would say, You have given me but fifteen, I want five more. Who would go over a bridge 295 feet long when the river is 300 feet wide ? Can you jump the remaining 5 feet ? Would you like to drive a horse and carriage over a bridge of that kind ? You would be all right for 295 feet ; never were feet better measured, never was work better done : this you acknowledge, but you say you would be drowned at the point where the bridge ends. Why not apply this figure and this doctrine to human character, and say, Let patience have her perfect work ; let the patience be the whole length of the affliction and let the man's strength be such that he can compass with entireness the whole task which he has to do.

But suppose any man should be conscious of defect, what then ? There is a provision made for that consciousness :—

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not ; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.” (Vers. 5-8.)

What do we want?—“wisdom.” What is the exhortation?—

“ask” for it. God never refused wisdom. God cannot refuse that gift. He can refuse wealth. He can refuse honour, he can refuse even health, but he cannot refuse wisdom. He lives to give wisdom ; he lives to complete spiritual miracles ; he lives to redeem. Let us be careful that we do ask for wisdom—not for mere information, but for that quality of mind which discerns the good from the bad, the right from the wrong, the true from the false ; that quality of mind which takes in things in their entirety. I find so many people who are clever only in points. They are too sharp to live. For some points they have a perfect genius, but they have no circular action of brain, their brain does not swing around a horizon ; it sees a lamp, it sees a bird, it sees some particular feature with marvellous distinctness, but it never takes in the invisible, the uncalculated, the possible, or the impossible ; its processes are not complete and comprehensive processes, they are flashes of the mind, intuitional action ; they do not represent largeness, not to say completeness, of view ; that is mere cleverness ; it is commercial or mechanical ability : but philosophy, genius, slow-going calculation says, I must take in all the points, the one will colour the other, there is a process of equipoise and readjustment and correlation. Fools cannot understand this, and therefore they are flying out at all inclines and angles, and doing all sorts of erratic and unprofitable things.

Wisdom is a large gift, quiet, solemn, majestic, rich in resource, enduring in patience. Yet the sharp man is often applauded, when the slow-plodding mind is left behind, because it cannot move with sufficient velocity. It is marvellous how one quality of mind is often mistaken for another, and how the man of information is often put in the chair, and the man of inspiration is left somewhere at the backdoor. Information is nothing but a momentary convenience : inspiration sees central principles, philosophic beginnings and genesis of things, and is always right because the accident comes, goes, changes colour and attitude, and disappears, but he who grasps the centre and reality of things has a permanent sovereignty ; he will not always be standing at the backdoor ; the poor, little, clever, well-informed chairman will be dropped out of his chair, and probably nobody will care to go back and bring him up again. Inspiration, or wisdom, or the

divine faculty of the soul, holds its own for ever, and grows with the growing ages. Distinguish therefore between qualities that seem to be alike. I have heard a nightingale sing and a cock crow at the same moment, and I thought I perceived a difference in their voices. Even for that degree of perception a man ought to be thankful. There are persons who do not know the one voice from the other; so they say to the nightingale, We can hear you, you need not sing so loudly; we can hear you. It is not enough to hear a voice, you must feel it. Hear it! a jackal has a quicker ear than a man has. But to hear is nothing; to feel the subtle spiritual thrill, that is the proper effect of music. So it is with voices that would teach you, with voices that would cheer you. No doubt out of the Christian pulpit there are voices—strident, clamorous, urgent, emphatic voices; but there is no voice you ought to listen to that would not be in place in the sanctuary. Any voice that could not be appropriately uttered within the shadow of the Cross of Christ is the voice of falsehood and deceit. Listen to the angels of the sanctuary, to the ministry of truth as it is exercised within the circle of the Cross, and believe me there is no wisdom that does not begin in the fear of God. We all want wisdom, let us “ask in faith, nothing wavering.” You would not give anything yourselves to a man that wavered. First he wants that which is on the right hand, then he wants that which is on the left, and he cannot make up his mind what it is that he really does want. You would be impatient with a suppliant of that kind, and you would dismiss him, and properly so. What should be said by high heaven if we do not know what we want? First say, “Lord, teach us how to pray,” and if the prayer be God’s the answer will be his and may be relied upon. We know not what to ask, but we can be taught. We ought to be taught even how to express our souls in the language of supplication and fervent desire: this also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working. Here stands the lesson that ought to guide the young mind and the old evermore—that wisdom may be had for asking. But we have to take care how we ask, in whose name we ask, for what reason we ask, that prayer may be purged of selfishness, and desire kindled by the very sacrifice of the Son of God.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we come now, as evermore, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, our infinite Saviour, that we may pray thee to keep with us in all the way of life, and make known unto us thy will in every time of darkness and fear. Thou hast guided us by thine eye; thou hast led us by a way that we knew not; thou hast conducted us in safety through the wilderness; and sometimes we think we have seen the green land beyond, and have caught an odour now and then as of the gardens of paradise, and these have cheered us with strange and most healthful encouragement. We know that thou art taking us to a great country; all that we see round about us means greatness, grandeur, completeness, heaven; when we have seen the seed, we have seen the tree; when we have beheld the first little budding leaf, we have seen, in prophecy, all the summer of God. We know and are confident of all this, and it makes the night short, and the day bright, and trials quite easy; it turns labour into rest, and pain into a kind of joy; continue thy ministry in our hearts, that we may know the process of heavenly discipline, and be perfected in all the graces of the holy truth. Amen.

James i. 19-27.

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God”—(vers. 19, 20).

THE WORD OF TRUTH.

THIS word “wherefore” leads us to inquire what the Apostle has been talking about. What was his last sentence? “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. Wherefore”—but is it not a feeble “Wherefore”? Is there any vital connection between the doctrine of verse 18 and the doctrine of verse 19? In the 18th verse we are called to the sublime doctrine of regeneration, or the new birth, the new manhood; in that verse we are reminded that God of his own will begat us with the word of truth; there we touch the point of doctrinal sublimity; this is the very crown of the work of Christ; here is

the new race, here is the seed of the Second Adam : but in verse 19 we are told that because this is so we are to be swift to hear, and slow to speak. There is no sublimity in this exhortation ; these are the most elementary aspects of discipline, decency, and self-control. How can we connect the new birth with the simple act of hearing well, and speaking slowly, hesitantly, in a tone of dubiousness and uncertainty ? Yet there must be some connection, because of this "Wherefore," which the critics have endeavoured to modify a little, and to set in a new angle, so as not to necessitate a distinct sequence, as if verse 19 belonged to verse 18. But it does. Verse 19 is elliptical. That is to say, it leaves out something which the spiritual understanding can easily supply. If James was not an elliptical writer, he yet wrote so tersely, he packed his sentences so closely, that his Epistle is about the longest letter to be found in the New Testament,—not longest in point of number of words, but boundless, endless, in suggestion, in that glimpse power by which a man skims over all the hills to see the lands that roll and fructify in faraway horizons. Let us fill up verse 19 in the spirit of verse 18 :—Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear this word—the word of truth by which we are begotten : let him listen with his soul, for the music never ceases ; let him be slow to speak, let him keep his opinions a long time until they mellow and ripen, and become sound doctrine, and really seized hold of by the heart, and kept and treasured as the very word of God : do not let him begin too soon to talk, to chatter, to join in the general theological fray, and to speak words he has only heard by the outward ear, and that have not yet got a thorough housing in his heart, his confidence, his love ; and especially let us be slow to wrath, and keep ourselves out of those little fuming controversies in which bigots almost frizzle themselves to death, thinking that if they get angry the universe will be kept from tilting over. It is not an exhortation to listen with the outward ear, or an exhortation to speak slowly, or to wait until everybody else has spoken ; the injunction directs itself wholly to the word of truth in the 18th verse, and calls upon us to be lifelong students of the word, and when we do speak to speak with our souls' whole conviction and undivided love.

The Apostle gives a reason for the suppression of wrath. "For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." Yet we think it does. It is sometimes almost comical to see into what uncontrollable paroxysms of earnestness some people will get into about nothing; and it is instructive to notice how much emphasis is thrown away; all the minor parts of speech, the conjunctions and adverbs and prepositions, all-important in their own places, are made to carry such disproportionate burdens. Do give God some opportunity of working in his own universe. Do not fear that the Church is going down because some man leaves it, or because all men leave it. You cannot injure the Church. We have taken occasion in this PEOPLE'S BIBLE to say that there can be no weak Church, there can be no poor Church. We betray our own worldliness, and narrowness of outlook, and dimness and obscurity of vision, by talking of Christ's Church as in some cases very poor, very weak. Never! Blessed be God, there can be no weak Church; thrice blessed be God, there can be no poor Church. The moment men begin to attach these limiting and patronising adjectives to the word "Church" they fall from heaven, they are no longer stars of the morning. Given two poor creatures that have not a shilling between them who yet truly love Christ, and live in fellowship with him, and they are neither weak nor poor; but the moment they get the idea that they are a weak Church, they are so far lost; then they go a-begging. Let the word "Church" tower out above all words that would limit and define and qualify it. The Church is but another aspect of Christ. His poverty was an element of his influence. But the wrath of man comes to play precisely where we open a way for it by the use of such words as weak and poor. Stand still, and see the salvation of God. "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree: yet"—and say was ever satire so finished, so complete—"he passed away, and lo he was not; yea, I sought him, and he could not be found." So shall it be with all the enemies of the Cross, with all the assailants of the kingdom of heaven, concerning Christ, as concerning his type, it shall be said, "His enemies will I clothe with shame: but upon himself shall his crown flourish." Nothing depends upon our anger. Is it worth while getting angry with an atheist?

Is it really equal to the occasion, looking at its sublimity and at all its higher indications and uses, for a whole Christian community to be boiling with unutterable rage because the heathen have imagined a vain thing? Peace is an element in our power. Faith is quietness, profound belief is repose: if thou, poor fussy man, if thou wilt go out to shore up God's kingdom, take care lest thine anger destroy thine own character. The wrath of man can contribute nothing to the righteousness of God. Let God have space to work, and when you are tempted to get up and be very indignant, do pray, in the name of history and prophecy, sit down.

How then are we to proceed? Has the Apostle left the word of God? No; he continues the same doctrine in verse 21:—

“Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.”

James is as strong upon the “word” as John is. They may be holding out that expression so as to catch different aspects of it, but it is still the word—the word eternal, or the word incarnated, or the word written, or the word spoken: but still the word; the word of truth, the engrafted word. But we can do nothing with this word until we ourselves are clean. We cannot take God's kingdom into our souls along a path that has been unprepared for its coming and its progress. “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare.” So here we have a negative work to do, which is in reality a work of preparation; we must get rid of all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness. Who can hear, if his ears are filled with wax? We must prepare the ear for hearing, lest it can only catch some distant rumble as of inarticulate thunder, and not finer, tenderer, minor music, that whispers its way into the listening and eager heart. We cannot receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save our souls, if we have come to it in the abundance of our prosperity, and in the self-gratulation of our progress, saying, We are men in authority, and can say to this man, Go, and he goeth: and to that man, Come, and he cometh: and we have all things, and are fat with prosperity. Even that disables a man from hearing God's word: but when it is more than ostentation,

when it is downright filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, God will not house with the devil. We should have been better students if we had been better men; we should have known more of God, if we had known less of the enemy by way of consort and co-operation. If we had loved pureness we should by this time have been almost in heaven:—"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." Then we have come to meekness, having left wrath. "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God," but meekness receiveth the engrafted word:—"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth": they shall have everything they want, they shall have everything that is good for them; their meekness will deplete their prayers of selfishness, and their very humility of soul will make them rich with God's favours. Yea, there is a filthiness and superfluity of criticism that can get nothing out of God's book: the heart does not proceed in the right way, or does not work in the right atmosphere, or is altogether embarrassed and mocked by the medium whom it has chosen. A broken heart can understand every part of the Bible; tears can silt down through all the rocks of difficulty; the contrite soul sees round all the long words without being able to explain them, and knows the coming of God by a sound in the top of the trees, or by some new stirring in the air that has music in it, and celestial fragrance. O man, put down the wrath of thine head, thy fine criticism, and selfish bigotry, and thy ecclesiastical foolery, and be meek, simple, broken-hearted, and read thy Bible on thy knees, and write out what thou wilt of words about the Bible for the people in secret prayer and heart-brokenness; and whilst men cannot tell the beginning of thy influence, or trace its way, or indicate its termination, what then? This is the power of God. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that wields the mysterious influence of heaven.

Here is the great condition for study; here is the sublimest motto for the college. Lay aside all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness—all ambition, ostentation, all intellectual pride, and all spiritual vanity; and sit down meekly, contritely, penitently,

and receive. We are so fond of giving in this direction, and suggesting, and taking part in the process; we are so disinclined to be simply negative, receptive, passive; yet this is the only condition in which we can receive the veriest riches of Christ.

“But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty” (ver. 25). That is easily done? No. Many men look into the Bible and see nothing; because the Bible will not yield its riches of wisdom and suggestion to the merely casual observer, who says he will glance at it, he will look into it, he will bestow some attention upon it. That is not the meaning of James. Looking into, in this case, means two things: first it means stooping; then it means the attitude of peering, intent looking, never taking the eyes off. You thought it was a casual glance, a “looking in” as we use the expression in familiar conversation: whereas it means the stoop of prayer, the penetrating, peering look that says in its very attitude, I am expecting something, it will come presently; do not disturb me: if I turn my eyes away for one moment I may miss it; do not distract me. All language is pictorial. When the great dictionary is written it will be a dictionary of pictures; there need not be much letter-press. At first, of course, words had to be made and remade, and they were fashioned on the pictorial idea; so here we have a man looking—peering ought to be the word—“for whosoever peereth.” Have we ever peered into God’s Book? We have the same idea in this expression—“into which things the angels desire to peer.” They do not glance at them in the course of some flight to distant regions, paying but casual attention to some transient mystery, but they look with all their might; all their nature becomes a faculty of vision. The true hearer in the Church is listening with every part of his body. He will not know until the process is over how his hands are clinging, clinching, and in what attitude he has been sitting the last half-hour; because his soul has been peering, has been on the outlook, on the watchtower; has been saying to itself, “If I look closely I shall see the beauty of the King.” So the Apostle is still on the same subject. We are not dealing with “swift to hear, slow to speak,” in the commonplace sense of those terms: the Apostle still fixes his mind on the word of God, called in the 25th verse “the perfect law of liberty.”

“And continueth therein.” The word “therein” in our version is written in italics, we may therefore strike it out, and read: “and continueth”—in the perfect law of liberty? No. Continueth in what?—in peering, in looking, in directing to God’s testimony a penetrating and undivided look. You have missed much in the Bible because you were not looking just then; you lost one sentence in the discourse, and therefore you lost the whole; you missed the opening prayer, therefore the rest of the service was an embarrassment or a mystery. Blessed is that servant who begins at the beginning, and holds on, persists, continues, peers. Let there be no wavering. “He that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double-minded man,” or a man whose mind is trying to do two things at the same time, “is unstable in all his ways.” Ministers cannot pick off their sermons from the Bible by an easy effort: they must peer, and piercingly look, and continue, and when we say, Where are they now? the answer must be—Continuing. What are they now doing?—Continuing. What is their relation to the Bible?—A relation of peering, keen looking, expectant watchfulness: for they know not in what verse they shall find their Lord next: he may flash out upon them in Genesis, in Nehemiah; he may not be singing so sweetly in the Psalms as in some unfamiliar book; it may be Habakkuk, not David, that shall be chosen by the Lord for the utterance of his ineffable music. Continuous looking, peering, watching; for at such an hour as ye think not your Lord may shine from any verse, and prove the inspiration of the whole by the glory of the part. “. . . law of liberty”: is this a contradiction in terms? No; it is the perfection of philosophy. There is no liberty without law, and there is no law that does not wisely provide for liberty, consulting the dignity of the subject, giving him opportunity for development, and for the exercise of self-control, and for the display of those moral dignities which separate man from all other parts of creation, There is a freedom that is licentiousness; it is a mere superfluity of naughtiness, it is a species of intellectual filthiness. The stars have no freedom except in their obedience to their central fires: related to the dominant suns let them swing like censers before the altar of God’s throne; but if they detach themselves and go to

seek liberty they shall find it under the name of ruin. We have a Bible, and we must abide by it; we have a doctrine, and we must understand it with the heart, and exemplify it in the life; we have a glorious liberty—"If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed"; this can only be understood by long experience.

. . . Not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the word (or work)." The Apostle says, "Meditate on these things." How often is that word "meditate" in that connection wholly misunderstood! We quote in connection with that, that Isaac went into the field at eventide to meditate; we think of Hervey's *Meditations among the Tombs*; we think to meditate means a kind of exclusion of all outward objects, and the fastening of the soul in devout attention upon some profound or metaphysical truth, or dwelling sentimentally upon some blessed aspect of the Gospel; there is a meditation that may take that form of exercise: but that is not the "Meditate on these things" of the Apostle. It should be quite another word in English, if we are to get the Apostle's real meaning. It is, Practise these things: get them into action, test them in conduct, take them down into the market-place, and see how they wear there; bring them out into the battle-field, and see what weapons they make; put them into the fire of experience and try them: meditate on these things; open your eyes, see what the world is, what the world wants; take these things down to the world, and practise the Gospel. What can he do who looks upon a game of skill, and says, I am meditating on this, in the hope that I may be able some day to play the game with some degree of skill? He had better go down and take a hand in the game—meditate, practise. How instructive is the case of the man who stands at the water's edge and says, I am meditating upon the ocean with a view to being able some day to swim in it: how long will a man have to meditate with his clothes on before he can learn to swim? The Apostle says, Practise: plunge in, stretch out, trust the ocean as you trusted your nurse; the old ocean can be rough, but oh, it can caress you like a mother, if you commit yourself to it in the right way; and that you will never do by standing upon a rock hundreds of feet high, and meditating. This is how many

persons are trying to be religious : they are entertaining every day to tea about twelve different honest doubters ; and they are holding conversation over their steaming cups, and talking all manner of unimaginable nonsense to one another. Why do they not go out and practise the gospel ?—teach the ignorant, lead the blind, help the poor, bless the friendless ? Why do they not carry the gospel into conduct ? Then they will learn its deeper truths more certainly. “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this” very thing, practised religion—“To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.” Practise these things ; go amongst the very poorest of the poor, and hear their tuneful talk ; yes, there is music even in the utterance of their rough experiences. I have often been thrilled by some magician in the use of words, I have felt the power of his spell, and have owned the regnancy of his mind, but never have I been so deeply, thoroughly, blessedly moved, as when some poor dear old mother has been taking the tear out of her eye with the corner of her apron, and telling me what the Lord had done for her when she was left without any help but his own. If any man will follow Christianity down into the market-place and the hospital and the battle-field, and the wear and tear of life, he will see that the chiefest of the miracles of God are being wrought in the world at this moment. The age of miracles past ? That golden age is dawning !

James i. 27.

“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”

PRACTICAL RELIGION.

THE word “religion” here means religious service. Not religious doctrine, not religious profession of a merely nominal kind; but religious service, activity, conduct. This rendering of the text does not do away with faith, theology, doctrine, or spiritual conviction of any kind; the text is not speaking about that line of things at all. We want a ritual, a ceremonial, a code of action: Very good, says James; if you want that, here it is,—pure ritual, pure religious service, real, honest, useful religious conduct is this. How many persons there are blessed or unblessed with æsthetic taste in religious ritual! What a marvellous study the religious antics of some men afford! They like a splendid service. James the Apostle says, So be it; here is the splendid service, without trumpet or drum or clash of metal, without colour or pomp or studied attitude, here it is: make room at the table for the orphans, gladden by your presence and assistance the houses that have been desolated by death,—pure religious service is this. Yet how to get rid of that little imp of æstheticism, the bowing and beckoning and posturing and rising and falling and intoning, and only omniscience knows what besides! James looks on and says, You think you are religious—pure religious service does not lie along that line at all: the orphans are round about the synagogue hungry and thirsty, or shivering with cold; pure religious service is to make room for them. That is not æstheticism, that does not lie along the genius of flowers and other emblems of nothing. But James is nothing if not practical; he is nothing if not stern, downright real, almost commercial. In James’ church we seem to

hear the clash of the scales as they go down upon its counter, and we hear his own voice, so clear and definite in tone, saying, We are wanting, we must have more, this will never do: you are weighed in the balance and found lacking. But we were very æsthetic; we took the Lord's Supper upon an empty stomach; we always looked towards the east when we were doing certain things, and toward the west when we were not doing them; we always perfumed the air of the church; we always went in at one door and came out by another: does that stand for nothing? Nothing! Pure religious service, real, downright, honest piety is this, To destroy the hunger of your neighbourhood, and make the desolate sing for joy. We have always been hard upon the Unitarians; we have expelled people from the church for not pronouncing "Shibboleth" with a good emphasis on the *h*; if any man omitted the *h* we simply turned him out of church: our motto was, Sound doctrine: does that go for nothing? Nothing! That is not pure religious service. Of course, if James was mistaken, there is an end of the matter; if James had no right to speak on the subject, why quote his text at all? why not override him, or depose him, or ignore him, or forget him? If James has any status in the Church at all, he says that pure religious service, the right programme, is this: "To visit the fatherless," literally the orphan. You should increase your family by feeding the orphans; you should enlarge your service by looking out for real poverty and calling it to your hospitality; you should say Whom can I make happy this day? where can I disperse the cloud, or mitigate the storm, or lighten the weight of the burden? what blind folk can I lead across the thoroughfare, that they be not overrun or injured? where can I invest my soul's truest love of man, because truest love of God? And although you do not know the language of flowers, although you do not know the language of emblems at all, yet you will be regarded in the heavens as having rendered a pure religious service.

But this is very legal; and there are persons who would die rather than be legal in piety. They have a prejudice against that word "legal," principally arising, as nearly every prejudice does, from not knowing what it means. There is nothing so difficult to get rid of as ignorance. Ignorance dies hard. You cut it in

two, but still both the pieces begin to wriggle ; you have only two worms instead of one. You cut ignorance up syllable by syllable, but every syllable lives, and comes back and sets up a little house of its own. Ignorance is not dispersed by intelligence, paradoxical as that statement may seem to be. A man may know better, and yet retain his ignorance in the form of a prejudice. If you push him and test him intellectually, he will say at the last, I acknowledge that to be so in fact : but what I feel is this. Then he will tell you the action of some deadly superstition upon his soul. The last enemy which shall be destroyed in the Church is superstition. Many persons are afraid of good conduct, lest it should take somewhat from the honour of Christ : on the contrary, I look upon Jesus Christ as the fountain and inspiration of all good conduct. Wherever I find really good conduct, I find Jesus Christ ; I say, No man can call Jesus the Lord, and no man can do the works of Jesus, but by the spirit of Jesus, although he may not know it. I will not admit that man can make any other than a waxen flower. Let me find a real flower anywhere, and I will call it a child of the sun ; let me find a waxen flower anywhere, and I will say, You keep out of the sun's way, the sun is your enemy, he will kill you with his burning look. There is a morality that is not moral, that we do not praise or even civilly recognise ; we denounce it as semblance, hypocrisy : but wherever there is a real morality, a true manner of the soul, a genuine attitude of reverence, worship and aspiration, resulting in beneficence of conduct, we say, This is the garden of Christ, this is a section of Calvary. It is interesting to watch all those persons who are afraid that if they behave too well they will take somewhat from the honour of Jesus. That is an immoral state of mind ; our object should always to be to create under the action of the Divine Spirit a simple, massive, noble character.

How is that character to be cultivated ? By acts of service. How is a man to be strong enough to stand upright ? By stooping down a great deal. The gospel always proceeds after such methods, saying, If a man would save his life, he must lose it ; if a man would serve Christ, he must take up his Cross and follow him ; if a man would be really dignified, he must be graciously condescending ; if any man would be truly religious

he must have a large household of orphans and desolate lives. Perhaps there are some who do not understand such doctrine; in a sense I am not sorry for it, in another sense I regret it very much. If the understanding of metaphysics would interfere with the operation of charity, I should regret that understanding unspeakably: if any man should be so taken up with the metaphysics of Christianity as to neglect its morals, I should describe that man as acting foolishly and suicidally. There are persons who do not know the meaning of the word "metaphysics," but they will not be kept out of heaven on that ground. I am not sure that it is a word worth knowing. The metaphysicians have never been a very lovely or united family: one generation goeth and another generation of metaphysicians cometh, and when the next generation comes it begins to denounce the one that is gone. One long-headed, shrewd, farsighted metaphysician has settled everything and published a book upon it; another metaphysician has arisen and torn him all to pieces, and wondered how in the inscrutable providence of God such a man was ever permitted to live; and no sooner has that boaster uttered his gasconade than there rises up immediately behind him another, and he takes him by the neck and shakes him over the pit of his own ruin. So that, on the whole, I am not extremely careful that men should trouble about metaphysicians and metaphysics until the orphans are all fed, and the sore in heart are all healed, and the last shadow has been chased away from the house and the life; then you can begin what is not worth beginning. Pity the man who is so anxious about doctrine that he absolutely forgets the matter of practice. If any man who commits himself to a holy life ignores the existence of doctrine, then he ignores himself. Doctrine, in some form or under some initial aspect or ministry, exists behind everything else: thought first, then word, then deed; that is the succession of action, not in metaphysics only, but in practical life.

Have you ever helped a really poor man? Then you have prayed; you are not an atheist although you thought you were one, you are not even an agnostic, though you had quite an inclination towards that new Greek formation. You have become almost tired of the old Greek "Atheist," because that word had acquired a bad reputation morally; but "Agnostic" was a sort

of clean rag, and you thought you might flutter that as if it bore a strange device. But if you have been feeding orphans, you are not even agnostics, you are Christians. Jesus went about doing good, always doing good. He took up little children in his arms; when he set them down again there were men and women, kings and queens. He broke bread, and multiplied it as he gave it away. He never sent anybody from himself to buy or get anything; he had everything in his own soul and in his own gift. Christianity covers a very wide area of life; we may have thought it only covered a point or two here and there, whereas it covers the whole space of being, so that if a man shall dry a tear from the eyes of sorrow the angels shall say, Behold he prayeth! That is not the end, that is but the beginning, but with such a beginning a glorious end must eventuate, it cannot be kept back long; no man can do these works except the Father be in him and with him, and the very doing of these works will lead on and on until the worker clasps the Christ and says, What is all I have done to this work of thine, thou bleeding Son of God, Priest of the universe?

James is very moral, he is quite a schoolmaster in discipline. He is indeed the martinet of the Church. He will not allow a man to be cleanly on the whole, saying, Taking life as it goes, and looking upon the average of things, I think you may be allowed to pass. He takes up the garment, and looks at it through a microscope,—and what an enemy that microscope is to everthing that wants to hide itself! When we go back to James and say, We have fed a hundred orphans to-day, and called at places that death had emptied, and kindled a fire on the cold hearth-stone in every instance, now may not we go to heaven? he says, No, let me look at your garments. Oh, that demand! There are plenty of kind-hearted souls, naturally impulsive in the right direction, who would feed any number of orphans if you would not look too critically into their lives. May we not hold the garment a little distance off and say, There, who can find fault with that? is it not right? James says, It is not for you to hold the garment, I must hold it in the name of the Judge, and I will tell you, after due criticism to-morrow, precisely the condition of the robe. You thought from the beginning of this exposition

that the whole matter was going to resolve itself into one of charity, as who should say, There are orphans : here is bread ; I can spare it, therefore take it. No man can be charitable in giving that which he can spare ; love does not begin so long as you can " spare " it. It is when the man says, I cannot very well spare this, but I cannot keep it back from him who loved me and gave himself for me,—that is charity. " Charity suffereth long, and is kind ; charity vaunteth not itself, doth not behave itself unseemly, is not puffed up . . . charity never faileth." Charity does everything but fail. Charity is sometimes mistaken for lunacy ; charity is sometimes mistaken for simple exaggeration ; and there have been some men who have called it ostentatious—bad men, who see themselves in everything as in a looking-glass, doubling their hideousness or giving some new aspect to their perversity.

But now we have come to a section of the thought which means travail, almost punishment. Here is spiritual judgment ; here is a criticism of motive. Who can put his motive into the fire and wait until it drops out and take it up again, saying, Behold the fire hath found no dross in this inspiration ? In proportion as we are pressed along this direction do we need everything that is evangelical. It is at this point the gospel comes in to supply all our lack. We say to the Apostle, representing the true Judge, Why not acquit us at the point of having visited the orphan and the widows in their affliction ? can we not be spared the remainder of the trial ? The Apostle says, No : now the garment must be searched, and the searcher must look for spots. Who can stand ? Not one.

James ii. 1-9.

1. My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.

2. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment ;

3. And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place ; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool :

4. Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts ?

5. Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him ?

6. But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats ?

7. Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called ?

8. If ye fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself ye do well :

9. But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.

THE ROYAL LAW.

WE do not know what is meant by a man having on "a gold ring." The translators have Englished this matter down to simplicity. The persons referred to had not on "a" gold ring, they had as many rings on each finger as the finger would carry. That is a very different statement ; that, however, is the historical fact ; the hands were all jewelled, hardly any portion of the hand could be seen. We do not know what is meant by a man having "long hair" in this country, or in Western civilisation ; when it is rebuked in the New Testament it is a very different thing from anything we have ever seen, unless we have travelled in Eastern countries. It is precisely the same with this matter of the gold ring, which in its singularity

is perfectly justifiable, and may be very beautiful. We are to understand, however, by the gold ring of the text, foolish, extravagant, ostentatious luxuriousness. We do not know what is meant by "goodly apparel"; the word is better rendered lower down, "gay clothing." The reference is to people who were very fond of high colours, and who covered themselves with great glaring, staring, dazzling, blinding garments; no matter how the colours lay in relation to one another, provided there was plenty of colour, a man was satisfied. Now, says James, if a mountebank like that came into the church, the church would not be good enough for him. Some think the reference here is to great pagan authorities, coming to pay an occasional visit to the Christian synagogue, which, by the way, is the literal translation of the word "assembly" in the second verse,—the only instance in which the term synagogue is associated with the Christian function in the New Testament. Some have thought that now and again a great Roman might look in, some huge and pompous local celebrity might deign to look in, to see how the Christians conducted themselves in worship; and James gave warning that the presence of such a person in the church may very likely excite undue attention, and elicit a deference which was neither rational nor pious. This, however, may not be the case; the reference may be to Christian classes, the one rich and the other poor, but all the classes being included within Christian or ecclesiastical lines: if so, the warning was all the more poignant and the danger all the more acute. Do not compare one man with another. It is not a question of stature against stature, and jewellery against jewellery: remember, says James, whose servants you are; you are the servants of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory; if you lose sight of your Master, you will be making all kinds of mistakes about one another. He whose eye is filled with Christ never sees what kind of coat a man has on: it is the poor fool who has forgotten Christ that begins to look at the people with whom he has to associate. If we could see all the heaven that this poor little capacity can take in, we should see no pomp in palaces or in thrones. Cæsar would attract none of our attention because we have been with the King of kings, with the Lord of lords; and this is precisely the Apostle's argument:—you are the servants of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord

of glory, the centre of all law, the focus of all magnificence and splendour : what have you to do with the coat of the self-idolator, with the jewellery of a man who clothes himself in shining stones of earth ? or why should you be intimidated by any little majesty of a local and transient kind ? or why should you be turned away as if through revulsion from the poorest human creature that sleeps without a pillow ? No, James would rather say, If ye had in you the spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, ye would say that this poor man more closely resembles the Son of God in his earthly relations than any other man. That would be Christian reasoning.

How difficult it is to keep the world in its right place ! The great man would not allow the poor black negro to sit in his pew. He was argued with on the ground of philanthropy, but philanthropy had no effect upon his nature ; he was argued with on the ground of advancing civilisation, things were now much larger and nobler than they used to be ; he was argued with on the ground of the personal piety of the negro, he was represented as reverent, as really Christian in feeling and spiritual in aspiration ; but all this was lost on the self-idolator : when, however, the self-idolator was told that the negro was worth a million dollars, he said, Introduce me, if you please. How difficult it is to keep the devil in his right place, and to keep the world within its right limits, and to keep ourselves really honest men. We shall get over all this little tawdry devotion by-and-by ; our hope is in education, our hope is also partially in familiarity, so that people, becoming accustomed to these little lights or superficial glories, will in due time learn to value them at their right price, or to despise them all. What does it matter how much luggage a man carries through to the grave ? Yet we admire the man who has a great deal of baggage. It is a kind of hotel standard : the landlord seeing the luggage carried upstairs is quite sure that his bill will be paid, or that luggage will never leave the roof until it is discharged. We are luggage-worshippers. All these fields of yours are but so much luggage ; the rows of houses are but so much baggage ; they but amount to such and such a quantity of *impedimenta*, that is all ; they do not make you any better or any richer in heart, any wider in mind, any kinder or more Christian

in soul. The question is, What are you, yourself? When you have lost your luggage, how stand ye? men, or not men? calm, noble, richer than ever, or perturbed, disquieted, humiliated, thrown down, and altogether disorganised? You are in reality what you are in your soul.

James begins to reason with the people, as he may well reason with all the generations following—"Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him." God does not take the view of the case which you adopt. God looks at men, not at circumstances; God looks at the soul, not at the body; God sees the jewels of the mind, the gleaming of intelligence, the uplifting of aspiration, the outstruggling of the soul towards liberty and light and rest. A man is not necessarily a bad man because he has a great income: a man is not necessarily a good man because he has no income at all, and because he is so crippled that he can never earn his own daily bread, but has to be a pauper all the days of his life. Incapacity and piety are not interchangeable terms. The real moral and spiritual argument you find below all these incidental aspects and transitory relationships. If a man is trusting in his riches he is a pauper; if a man is living honestly, he never can be other than really rich. Unless we have a clear understanding of these terms, we shall never get at the meaning at all. We must not look upon "rich" as equal to money, "poverty" equal to piety; nothing of the kind: the whole question of character still remains to be looked into and to be determined.

What is the charge of James against the people to whom he is writing? He states it frankly in verse 6—But ye have despised the poor—despised them, not because they were ignorant, perverse, foolish, worldly, or stupid, but ye have despised the poor because they are poor: if these very same men had been the recipients of ten thousand a year, then you would have quoted their names, and you would have said that your gardens adjoined one another, and that you were on hobnobbing terms with my Lord Ten-thousand-a-year. There would have been no change in the men, they have not been to school, they have not learned several more languages,

they have not purified themselves of low desires; they have simply laid a great income upon their ignorance, and you look at the revenue and not at the superstition. Are ye not partial, and do ye not indulge evil thoughts? and is not your whole intellectual and social system thrown out of gear by these seductive temptations? Nor let the poor man imagine that he is despised when he is not. The poor man is apt to be sensitive; and sensitiveness is often stupidity, it is most offensive to everybody who has to do with the poor man, or with the rich man either, when any man claims to be too sensitive. I do not understand that a man is necessarily of a very high quality of character simply because his pockets are empty; I can quite understand men believing themselves despised when no feeling of contempt whatever exists in relation to them. Poverty may be honest, and honesty is always independent. Honesty can always walk in the middle of the road; it may not be able to ride in a chariot, but honesty knows the way home and takes it straightly, and is thankful that it can at all events fall back upon an unaccusing conscience. He is wealthy who wants little; he is a rich man whose necessities are few; and he is a poor man who, being a millionaire at the bank, wants the next field. Greed is never contented, cupidity is never satisfied, avariciousness lays down its head upon a pillow of thorns.

“Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?” That was the case in the time of James, and has probably been the case in all generations. It is simply impossible for any poor man to get justice in England. He will get justice if he gets before the judges, but how to get there is the question. He is not strangled by the judges: the judges of England are to be spoken of in terms of veneration and religious gratitude; they do not care whether it is prince or peasant that stands before them, they will deal out justice according to the evidence that is submitted; we ought to be proud of the English bench; but the poor man cannot get to the bench, he cannot get through the bar; there are many gentlemen who take care that the poor man shall have a hard time of it, if he wants to lay his case before the court. Why not go and seek justice? you say to the poor man. He says, I cannot pay for it: I want it, I am dying

because I cannot have my case clearly stated, but I have not the costs. Why not seek to be released from this burden? Because I cannot pay for the release. The judges will do you justice. Certainly, if I could see them they would, but I cannot get at them. Justice is too dear in this country. Justice is an article of commerce, and it is sold for gold in the sense in which I have just defined. Thank God, not in the higher sense. England has outlived that period of venality, and now the bench is spotless in its administration of justice. The rich man challenges the poor man to go to law, knowing very well that the poor man cannot follow in that pursuit. The great newspaper with its million pounds behind it, says, To the law! The poor man says, I would go to the law, but it would mean utter ruin to me before I could have my case fully laid before the proper tribunal. The Apostle's argument is this, that life uncontrolled by moral and spiritual considerations is oppressive, overbearing, dictatorial. Wealth, spelling itself with an infinite W, demands to have its own way, to sit where it pleases, and to order the rest of the world about as menial servants: that is vulgar wealth; that is the new riches; not the real wealth, accompanied by learning, self-control, piety, Christian reverence, love of Christ. Blessed be God, it is possible for a man to be very rich, and yet to be very good. It is a great danger; he lives on a volcano, he would seem to invite the enemy; yet history and our own observation concur in testifying that it is possible to be wealthy and to be modest; possible to be socially great, and socially kind; possible to have much of this world, and to counterbalance it by infinitely more of heaven: blessed are they who can thus exemplify such a possibility.

“Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by which ye are called?” Here the Apostle is evidently speaking of pagan rich people. To blaspheme means to hurt with the tongue, to prick, puncture, injure, poison with the tongue; to utter foul words, unjust words, hellish words. Do not these people hurt the Son of God with their unruly tongues? Are they not irreverent, are they not impious, are they not profane? Hear their language, it expresses a boastful spirit; if they were poor they would be close-mouthed, if they had nothing to eat you would never see their real character: wealth develops personality. A man who

never suspected himself of being overbearing or tyrannical, will suddenly develop into an oppressor when he receives his wealth without a corresponding addition of moral quality, spiritual energy, and sense of dependence upon the living God.

“If ye fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well.” A man is your neighbour, whatever his circumstances may be. If he be too rich to acknowledge you as a neighbour, you can do without him; if he be so poor that he will thank you for neighbourly offices, you need not make him feel his poverty by an injudicious bestowal of such offices. Neighbourliness is full of subtle quality, full of spiritual unction, and may be turned into a real blessing. A man is not your neighbour simply because he lives next door to you; he may live next door to you locally, and yet live many miles from you sympathetically: he is your neighbour who understands you, who trusts you, who comes to you in his hour of need, and who quietly and hopefully tells you that he would be thankful for a hand stronger than his own put out to assist him in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. You will be imposed upon. I do not really care much for people who have never been imposed upon. They impose upon themselves. They seek to impose upon God, and they succeed. They eat bread to which they are not entitled; they drink water which they have practically stolen. Deceived! why, Jesus was once imposed upon by nine men all at once. There were ten men who came to him and told him what they wanted, and he granted their request; and no sooner did they get what they wanted, than off went nine, and they have never been heard of since. One man came back, and had the good sense to fall down and worship the Son of God. What, have the nine never been heard of since? how mistaken the suggestion, how absurd the proposition! Why, they are here, they are everywhere, we cannot get rid of them. We know them to be of the nine, although they never confess it. There lives no man in gospel lands who is not a debtor to Christ; there lives no man under the sun that is not a debtor to the Cross of Calvary.

How then, is all this difficulty to be handled? By not handling

it at all. We get wrong when we become economists, managers, machine-minders. Whenever we turn Christianity into a machine or an organisation, we do it injury. Christianity is a spirit, it is a quality of the heart: if we have in us the obedient spirit, carrying out the law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," there need be no handling in an economic sense, there need be no showy patronage of the poor, as who should say, Look at me: here is a man with the poorest clothing on, and I will walk with him, as it were arm-in-arm, down the whole length of the church: behold me. That man is not kind to the poor; he does not understand the poor; he is not an ornament in the sanctuary, he is an ostentatious idiot. He only does Christ's will who so does it that he is not seen of men in the doing of it. How is the spirit? how is it with our hearts? Do we really love the Saviour? are we crucified with Christ? are we partakers of the miracle which he alone, as the priest of the universe, works out? If so, we shall do all things almost unconsciously. The garden never says, I am giving you great wafts of fragrance to-day, am I not kind? The garden never says a word about the odours which it throws upon the winds. If we be in Christ Jesus, rooted and grounded in him, sharers of his grace, guests at his table of sacrifice and priesthood, our life will emit its frankincense, our hands will distribute the myrrh of the gospel, and our whole action will be modest, beautiful, simple, beneficent. This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working.

PRAYER.

How shall we thank thee, thou God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for all thy loving kindness and thy tender mercy, when they are without measure or bound? Our poor song is strained, our praise is without effect, our thanksgiving fails for the infinite occasion: who shall praise thee adequately, or set forth thy glory in words that are enough? Behold, there is none who hath harp, or instrument of music, or voice, to praise the Lord with sufficiency of praise. Yet thou wilt accept our song, feeble though it be; thou knowest what our hearts would do if they could: sometimes we feel as if life were too small for us, as if it needed enlargement, because of our slumbering faculty, which, if awakened by the breath of the Lord, would need all space for the utterance of its song. Thou art verily good unto us. Every man has his own blessing, every home its own light, every life its own song. Thou hast left none unblessed; on every flower there is one trembling drop of dew. We accept all thy gifts as pledges of still greater bestowment: what shall we see when we receive our sight? what shall strike the vision of the soul when delivered from the limitations of the flesh? These are mysteries we may not penetrate, but they are so hallowed and tender and condescending that they lure us on an onward, heavenward course, and we are filled with delight because of the assurance that every cloud shall be transfigured into glory, and all things now difficult and bewildering shall be made part of the great harmony of thy movement. What we need is patience, the power to wait, the energy that can stand still, the resoluteness which can express itself in repose. But this is the gift of Christ; the world has no such treasure to bestow. Bless us with thy peace, thou Son of God, and we shall be quiet under all circumstances; yea, though the earth be removed and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, we shall linger with religious leisure by the stream which maketh glad the city of God. Amen.

James ii. 10-26.

“For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all” (ver. 10).

THE BROKEN LAW.

THAT seems to be hard. James is hard. He cuts like a diamond. Now and then he melts a little in his feeling, and then he says some gracious words; says indeed some of the most gracious words that can be found in the New Testament; then presently he straightens himself again as if he had never

stooped to dry a tear. It seems unreasonable that, if a man be good in nine points, all the nine points should go for nothing because he is wrong or bad in the tenth point. Does it seem hard that the word should be marked as ill-spelt because there is one wrong letter in its composition? Yet that is what school-masters do: that is what even mothers are obliged to do; they do not want to do it, they would gladly wink when they come to the letter wrong, but having regard to the real progress of the scholar they are bound to point out the wrong letter which spoils the whole word. Which is the right letter in a word? They are all right letters; one letter is just as right as another; the *h* cannot boast against the *g*, and the *t* is quite unable to snub the *s* as an inferior member of that word. It seems hard for the child to have to go back to spell a long word with four syllables in it another time because one of the letters is not right, and perhaps because that one letter is not definitely pointed out: it seems twice hard not only to be told that we are wrong, but to go and find out where we are wrong. That is discipline. That is wise tuition. The lesson is a double one; we are first humbled, and then we are sent upon the quest of error, that through that quest we may come to conclusions that are right. Education is not one act; education is a series of acts all running into one another, and interplaying with effects in emphasis and colour in a way which could only be secured by this interaction. We cannot tell when we made our real progress; it was not in one step, it was not in any dozen steps, but the steps all went back upon one another and recurred and interplayed; yet almost suddenly we became conscious of the fact that we had got on one clear mile. What was it that charmed us on the road? We cannot tell. The birds, the flowers, the fragrant breeze, the lovely landscape, the sweet companionship,—which of them? None of them. How then? All of them. That is education; that is progress.

“The law,”—why not say the “laws”? That is the whole mystery of the occasion. We do not want these confusing plurals. It is because the term is singular, definite, indivisible, that life is made so solemn, yet so tender. Were it a question of laws, then it might be a question of proportion. If the laws are

ten in number and we keep seven of them, we ought to be accounted as seven-tenths good. The commandments are not ten in any sense that destroys their unity. We have seen in our former study that there are not ten aspects of virtue, but there are ten ways in which vice has enabled itself to wriggle out of the right road: therefore the law says, Stop up every hole! The law is love, or light, or truth; some indivisible quantity: but because vice is so wily, law has made arrangements to check its progress and foil its mischievous policy. The law, then, is one. God is one. Truth is one. If we say a man is very truthful, but not very courteous, we utter a sentence that is anomalous and self-contradictory. It is impossible for a discourteous man to be a truthful man. How so, teacher? Have we not heard of bluff, brusque, strong-mouthed Christians? Possibly: but you had no business to hear of them, because they ought not to have had any existence. Courtesy is truth—truth in proportion, truth in colour, truth in feeling, truth in social music. We make a mistake in thinking of truth as an iron pillar or a granite pedestal, something absolutely stern, tuneless, flowerless: truth gathers up into itself all grace, all music, all sacred passion; truth is courteous, and courtesy is essential to truth. The men who can drink more wine than would kill some other men have had no hesitation in holding up their riotous hands, their five foul fingers, in sign of excommunicating a man who has got wrong in some other way: as who should say, My brother, we do not blame you for getting wrong, but for getting wrong in that particular way: we all get wrong; if you had got wrong just as I do, why, nothing would have induced me to vote for your expulsion from the Church. More than that, a man may have so seasoned himself in wine-drinking that he can take six glasses one after the other, and joke between the couples; another man not so seasoned takes his second glass and is found on the floor. What is to be done with him? He must be expelled—expelled by the very man who drank the six glasses and who offered the temptation to his weaker friend. Is this right? is this noble? is this after the spirit of the Cross of Christ? How is it in society? By society is here to be understood an honest, not a painted, community. Suppose a man should be introduced to your society as a scholar, a gentleman

fit to be sent on any embassy requiring *politesse*, tact, artistic behaviour ; a man who speaks seven languages : will you receive him, if I add that he is an incorrigible liar ? That is all : now what say you ? You will not receive him, you cannot receive him ; all his qualifications and attractions are overwhelmed, obliterated, by the fact that the truth is not in him. But he only offends in one point : see what a gentleman he is, and how well-dressed, how well-spoken, how correct in accent, how musical in emphasis, how well-mannered. All this, you say, is true, but the man is a liar on your testimony, and therefore all other statements, though in his favour, must go for nothing. Then you are as stern as the Apostle James himself. Now that we touch the core of the matter we find that James is not the only stern man in the Church.

Yet this is not sternness, using that term as equivalent to un pitying and unrighteous rigour. It is only the sternness of truth, honesty, purity of heart. Here is another man of whom many things can be said truthfully that are favourable, the only drawback to this man's character is that he is a forger. What of that ? If the points in a man's life are ten, and nine of them are good, and the tenth point refers to a trick and habit of forgery, you would never keep the man outside on that account. You are accustomed to carry things by majorities : yea in our assemblies that are even called Christian we sometimes carry things by "overwhelming majorities." What delightful characters we are ! Why, if nine to one is not an overwhelming majority, what is ? Has not the minority a right to live ? Here is a man who is good in nine of the points when you come to point number ten, and yet you take him fiercely into hands and put him out of the synagogue. You are right. The illustration is only intended to give emphasis to the text, namely, that one point being wrong the offence against the whole law is complete.

We cannot keep the law in one point only. James graciously assumes that it may be possible to keep nine points of the law and offend in one ; but he is only making the assumption for the sake of argumentative illustration. It is impossible for a man who is wrong at any one point to be right at any other. He may be apparently right, he may be expediently and conveniently

right ; that is to say, he may be employed by merchant-men to do a certain kind of business, and he may do it well ; but the character is more than the action ; the action is sometimes but a dim or infirm symbol of the real character. The character is in the soul, in the spirit, and not in the overt act, which may be but a trick of the hand, an arrangement ; something well done, but of the nature of legerdemain. Character is a question of quality ; it is a question of spirit. When a man tells the truth and does not want to tell it, he is a liar ; when a man pays you your wages and would rather not do it he is an oppressor. Not the act detached and self-complete, but the character out of which the action comes must determine the whole question. Who then can be clean ? Precisely so ; that is the evangelical inquiry. Not one. Is there no possibility of becoming really clean of heart, and righteous in spirit ? Certainly there is. What is that possibility ? That possibility is revealed in one Name only. To work that miracle the Son of God wrought all other wonders. Whatever he did was meant to be initial, prefigurative, indicative ; when he cleaned a man's skin of the foul leprosy, he said, I do not want to terminate there, I only clean the body of this foul disease that I may be permitted to get at the soul. The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth from all sin. Marvel not that I say unto you, Ye must be born again : you must begin at the beginning ; what you want is not reformation but regeneration ; what man wants is not to be newly attired, but to have a new spirit ; he needs to have his heart of stone taken away, and to have a heart of flesh put in its stead.

James is strong upon the whole question of moral unity. He will not have anything done by halves. He treats the question of faith just as he treats the question of the law :—

“What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works ? can faith save him ?” (ver. 14).

There is no need to be afraid of this inquiry. No Paul's ghost need be started in order to scare the religious imagination, as if a great and irreconcilable discrepancy had been discovered between the two Apostolic teachers. James simply asks, Can faith save a man when it is detached from works ? who knows

then whether it is faith or not? How do we know the faith but by the works? The faith is the creator of the works; works, if honestly done, ought to represent the degree of faith that is in a man's soul. When man is right, action shall express character, but now it is often used for the purpose of concealing character; assuming honesty through every point of the soul, then every action is a word of truth, every attitude is a picture of inward beauty. "Can faith save him?"—that is, can intellectual faith, or theoretical, or speculative faith save the soul? and we answer with Paul's authority, as well as the authority of James, Thank God, no! Whoever would seek to dissociate morality from theology cannot adore God, or love the Saviour, or obey the Holy Spirit. Whoever supposes he can keep faith as a mere sentiment, an inward and spiritual luxury, a new variety of moral confectionery, is a thief and a robber in the Church which he disgraces. How much this needs to be said, and how much nearly every man needs to say it to himself, flatly, resonantly! Is there not a temptation to say, What are the points of my faith? and having gone minutely over all the points to say, There, that is sound! So it is; it is just that; by a happy inspiration you have hit upon the word. There is also a temptation to judge other men unkindly and ungraciously by our own standard. James would seek to say to all intellectual combatants, My brethren, what does it come to in the matter of character? what are you as doers of the Word? When you pass away from the Church into the home how is it with you? how do you stand in your own house? When you go into the market-place from the altar what do you take with you? is the odour of heaven upon your garments, is the fragrance of heaven in your very breath, do you look as if you had been praying? Are you not only honest according to the ordinary conception of that term, but is your honesty fostered, and nourished, and beautified by a fine generosity? Do you want to see whether you can do a little more, and how you can do a little better? Does the customer say, This man can be trusted? On the contrary, as it is you go forth with a creed drawn up by divines fourteen hundred years ago, and you carry with you every line, jot, and tittle of it: now what are you in the market-place? If there you are known to be a man of ambiguity of speech; if you are

understood to be a man who will take a profit whoever sustains a loss, and under whatever conditions the loss may be sustained; if you are known as a trickster, and a card-sharper, and a gambler, who is afraid of the name only, but not of the reality; then you do not believe the theology you think you believe. You only use it, pervert it, make a cloak of it; the theology is not to be blamed, but you, thief, liar, can only be blamed, denounced, execrated; and when the Judge sends men to eternal punishment you must go in the black procession. James therefore is not arguing against faith, he is simply saying, that where there is real faith there must be real character, and character is but the larger word for works. Nothing of a merely legal nature is intended by this praising of character or of action. I do not know that we should be so much afraid even of what is termed legality. In some instances I could do with a little more of it. I have known men who were just as sound as they supposed they were, and yet I would not trust them with any money if I wanted to see the money back again. It is when faith is unhappily hypocritically adopted by such men that the Son of God is crucified afresh.

Shall I tell you who the infidels are? I will not hesitate to accept the challenge if you address it to me. The men who profess Christianity, but do not act it; the men who would stand up for the inspiration of every comma and semicolon in the written Bible, but who never obey one of the precepts of that sacred book,—these are the infidels. They are doing infinitely more harm than any infidel can ever do. They are using the Christian profession for the purpose of doing unchristian or selfish work. On the other hand, if a man suppose that he can climb to heaven by doing what he calls good deeds, purely of his own motion and by his own regulation, let me tell you what he is attempting to do—he is attempting to reach the skies by a ladder. That has never been done. There are long ladders, but never one of them rested its trembling head on the horizon. Anything we can do is imperfect: the miracle that must be wrought is the miracle of God the Holy Ghost. We must have a new heart, a new spirit, a new self. We ascend to heaven not as a trick of cleverness on our part but as a miracle of the grace of God on the part of Christ.

So I have no fear of these apparent discrepancies, because the discrepancies are apparent, and not real in any one element or aspect. "Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone;" it has no body, it has no medium of expression, it cannot put forth its Divine faculties; it dies for want of exercise. Faith allowed to fall into desuetude may easily rot into infidelity.

"Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well"—so far the faith is not to be challenged in point of orthodoxy, but—"the devils also believe"—they are not polytheists, they would say, How true it is that there is but one God: yet when they believe they "tremble"—literally, their hair stands on end; it is no gospel to them, it is the consummation of terrors; if they could get rid of God, they could get rid of hell. Hell is the creation of God; hell is a necessity in any universe that is bad. Sin made hell. God has appointed it, because without it how could the universe be administered? The wicked shall go into hell, with all the nations that fear not God. Do not make a point of controversy of it: go into your own consciousness and experience: every man knows that the moment he did the forbidden thing he was stung by the fire of hell. This is not a mystery which we must die to believe, it is a fact which our consciousness or our experience attests.

James uses a beautiful illustration in the case of Abraham; he says:

"Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?" (ver. 22).

If it had been a question of Abraham only we might have been dismayed. We are not helped always by the great and shining characters of history: they may for our present state of vision be too dazzling in moral purity; we would like, therefore, some case nearer our own level. Blessed be God, in reading Scriptural biography we often come upon the spot, even in the sun of the finest character. It is at the contemplation of that spot we take heart again. James is not afraid, therefore, to set side by side with Abraham a character of another caste:—

"Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she

had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?" (ver. 25).

This word cannot be softened out of its basest meaning, it is not to be rendered "innkeeper"; the woman must stand there with all her sins upon her: and yet she had something in her heart greater than herself, greater than her sin; and by that something she touched the Infinite, the Eternal, the fatherhood of God. Here we come to another aspect of the case that was presented in our first reading. We cannot always give an account of our actions; we do some things without being able to explain them; there may be a Christly inspiration for which we have no words and of which we have no direct consciousness. Rahab, why didst thou receive the messengers? She might be able to give one or two probable reasons, or reasons which seemed to her to be equal to the occasion: but we do not always realise our deepest consciousness, there is what may be termed a sub-consciousness, another and deeper self, a ministry and action of motive not to be set forth in palpable words open to literary criticism. Peter was in that condition; his lips were scarcely healed from the wound of the oath they had uttered, when he said, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee." What, below all that blasphemy? Was the blasphemy but foam? Was the soul but lashed into momentary excitement? Were there depths of ineffable peace? There may have been; the poor broken-hearted man could but say, I remember what happened a day or two ago; I was not fool only, but sinner, criminal, base man; yet I did not mean it all; thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee. Here, then, is hope for many of us. We have done the things we ought not to have done, we have not done the things that we ought to have done, and yet in our soul's soul we are praying all the time. That is a mystery which the vulgar cannot understand; that is a mystery which often begets for us the undeserved character of inconsistency. Actions of the hand come and go, they are suddenly extorted from our very fingers; we speak extemporaneously what we feel at the moment, and often without due deliberativeness we express ourselves; yet, when we fall back upon our deeper consciousness, we find that the soul has never forsaken the altar, has never been untrue to Christ.

Everything, therefore, as to construction will depend upon the compass of the life we lead. There are some people who have not yet begun to live; they are living in points, they are excellent in aspects, they are people of promise, but the whole grand sublime idea of life they have never grasped. Nor are they to be blamed: who would reproach a child for not knowing as much as is known by an octogenarian? who would blame a young student that he is not as far advanced in knowledge and in wisdom as his veteran teacher? Much, therefore, of our judgment, must be regulated by circumstances, such as time, place, opportunity, degree of industry, and degree of faithfulness. The mischief is that a uniform standard is too often applied to men. We cannot tell how much it took to make some men go to church; other men are never happy but when they are there: are both the attendances to be marked down at the same valuation? They will not be so registered by God in his life-books. You do not know what it cost your brother to kneel down at his own bedside and utter family prayer for the first time. He was knocked down as with lightning—struck by the sound of his own voice; he had no sooner said "Our Father," than he became dizzy, the whole room seemed to be revolving swiftly, and everything seemed to be out of place; but he persevered, and now he can pray calmly, coherently, and with profit to others. One man has been, it may be, brought to church very much against his will; he says, No, certainly not; I cannot go: I have not been to church for years; do not ask me to go, let me see the green fields and hear the singing birds, or pass into the city and partake of its urgent life; anything but going to church. Yet you appealed again, by a chary use of wise words you persuaded him to come just inside, and told him that if he did not like the service he could easily retire. When he came over the threshold of the sanctuary he did more in the way of self-denial and self-mortification than many of us may have done for years. Let us, therefore, leave all judgment with God, and especially let us abolish the uniform standard; let us recognise psychological difficulties, differences amounting almost to opposing constitutions, and let God be judge.

PRAYER.

WE come unto thee, Father of our spirits, in the name of thy Son Jesus Christ, who washed us from our sins in his own blood. He himself bare our sins in his own body on the Tree. He died, the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, and be our everlasting King, eternal in his living, his intercession, and in his sovereignty. He is alive for evermore. Christ has abolished death. He himself tells us that he was dead, yet is alive, and is living for evermore. We wish to know somewhat of this fulness of life, this ocean-like roll of ages, this new revelation of duration. May we know that if we are in Christ we also shall share his blessed eternity; where he is there we shall be also, and as long as he is we shall live with him. We worship Jesus Christ thy Son, who is yesterday, to-day, and for ever; the same always, unchangeable, Alpha, Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End, the All-in-all, summing up in himself all majesty, all tenderness, all love. May we be in the world as he was, may he be our Ideal day by day, towards whose realisation we shall struggle with all our strength. The Lord help us, the Lord help us to see his Son, the Cross of Christ, and the crown of Christ, so that having been with him in the fellowship of his sufferings we may also be with him in the power of his resurrection. The Lord hear us in these things and come to us daily with new revelations of light and love and power to help. All this we say at the Cross of him who died for us and rose again. Amen.

James iv. 14.

“Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.”

“WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?”

THE question may be asked in many tones. It may be asked rebukingly, pensively, comfortingly; we may throw into the inquiry a tone of music and most solemn wonder. There is no doubt as to how the question was asked by the Apostle. He was taking a rather humbling view of life. He was addressing certain persons who were boastfully saying, “To-day, or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain,”—descendants of the man who pulled down his barns and built greater in his dreams, and who

said to his soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease. But God said unto him, Thou fool! between to-day and to-morrow stands this night: for that you have made no provision. The Apostle rebukes the boasting buyers and sellers, saying, "Ye know not what shall be on the morrow." That is as great a mystery as God. Yet we are troubling our little heads about God, as who should say, If we could only come to some satisfactory theory about God, we should be good. Oh, slow of heart, you come to some satisfactory theory about to-morrow! It is not in existence; yet it is old as eternity and assured as the throne of God. Do not pretend to be impiously or piously religious upon all the great conceptions and outlooks of faith, as who should say, If we could but master these, what wonderful men we should be! Look to yourselves; handle the mysteries that are round about you; when you have adjusted these you may proceed to the higher forms in the school of God. The Apostle tells the boasting programme writers that their life "is even a vapour." Here James—stern, moral, maxim-loving James—becomes almost poetical. When such a man is poetical there is often a wondrously graphic touch about his utterance. Saith James, Your life it is even a vapour, a curling cloud of smoke, a mist that appeareth for a little time, then vanisheth away: what ye ought to say is, "If the Lord will"; ye should connect yourselves with the greatest ministries of the universe, ye should lay on to your souls the currents and fountains of heaven; ye ought to be great speakers, and not little boasters; ye ought to make your morrow's journey contingent on the goodwill of the good Lord. Thus would James have us religious in everything. He would have no loose talk about to-morrow; in the very midst of our boasting he rebukes us by telling us that we are handling a vapour. That is no doubt the immediate Apostolic suggestion.

Yet may we not use the words on a larger base, and for another, yet not wholly unkindred, purpose? May we not read the suggestion in another tone? What is life?—what a mystery, what a tragedy, what a pain, what a feast, what a fast, what a desert, what a paradise: how abject, how august is man! It may not have occurred to some of you, as it has of necessity

occurred to those of us who are called to preach, that there is hardly a more appalling and pathetic spectacle than a promiscuous congregation. We do not see life in its individuality, but life in its combinations and interrelations of most delicate, subtle, suggestive, and potential kind. When we begin to take the congregation man by man, what a sight it is! The old, and the very young; the pilgrim going to lay his staff down, tired of the long journey, and the little child sitting on its mother's knee: the rich man whose touch is gold, the poor man whose most strenuous effort is his most stinging disappointment; men who are doomed to poverty, men who never have a holiday; if they were absent one day it was that they might crowd two days' work into one when they went back again; and men who have never been out of the sunshine, before whose sweet homes there slopes a velvet lawn. What is your life?

Then, if we go a little farther into the matter, the audience becomes still more mysterious and solemn. What broken hearts are in every congregation, what concealed experiences, what smiles of dissimulation! as who should say, We are happy; yes, we are happy, we are happy. The protestation is its own contradiction. There is a protesting too much. There are griefs that cannot be shared, burning griefs, griefs that weep inwardly, so that we never see a tear, and therefore would never suspect what a sorrow it is that is eating out the soul. There are purposes that no man can explain, and yet they are influential factors in life: because they cannot be explained they often invest a man's life and policy with a kind of mystery, that brings him under many a needless suspicion. If the poor soul could only tell out all its plans, all its purpose, the mystery would be shot through and through with light, and men would no longer painfully wonder at the ambiguity, nay, the very duplicity and falsehood of certain lives. But who can explain a half-formed plan? Who can call into his heart's confidence all his friends when his heart has not made up its own scheme? He will not have an inward parliament then, he does not want the matter to be talked over by many tongues; he is thinking, dreaming, scheming, and, saith he to himself, When I have perfected this, then I will tell my friends, and they will rejoice

with me. Meanwhile, he is under suspicion ; he is supposed to be a dark-minded man ; he is understood to be a person whom you can never fathom ; whereas, in the soul of him, he is frank as a child, white as the snow, has no unkind or malign feeling or purpose towards any living creature, but he is so constituted that he cannot take men into half-confidence or make them sharers of partial mental operations.

If we go a little farther into the matter, what minister can read his congregation through and through ? Men are not what they seem. That man, so good-looking, so well-dressed, so well-behaved, has a thirst within him that vineyards could not quench. He speaks gently, courteously ; he is indeed through nine-tenths of his constitution an honest, good soul ; but even he dare not tell his own mother what an unquenchable fire he carries. He thirsts for drink. He dare not go to God's own sacrament lest some whiff of the intoxicating fluid should cause that inward fire to blaze out of him, and he would go down to the very mouth of hell enwrapped in flames. Who suspects him ? No man. He has never told the dreadful secret. We should be careful how we turn such things into matters of frivolity. We should be ready to surround that man, not ostentatiously, but subtly and sympathetically, and hold him up in every good desire. When that man utters a poor, stumbling prayer, he utters an eloquence that moves all heaven ; its febleness is its omnipotence. Another man can hardly trust himself to touch money that is not his own, because he was born a robber. I do not blame him so much as I might blame some of his ancestors, if I could trace his heredity. The man was born so ; it had been good for him if he had never been born, if he had lived in some other sphere, and never set foot upon this tempting earth. We cannot hear him tell the tale, for he never tells it ; all the while he is saying to himself, I long to steal, to plunder : how can I keep this hand out of other people's treasure ? Yet still he sits in God's house ; when he sings a hymn he sings it honestly ; when he bows his head in prayer it is to seek real help from heaven. We cannot tell what we are. Every man has his own secret : the heart knoweth his own bitterness. Everywhere it would seem as if the signature of the devil were a very vivid impress on the human heart. And

even in God's house, are men who unknowingly gamble. They could even take part in a demonstration against gambling, and still practise the mean device and imposition—an imposition which tells heavily upon themselves. These men are not known; if they were known, they are not to be so much blamed as we might in some moods suppose: we must know more about the cases before we are so lavish with our judgments and rebukes. Man is a mystery to himself, to others,—mostly to himself. God is judge. Who art thou that judgest thy brother? Thou dost not judge thy brother, thou dost judge the law. You cannot offend against a man without offending against God; you cannot be harsh with a fellow-creature without inflicting an impious criticism upon the government of the universe. How many men burn with eternal fire! And all these things unrevealed, unconfessed, unacknowledged. Yet, looking upon a promiscuous concourse, one would say, How respectable, how intelligent, how delightful to meet such people! The terms are not wholly to be condemned. There may be much justice in the use of such terms, and yet to him who can see us through and through, what a sight we present! Blessed be his name, *his* eyes only can see us, and blessed be his love as written red on the Cross, those eyes are eyes of pity.

The only power that can touch all these classes and conditions is the gospel of Christ. No lecturer upon any limited subject can touch a whole congregation in its deepest and most painful and tragic experiences. No lecturer on astronomy can search the heart. Science holds no candle above the chamber of motive, passion, deepest, maddest desire. The gospel of Christ covers the whole area. How does it cover the whole area of human experience? First as a hope. Blessed be God, that is a gospel word. Christianity does not come down to men with judgment and fire, and burning; the gospel is not an exhibition of wrath, retaliation, vengeance: the gospel is love, the gospel says to the worst of us, For you there is hope; I know you, I know all the fire that burns in you, all the temptations that assail you, all the difficulties that surround you as with insurmountable granite walls: I know them all, and, poor soul, I have come with good news from God, good news from Calvary; I have

come to say, Hope on, for there is a way to reconciliation, and pardon, and purity, and peace. Then the gospel comes covering the whole area, not only as a hope, but with co-operation. If we might personify the case, the gospel would thus address man: I have come not only to tell you to hope, but I have come to help you to do so; the work is very hard, and I will do most of it; what you have to show is a willing heart, an earnest disposition, and, come now, together we shall work out this salvation of yours. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: for it is God that worketh in you, with you, for you: we are fellow-labourers with God. And then there is a third consideration, without which the case would be incomplete. Christianity, or the gospel, is not only a hope, and co-operative, it is a discipline. You always come upon the strong word in a great appeal. It is not all tears; you come upon the backbone, upon the line of iron, upon the base of rock. So the gospel comes to us as a discipline, and says, Having then, dearly beloved, these promises let us purify ourselves, even as God and Christ are pure; now for work, self-criticism, self-restraint, self-control, now for patient endeavour: cheer thee! It is a gospel word. Gospel calls mean gospel helps.

Who knows what life is? It is the secret of God. Up and down the mountains and valleys of the soul there are countless millions of germs waiting for the sunshine, and the dew, and all the chemistry of the spiritual kingdom; and out of these germs will come inventions, discoveries, new policies, novel and grand suggestions, heroisms undreamt-of, evangelisations and civilisations that shall eclipse the proudest record of time. Every evil thought you have kills one of these germs. When you long to gratify some illicit appetite, you have killed part of your soul. He that sinneth against me, saith Wisdom, wrongeth his own soul. He is a millionth part dead: the germ that might have meant a grand discovery has been extinguished, burned in hell. Every time you give way to an unholy passion you disqualify yourself to pray, yea even to think soberly and wisely. A continual process of self-murder may therefore be going on in a man's soul. We do not need the bare bodkin or the hemp thread to put an end to life: bad thoughts are murderers; evil desires take

the soul out of the soul; the fever within does not boil the blood, it burns the soul.

What is life? A mystery, a seedhouse, a sensitive treasure. What is life? It is the beginning of immortality. The dawn is the day: the child is the man. We do not wait till the child becomes old before we recognise him; when he is born we write him down among the treasures of the nation, and the nation takes charge of the child. It does not belong to one man or to one woman, it belongs to the total humanity of the nation. Will you expose the little creature and let it die? You will be hunted; blessed be God, you will be hunted down, and for that life you must answer. But it was a little life. The emphasis is not upon "little," but upon "life." There is no little life in any sense that implies insignificance or contemptibleness. So we have in us but a child-life, an infantile spark, quite a little beginning; but it is a beginning, and the grandeur is not in the word "little," but in the word "beginning." And, because we have this consciousness of life within us we ought to have a corresponding sense of responsibility; and to answer great appeals we ought to connect ourselves with the vital currents of the universe. Why take this little life and say we will handle it ourselves? As well take a bulb out of the earth and say, We will grow this without the earth and without the sun. We cannot: neither can we grow our own life into fruition and beauty and completeness unless we be associated with the currents of the universe. What are they? gospel currents, Christian vitalities, spiritual ministries, in a word, God the Holy Ghost. "Marvel not that I say unto you, ye must be born again." This is time, little time; but little gates may open great estates, small doors may open great palaces. This is the time-gate, but it swings back upon the infiniteness of God's eternity. It is high time to awake out of sleep and to realise the tragedy, the grandeur, and the responsibility of life. He who loses time loses eternity.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, do thou form within us the Son of God, the Hope of glory, the Teacher of all wisdom, the Light of all truth. We bless thee for the mystery of motive, we thank thee for the outcome of conduct; we cannot understand these things, but may we yield ourselves to all holy ministries that at the end under thine own hand we may be perfect men in Christ Jesus. We bless thee for what little has been done in our shaping and formation and direction; we thank thee if we have begun the alphabet of good behaviour: help us to read on steadily, to work on patiently; say to us by thy Holy Spirit, In your patience ye shall win yourselves. We desire that this prize may be ours; we would not hold our prizes in our hands, we would have ourselves as our victories, we would be delivered to keep the truth. We bless thee for these aspirations; once our eyes were in the dust, now they are lifted up and they at least see the outline of the stars; may we look steadfastly and eagerly from the Cross, and by-and-by, like our Lord, we shall see heaven opened, and in the opening heaven we shall forget the dying earth. The Lord help us to live wisely, purely, nobly, usefully; may we be living epistles, may we write the gospels again in holy conduct; may men take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus and have learned of him; may we remember in all things that, by our very profession, we represent the Son of God. Where thou has sent great affliction thou wilt not neglect to send great comfort; thou hast a voice which can be heard even in the cloud; thou canst divide the great sea, and rebuke the deep river, and cause the mountains to disappear from before thy pilgrims. Amen.

James v. 11.

“Ye have heard of the patience of Job.”

CURIOUS IDENTIFICATIONS.

LET us notice how very curiously, and in some cases how very eccentrically and frivolously, some men are identified in Holy Scripture. The texts might be a hundred in number: one will do to start with—“Ye have heard of the patience of Job.” Thus we hear of men in little points, striking aspects, wise or silly anecdotes. Who knows anything about Job, except his patience? Who can quote any argument of the great sufferer? Who can recite his curse upon his birthday? Who knows how many chapters there are in the book of Job? Yet there is hardly a child in the world attached in any way to a Christian

home or a Christian school who has not heard of the patience of Job. You never hear the whole man discussed. You never hear a whole sermon quoted, but some odd sentence, some little unhappy or infelicitous phrase into which the speaker may have been momentarily betrayed; but the whole genius of the discourse, the picture, the apocalypse, the miracle of thinking and the miracle of expression, these are never referred to. Some little curious sentence determines the man's reputation. "Ye have heard of the patience of Job." Can you prove it? When was Job patient? Was his patience a mere rumour? When did the Lord say to the patriarch, Job, you have been very patient under all this harrowing? When did Job ever pretend to be patient? Cannot more petulant, rasping, whining expressions be quoted from Job than from any man who ever lived?

"Ye have heard——" But we have heard so many things that are not true. When will men give over believing a single word they hear that is really not good, beautiful, musical, and divine? Thousands of years have not taken out of us the devil that wants to hear everything that is vicious and debasing. We have classified the great heroes of Bible history, so that now we have the whole of them in a kind of question and answer form. Thus:—Who was the meekest man? Moses. Who was the most patient man? Job. Who was the strongest man? Samson. Who was the wisest man? Solomon. No grasp of the whole character. What do you know about Jeremiah? Listen:—I have heard him called the weeping prophet. Exactly: and therein you have done the man infinite injustice. He could fly as high as Ezekiel, he could burn like Isaiah, and he could cry like a fountain. But all you have heard of him is that he is a weeping prophet. When shall we give over indicating or identifying men by little points, small peculiarities, frivolous idiosyncrasies? When shall we come to do them such justice as to grasp the whole unit and say, Here is a man of a many elements, personalities, and virtues; manifold, interplaying, mysterious music; complicated yet beautiful as light.

Some men can be struck off in this frivolous one-sentenced way. Thus (Deut. iii. 11)—"Og." What Og was this? This

Og :—"Behold, his bedstead was a bedstead of iron ; is it not in Rabbath of the children of Ammon ? Nine cubits was the length thereof, and four cubits the breadth of it, after the cubit of a man." That is all ! Some men can therefore thus be indicated superficially because they are superficial : they have a large collection of autographs—Oh ! that is the man you mean ? Yes. What more about him ? Nothing. He is the man who has a large collection of insects. Is that all ? Yes. Then pass on to the next character ! Sometimes a man is known by his mere physical contour, peculiarity, strength, way of walking, his gait. One such man there was at Gath, "where was a man of great stature, whose fingers and toes were four-and-twenty, six on each hand, and six on each foot,"—and that is an end of him. The man could not help it. He fixed neither his stature, nor the number of his fingers and toes ; but they were the making of him in history. Nothing more do we know about him, except that he was "the son of a giant." This peculiarity of stature, and perhaps multiplication of digits, ran in the family. That is all. "Ye have heard of the patience of Job" ; you have heard of Og's bedstead ; you have heard of the giant of Gath with the four-and-twenty fingers and toes : you have heard nothing of any of these men,—unless it be in the later cases we have heard all there is to be known about them, in which case the instances are pitiful. Sometimes the Lord Jesus described men in a way that has a smile almost as broad as a laugh between the lines. "There was a certain rich man," said he, "clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day." You cannot add a word to that. You cannot imagine a more complete representation of gilded debasement, decorated degradation. Oh, how heart-breaking ! that a man should be known as rich, clothed in purple and fine linen, and faring sumptuously every day !

Let us now come into another class of identifications, where the air is purer, where the light is the blessing of a summer day. There was a man called Caiaphas ; but this name is not an uncommon one in the period and in the race to which he belonged. Which Caiaphas therefore was it ? Now comes the point of identification, the descriptive clause :—"Now Caiaphas was he, which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one

man should die for the people." Here is a man associated with a great idea. We know nothing of his stature, of his fingers, toes, bedstead, clothing ; he stands in history associated with the sublimest thought : patriotism ennobled and sanctified ; theology dark with excess of light. Caiaphas did not know what he was saying. What man has ever given expression to any great idea who knew the circumference of it ? Who knows where one vibration of the air ceases to palpitate ? Who then can tell where one real, living, divine thought ends its issues ? Talk of expounding the prophets ! who can do it ? The very fact that they were prophets lifts them above our exposition. We can move in their direction, we can catch a portion of their spirit, we can represent some outline of their meaning : but the prophets themselves did not know what they were thinking about or praying about ; they wondered what the Spirit meant when it spoke of suffering and death and millennium, and the wolf and the lamb feeding together like friends. There are those who would insist upon knowing what Paul means. Paul did not know himself. I do not want to know what Paul means, I want to know what the Holy Ghost meant when he spake through Paul. I do not interrogate the trumpet, I interrogate the trumpeter. So with regard to this Caiaphas. He laid down the most wonderful philosophy that was ever suggested, and did not know in all its fulness and unction and pathos the evangel which he declared. One man dying for the people,—why, that is all history gathered up into one vivid sentence ; that is the tragedy of life in one palpitating eager line. Who could die for the people except in symbol ? Fear thou not : the Lion of the tribe of Judah hath strength to open the book, and the Son of God hath quality enough to die for the universe every day of the week.

This idea of substitution is one which I cannot explain, and which I cannot relinquish. It is to me the central idea of the atonement. You have followed my teaching but poorly, if you do not know how frequently I have said that the atonement cannot be explained. It can be felt, the eyes of the heart can see the mystery for a moment ; that moment may be the moment of salvation. But the atonement is not a riddle to be guessed, it is not a proposition to be controverted ; it is a fact to be received by

the broken-hearted in their extremest self-disgust and self-helplessness. There are some who will not have the idea of substitution, on the ground that men are suffering for their own sins. I deny it; I join issue upon that statement; I call it, to begin with, a lie. No man is suffering for his sins, in the sense which makes suffering and sin equivalent terms. That is the vital point. A man has five thousand a year, robust health, genial spirits, rising reputation, equipages, and acres, and a score of servants answering a score of bells,—what! he suffering for his sins? It is an irony that might be laughed at, but for the grave fallacy which makes it an obvious lie. A poor man, apparently penniless, breadless, friendless, homeless—is not he suffering for his sins? No, not necessarily. We must understand the case before we pronounce upon it. Has it come to this, then, that a man sins and suffers, and there's an end of it? Why, doth not nature herself teach you that nothing of the kind is known in all the social mystery of life? A man may suffer for another man's sins: how then? "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents," and yet he is blind. What about his grandparents, what about the line of heredity stretching far back through generations? The infant of seven days old is in pain—for whose sins? Then there is a law of transference, is there, or a law of sequence? You must recognise that law in the fulness of its meaning before you talk about a man suffering for his sins and therefore there is no need to punish a man for them. That is loose, foolish, blasphemous, wicked talk. Life is not so superficial and lineal and easily measured and managed as all that: life is a tragedy. How one man can die for ten thousand ages, we cannot tell: but we cannot tell why there should be ten thousand ages. We are not called upon to tell: explanation does not lie within the range of our responsibility: we have enough of germ, suggestion, initial action in our own instinct and in our own social administration to give us a hint of the possibility of a grand vicariousness, a marvellous condescension on the part of God, by which his own death in the person of his Son shall be regarded as equal to the death of all who have sinned. Moreover, we cannot tell what sin is. It is not a term in the dictionary, it is not a mere word; before you can determine the matter of suffering you must determine the range, quality, issue, and whole

mystery of sin. Sin is not an offence against the magistrate, or against the law, or against some conventional standard; sin goes farther and means more, and strikes God in the heart, and thus shakes the universe. What it means in all the fulness of its significance we shall know in eternity. Meanwhile, I say of my Saviour, He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him. How, why, I know not: but I feel that it being so the sinner may call upon him too, and thus be saved.

Let us relieve the agony of these considerations for a moment by turning to another instance of a remarkable reputation. The Apostle writes the word "Judas," and his very hands seem seized with paralysis,—“Judas,” and in a parenthesis he says, “Not Iscariot.” Blessed be God a man may be called “Judas” without being called “Iscariot.” We have to save ourselves from being confounded with some people. Sometimes the names are the same, but the qualities are infinitely different. Sometimes part of the name corresponds with the abhorred appellation, but we are saved by the fact that the other part is utterly distinct from the first. “Not Iscariot,”—not the dealer in blood, not the betrayer of the Son of God, not the man who took thirty pieces of silver that he might sell his Lord; not the liar who blistered Time’s fairest cheek with the foulest kiss; not the damned! There are times when a man is bound to say that he has no connection with such and such deeds and issues.

Take another case, which shall be the last. “Mary is a name that occurs again and again in the New Testament. There were many Marys. I read thus in one case, “It was that Mary which”—listen!—“that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair,”—the best Mary but one, the best but the mother of God. The practical question is, “How do we mean to be known?” By our stature, by our curiosities, by our fine clothing and fine faring; by the utterance of sublime ideas, by the conception of noble thoughts, by the doing of deeds that would be illustrious in moral majesty if they were not overwhelming first in moral pathos? We may leave no distinctiveness. A person may so live as not to be missed. That is an appalling thought; it is, however, an indisputable fact.

The persons did nothing, said nothing, suggested nothing, lived in nothing and died in nothing, went for nothing. We may leave a bad distinctiveness,—the man of evil habits, the drunken husband, the drunken father, the profane speaker, the man who never opened his mouth but to pollute the air. Or we may, blessed be God, leave a good distinctiveness. We may so live that many will miss us who were never supposed to have known us. We shed influences which we cannot follow. We can have individuality without ostentation. There is a fame of the heart, a fame of goodness, a fame of charity ; there is a household glory. A man may be famous at home. The day has not begun until he comes in ; the home is only a house until she who is loved appears upon the scene ; the house is only furnished by the cabinet-maker, not lighted up by the genius of home, until such and such a life is realised in its holy and happy presence. How are we to be known ? It is a poor fame that spreads itself over all the world but has no fame at home ; it is mere noise. There is nothing so contemptible as fame, if it be not rooted in conscience, in intelligence, and in appreciation at home. To be famous under his own roof, should be the ambition of every man. That lies within the power of all. If fame were a question of genius, statesmanship, production of the finest poem or the finest criticism of the day, why, that fame lies within the reach of ingenious devils ; but we should covet the fame of love, the fame of household trust, the fame of the heart. Do not be known merely for little things, but never despise the things that are little. It will be a poor consequence if we are known as the most punctual people in the world, if we are known also as the most untruthful persons ever spoken to. It will be a very poor account to render at last that we were courteous beyond all that was known of civility, and yet we were oppressors of the poor and the helpless. Let us be known for sympathy, for prayerfulness, for that wondrous mystery of life which is called faith—all the five senses gathered up and consummated in a sixth called faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God. We walk by faith, not by sight. Faith shall have great harvesting. Reason sows in a little measurable plot that can be cut down in a day by any hireling hand. Faith sows upon the acreage of the universe and wants eternity in which to reap the harvest.

THE FIRST EPISTLE GENERAL

OF

P E T E R .

(BABYLON, A.D. 63.)

[NOTE.—“The Epistle was addressed to the Churches of Asia Minor, which had for the most part been founded by St. Paul and his companions. Supposing it to have been written at Babylon, it is a probable conjecture that Silvanus, by whom it was transmitted to those Churches, had joined St. Peter after a tour of visitation, either in pursuance of instructions from St. Paul, then a prisoner at Rome, or in the capacity of a minister of high authority in the Church, and that his account of the condition of the Christians in those districts determined the Apostle to write the Epistle. From the absence of personal salutations, and other indications, it may perhaps be inferred that St. Peter had not hitherto visited the Churches; but it is certain that he was thoroughly acquainted both with their external circumstances and spiritual state. It is clear that Silvanus is not regarded by St. Peter as one of his own coadjutors, but as one whose personal character he had sufficient opportunity of appreciating (v. 12). Such a testimonial as the Apostle gives to the soundness of his faith, would of course have the greatest weight with the Hebrew Christians, to whom the Epistle appears to have been specially, though not exclusively addressed. The assumption that Silvanus was employed in the composition of the Epistle is not borne out by the expression, ‘by Silvanus, I have written unto you,’ such words according to ancient usage applying rather to the bearer than to the writer or amanuensis. Still it is highly probable that Silvanus, considering his rank, character, and special connexion with those Churches, and with their great Apostle and founder, would be consulted by St. Peter throughout, and that they would together read the Epistles of St. Paul, especially those addressed to the Churches in those districts: thus, partly with direct intention, partly it may be unconsciously, a Pauline colouring, amounting in passages to something like a studied imitation of St. Paul’s representations of Christian truth, may have been introduced into the Epistle. It has been observed that there is good reason to suppose that St. Peter was in the habit of employing an interpreter; nor is there anything inconsistent with his position or character in the supposition that

Silvanus, perhaps also St. Mark, may have assisted him in giving expression to the thoughts suggested to him by the Holy Spirit. We have thus at any rate, a not unsatisfactory solution of the difficulty arising from correspondences both of style and modes of thought in the writings of two Apostles who differed so widely in gifts and acquirements."—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible.*]

1 Peter i. 19.

"The precious blood of Christ."

THE PRECIOUS BLOOD OF CHRIST.

MY heart's desire has ever been to make known to men that there is no salvation but by blood, and not by blood only, but by the particular blood named in the text—even the precious blood of Christ. I am afraid that in these latter days some of us have tried to find out some other word to use instead of this word blood. We shrink from it. A dainty piety has forced upon us a dainty vocabulary. As the intensity of our love has gone down, the intensity of our speech has gone down along with it. We speak of the life of Christ and the love of Christ, but we too seldom speak of the precious blood of Christ; that would seem to our frigid piety to be an exaggeration, and our frigid piety is encouraged by our deceitful fancy, that tells us that love is a larger term than blood, and should always be used instead of it. Beware of the temptations of a worldly fancy. If your piety becomes the creature or the plaything of your imagination, you will commit the keeping of your soul to the most capricious and the most irresponsible of all powers. We need some term that lies away, infinitely beyond the airy and cloudy region of fancy; a broad and emphatic word—a word that carries its own single and definite meaning so plainly that mistake is impossible, and that sacred and inviolable term is blood. The world over, that word has but one meaning. Even the word love may be tortured into ambiguity by men skilful in definition, but the word blood is too simple, too energetic, too solemn, to take upon it the faintest gloss of the most reluctant expositor. It is blood; it is precious blood; it is the blood of Christ; it is the blood that cleanseth from all sin; and to attempt its passion by the use of supposed equivalents, is to trifle with the supreme purpose of God in seeking the salvation of mankind. In a case like this, even reverent paraphrase is in

danger of becoming almost profane. What other word can take the place of the word blood? Even love itself is a word with many aliases, or a word which admits of many changes and partial substitutes: it is regard, it is affection, it is sympathy, it is forbearance, it is friendship, it is trust—but how will you replace the word blood? It stands alone. It will not clothe itself in the disguises of various terms. Its unquenchable ardour burns through the snow which you scatter upon its summit. No winter can loiter upon those ardent slopes. If you mean to tax your fancy for the production of equal terms you must go elsewhere, for the term “blood” can accept no humiliation and pander to no disguise.

We are sometimes asked to admit that it cannot be what is called real, literal, or merely physical blood. Why should it not be real blood, the actual blood of the actual body? Let us take care lest our vulgar conceptions deprive us of gracious meanings and privileges. It may be our notion that is at fault, and not the word of God. The reference is unquestionably to the real blood of Jesus Christ, “who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree.” Who shall say that his bodily blood was limited, and could therefore have but limited application? Verily herein we are straitened, not in Christ, but in ourselves; yes, even in the very imagination which is supposed to create for itself such wide liberty! If the people could find no limit in the handful of bread with which Christ satisfied the throng, as the poor woman could find no limit to the oil blessed by the prophet, who shall take upon him to say that it was a shallow and measurable stream that flowed from the heart of Christ? Did he not work miracles upon his own body? Did he not conceal it? Did he not cause it to pass untouched and unhurt through the angry host upon the hill? Did he not keep it from sinking in the sea? And can he not crown these wonders by giving us his blood to drink? “How can this man give us his blood to drink?” We never could tell how Christ did his mighty works, but, praised be his sweet and tender name, dear Jesus, Heart of God, he did them, and therein is our joy satisfied! To me the controversy is mean which contends that Christ does not give us his flesh to eat and his blood to drink, in the sacred ordinance of the Supper. He

who maintains the contrary can make the vulgar stare by his tricks in the use of words, and can impale on harmless horns the argument which he opposes, but he has never plumbed the depths of Christ's power, he has never known what alone can appease the heart's violence of grief, nor has he entered into the holiest of all, wherein the corruptible letter clothes itself with the incorruptible spirit. When my heart is stung to death by its own remorse on account of sin, when hell is moved from beneath to receive me as fit only for its devouring flames, I am in no mood to be satisfied with types and symbols; a real want demands a real remedy, a real sinner calls for a real Saviour, and real sin can be met only by real blood: in that infinite distress you must not meet me with etymologies and verbal dexterities, you must let the tormented soul have free access to the precious blood of Christ. I know well that the literalist can vex me with truisms, and confound my poor learning by his brilliant ignorance; he can tauntingly ask me, How can this man give you his blood to drink? and I have no answer in words; he entangles me in the thicket of his alphabet and holds me as his prey, but deep down in the contrite heart, in the solemn sanctuaries never defiled by common speech, I know that Christ's word is better than man's when he says, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." If you ask me whether a morsel of sacramental bread is the actual body of Christ, my senses combine in a unanimous protest against an absurdity so manifest; but in this holy exercise I do not walk by sight, but by faith; my senses have slain me aforesaid, so that I cannot allow them to usurp a function they have so disastrously abused; I will not allow them to speak in this sanctuary; they can but degrade its sacredness: they have been liars from the beginning, and in all heavenly mysteries they are liars still; I will listen only to the voice of the dying, mighty, holy, infinite Saviour—"Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; for my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed; he that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me and I in him."

By no priestly incantation is common bread transformed into the body of Christ. I know nothing of sacerdotal magic. My

soul resents with horror too solemn to be merely contemptuous the suggestion that priestly wizardry is needful to my participation in the blood of Christ. But this is my faith, the faith that brings things of heaven near, the faith that consecrates the very dust of earth, that if, in the burning agony of my contrition, shame, and helplessness, I put forth a trembling hand, and seize the common bread which makes the body live, and eat it for love of Christ, it will be to me the very flesh of the Son of God, a real appropriation, a holy sacrament; foolishness, to the cold, low world, but wisdom divine and comfort infinite to the hungering and dying heart. I shall then know, not by some intellectual feat, the deep meaning of Christ's words: "This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die. I am the living bread which cometh down from heaven; if a man eat of this bread he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

We need what is truly called a realising faith as well as a spiritualising power. We are sometimes under the spell of two voices and hardly know to which to yield. The one voice says, Spiritualise everything; clothe the stones of the field with mystic meanings; fill the winds with voices from worlds unknown; and turn the stars into eyes of holy watchers not yet named of man. The other voice says, Beware of making the simple mysterious; avoid the attenuation which destroys solid meanings; take the very first signification that occurs to the earnest mind, and suspect all explanations that are far to seek. These contrary voices make themselves distinctly heard in the interpretation of this text; the one voice exhorts us to escape the narrowness of a literal meaning, and the other exhorts us not to lose the real and the true in some vain search for the speculative and the doubtful. A realising faith does not make things less, it makes them more vivid, it sets them before the eyes with true naturalness, and constrains their hidden meaning into bold and noble expression. I would, then, pray to have a realising faith when I think of the blood of Christ; the life-blood; the blood that cleanses from all sin; the blood of sprinkling; the blood of atonement; the blood of the everlasting covenant. I would see it as blood. The grossness is not in the

blood, it is in myself. The blood is holy. Is there aught in the great universe so holy as the blood of Christ? But we cannot realise the blood until we have realised the sin. Where there is no conviction of sin—conviction amounting to the very anguish of the lost in hell—there can be no felt need of so extreme a remedy as is offered by the outpouring of the blood of Christ. A self-palliating iniquity may be cleansed by water. The light dust which bespots the outer garment may be removed by gentle means. When a man feels that he has not sinned deeply he is in no mood to receive what he considers the tragic appeals of the gospel; they exceed the case; they destroy themselves by exaggeration; they speak with self-defeating violence. But let another kind of action be set up in the heart; let the man be brought to talk thus with himself—“I have sinned until my very soul is thrust down into hell; my sins have clouded out the mercy of God, so that I see it no longer; I have wounded the Almighty, I have cut myself off from the fountain of life, I have blown out every light that was meant to help me upward; I am undone, lost, damned,” and then he needs no painted Cross, no typical sacrament, no ceremonial attitude, no priestly enchantment, he can be met by nothing but the sacrificial blood, the personal blood, the living blood, the precious blood of Christ.

How far it is possible to sustain in constant experience those keen and vivid realisations of the blood of Christ is known to us all. Considering the infirmities of the flesh, the deceitfulness of the world, the subtle and persistent temptations of the enemy, the continual vexations, anxieties, frets, and chafings of a life that is one daily struggle, it is not too much to say that we could not bear the incessant realisation of all that is suggested by the expression, “the blood of Christ.” But if this is our weakness, and it surely is, what shall we say of the strengthening might that is stored up for us in Christ? We can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us! For observe that, though the painful sacrifice of Christ makes an unendurable strain upon our feelings at one period of our spiritual history, it becomes to us the tenderest solace, the richest grace, the sweetest reflection, and the serenest rest, as we advance in our holy course. No longer are our sensibilities torn by it. No more do we see the wild but

passing cruelty of man ; the crucifixion becomes an atonement, and then on the Divine side we see the pity, the righteousness, the wisdom, and the love of God.

The practical effects of realising all that is meant by "the blood of Christ" are most useful. The text ceases to be a mere expression, and becomes a most solemn and all-determining fact. It becomes indeed the regulative power of our whole life. See, for example, how it reduces us to a state of most utter and abject helplessness in the matter of self-salvation ! If we could be saved by the shedding of blood only, how could we save ourselves ? If Christ had saved us by some lower method, we might have been tempted to think that our redemption lay within our own power. But when it required the outpouring of every drop of blood that was in the fountain of his great heart, either he made a fatal mistake in his method, or we make a fatal mistake in supposing that we could have redeemed ourselves. Immediately following this reflection is the thought that, if so much was done for us, what is there that we can do in return ? "How much owest thou my Lord ?"

"Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all."

We are not our own ; we are bought with a price ; therefore we are to glorify God in our bodies and in our spirits, which are God's. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." My soul, canst thou reckon a debt so immense ? Hast thou a pen that can be dipped in a sea of ink and a hand that can wield it until the day of death, that the sum may be set down in the face of heaven ? My tongue refuses the intolerable burden of complete acknowledgment. My age would wither away before the growing tale was well begun. I owe all to Christ. There is nothing mine but my hateful sin. He found me ; he loosed my bond ; he paid my debt ; he sounded the depths of all my woe ; he ransomed me with blood ! "I will offer to him the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and call upon the name of the Lord." How poor my best return ! How mean my gifts ! How weak my

service ! But as he met me in the helplessness of my sin, so will he meet me in the imperfection of my work. He will make it worthy with his own merit ; he will complete it by his own might ; he will sanctify it by his own holiness. The blood of Christ ! It did not flow on one day, it flows evermore ! My soul, is thine but a geographical Calvary ? or is it a Golgotha of the spirit, the place where thy Church is founded and where thy heaven begins ? Have we outlived the efficacy of the blood of Christ, and is the tale of his Cross a sound from which all the music has gone for ever ? We need the sun to-day as we have ever needed it ; the wind is still the breath of health to our dying bodies ; still we find in the earth the bread without which we cannot live ; these are our friends of whom we never tire : can it be that the only thing of which we are weary is God's answer to our souls' deepest need ? Shall we keep everything but the blood of Christ ? Shall the Cross go, and the sun be left ? Verily, as the sun withdrew at sight of that Cross and for the moment fled away, he would shine never more were that sacred tree hewn down by furious man. The blood of Christ is the fountain of immortality ! The blood of Christ,—it makes the soul's summer warm and beauteous ! The blood of Christ, it binds all heaven, with its many mansions and throngs without number, in holy and indissoluble security ! My soul, seek no other stream in which to drown thy leprosy. My lips, seek no other song with which to charge your music. My hands, seek no other task with which to prove your energy. I would be swallowed up in Christ. I would be nailed to his Cross. I would be baptised with his baptism. I would quail under the agony of his pain, that I might triumph with him in the glory of his resurrection. O my Jesus ! My Saviour ! Thine heart did burst for me, and all its sacred blood flowed for the cleansing of my sin. I need it all. I need it every day. I need it more and more. Oh, search out the inmost recesses of my poor wild heart, and let thy blood remove every stain of evil.

1 Peter ii. 1-9.

1. Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings,

2. As new born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby :

3. If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

4. To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious,

5. Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

6. Wherefore also it is contained in the Scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious, and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.

7. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious ; but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner,

8. And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient : whereunto also they were appointed.

9. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people ; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

LIVING STONES.

THIS Epistle is called "General" because it is catholic. The word "General" therefore literally describes the scope and purpose of the letter. We must not have in God's New Testament anything petty, narrow, merely local ; anything that is discoloured by the faintest tinge of exclusiveness or selfishness. Peter says, "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass." He is not talking about the body, he uses the word "flesh" in an ethnic—that is, in a racial—signification. The Jews were very proud of being the only flesh worthy of God's notice. They had no association with other races ; they could not stoop to the vulgarities of human nature. The Apostle Peter, once so punctilious, says concerning flesh in this invidious signifi-

cation, "all flesh"—the best of it, Abrahamic flesh—"is as grass, and the glory of man"—racially, locally—"is as the flower of grass,"—a thing to admire for a moment, but a thing doomed to pass away: you Jews and Christians of the dispersion must learn that you are no longer ethnic, or race, or class, men, you are born again—you are "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever!" So you are no longer Jews and favourites, you are now a part of the great sum total of humanity, you belong to the redeemed world, and wherever you see a man you see a brother, wherever you go into another land you go into another home: now, in the largest, divinest sense, the earth is the Lord's. The Apostle Peter was speaking about the funeral of ethnic distinctions, of class peculiarities; he said, All these must be buried, so that they can know no resurrection, and henceforward we must live the new humanity. That is Christ's conception of growth, evolution, sanctification.

Now we are prepared for the specific text, which is in this second chapter, "Wherefore"—for this very reason of universality; because we are no longer Jews and Gentiles, bond and free, great and small, men and women, divided, subdivided, and classified by pedantic distribution of taste or colour or faculty,— "Wherefore," seeing that in the Second Adam we are all one, federally united, fraternally identified, kin,— "Wherefore," because of all this, a certain very definite moral discipline must be accepted and obeyed. The moral discipline itself is laid down in great simplicity of language; it may therefore profitably be our business to stand awhile to look at separate phrases, and see what we can make out of their meaning.

Thus: Here is the phrase "Laying aside." This could be pictorially represented better than it could be verbally described. All dictionaries should be pictures; for want of the picture we often do not see the meaning. "Laying aside" is a picture-phrase, and requires for its illustration a man who is taking off his garments. That is the literal signification of the word. The idea is that there was a certain race of men clothed with malice, with bad feeling, or if not with positive malignity, yet with an ignorance that in some of its practical expressions

amounted to the expulsion of the majority of the human race from the love and complacency and protection of God. The Apostle, speaking in the name of Christ and in the Spirit of Christ, says, Seeing that all these distinctions have been abolished by the great act of the incarnation of the Son of God, take off that imposing robe, tear it away, and lay it aside, and forget it. The expression is not, Loosen your garment of malice a little, will you; or take it off for a little while and put it beside you, that you may feel the benefit of it when you go out again. That is not the lexicographical idea at all; it is, Tear it off! do not get anybody to help you to take it off, but pull it off, and lay it, throw it, aside: stand up in the loveliness of your new nature, a nakedness that is not ashamed. These words are heroic and bold in any speaker: but how heroic and noble they were in the case of Simon Peter can only be realised by those who have studied that man's peculiarity, his intense Judaism, his bitter Jewishness of feeling, his determination to exclude from his sympathy anybody who did not go to his particular synagogue. Words have meanings according to the speakers who employ them. If certain men used little mincing words they would be guilty of the most palpable irony; such words do not belong to their capacity and stature of manhood. Peter is now speaking, not his mother tongue, but a tongue he has learned at the Cross. Blessed Teacher, thou Teacher of Nazareth, thou Christ of Golgotha, thou dost make all thy men big men; never did one come to thee and leave thee a little, localising, pedantic moralist; when men have come away from thee to do thine errands they have come with great speeches, broad, generous, eloquent; proclamations meant to fill all the winds, and be carried everywhere to the most distant and desolate parts of the earth. This of itself is an argument in favour of Christian thought and action.

But having laid aside something, including "all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings," something positive must be done. That particular something is indicated in the second verse—"desire." What is the meaning of "desire" in this connection? It is a very simple and beautiful meaning; literally, Get an appetite for. You cannot live upon yourself; every man has to go out of his own limits in order that he may

support even his body, not to say his mind. The mind has to go to the book, the body has to go to the fields; we live not in ourselves or upon ourselves, but upon the bounty that is round about us. The Apostle Peter says, Get an appetite for the new food. The food is plentiful, the appetite is finical. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst; blessed are the men of large appetency for spiritual bounties and luxuries: for they shall be filled, and yet never know the burden or the pain of satiety. What we want is the appetite. Every chapter of the Bible would be a banquet of food for an eternity if we had the right appetite. The appetite must be keen, a hunter's appetite; the man who comes in from the mountains and brings the mountains with him, he is the man who knows what is meant by keenness of desire for food. We want that same keenness in our spiritual appetite,—a real downright hunger.

What is the hunger for? "The sincere milk of the word." "Sincere milk,"—what is the meaning of that expression? The word is not "sincere" at all; it is another word, almost as much out of place to the mere seeming of the eye:—Desire the reasonable milk of the word,—the milk of reason. And yet we are told that the Bible is against the reason, the Bible discountenances the exercise of reason. Only ignorant persons so describe and so degrade God's book, which is a perpetual appeal to be more reasonable, to be wiser far. Get an appetite for the reasonable milk, or the milk of reason; the spiritual, the mental milk. How are we to take it? Not as critics. No critic is really in a flourishing condition; at best he is a pinched, nipped-up, bloodless creature. He might easily be mistaken for a vinegar cruet; be not surprised if some morning you read that a really noble soul took up a critic, thinking he was going to take vinegar for something that he was eating. We are not to drink the mental milk as critics, but as "newborn babes," and the object of our taking the mental milk is to "grow." The Apostle Peter had a fondness for that word "grow." He himself was a grown man. He began at a very small point, at a very far-away place, and we have seen how gradually he came up, until he who had never eaten anything common or unclean stopped whole days with one Simon a tanner; and now he tells the Jews that all

their flesh boasting is as if the grass of the field stood up and said, Behold my majesty. The Apostle Peter would even grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. And we can only grow as we imbibe with a keen appetite the mental milk, the milk of reason.

Peter describes our Lord as "a living stone." This has always been known by certain men as the "name passage." "Living stone,"—the word "Peter" means stone,—"To whom coming, as unto a living Peter," the first of Popes, the plasm of the boundless St. Peter's of Rome. It is true that "Peter" does come from a word which means stone, but unfortunately for that particular criticism the word *petros* or *petra* is not used here at all. That is a fatal drawback:—"To whom coming, as unto a living *lithos*. *Petros* is the stone in the quarry, the natural rock; *lithos* is the stone taken out, hewn, smoothed, shaped, made ready for a building. This living stone was "disallowed" of men. What is the meaning of the word "disallowed?" It has a meaning full of suggestion. It signifies that the stone has been examined. Not neglected, not that it has escaped attention, not that men were unaware of its existence and went on building without it, because they did not know that it was available; the word "disallowed," as Peter used that word, signifies that the stone was well known; the stone had been examined, estimated, appraised, and when men had exhausted their criticism upon it they voluntarily and of set purpose put it aside as disallowed,—purposely, and, in a sense, intelligently put away. There is the basis of responsibility. Now ye say, We see, your sin remaineth: if ye had not seen, ye would have had no sin; but if you had pronounced an opinion upon the Christ, if you had run through, however hastily, the evidences which belong to his personality and history and purpose, you have incurred the responsibility of setting yourselves against the whole testimony of Scripture and against the whole testimony of the Church—the invisible, spiritual, influential Church of Christ. That is a very different standpoint from that which is occupied by the ignorant heathen who never heard of the Saviour. They do not, in this sense, disallow Christ, they know nothing concerning him; only they can disallow, in the Petrine sense of the term, the Son of God who had read about him, heard a statement of his

claims, and had been brought into conscious contact with appeals regarding his personality and priesthood.

The figure is full of graphic beauty. The stone is a living stone, and upon it are to be built stones that are "lively" or living. There can be no death in this house of God, which is called the "spiritual house." All the stones are not of one size, all the stones are not equally beautiful, all the stones have not had equal labour bestowed upon them; some stones are very little, some of them are hardly put into shape at all: but they are living stones, and they are placed upon a living foundation, and are built up a spiritual house. The house is not made of one stone; the stone that is under belongs to the stone that is upper, and the stone that is upper could not be where it is but for the stone that is under. The foundation means the pinnacle, and the pinnacle, far up in the blue sky with finger pointing towards the immeasurable spaces, could not be there but for the sunken and unseen foundation. It is one house built of many stones, all the stones are living, and it is the life that gives the value to the stones. "To offer up spiritual sacrifices,"—no longer bullocks and heifers and goats and birds, no longer lambs and sheep a thousand in number; but spiritual, reasonable sacrifices; sacrifices of the soul. A man shall come to say to God, "Not my will, but thine, be done": when the man so says he offers up a spiritual sacrifice. When a disciplinarian of the Christian sort shall take an appetite and lay it upon the altar and cut its throat, he has offered up a spiritual sacrifice. When a man who was born an evil speaker, one of those unfortunate creatures who seem to have been doomed to talk mischief, has become converted, and when the old nature sometimes suggests a stinging speech to him, by which he could inflict pain on some brother man; when he feels the speech on his tongue and casts it out without articulation, so that the man for whom it was designed will never know of its existence, God will say concerning that victorious Christian, He is crucified with Christ; he was going to utter a bitter speech, it was formed in his mind, it was half-way on his tongue, a moment more and it would have gone; but just then prayer prevailed, the man never spoke the speech, and he is written down in heaven as a son of God.

Peter quotes something that is "contained in the Scripture,"—note, not in the Scriptures. Whenever we find the word "Scripture" used in the singular, as it is here, it refers to the particular book from which the quotation is made; when the word "Scriptures" in the plural number is used it refers to the whole revelation, and may be part of this book and part of that book, put together by inspired genius.

The word "confounded," with which the sixth verse closes, should be "ashamed," because that will suit the rest of the reasoning better, falling into balance and harmony and so making music. "Unto you therefore which believe he is precious." How many delightful sermons have been preached from these words that ought never to have been preached! A great felony is being committed on many ministers by the Revised Version—sometimes depriving them of their special sermons. "Unto you therefore which believe he is precious": there is no reference to Christ at all. The words "he is" are in the Authorised Version in italics, and therefore they ought not to be there:—"Unto you therefore which believe . . . precious"; more literally and graphically still, "Unto you therefore which believe is the honour." What honour? Now, remember that the word "confounded" is turned into the word "ashamed," and then attach the word "honour" as the balancing word, and you have two classes of persons:—those who disallowed Christ bowed down in shame, saying, We were wrong, we misjudged that man, we have made a profound and fatal mistake in our estimate of qualities, we did not know that he is what he has turned out to be: and therefore they hold down their heads in shame, and their cheeks are wet with tears. That is the picture on the one side. "Unto you therefore which believe is the honour": you were right, your faith is vindicated; Christ is proved to be the corner stone, the living stone, the one foundation, elect, precious: hold up your heads! That is the picture. The men who disallowed him all bowed down like broken bulrushes, saying, Ah me, ah me! how foolish, how wicked I am! On the other side, the men who did believe in Christ are crowned with honour; they know in whom they have believed, there is no shame in their attitude, there is no indication of

fear in their voice ; they are the avowed and crowned sons of God.

Out of all this there will come "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people." One would say that "peculiar" means singular, odd, eccentric, whimsical, fantastic: along that line of words we might choose our equivalents for this term "peculiar." In so choosing equivalents we should make a grievous mistake. We speak of a man's *peculium*, that is, of something which belongs to him, and to no one else; it is his own; now we are getting nearer the meaning of the word. It has been well said that when a child says, concerning property or a little corner of the garden, "This is my own, my very own," that we have the right meaning of the word "peculiar" in this connection. Christ is represented as saying, I won you by hard work, you are my own, my very, very own, my *peculium*. He shall have the heathen for an inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth shall be his *peculium*: he knoweth his own; the Lord is mindful of his own. How wondrously all things are lifted up by this touch of the Cross! We are no longer mere men, creatures attesting a Creator; we are not our own; we are Christ's, and Christ calls us his *peculium*, something that belongs to him by right of labour, right of gift, right of service. It is a grand characterisation. May it include us all!

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, behold us at the Cross of Jesus Christ thy Son, and have mercy upon us according to thine own great love. We wonder at the Cross; we look up and behold, and are amazed: for we cannot tell all the meaning of this agony. We read strange writing on the Cross:—He was wounded for our transgression, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, by his stripes we are healed. This we read, and herein we are amazed with great wonder. God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son: this also we see written upon the shameful Tree. And again: Herein is love that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us; he was delivered for our offences, he was raised again for our justification. These words are full of the mystery of love, and the mystery of suffering. Whilst we gaze upon this Tree in the shameful desolation of winter it already begins to put forth signs of life, and we see that this is the Tree whose leaves shall be for the healing of the nations. We would be crucified with Christ, we would know the fellowship of his sufferings that we may afterwards know the power of his resurrection. We would be born with Christ, and with Christ we would rise again. Enable us in our sorrow and darkness and despair of soul to behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. For this Cross we bless the Lord; it is our refuge in the time of accusation, it is the asylum of our soul when our soul has no other sanctuary. Simply to the Cross we cling: God forbid that we should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. May we not diminish its meaning, but magnify it; may we see in that Cross more than can be seen at first sight; may it grow upon our wonder and reverence until it fills our whole soul with its own glory. God be merciful unto us sinners: teach us that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin; show us the meaning of his love when he gave himself for us, the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us under God. Enable us to enter into the meaning of the sweet and profound doctrine. Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I Peter ii. 21, 24.

“Christ also suffered for us” . . .

“Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree.”

THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST.

WHAT do we know about the whole work of Christ, except what we are told in the Bible? Nothing. To the Scriptures therefore we must repair, if we wish to take a right

view of all the work that is covered by the sacred name, "Christ." There must be no reference to our own thought, our own invention, our own surmising. The Christian religion is a book-religion. It is the Book that begins it, it is the Book that closes it. Outside the four corners of the Book the Christian thinker has no business. How often this is forgotten! It might be supposed from a good deal of controversy that every man is at liberty to form his own idea, and have his own gospel, his own private interpretation, and his own patent of theology. To the Book we must go. What does the Book say? is our question. We did not write the Book, we have to read it; we did not make it, we have to interpret it by the Spirit of God. There may be many different interpretations, there we may have great liberty; but the thing to be interpreted is one, and if so be it be sincerely, humbly, and reverently interpreted, then private judgment may claim its own dignity and its own responsibility. But private judgment is formed upon what is written in a book. Even the law may be variously interpreted. The highest authorities contradict one another; one judge plainly tells another that he misconstrues the statute, in effect, that he does not know what he is talking about: yet neither the one judge nor the other made the statute. So we have statutes to be interpreted, and we must interpret them reverently, and in consciousness and growing dependence upon spiritual enlightenment.

Who was most likely to know the whole purpose of Christ—the people who lived with him in his daily confidence, or the people who live hundreds of years after he has left the world? Let us reason upon this matter soberly. Here were men who lived with Christ day by day, who heard all his loving talk, who listened to all his social prayers, who looked upon him in every varying mood and aspect of his life; and they have written their impressions and their inferences, and they say they wrote what they did write under the influence of the promised Spirit. Here are other men who lived hundreds of years after Christ in visible form had left the earth, and they are writing books about Christ which in some respects directly contravene the apostolic testimony. The question therefore is, which is the more likely to have known the real meaning and purpose of Christ—the men who

lived with him, or the men who came into the world centuries after him? Thus we are thrown back upon our first position, that we must go to the Book. We need not believe what the Book tells us, but we must take the responsibility of our disbelief. If the Book is wrong, there is nothing right; there is nothing to compete with it, there is no other direct personal testimony. It is this for the Christian, or it is nothing.

We are sometimes told that Christ himself never said anything about his being a sacrifice, a propitiation, a substitution. How do we know that? On what authority do we speak? If Christ never named the subject, how did the apostles come to invent it? They lived with him, they had immediate personal communication with him; even Paul by a miracle was brought into close personal relationship to the Saviour of the world. How did a man like Peter come to conceive the ideas which he represents in his first Epistle, if Christ had never once mentioned the subjects referred to? Did not Christ impose temporary silence upon his apostles in his lifetime? Did he not say, Tell no man this: say nothing further about the subject of our immediate conversation: a time will come when you may tell all; when the Son of man is risen from the dead, and the whole purpose of his ministry, so far as its time-revelation is concerned, is completed, then you will have to preach the gospel to every living creature? They are no sooner loosed from his side, and sent out as angels to the ends of the earth, than they begin to talk about the Cross the sacrifice, the efficacy of the precious blood, the mystery of Gethsemane, its agony, its bloody sweat. It would be curious indeed if Christ had never named these subjects, and yet the moment the disciples are left to themselves they begin to set forth these great doctrines of Christ, these ineffable revelations of love. The evidence would seem to point to the fact that, having lived with Christ, they heard a good deal which is not reported in the gospels. They did not tell all that was disclosed to them. We cannot tell what seal was put upon their confidence. Mysterious hints were given about suffering; about laying down the life and taking it again; about going away for a little while and returning: we cannot tell what seal was placed upon the hearts and lips of the listening disciples.

But this we know, that a Spirit, called the Spirit of truth, was promised, whose express function it was to be to bring all things to their remembrance whatsoever Christ had said unto them; and the moment they are let go they preach doctrinally as well as historically. We cannot dismiss the evidence of such men lightly. It must be examined, it is a rarity in literature, it is a curiosity in theology, it is a new departure altogether. They seem to leave the mere life of Christ as a visible incarnation and priesthood to the revelation of its deeper and inmost meanings; they set before us an atonement, a propitiation, a sacrifice,—a doing for us on the part of Christ what we never could have done for ourselves. Through this gate we pass into the field of inquiry.

Some persons do not take what is called the evangelical view of the work of Christ. I personally take that view and none other. No other view seems to me to include all the elements and particulars of the case. Other views are neat, measurable, occasionally pathetic, and frequently ethically beautiful; but they do not include the agony of the whole occasion and situation. They are theories which I may denominate aspect-theories, partial conceptions, southern or western views of a great cubic quantity. They do not take in the whole temple, its foundation and roof and lighting, and all its points whereby it claims the universe. No man must set up his judgment against the judgment of other men in any narrow and dogmatic way, but every man must allow his judgment to speak through his heart, and his heart to speak through his judgment; and whilst we allow the widest liberty to sincerity and earnestness we must claim to have that liberty on our own part; and, exercising that liberty, I venture to say that what is called the moral view of the atonement is no view at all to me. What view I may take as the years come and go, as experience enriches and learning extends, I cannot tell, but at this moment I feel that Christ on the Cross is doing something for me, the whole meaning of which I cannot tell, which I never could have done for myself, which no being in the universe but himself could do; and when the Apostle tells me that he is bearing my sins in his own body on the tree, I say, God be thanked for him! for such a

priest. this poor lost soul of mine needs : if that is what he is doing, worthy is the Lamb that was slain ! There are those who tell me that the word "blood" and all words related to it partake more or less of the quality of coarseness or vulgarity. I say I do not come to the Cross as a respectable man : respectable men have no business at the Cross : I do not come to Calvary as a man who has any right to speak, but as a self-condemned criminal, asking if God will have any connection with me, with one so worthy of the hottest place in the hottest hell. Everything depends upon how you approach this subject ; if you are coming to it as learned dons and certificated teachers and wise theologians, you may take one view : but I come to it on hands and knees, with blind eyes, with choking throat, with conscience all aflame ; and all I can force out of this constricted throat is, God be merciful to me a sinner ! When I am in that mood, and an Apostle tells me that Jesus Christ died for me, even in the sense of dying in my stead, I answer him with my love. If we were all more or less guilty only, and could discuss the coming of Christ and his mysterious action on critical grounds, there is no telling how high the controversy might rise ; but we do not come into this field as controversialists, we come as men conscious of sin and conscious of self-helplessness.

There are some who say that Christ came to show the love of God. Why, what has God been doing from all time but showing his love ? This is the very thing that God has been doing from Adam to Noah, to the prophets, from the beginning. That answer will not satisfy my heart in its moods of shame and self-accusing. The Old Testament is full of the love of God. The Psalmist says, speaking for every house in history, "His mercy endureth for ever." One sweet singer said, "The Lord is very pitiful and gracious, slow to anger, plenteous in mercy." The chief of singers said, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." We did not want any new man or any visible angel to come and tell us that God loves us. His creation is love. The image we bear is the pledge of his tenderness. Say that some man came into the world, not to show the love of God, but to *be* the love of God, and you lift the argument immeasurably higher :—"I am the way, the truth, and

the life ; I am the bread of life, I am the water of life ; I am the door ; I am the shepherd." There you introduce a new and most solemn music.

Some tell us that Christ came to set us an example, to show us how to conquer oneself, how utterly to empty oneself of oneself,—to complete the miracle of self-surrender : as who should say, Men women, and children, behold me, the thing to be done is to conquer yourselves, and this is the way to do it. I cannot accept that view. It has its points of value and its aspects of beauty, but it does not include Gethsemane. Christ's life was no example in that sense. It had its imitable and exemplary side, but behind that side lay the metaphysics of infinity. An example, in the large sense of the term !—why, it could not be that, for he was here but three years ; that was not time for such an example as I want. Some of us have been here thirty, fifty, seventy years, and are we to be pointed to some young man who came and lived three years, and went away again almost as soon as he could, and to be told that is our example only ? That does not cover the whole of the case. It was an example within its own lines, it was the holiest revelation of life that was ever made ; we say concerning that fair One, There was no guile in his mouth, his heart was free from deceit, his lips were as a harp played upon by the fingers of God. The life of Christ is less an example than was the life of many a man in his own time. It was so simple a life ; it was a life without a home, without a house, without domestic relations and responsibilities, without all the wear and tear continually exasperating our daily life. The lines upon which it was built were too narrow socially to be a mere example. If he was a man, it was not an example that covers all the possibilities of the case : if he was God, what he did torments my weakness, taunts and mocks my shrinking frailty. I am flesh, I am not to have myself exemplified by the infinite, eternal God.

There must therefore from my point of view be something more in it and behind it than mere revelation of God's love, than mere exemplariness of the way of living, than mere self-surrender and self-oblivion, than mere suicide of the individual will. All

these are elements in the case, each of these has its own definite position and value, but all these put together leave out Gethsemane. There is blood that the spear cannot reach; that blood was shed in the Garden. The blood shed on the Cross was drawn out by cold iron, cold steel, but that other, redder, richer blood no murderer drew forth,—“He sweat as it were great drops of blood.” That is the blood I want, and I need it every drop. If I came booted and spurred and coated like a respectable king, I might ask for something else, but I came in lost, dead, and I see that in Gethsemane something was done on my account, and when an Apostle tells me that he shed his blood for me I can believe it in the fullest sense. I will not ask to have that blood translated into metaphors and symbols and emblems, I will not have a poet to turn that agony into blank verse; I will be told plainly that this blood was shed for me because I deserved death, and I will say when appealed to, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.” I get something along that line of thought that I do not get along any other line, and that something is to me life.

No believer in the deity of Christ, in which I believe with my whole soul, can believe in such theories, as I am at present advised. They will suit momentary moods, they will do under certain conditions of life, but they will not cover the whole tragedy of moral thought and moral necessity. “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God”—that is, we are told, a poor translation of the word; it should read, “who, being originally in the form of God,” and “originally” means from the origin, from the beginning, for the uncalculated and incalculable past—“who being originally in the form of God, thought it not a prize to be snatched at to maintain his equality with God.” Beautiful is that new translation of the word,—“who, being originally of the substance and quality and of the very form divine, thought it not a prize to be snatched at, that he should exercise divine prerogatives, when he saw that man was lost; compared with the salvation of man, the exercise of God-rights was not a prize to be seized. So, divesting himself, taking off all these rights, he became a man.” What to do? To show us an example, to lecture to us on self-sacrifice, and to prove to

us the love of God, and to tell us that God had been loving us? We knew that, or we could not have sinned as much as we did. Tell me that he divested himself of his God-functions that he might become obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross say even "in our stead"—hateful words—and when I am in my deepest dejections, when I need Christ most, that is the only gospel that really finds me in the innermost recesses of my being, and fills up the whole want of my life. Other theories I can discuss in cold blood; I could discuss them as if I had found them in some pagan writer; they are beautiful theories, they are ethically charming: but I know myself better than these theories know me. The more life a man has the more he gets away from your little shallow-vessel theories, that can hold but one mouthful of water when his soul is aflame with thirst. When a man can shatter all the commandments at one stroke, when a man can be almost in hell and know it, it is no theory—moral, abstract, metaphysical, beautiful—that can touch him. Tell him then that Christ so loved him as to die for him,—not in some metaphorical sense which only a poet can explain, but in the sense of really dying in his stead, and the man will seize that meaning: he may outlive it, and come to see its poetic aspects in the coming eternities, but in the first instance he needs that broad, rich, generous, visible, palpable gospel to save his soul.

When we speak of the simplicity of the gospel we must not forget its mystery. Simplicity is not shallowness. Behind everything Christ did lay the whole scope of eternity: when he uplifted a hand it was the hand that had shaped infinity. There is nothing superficial or lineal about the action of Christ. We measure lineally, Christ measures cubically. He takes the line in every direction. Hence sometimes his work appears to be small; the line superficial or lineal is much longer than the line cubical, but the line cubical is richer, it encloses more, it suggests more; it has in it an outline of the universe.

Without therefore coming into conflict with anybody personally, I am here simply to bear my own personal testimony, and to tell you that what is called the evangelical view of the atonement is the view that I accept, and I accept no other. I know it is

unpopular, I know it has been ruled out of the leading magazines ; I am well aware that it is now regarded as coarse ; I am perfectly well instructed as to the modern view of the Book of Leviticus ; I have read nearly everything I could lay my hands upon on the other side ; I have been amazed at the beauty and poesy I have found in many an argument illustrative of what is termed the moral theory of the atonement. As to the sincerity, earnestness, and mental illumination and capacity of some of the writers, I have no doubt ; I covet to be as great as they are : but when they have told me all that they have discovered about the atonement of Christ it does not touch my sin. It touches my fancy, it touches my taste, but it does not get at that black devastating devil that is gnawing my heart away. Of course there are those who could not bear the evangelical view, because they have never known anything about sin. They have always been just as they are ; they have lived lives of monotony ; they have risen in the morning, gone round the day's duty, never had an unkind thought about anybody, never wilfully broken one of the commandments ; if they were told they were criminals or reprobates they would resent the terms or express amusement at the wild exaggeration. What can such people know about Christ's Gethsemane and Christ's Cross ? Nothing. They are not in a fit state to hear the gospel ; they do not feel their need of a gospel. Yet if they could see themselves aright they would know that their righteousness is unholiness, and their respectability is a delusion. Not until a Pharisee gets rid of his pharisaism can he begin to pray. He may give a catalogue of his virtues but he cannot cry to God for mercy.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, we pray thee that thy grace may descend upon us, that we may be purified and ennobled, and according to the multitude of our fears multiply thy comforts to our soul; then shall we not be swallowed up of sorrow overmuch; we shall taste the bitterness, and know that the tasting is for our good; we shall be purified by chastisement; we shall say, It was good for me that I was afflicted; before I was afflicted I went astray; affliction like a veiled angel has brought me to the home sanctuary of God. Thou knowest what we need, what we can bear, how much prosperity we can carry, and yet not fail in worship, in love, or in obedience; thou knowest how bitter the cup must needs be for our purification and cleansing. We leave ourselves in thy hands, knowing that thou dost not destroy whom thou hast created; thou dost live for their nourishment and culture, their education and perfecting. The Lord reign over us, and keep us high or low; send us abroad or keep us in obscurity; where thou wilt and as long as thou wilt: thy will be done. We commend unto thee all who are in circumstances that need the prayers of the church: the poor, the sick, the wandering, the feeble, the homeless, wrecked lives, lost men, to whom there is no light, no Sabbath, no peace, no hope: Physician, Healer, Lover of the world, proving thy love by thy crucifixion, save the sons of men! Amen.

1 Peter iv. 15.

“Let none of you suffer . . . as a busybody in other men’s matters.”

PECCADILLOES.

THIS text is not much by itself. I do not select it except as indicating a class of texts full of practical meaning. We are here invited to consider what may be called, for want of a simpler word, peccadilloes—or little sins. We are not exhorted against great crimes only, as murder, drunkenness, theft, and the like; all these are the subject of apostolic comment: but we are also exhorted to be on our guard against the little foxes that spoil the grapes. Many a man is almost irreproachable on great matters who is yet riddled through and through with little holes, small infirmities; insignificant drawbacks they may appear to himself to be, yet there they are, and the Apostle, as the exponent of a spiritual religion, seeks to encourage us to amend ourselves in small particulars. In a Christian congregation no man requires to be warned against murder, at least as murder is

commonly understood ; but where is there a man who does not need to be warned against little slips, and small sins ; who does not hide from himself the smallness of the sins by calling them peccadilloes ? Why not call them by the plain, simple, English word ? Why hide our shortcomings under the polysyllables of a foreign tongue ? After all it comes to this, that the Apostle is careful about the vulnerable heel. He says, You are strong in ninety-nine points out of a hundred, but man is no stronger than his weakest point, and it may just be possible that his whole character is running out at so mean and insignificant a point as being an intrusive meddler in other people's concerns. It is wonderful how character leaks. There is no great breach in the character. The character is, however, oozing away a drop at a time. An incessancy always works either ruin or success. In education, in commerce, in all high and noble endeavour, persistency wins,—In your patience ye shall win your souls. But the persistency which is so honourable and successful in noble pursuits becomes the incessancy which eats up the character. Think what incessancy is: figure it to your minds under any action—such as the dropping of water, the leaking of gas, the loss of small sums, whatever it may be, never ceasing, going on night and day ; no great loss ever occurring at any one moment, but all the moments constitute one period of loss. The Apostle therefore is intensely spiritual ; he would say to us in effect, You have escaped murder and drunkenness and theft and all the grosser sins and crimes ; now you must come to close work—small, fine, detailed stippling, every touch full of meaning ; no one touch indicating great progress, but all the touches expressing the last refinement. The text therefore is not complete in itself, but it indicates a considerable number of other texts.

Now in other matters we set great store by fine work. Concerning a painting, we say, What wonderful work it expresses ! it appears to have been done by a touch, but the touch itself is a touch expressing prolonged and anxious education ; it is not the touch of an amateur, it is not the touch of a beginner, it is the touch of a master-hand. In painting, therefore, we are strong in our admiration of refined, detailed work ; so we are in sculpture and in all handicrafts ; our common criticism is : This has

been worked to the very finest possible point. There is a rough-and-ready way of doing work; there is also a detailed and most careful way of working out results; we always praise the latter form of service, and we are right. The numismatist takes up his coin and says, See how finely this coin is milled! how beautifully it is touched at every point! and notice that nothing has been neglected or left in the rough. What is the man doing? Praising fineness of work, detailed care. He is perfectly right: but in proportion as he is right about his painting and sculpture and coins, or any manner of handicraft, is he not *a fortiori* bound to go forward, and say, If in mechanics, how much more in character? It is not enough simply to be not a ruffian, not a murderer, not a thief; you must by this time have come into the refinement of spiritual education; now one tap should open heaven's gate widely. Jesus Christ shows his anxiety about this matter of instituting a process of what may be called comparative morality. When he sees men exchanging courtesies, he says, This is good: but do not even the publicans the same? When he sees men abstaining from crime, he says, This is good: but what do ye more than others? When he sees men loving others who love them, he says, This is good: but do not the pagans the same thing? As disciples in my school you should go forward, and do miracles; you should, so to say, give to nature her highest meaning, her widest, sublimest application of thought and purpose; and the Christian should stand unapproached, unapproachable, ineffable, in beauteousness and piety of soul. The Apostle, as a great minister, takes in the whole survey, and he warns men against murder and theft and evil-doing, and yet he adds, Do not suffer as a busybody in other men's matters.

So Paul in speaking of the qualifications of a religious officer goes into very special detail. Who shall be bishop? The Apostle says he must for one thing be a man "that ruleth well his own house." But is this necessary? The Apostle Paul says it is. He proceeds to argue the case, saying, "For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the Church of God?" What a wonderful religion this is! setting up its standards on the hearthstone, watching how men live at home.

Verily this is morality carried up into divinity; truly this is divinity incarnating itself in morality; surely here earth and heaven meet in one solemn conjunction. We cannot understand all the qualifications of a great official in the Church, but we can understand how an aspirant to high office behaves at home. Home is a unit we must never omit from our most intricate and important calculations. I do not go to the newspapers for a man's character; not to a hired critic do I appeal for an estimate of a soul. I ask, what is he at home? Does he furnish the house when he comes into it? Does he turn his house into a music palace by his very voice? Do the servants and the children rejoice in the sound of his footfall? Is the window filled with the fairest face he ever saw when he draws near to it? No matter what the outside world may think or say of him, he makes a home; he is therefore at least the outline of a bishop, he is at least the shadow of a deacon. He begins well; he may have some larger faculty; having been faithful over a few things he may be qualifying himself to become ruler over many things. We all have a field here. I would not speak to you, except reprovably, if I thought you did not make your house the very pleasantest little home in the world; I do not want to be associated with men who cannot behave themselves at home. I want your name at home to be a name of love, nobleness, kindness, so that anybody in trouble can come and lay the aching head on your strong breast and cry it all out there, and get healed by that fatherhood which is in every man. It is very noticeable therefore that Paul would not ordain a man to the bishopric or to the diaconate who did not rule his own house well. If this rule were established all through and through life who could be the fault-finder? Yet some persons are quite ingenious in fault-finding; they seem to have a call and an election in this matter. They know how everybody else should behave. The Lord never called a censorious critic to any trust.

The Apostle holds the same argument in his first Epistle to Timothy, and tells certain people their duty in these words—“Let them learn first to shew piety at home.” Blessed Paul! Sometimes we have been under the temptation of thinking that he cared nothing for home or friends or country or earth or time

or space ; but then he was in his eagle moods, his opinions darkened all heaven as they ascended towards the sun. At other times he came down and sat in the ingle-nook and told his Christian followers how to conduct their houses. When a man touches spheres so remote as these, surely he is under divine inspiration.* The Apostle was not an ascetic; he did not live by himself and snub all manner of intercommunion as between neighbours : but he saw how this kind of action was deteriorating, and therefore he rebuked persons in these terms—"wandering about from house to house ; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies" (1 Tim. v. 13). He kept his eyes open upon the society in which he lived. What, said he, can ever come of this kind of conduct? You are never to be found at home ; you rise in the morning to go into somebody else's house ;—"wandering about" : how can you ever become scholars, hard workers, when you do not submit to the discipline of industry, and keep on doing your honest, simple duty with both hands?—"tattlers also,"—getting hold of little bits of stories, always hearing things that are not worth hearing, and then saying, We could not help hearing them. No, the Apostle would say, Perhaps you could not help hearing them when you went to the place where they were being spoken, but you can help repeating them. When we get rid of all the wanderers, tattlers, and intrusive meddlers, we shall begin to get quite a consolidated army of real, earnest, useful workers.

This kind of doctrine has a wide application. Writing to the Thessalonians his second letter he says in the third chapter and eleventh verse :—"For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies." This is the third time we meet with the term "busybody,"—twice in Paul, once in Peter, and the meaning is an intrusive meddler in other men's concerns. If people would remain at home and attend to their own business, it is wonderful how short they would find the day to be. Time flies when we are working. The idler's day has in it twice the usual number of hours, and every hour has in it twice the usual number of minutes : but when a man is working time flies. The Apostle therefore would

* For a summary of the teaching of the Epistles (chiefly Pauline), see page 322.

bring us back from our wandering and our tattling and our expenditure of energy in misdirected ways, and would fix us down to simple honourable work with a view to the formation and completion of Christian character. These are not trifles. When a man is trying to hold his tongue, knowing that his infirmity is to speak much and think little, he is not engaged in a trifling occupation ; he remembers what has just been said, that character is no stronger than its weakest point. A famous sculptor was busy with his chisel. Having finished the face of his figure, which in marble is the soul, he spent day after day in the arrangement of the hair. Said a critic to him, Why spend all this time over the hair when the statue is to be sixty feet high? who will see it? The sculptor replied, "The gods will see it." That is work ! If we cannot see it from below, they will see it from above ; and the higher up the higher the criticism. If they do these things to obtain a corruptible crown, what shall we do who have to fashion a soul, work out to its finest uses that wondrous mystery which is called character ? Is it enough to have a fair outside ? Society can see that : who sees the soul, the fine touches, the delicate elaboration, the microscopic refinements ? who see these things ? The gods—to us, the God. Work for him : fashion everything according to his scale of criticism ; and then we shall grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, to this purpose, that the outcome may be simple, strong, beneficent character.

We know what it is to have little drawbacks, small infirmities. For example, we say of such and such a man that he is an excellent character but very satirical. Then he is not an excellent character. You are misjudging the man ; you are taking away some other man's character to give it to one to whom it does not belong. If the satire be directed against wrong-doing, injustice, falsehood, hypocrisy, and the like, then the more of it the better ; but if by satire you mean an instrument by which human feeling of an honest and simple kind is wounded or exasperated, then you are taking the instrument of hell with which to do the work of heaven. Never mock the earnest man ; never sneer at the soul that is trying to pray and often breaking down in the great endeavour. Many a hearer has sneered at a speaker

when he little knew that that speaker was, as it were, pouring out his soul unto death in some unconceived and inexpressible agony. You are not a good man, if you can sneer at any other man who wishes to be good. We say, This is an excellent man but a little unpolished. Then he may be an excellent man but not so excellent as the Lord designs him to be. We are to be polished stones—not in any conventional and pedantic sense. Many a man is courteous, who has rough hands honestly employed in getting daily bread. Many a man is polished, who does not know the grammar of his mother tongue. What do you mean by polished? Do you mean that subtle spiritual refinement which comes from love of great subjects, noble aspirations? Then such refinement is impossible to the most uncultivated person: and social veneer may be covering the most detestable corruption. We say of another man, He would be very good, if he were not so suspicious. Then that is his weak point; he must arm himself against suspicion; he must allow himself to be taken in three times a week for a year or two. He must say, This is my weakness: I am suspecting everything and everybody but myself. You must reverse the process and suspect yourself; do not believe a word you say; tell yourself to your face that you are a lying man, and say when you are going to pray, I am going to add to my hypocrisy: good God forbid that I should do this at the altar. We cannot have this excellence, *minus*; this wonderful character attached to the weakness of being a busy-body, a tattler, a man who cannot rule his own house, a woman who does not show piety at home. We do not care for your high and mighty occasional doings; we want the simplicity that is lovely down to its very roots.

Seeing then that Christianity would amend character in such matters, what may we infer? We may infer that Christianity is intensely spiritual. There is nothing rough-and-ready about it. It is like the Word of God by which it comes to us, it is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow. Christianity would have us holy in the inward parts; the king's daughter is to be all beautiful within, if her covering is to be of wrought gold. Who, then, can be saved? Holy Spirit, dwell with me! Lord, abide

with me! We are to infer that character needs long training. You cannot make a character in a day. You cannot hasten the development of character. The element of time enters into the value of reputation. Not the man who has been good for three days, or three years, but the man who has added year to year, decade to decade, and who, winter and summer through, has been faithful,—he in the time of snowy hair may stand up as, in some sort, an image of what the Holy Ghost would do in the soul of every believing man. We are to infer that little things are often difficult things. It is sometimes easier to pay money by a cheque than to find coin for it. Many a man has less difficulty in drawing a cheque for fifty pounds than in finding some fractional sum under a sovereign. Many a rich man is often short of small coins and has to borrow of men who are ashamed to ask for their return. We should be careful about all these things. Never borrow without meaning to pay back. Never injure what are called the minor moralities of life, the little flowers in the garden; but be strong there as elsewhere and, if we take care of these little things, it will be wonderful to see how we advance and grow in things that are greater. We are to infer that spiritual education can only be conducted by spiritual agency. What is that agency? It is the ministry of God the Holy Ghost, the continual illumination of the Divine Spirit in the soul. And we are not to take care so much of grand spectacular aspects of character as to take care of the little and unseen phases of conduct. What, is this thy meaning, O Cross—Cross of Golgotha? Is conduct thy meaning? And the Cross answers, Yes: not theology, not metaphysics; these have their place, their importance, their inexpressible value: but the Cross has been set up in vain if its believers be not real, simple, honest, honourable, beneficent men. I would not address you in the poetry which means nothing, but in the poetry of discipline. I would stand up as, officially not personally, a general of the army, and would exhort you to be faithful in all small matters; and having done so I would turn sharply in upon myself and say, Apply thine own doctrine; reduce these things to practice; and thus let there be shown to the world such largeness and beauty of character that men shall say, The religion that produces such manhood must have come from heaven.

NOTE.

[From ANGUS'S *Bible Handbook*.]

THE following are among the more important of the truths discussed in the Epistles.

- Man's need of salvation, *Rom.* Justification by faith, *Rom.*
 The fruits of faith in Christian experience, *Rom.*
 The fruits of faith in Christian character, *Heb.*
 The fruits of faith through the *Gospel*, *1 Pet.*
 The fruits of justification and its consequent blessings, *Rom.*
 Man's connection with Christ, and man's connection with Adam, *Rom.*
 The source of redemption, *Rom.*; and the peculiar grace bestowed therein on the Gentiles, *Eph.*
 The relation of the gospel to the Jews, *Rom.* (see *Heb.*)
 Morality, its true nature and vast importance, *Rom.*
 Morality, evangelic motives to, *Rom.*; peculiar motives justly binding on the Jew, *Heb.*; and on heathen converts, *Eph.*
 Principal duties of Christians to God, *Rom.*, *Eph.*; to themselves, *Rom.*, to relatives, *Cor.*; to fellow-men, *Rom.*; to civil government, *Titus*; and to fellow-believers, *Cor.*
Eminent holiness its appropriate fruit and best security, *2 Pet.*
 Holiness essential to true religion, *1 John*.
 The spiritual warfare, *Eph.*
 Persecution, its comforts and lessons, *Phil.* Apostasy, its danger and signs, *Heb.*, *2 Pet.*
 Apostolic character and authority, *Cor.* False teachers, their character and end, *Cor.*
 Christian ministers, their character, qualifications, and duties, *Tim.*
 Christian ministers, duties of the Church to them, *Tim.*
 Deacons, etc., their character and duties, *Tim.*
 The Church, its members, discipline, divisions, ordinances, *Cor.*
 The Church, its members, their duties, their gifts, the excellence of love, *Cor.*
 Christ's dignity, essential and mediatorial, *Heb.* Christ's incarnation and its end, *Heb.*
 The superiority of his office, as prophet, leader, and priest, *Heb.*
 The superiority of his sacrifice, *Heb.*
 The significancy and inferiority of the ancient economy, *Heb.*
 Our spiritual liberty in relation to it, *Heb.*
 The corruption of Christianity and prevalence of infidelity in "the last time," *Tim.* How met, *Tim.*
 The resurrection of the body, *Cor.* The second coming of the Lord, *2 Thess.*
 The judgment and its issues—eternal life, eternal death, *2 Pet.*

THE SECOND EPISTLE GENERAL

OF

P E T E R .

(A.D. 64 OR 65.)

[NOTE.—As to the contents of the Epistle, SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible* says:—"The customary opening salutation is followed by an enumeration of Christian blessings and exhortation to Christian duties, with special reference to the maintenance of the truth which had been already communicated to the Church (i. 1-13). Referring then to his approaching death, the Apostle assigns as grounds of assurance for believers his own personal testimony as eye-witness of the transfiguration, and the sure word of prophecy, that is the testimony of the Holy Ghost (14-21). The danger of being misled by false prophets is dwelt upon with great earnestness throughout the second chapter, their covetousness and gross sensuality, combined with pretences to spiritualism; in short, all the permanent and fundamental characteristics of Antinomianism are described, while the overthrow of all opponents of Christian truth is predicted (ii. 1-29), in connexion with prophecies touching the second advent of Christ, the destruction of the world by fire, and the promise of new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. After an exhortation to attend to St. Paul's teaching, in accordance with the less explicit admonition in the previous Epistle, and an emphatic warning, the Epistle closes with the customary ascription of glory to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."]

2 Peter i. 21.

"For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

HOLY INSPIRATION.

WHAT do you mean by "prophecy?" If you think you know, be sure about it, because in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred people do not know; you may be the hundredth instance. Probably the reply will be:—Prophecy means foretelling; prophecy may be described as a species of fortune-telling: such and such things will happen to Tyre in a hundred

years, and such and such things will occur to Babylon in a hundred and fifty years. That is not prophecy; it is only one of the least and pettiest definitions of that all-enclosing term. In its highest meaning, prophecy signifies teaching, revelation, disclosure of aspects of providence, government, and destiny. Prophecy is a word which covers the whole school of God; it is the floor and the roof and the ceiling of that sanctuary of education. A prophetic view of the future is a great reading of spiritual and moral issues,—not that the palace shall become a desert, and the banqueting-hall the rendezvous of eagles and beasts of prey; all that may be surmised and dreamed of in nightmare. The prophet was a man who read the future in its big print and its little print, its tragedies, its issues, supreme, sublime, and everlasting. Thus the prophet never ceases from the world. The prophets are not dead; they have been reincarnated, shaped in other forms, and set to other uses, and still their great function remains identical—namely, the function of reading truly, loudly, solemnly, and fearlessly the harvest when only the seed is in the hand. He is no prophet who looks upon the fields in the autumn, and says, What is in it? He is the prophet who, having seen the seed, foretells the harvest. There was no difficulty in foretelling the issue of Tyre and Babylon, and the empires of wickedness; a child in the kingdom of God could have foretold that. Wherever you see wine triumphant, self-indulgence supreme, the love of luxury carried up to the point of idolatry, then lift up your voice and cry, saying, Thou shalt perish from the earth! That is prophecy. Prophecy does not write almanacs; it publishes eternal issues.

“For the prophecy came not in old time,”—literally, The prophecy came not at any time: it never did come, by man; it was never a merely human invention. There was always more prophecy than there was vessel to hold it. The casket is not the wine, or the jewel. Man could never invent God's meaning of prophecy. Man was not morally equal to the task. The Old Testament was full of moral sublimity. Its mere intellectual ability is nothing compared with its moral fervour. The morality of the Bible is its inspiration, and its defence. If the Bible be a bad book it is not inspired; if the Bible tend to the belittling, the

dwarfing, and the retrogression of human nature, it never came from God. God never published anything but music; God never spake anything but gospels. When any other word was forced out of him—namely, the word of wrath, condemnation, and judgment—it was forced out of him because of his very love of right and music and gospel. The Old Testament is the great cleansing force in ancient history. It will have every corner looked into; it will have no drain covered up that ought to be exposed, or exposed that ought to be covered up; it will have everything right. Nothing is settled until it is settled right. The Bible will have no compromises. So long as there is one evil force in the land it must not be bribed into silence and non-resistance; it must be cut into little pieces, and be cut again into finer fractions, and the whole integer of wickedness must be cut up and destroyed and forgotten. What wonder if some should arise in the after ages and say, No prophecy ever came by man: man was but the vessel which held the rain of heaven—but the instrument through which God breathed his music.

“Holy men” are referred to. Do not let us frivolously pass over that expression. The men become new men by the epithet that is attached to them. The emphasis is not on “men,” the emphasis is on “holy”: and why is the emphasis on “holy” but to express the thought that God has always elected character? Men of character spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, —mentally substantial men, morally noble souls, minds that knew the art, the mystery, and the miracle of prayer; men who walked with God. If there were more such men there would be more prophets. Character is wanting, not genius. The Lord will have nothing to do with what we call the higher mental grade of men. He knows they are never to be trusted, they are always changing their point of view, they are continually recolouring their rainbow, they are always outwriting and outdriving themselves: the Lord, therefore, will employ children, babes, babblers, people who hardly know anything about language, but who, in their very endeavour to speak, blunder and hesitate, and say things upside down; and yet God is so interested in their incoherence that he makes it the sweetest music in the world. God never employs finished preachers, very highly certificated preachers, who know

all about grammar, and nothing else. The grammarian can never translate the New Testament. Only he who has lived and moved and had his being in God can tell what Jesus meant by the Sermon on the Mount and by the death on the Cross. The Lord will employ holiness, simplicity, pureness, downright earnest, burning sincerity of heart; but as for genius he has no place for it in all his sanctuary. Yet there have been men of genius in the house of God. Yes, that is true, but the genius has been so outmatched by the simplicity that it has fallen into a secondary place, and itself has been the first to say, Unprofitable ! unless thou wilt make use of me, thou condescending Christ.

“Holy men were moved by the Holy Ghost.” Observe, the one “holy” is balanced by the other “Holy,”—like to like: so have I seen two dewdrops roll into one. “Moved by”: the literal figure is that of a ship in full sail, heaven’s breezes filling the throbbing canvas, and the vessel moving under these great natural impulses. It is not leaves blown by the wind; that would have been a poor figure: it is not sand tossed by the storm; that would have been a bewildering metaphor: but a ship, well-built, well-rigged, well-manned, set to heaven’s breeze, and moving to an appointed haven. The figure is clear, vivid, simple, perfect. Understand, therefore, that prophets are not absolutely unconscious. If the figure is to be applied practically, then we shall have the idea of a ship set so as to catch the wind. He is a poor navigator who, having ship and sails, does not know how to spread the canvas, and who may bunglingly spread it the wrong way, so that the very wind of heaven meant to help him shall fight against his purpose. Men must put themselves into the way of inspiration. If men want water they must not go to the wilderness, but to the fountain, the river, the well-head: if men want to grow in religious impulse, they must go to church, they must go to the altar, they must frequent the sanctuary, they must put themselves in the way. Business men will support this theory. Who would open a business establishment on the centre of a boundless plain, and expect to drive a thriving trade in the desolation of the wilderness? Who would put himself to the trouble of carrying up his warehouse to the top of Mount Sinai? Men of commercial instinct and habit would say, You

must get amongst the people ; you must put yourself in the way of doing trade ; you have falsely environed yourself, you are out of place ; nothing can come of this but disappointment, alienation,—away to the market-place, to the thoroughfare, to the place where merchants most do congregate. This is precisely the teaching of the figure that is now before us : we must so set our sails as to catch the heavenly wind, we must be in the places where God's name is recorded. Men have a right in coming to church to expect to be inspired : but they must come in the right state of mind. No man ever went into the humblest sanctuary and fell down before God, saying, Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth, who did not hear all heaven talking to him. When men go to church in the right spirit, with broken-heartedness, penitence, self-misgiving, they have a right to expect that the sails of the soul will be filled with heavenly gales, and the soul borne on to its desired haven. Oh, wasteful are they who have had the chance to be inspired, and have set their sails in the wrong way !

What we have to do is to wait upon God. Why tarriest thou at the King's door ? I tarry for the King's presence. Why not fly abroad and say what is in thy mind to the age ? Because there is nothing in my mind, and the age does not want any man ; I am waiting for my message, when I receive my message from the King I will be off ; I will salute no man by the way, I will hasten to my assigned sphere. The reason why we are making so little headway in the Church is that we are making so many sentences. We are not talking out of God, but out of ourselves, and the age cannot drink out of so empty a vessel. When a man sits down to write a sentence, calling it part of a sermon, he may easily be guilty of blasphemy. We do not want any of thy sentences, poor scribe : come to the house in the right tone of mind, set thy sails in the inspirational direction, say to God,—Lord, I am ready, by thy grace, do with me what thou wilt ; and the sentences will come, and if they do not come the silence will be better than the speech. Here is the ruin of the ministry. It has become a profession, it has become a sermon-making machine ; it is no longer the instrument through which God breathes the blast of fire, or the

melody of peace and love. The inspiration must be that of the heart. We must look more to the heart and less to the tongue. The true preacher is as much a hearer as he is a speaker. He does not know what he is going to say ; if he did he would be a thief in the house of God, a manufacturer, an artist, a mechanic.

Holy men of God spake as the sails of their souls were filled by the Holy Ghost. This is inspiration ; this is power. The music is not in the instrument, it is in the man who uses it ; the song is in the soul. It is possible so to utter words as to have no connection with them. A man may have written something and may read it to me, and yet it may not be the man who is reading ; he is only uttering with his tongue words which he himself had arranged and forgotten. It is possible so to play music as to lose the music and have nothing but sound, yea, every note may be correct, but there may be no soul. There are perfect skeletons ; that is to say, there are skeletons that are perfect ; every bone there, the whole anatomy complete : what is wanting ? The fire.

“ But there were false prophets also among the people.” We cannot get rid of this “ But.” We have often met it, notably in the Acts of the Apostles, early in the history of the first Church. We were reading musically and easily, flowing down the history like a river between green banks, when we came to chapter five of the Acts of the Apostles—“ But ” : after that torrent and cascade, rushing, tumultuous, broken, shattered water, the old liquid, mirror-looking river was dead. So we come here upon this same “ But,” written in significant capitals, standing at the very forefront of the second chapter. This division of verses is of course mechanical and clerical, but there would seem now and then to be something more than human in the arrangement ; the words are so picked out and set before the eyes as to be their own annotation. “ But there were false prophets also among the people,”—always amongst the people, promising them impossibilities, selling them painted heavens, offering them paradises in gilt. Why do not the people dismiss such prophets ? You can know when a man is a false prophet by the size of his scheme. False prophets always have little schemes, petty ends,

selfish policies. Falsehood is known by ignobleness. Wherever a man is telling you to look out for yourself, he is a false prophet; wherever a man is urging you to save your life, he is a false teacher,—he that saveth his life shall lose it: whoever says unto you, “As ye would that others should do unto you, do ye also unto them,” is a prophet from heaven; whoever says, “What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God,” came from heaven, and the fragrance of heaven’s summer is in his very clothing. There are prophecies that look as if they were full of benevolent and immediate progress, something that can be taken home now; and there are prophecies so big, so grand, that they must be lived a line at a time, before we can really appreciate their magnitude and appropriate their goodness. Such are the prophecies of Christ. O thou Christ, why dost thou not come to-day? That is the inquiry of impatience. Why dost thou permit little kings and queens to be lording it over us? That is the cry of impatience. The Lord is fast dethroning all monarchies and popedoms, the Lord is against them all. The monarchy which he will set up is the monarchy of the Son of man, crowned Immanuel, in the person of Jesus Christ, the infinite Saviour of the world. And as for those of us who hold temporarily little dignities and small offices, we are being used for a purpose, and if we use our office humbly, and carry it as a burden rather than as a pride, we shall not be harshly treated at the last; but if we set up our little functions as if they were of any consequence to the universe he will dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel. I will hasten to the school of the prophets, I will not linger in the dame-school of imbecility; I will seek but the man who is most holy, and he shall be my teacher, and he shall pray for me, and show me how to pray; and whether I find that prophet in the Episcopal Church, or in the Papal Church, or in the poorest little conventicle that is roofed in with debt and walled round with difficulty, I will find out that man of the over-soul, that wondrous man that carries fire that does not burn him, and I will abide with him to the end of my days.

PRAYER.

O THOU giver of all good, thou hast said unto each of us, what is now thy petition, and what is now thy request? and it shall be granted unto thee. These are the challenges of thy love, these are the inquiries of thine omniscience, for thou knowest the answer ere the question is put: yet it hath pleased thee to permit us to speak in our own words, and to tell our own little tale of need and weariness, that we may be comforted somewhat by hearing our own voice. Thou dost work thus mysteriously; whilst we talk of our misery we forget it, when we speak confidently to thee of all our sorrow we wonder at the end what we have been talking about: thus dost thou displace sorrow by joy; thus dost thou feed our hunger, and we do not see the hand that supplies the bread. Verily it is a mysterious life! sometimes we think we know it, and then we feel that we know nothing whatever respecting it; now and again a light strikes us, and we say, This is the morning we have waited for,—and, behold, the light goes as it came and we are left in deeper gloom. Sometimes we think we see right beyond the grave; if we cannot see the flowers that are growing on the farther land we think we detect their sweet odours in the winds that blow from thence; then again death seizes us, and we have no hope, and we lie down in the pit of despair, and cover ourselves with darkness as with a garment. Yet amidst all tumult and unrest and trouble, we hear that same voice of music saying, What is now thy petition? and what is now thy request? and it shall be granted unto thee,—as if we could hold all heaven, as if we could find room for thyself. How thou dost bless us, and we know it not; how we forget because of our familiarity that every dewdrop comes from God, and every blade of grass is part of our Father's treasure. Thou has taken all things into thy keeping and not a sparrow falleth to the ground without thee. The very hairs of our head are all numbered; in all the lap of the summer there is not one little flower that thou knowest not, the least of these is thine; thou didst make it, we can but pluck and destroy it. We thank thee for all days that remind us of heaven, days of the Son of Man upon the earth, beautiful in their dawning, grand in their zenith, and tender even in their setting glory. For the sabbath days that open Paradise, how can we thank thee? we know they are thy making, they bear the image and superscription of God our Father; they are gifts of rest, they are pledges of love, they are hints of heaven; we thank thee for great sanctuary calls and visions and privileges; we bless thee for every Tabor of transfiguration, for every Horeb, every mount of God; for all the holy words we have heard which have put us to shame, and then have created great hope in us, we bless the Lord. Be with all whom we love and for whom we should pray; be with those who have come home from school and college and other engagement to complete the household circle; and make every family a joy and a blessing

to itself and to others. The Lord look upon those to whom there is no time of joy, burden-bearers, men and women who know the mystery of heartache and daily disappointment; who lift up their head to an empty sky, and look down to the earth and behold it is all winter. Be with those whom thou hast appointed to be teachers of patience, quiet resignation, and domestic heroism; may they not fail in the furnace, may they glorify God in sorrow. Be with every man who meant this year to be the best of his life: he dare not open some of the pages of the record, yet here and there we see some line which gives him heart again, and he says that, God helping him, next year shall be better than the past. We thank thee for every holy vow, for every radiant hope, for everything that makes the soul cleaner, and better, and stronger. Be with those who are looking forward to new engagements, and new relationships, and new responsibilities; honest men who are struggling with daily difficulties, souls that could do more if they had the opportunity: answer thou every lawful and noble aspiration, and crown young hopes with rich benediction. The Lord look upon all the earth: is it not a little one, the Zoar of the skies, a tiny place? Yet it held the Cross. Beside that Cross, our sin so great becomes a departing shadow. O Son of Man, Son of God, dying, rising, triumphant Priest of the universe, wash us, cleanse us from all our sin. Amen.

2 Peter iii. 9.

“Not slack [slow] . . . but longsuffering.”

THE LONGSUFFERING OF GOD.

WE wanted some one to say this. It does seem that the Lord is very slow. It is like us to attach small meanings to things. Water cannot rise above its own level: how can the mind get above its own imagination? We needed, therefore, some one to come down as it were with the key to correct us, to take away the little word and put in its place the greater word, saying to us, You ought not to say Slow, you ought to say Long-suffering, patient, forbearing, kind; anything but slow. Apostles who bring us words like these prove their own inspiration. They never take away great words and put little shallow words in their places; then should they disprove their own pretences in the matter of the Apostleship. Whenever the Apostles would take a candle away from us it is that we may open our eyes upon a sun. The gifts of God are descending, expanding, multiplying; they are not dwindling and dwarfing and diminishing, and falling away into an invisible, because infinitesimal, point. Here is a whole heavenful of light. We are liberated from false interpretations, from narrow and ever self-impoverishing constructions, and are

made to see that what we thought was slow was beneficent, calculated; that slowness is longsuffering, patience, restraint, hopefulness, the multiplication of chances to men that seem intent upon ruining their lives. We might as well stop here, for we have reaped the whole acreage of Divine love. We may now pull down our barns and build greater, and say to our souls, Fret no more, chafe no more: we thought the Lord was slow, laggardly, tardy, indifferent; and behold, all the while he was patient, forbearing, hopeful, generous, infinite in love: we cannot build storehouses enough to hold such a harvest.

Again and again, as we have seen, the inspired writers come in with the larger meanings. We have seen an instance of this in the words, "It is Christ that died"; scarcely had the Apostle said so when, as if in self-correction, he added, "yea, rather, that is risen again." Examine the Scriptures in the light of this suggestion, and you will find them ablaze with morning light; look upon your own lives in the light of this suggestion, and the whole outlook is changed as a landscape is changed when the sun burns upon it. No doubt, if we look simply at the surface, things do move slowly: but what do we mean by slowness? Slowness is a term of time; terms of time are unknown in the thought of God. He has given us time as we give a child a watch; he has allowed us to break up the profound flow of his eternity into dates and periods and terms. We have thus been led into false religious reasoning by the tick of our own clock; we have made a pendulum for convenience, for to that use God limited it, and behold we have turned the pendulum itself into an argument in support of atheism. We cannot be trusted with anything. We turn every gift of God into an edged instrument and cut our own fingers with it. The clock is ruining some men. In the hush of eternity there is no tick of time. Whatever else you forget, remember this, that one day, so called by men, is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years is with the Lord as one day. We must take the Lord's standard before we can judge the Lord's providence. We cannot understand eternity through the medium of time. We must stand at God's right hand, and there the devil and his smoking perdition fall into the right perspective. Here is a key; with the use of this key

we should be no longer sad ; having this key and permission to use it, we should have in our spirits the bound and the joy, the sacred exultancy of eternal youth. The atheist writes his commentary upon the Bible, upon time, upon life, and upon what is called the providential plan. All atheistic comments are little, narrow, shallow ; obvious, because superficial ; important, because near : with one little speck of dust you could shut out the sun. The atheist refers us to what he calls facts, but his facts are lies ; he has nothing to go by but a clock, a watch of his own making, and judging by that he says, How slowly all things go on ! If the Lord God be omnipotent why does he not hasten things ? Whereas, the true interpretation is, because he is omnipotent he need not be precipitant.

“Not slow . . . but longsuffering.” He wants men to be saved. He says, Mayhap in another five years they may turn to me and live. Always there is a priestly voice in the universe saying, Let it alone this year also, and I will try again, and exhaust all my skill upon it, and if I can save this life, well,—but give it twelvemonths more, and if at the end of that time it be no better, then thou shalt cut it down. Yet at the end of the twelvemonths that same voice says, Let it alone this year also. Is such reasoning to be debased by the suggestion that the agent is slow ? The axe is in his hand, he stands in a threatening attitude, the axe is lifted up on high, but one moment more and the tree is down, and because the priestly voice says, Give it another chance ! the atheist says, The Lord is slack concerning his promises and threatenings : if he is going to save the world, he is a long time about it ; if he is going to crush the world, he seems to be hesitating a long time. Thus the atheist chatters his frivolity in the very presence of the redeeming beneficence of God. In all things get the right word.

Thus we might say in looking upon the preservation of sinful lives and construing the providence of God in the light of this suggestion, The Lord is not morally indifferent, but longsuffering. The Lord does not look upon the earth saying, Let them do what they please, it is of no consequence to me ; my ineffable peace can never be disturbed, riot as they may, slay one another and

break the commandments as they may; all the waves of their tumult cannot dash even against the foot of my throne. No such speech does divine love make. The Lord spares the sinner because he wants to save him. "Longsuffering," simple as it may appear to be, means suffering long; he will suffer another day, if thereby he may save the soul; he will suffer another century, if thereby he can move the earth but one inch nearer heaven. Where do we ever give one another credit for great motives? what wonder then that we should withhold the ascription of great motives to God? If one amongst ourselves does anything great we instantly ascribe a little motive to him: we say, He is ostentatious, he is giving that he may be seen to give, he is praying that he may be heard to pray; he is his own trumpeter; depend upon it his purpose in doing this deed is—and then comes some foul suggestion, marked by the selfishness of its own originator. What wonder then that men who thus ascribe poor, shallow, vicious motives to one another, even in the matter of prayer, should treat the court of heaven with contempt, and tell God to his face that he is slow? Whereas the true meaning is, not that he is slow in the sense of moral indifference, but that he is longsuffering in the sense of fatherly patience. Ignorance is hasteful; incompleteness is precipitant. All incompleteness is wanting in repose.

Change the point and view and say, The Lord spares the sinner, not for want of resources, but through longsuffering. He could crush him and throw the refuse away: but this is not the way of God. The Lord is very pitiful and kind, plenteous in mercy and in patience, yea, his mercy endureth for ever, and he continually says, I have no pleasure in the death of the sinner: I would that the wicked might turn from his way. The Living One has pleasure in life: in death he finds no pleasure. We think that sin should be met by instantaneous punishment. That is our little cleverness. The Lord says, I will meet it with longsuffering. The Lord says, I will delay the stroke in the hope that the offender may begin to pray. His very mercy is turned against him; his love is charged with false motives. Yet this is not wonderful let us repeat, because we are always charging one another in the same way, never saying, How noble!—always adding the little

thought, the mean desire. Truly God is not without resources. The Apostle tells us that he has overflowed the world with water, and he is reserving it for fire, and that all visible things shall be dissolved, shall melt away like wax : but the Lord is keeping up the heavens and the earth that he may save the lost sinner. He keeps the firmament in its place, and all the stars in their courses for another century, that the last obstinate heart may be touched, may surrender its arms, and may turn its rebellion into praise.

This gives us the higher meaning of providence. Providence is not a question of letters and grammatical interpretations : we can only understand God's Bible, God's nature, and God's providence by the larger terms, the fuller, deeper, tenderer suggestions. Let us take this text home with us, and our houses will be furnished from heaven ; all things will become new ; we shall get rid of the old words, and put new words, which are yet older, in their places. Thus : the sick man shall say when he is told that he has had many afflictions to bear, No, not afflicted, but chastened. The sick man shall thus become the reprover of his consoler. The consoler thinks he helps the sick man by telling him how deeply he has been afflicted, but the afflicted man who has seen the way of God says, We must drop that word afflicted, we must get rid of it, it is a narrow, superficial word, and in its place we must put the music,—chastened, refined, mellowed, ripened. Hand the word afflicted over to the atheists, let them wear that black drapery : the white garment of chastening, sanctification, ripening, belongs to the saints of God. Thus the man who has been pitied as limited and dwarfed, "cribbed, cabined, and confined," will say, You must take all these words away now ; I have outlived them ; I am not limited in the sense of being humbled and snubbed, I am adapted ; now I see the fitness of things ; I have had my ambitions, they have befooled me, they have led me into many excesses and irrational extravagances, and I have always thought that I was about to seize the reins and drive my own chariot : I do not call God's way towards me a way of limitation, but a way of adaptation ; he has told me that I am not fit for the things I once thought myself highly qualified to undertake ; he has told me just what he meant when he made me ; his purpose has been so revealed to my soul that I see it, and now I can be

larger than I ever dreamed of being, but I have to seize that idea of largeness in God's meaning and use it in God's way, and now I can do all things through the Christ-strengthening idea, through the divine revelation that if I act according to God's appointment I shall never tire : I tired in an hour when I walked my own way, I came home and complained of weariness ; I said, I am growing old, I cannot do what I used to do ; whereas all the while I was walking along the wrong road ; but the moment I got into the right path I heard a voice from heaven saying, Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fail, but they that wait upon the Lord, they that swing in the rhythm of heaven, shall walk and run and leap and fly like eagles, and no sense of weariness shall ever oppress their consciousness. Blessed be God that we soon get tired on the wrong road. A man soon gets tired of opposing gravitation ; we soon want to take down the arm that is lifted against the sun. So we shall go into the sick-chamber at home and have a new view ; the window will no longer look northward, but southward, with a point of west in it. When our friends are dying, and we say to them, You are quickly disappearing, you are being crushed by the great wheel, the friend will look up and say, Not killed, we must get rid of that word, but liberated : not slow, but longsuffering : not morally indifferent,—longsuffering : not without resources, but longsuffering : not afflicted,—chastened : not limited,—adapted : not killed,—released, released !

THE FIRST EPISTLE GENERAL

OF

JOHN.

(TOWARDS THE CLOSE OF THE FIRST CENTURY, OR A.D. 68.)

[NOTE.—“This sacred writing, though called an Epistle, has more of the character of a discourse on the doctrines and duties of Christianity. It appears to have been addressed to believers generally, especially to Gentiles and residents in Asia Minor, among whom John himself had laboured (ii. 7; ii. 12-14, 20-27). The writer has not deemed it necessary to prefix his name; but its remarkable similarity, both in matter and expressions, to the other writings of the Apostle John, confirms the testimony of the early Christians, and affords satisfactory evidence that he was its author. It was certainly written by an eye-witness of the person and labours of our Lord (i. 1-4; iv. 14). It is commonly supposed to have been written from Ephesus, but at what precise date is uncertain; a late date is highly probable from the errors which are here condemned.

“The general character of this Epistle probably gave occasion to the opinion early entertained that John was of a peculiarly affectionate disposition; and this opinion seems just. Yet none has spoken of false doctrine more sharply. The gentlest Christian may be a son of thunder (Luke iii. 13-19) when Christ’s honour is at stake, and charity may be exercised in denouncing sin as well as in loving the brethren.

“The truth most largely insisted upon in this Epistle is the necessity of holiness, as the evidence and fruit of faith.”—ANGUS’S *Bible Handbook*.]

“I DON’T KNOW.”

YOU may notice how often the Apostle uses the word “know” in the opening chapters of his first Epistle General. Again and again John says, “We know,” “hereby we do know that we know.” He seems to have anticipated the uses to which that word might be put in after-time, and he insists upon a personal and definite knowledge of things divine or

supernatural. He had no doubt of his knowledge. He did **not** use any lower term ; he did not say, I think, I hope, I venture to imagine, I infer ; but roundly and definitely he said, "I know." Let that go for what it is worth. John is a witness ; the character of the witness is above suspicion ; the disposition of the witness was one of Christ-like, solicitous love. The man who bore this character, who companied with Christ many days, and who was the most familiar with his Lord of all the disciples, said, distinctly, repeatedly, triumphantly, "I know." There are men now who do not deny : and that is their weakness. Instead of denying they abstain from pronouncing any affirmative opinion. Their position may be stated roughly thus :—We do not deny the existence of God, we do not affirm it ; we simply know nothing about it, and can know nothing about it, and therefore we say nothing about it. The general argument we have endeavoured to examine before, and to pronounce upon ; there are some considerations arising out of it which the humblest mind can follow, and which the largest mind will be glad to apply. What does "I don't know" amount to in the practical reasoning and the actual conduct of life ? We have assigned it great scope, and invested it with great authority, in matters of a religious nature : but how do we treat our own argument when it is applied to the actual facts of life, the daily and ever-recurring duties and activities of this present state ? We ought to answer that question. Let there be no evasion of it. It ought not to be difficult to show that "I don't know" amounts to nothing in all the great practical issues and activities of life. If, therefore, we can strip this little argument naked, and excoriate it, and destroy it, it will be a pitiful subterfuge if any man should magnify in religion an argument which he has grid-ironed and destroyed in practical life. Observe, the question is, What does "I don't know" amount to as a regulator of conduct ? If we miss that point we miss every illustration following upon it. Fix the mind upon the definite thing to be illustrated and established, namely, that "I don't know" amounts to nothing, and we daily show it to amount to nothing in the development, the discipline, the culture, the service of life.

Take it thus: I do not know how long I may live : then, why

should I trouble myself about life? I may be dead to-morrow: why should I think and write and put myself through endless processes of discipline? I may be a dead man before midnight: I know that I must die, I do not know when I shall die, I may die within a very few moments, and therefore how unprofitable it would be for me to concern myself about anything: nothing is worth doing; I may no sooner lay my hand upon my work than my hand may be paralysed, and my work may drop out of my fingers, and I may be counted among the dead. If a man were to talk so he would be regarded as practically insane. The wise man does everything in life as if he were going to live for ever. Who builds his house for a night? Who builds his dwelling-place for the summer weather? Suppose he should begin to build his house in the early spring, how would the reasoning stand if it took this form: I may be dead before winter, therefore the very frailest walls will do, and you may scatter but a few broad green leaves upon the roof; that will be shelter enough, for there are no great storms at this time of the year: I do not know anything of any other time. No builder could take any direction from a man who talked so loosely and incoherently. The man builds as if he were going to live a long time. The "I don't know" simply amounts to nothing when he is calculating magnitudes, forces, oppositions, conflicts, and possibilities. He builds out nature; he admits such portions as he would gladly welcome as guests, as the soft zephyr, the light breeze, the sunshine when not too dazzling; for the rest of nature, he has barricaded it out. Every house is a protest against nature, as well as an adaptation of some of its forces, and a modification of some of its uses: but the whole house means durability, and the builder prides himself on the durability of his house at the very moment when he is saying that he does not know how long he himself may live. We were made for durability; we do not love the flimsy and the frail; there is something in us which says, You stand for eternal masonry: build your house in the rock. What is that voice? If it were applied to theological subjects it would be called superstition; when it is applied to the common affairs of life men say, That is the sort of man—broad, massive, durable; whatever he puts up bears the stamp of his own manhood; it is right square, and real in strength, and marked all

over with every sign and aspect of permanence. But the man called himself an insect, a worm ; he said he might die before night ; why all this bluster about durability ? A man cannot deny himself. Set him theorising, inventing, and speculating, and, oh, was ever such a child found in all the wilderness of time for dreaming and talking ineffable nonsense ? But when he comes into the market-place, when he settles down to the fair work of life, what wonderful common-sense he applies to all his affairs ! He will not remind himself of his mortality, he will not build upon incertitudes ; he seeks for granite lines, and on those lines he builds.

Or take it thus :—I do not know how long my child my live : why should I send him to school ? why should I educate the child when death may snap the scholar in two at a very early period of his culture ? why should I show the child the world at all ? Poor little creature, he may be dead to-morrow ; I do not know how long he may live ; children do die suddenly, and die in thousands, and the lot of others may be the lot of my child : why should I not take this view, whilst other men take another view, and order my policy accordingly ? That would be the talk of a murderer ; he would not imbrue his fingers in blood, but he would smother the mind and soul of his child. Here is a man who says, “ I don't know how long this little child may live, he may die to-morrow ” ; and yet he sends him to school to learn reading, writing, ciphering, various languages, somewhat of history and philosophy ; why, he is training the child as if he were going to be a Methuselah in point of age. Certainly, and he cannot get out of it ; there is a pressure upon him. No healthy man could talk in the other strain. When we are in health we plan for duration, for possibility. We do not know that education will be of any use to the child, but it may be. That is called good reasoning in ordinary life, but when a man arises and says in the Church, “ There may be a God, there may be an eternal state, ” he is a fanatic ! We should have the “ may be ” in our reasoning ; we should have the subjunctive mood in our verb *To be*. Why do you lame the verb ? why do you eviscerate the mood that alone has in it scope enough for the imagination of the soul ? Is it our place to dismember living verbs and to change the conjuga-

tion of a tongue we did not create? Observe how a man cannot help recognising possible immortality in commerce, in building, in education, in discipline. If a man roused to the highest point and sensitiveness of consciousness knew that he was the prisoner of a day, and that in the night he would find a grave out of which there is no resurrection, he would go mad. It is this secret spiritual pressure, call it if you will supernatural, and action upon the imagination and the consciousness, that gives life all its dignity and all its peace.

Or take it thus :—I do not know how long I may retain my reason ; as a matter of fact men have lost their mental powers ; even mental giants have become mental imbeciles : I can reason a little to-day, but my mind may be clouded to-morrow ; I do not know how long I may have full possession of my faculties : what is the use therefore of my subjecting those faculties to discipline, to nurture, to culture ? why stimulate the mind to higher activity ? why embolden the mind with nobler ambitions ? I cannot tell into what daze and bewilderment I may be thrown to-morrow ? No man can talk like that. When I say no man, I mean no healthy, sane man. The world would stagger and fall down and never recover itself, if its leaders could talk in that poor tone. What is this spirit in us which says, Do your best : stand erect : lay your hand upon your brow and feel if there is not already on it a diadem ? It is on this instinct or impulse or passion that the true religion builds itself ; and out of these enthusiasms and convictions, often wordless because of their very grandeur, comes the religious inspiration of life.

Or take it thus :—I do not know how long the nation may be unassailed ; no hostile army may come against it for five centuries : why fortify, why build ships, why maintain defensive forces ? Why have any interest in the country's protection at all ? Why not leave the whole problem to be solved by nature ? History shows us one man blinded by hail, another great army overwhelmed by waves and billows and vexing winds : why not leave the whole matter ? Patriotism will not allow that reasoning. Patriotism has its " may be." Sometimes that " may be " may be exaggerated, may be urged and driven to false uses, but within all that is sophistical and fallacious there is that element of truth,

namely, that a man will put a fortification around his hearthstone—not a visible one, but an invisible and impalpable defence. Every man will bolt his door; every one will in some way insure and protect himself. And what is true in individual life is true in national life. There is a patriotic genius that says, "Maybe—perhaps—it is just possible." When a man arises to talk this very same language in religion, saying, "There may be a providence, there may be a state eternal, there may be a day of judgment, there may be a burning hell for wickedness," he is an enthusiast, a passionist, a fanatic.

It may be said that, in applying these illustrations to the religious arguments, it is impossible that any man can know that there is a God. Who says so? He ought to be a bold man who speaks for every other man: now where is he? He ought to be as wise as he is bold. For a man, who will not allow the Christian Church to assert the existence of God, to arise and say, "It is impossible that the human mind can know the infinite or the supernatural or the divine," is guilty of great presumption! To know that it is impossible to know is just as much a revelation as to know that it is possible to know. Only a revelation can meet the case in either instance. We are not to have an omniscience of agnosticism—if the paradox may be allowed, for it is a paradox which amounts to an argument—we are not to have an omniscience of agnosticism and only an ignorance of faith. How fine the figure, how sweeping the action, what a stroke from the shoulder is that which sweeps away the possibility of knowing that God created, redeemed, and preserves us!

All dogmatism is not confined to the Church. I do not see why a man should be a very great philosopher who sets up "I don't know," and why he should be a great fool who declares that it is possible that things did not make themselves. Let us be fair on both sides. Let me repeat, only a revelation can authorise any man to declare that it is impossible to know whether there is a living Spirit in the universe or not. Let us take witnesses on both sides. The witness of Jesus Christ is not to be ignored, and he came to reveal the Father. The witness of the apostles is not to be dismissed with a sneer, because they suffered for their faith, and they triumphed in their sufferings. But let us

take it, on the admission of the men themselves, who say there may be, but they do not know it, and cannot know it: if there is such a "may be," it is enough to build faith upon. That "may be" should be the parent of reverence, devotion, expectation, and hope. That "may be" opens the door of a universe. In life we do provide for contingencies; saith a man, "It may be stormy," therefore he makes provision accordingly. Saith the merchantman, "It is possible this adventure may miscarry, therefore—," and then he provides for security and defence. But when a man arises and says, "It may be that time is not all, that the grave is not the end of things, we do not live like dogs, and there is no reason why we should die like dogs," he is supposed to be a religious lunatic. In all life we provide for the long view; in all life we provide for our higher self, in some form or other; it may not be the highest self, but it is for some self dreamed in dreams, that is to be healthy and happy, joyous all day, abounding in riches, and having the power to evoke and appreciate music. It is for this the miser grabs and hoards his gold, he is building a heaven in his canvas bags; it is for this a man undertakes long journeys and dangerous voyages, and enters into many speculations more or less hazardous in their nature, that he may lay up against a rainy day, and provide for old age, and strengthen his roof in view of possible winters. What! all this built upon a "may be"? and you will not allow souls to build anything upon the larger "may be" of God, eternity, heaven, and hell? I do not recognise the consistency of your reasoning.

Applying these illustrations to the Christian religion, they increase in force, because the Christian religion is not selfish. A man is not insuring himself against hell when he accepts Jesus Christ. No man can be in the crowd of Christ's disciples without having a great, heavy cross upon his shoulder—what Jesus Christ calls his own cross (see the Revised Version):—"Except a man carry his own cross." No man knows how hard and heavy is the cross of any other man. It is not an object or a symbol, it is a great crushing weight, it is as fire in the bones, it is a daily martyrdom. A man who submits to that kind of process in support only of a religious "may be," shows at all events that he has faith in that contingency. The Christian religion is not sentimental, it

is disciplinary, it is moral ; it calls upon a man to be noble, pure, generous, beneficent ; it will not allow him to live his own life, or to seek his own pleasure, or even to indulge in some emulous hope concerning his own salvation : it will have every man work out his own salvation, go about doing good, following in the footsteps of Christ. It is a tremendous religion, is the religion of Christ. It gives no ease, except after process ; it starts a process the end of which is rest, but the way itself is thorny fiery, vexatious, and all-testing enough.

Then the Christian religion, right or wrong, is complete in its proposals. It omits nothing. It begins with us in infancy, it takes us up in its arms and blesses us, and sets us down to work ; it goes with us all through life, blessing our bread, making our bed in our affliction, directing us in all the concerns and necessities of life ; it comes to us when no one else will come near us ; when terrible diseases befall us, the only one who will come to us, next to our own blood, is the Son of God. Christianity has a balm for every wound, a gentle touch that can be laid upon the sorest place in the heart. Christianity is so far complete that it goes with us through the valley of the shadow of death, and tells us when we are in the darkest place, that presently we shall be in heaven. And in heaven it does not promise us a velvet cushion on which we may sit for evermore ; it says, There his servants shall serve him ; there liberation shall be but a higher qualification for duty. It is a bold religion. It is complete in its philosophy, it is as strong at one point as another in all its elaborate argument. If it is wrong, it is all wrong : but if it is right, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear ? We can only bear personal testimony about this knowledge. We must deny that knowledge is limited to the intellectual faculties. We must deny that all knowledge can be found in books of mathematics, or be set forth in geometric forms, or told in logical propositions. There is a knowledge of the feeling ; there is a knowledge of the heart ; there is a knowledge that comes by instinct ; there is a poetical, ideal, sympathetic knowledge ; a higher faculty outreaching the hand, that seizes heaven by that faculty. We know that we do know. We lay hold upon God.

1 John i. 1-5.

1. That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life ;

2. (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us ;)

3. That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us : and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

4. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

5. This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

BEGINNINGS.

IN beginning his Gospel the Apostle John says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." In writing this Epistle he says, "That which was from the beginning." The Apostle was a man who took in a whole horizon. A clever man only takes in points ; a clever man can, therefore, be dogmatic and impudent. The inspired man is filled with a sense of inexpressibleness, and, therefore, he must be sometimes apparently indefinite, but always he must be reverent. A fluent theology is a contradiction in terms ; a stumbling, hesitant, groping, wondering theology may end in great certitude and reverent and tender worship. Always be on your guard against glib spiritual directors ; the men who can hand you out what you want, as if it were all compact and ready for delivery. There is no such theology, blessed be God, in Holy Scripture. The Apostle John will not have the mere incident, he will have the atmosphere. It is the atmosphere that is so often left out in men's thinking, and men's pictures ; there is a want of open air. The thing that is set forth may within narrow limits be most accurate, it may even be painfully accurate : we do not want mechanical accuracy, we want sugges-

tion, air, atmosphere, that subtle interplay of unnameable forces which ends in a challenge, before which the whole imagination bows as before a new and sacred presence. Hence the man of facts is always making a fool of himself. Nothing can be so misleading as facts. We should look upon facts as only pointing to the truth. The truth was before the fact, and will be after it, and the fact itself will be sponged out as something no longer needed. We are going on to truth ; that great dream, that eternal satisfaction, which is only an unbeginning beginning, only an endless end. What foolish talk this must be to the man of facts. I do not know that a piece of cabinet-work, as chair or table, needs much atmosphere, but a tree needs the whole air, and all the sky above it, to give it fit forth-setting. What the tree owes to the sky behind ! That fine umbrageous tree is nothing at midnight. It is still there ; in a sense it is still where you left it, but only in a very little, superficial, and useless sense. The tree is not there until the sky is there ; you must have them both together before you can have the one. So it is with the great trees of righteousness, trees of truth, trees of history ; we want the background we need the atmosphere, we wait for the shining sky, that everything may be coloured and set forth in significant emphasis.

So this Apostle will have everything from the beginning. He will have nothing new but conduct. There he will be as novel as you expect the very highest genius to be ; when he comes to press home the utilisation of his gospel, he will have your conduct to be as new as the dew of the morning, as fresh and sparkling and beauteous as those pearls or diamonds of heaven. As to truth, thought, theology, he will have all things from genesis, origin, protoplasm, unnamed infinities, uncalculated eternities. This is the great object which religion has to work out in the world—to make men feel that they themselves are of yesterday, and know nothing, and to give them to feel that though only of yesterday, yet by so much they are looped on to the everlasting duration. It is apparently a frail loop, but it cannot easily be broken. Why not begin at a given point in history ? Because you cannot. You must begin where God began, or you can know nothing in its completeness. A momentary hunger can be satisfied by momentary bread. You can steal bread enough to

appease the hunger of the body, but the hunger of the soul is an inexhaustible desire; it grows by what it feeds on, it cries for more, its delight is in its own pangs. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled,—only in order to increase their capacity for reception. Have faith in those great teachers who speak out of the tabernacles of eternity. It would be much easier to speak about facts that come and go, little specks upon the hand, and small flashes that dazzle the eye for a moment, but there is no abiding in such bubble-talk. The men who come up from eternity are the messengers of God. Many have spoiled the religion they meant to teach by treating it as if it were in a box, foursquare, and could be handed out in morsels or in packages as the momentary occasion might call for. Who can cut the sky into inches, and give it away with finger and thumb? Who can snip a bit out of the wind, and say, That is a sample of the tempest we had? So with this heaven-filling, eternity-filling religious thought; it breaks up the vessels of words and overflows into the larger capacities of dream and imagination, feeling and aspiration; words fall back like exploded vessels, and say, We have not room enough for this visitation. So many men have found in music what they could never find in words, and some have found in dreams what was to them the beginning of the higher heaven. You do not know one tree unless you know all trees: you do not know one science unless you know all sciences. No man understands the law of his own country who only knows special cases, and *nisi prius* pleadings. He is a little contemptible person who stuffs the unworthy sack, which he calls himself, with the shavings and sawdust of particular cases. A painter cannot paint the glacier until he has studied geography and astronomy and chemistry: what a botchy sketch he can take of it! he is but a sign-painter: pay him his wages! you can pay such a man to the full, and get his worthless “thank-ye” in return. The glacier, the mountain, was never painted until a man came into England who anticipated science, and painted things that at first frightened men, but things so associated with the eternal thought, the beginning, that men grew up to them, and said, Turner is the only English painter that ever represented the genius of glacial construction and mountain history. Only a man here and there has eyes that can see. The

New Testament without John would have been without its greatest character, its finest genius. He did not fall so readily into argumentative form as some others, but he lived in a region beyond formal argument, he lived with God; that man, with the shining celestial face, apparently never lifted his head from the bosom of his Lord.

If we could enter more into this thought we should read the Bible correctly, because we should come upon it, not as something that either begins or ends, but as something that runs into every other thing that is true, and that consequently belongs to the whole economy which we designate by the mysterious word, "eternity." The Bible does not begin with Genesis, the Bible does not end with the Revelation of John the Divine; the Bible begins when God begins, and Revelation goes on until God ceases to be God, which is never. Do not regard the Bible as a little book that has a beginning and an ending; it never ends, because it never begins, in any mechanical sense. It is as a voice overheard; it has been going on, in its soft musical murmur, in its impressive, soul-enthraling whisper all the time; but, hark! there is something now you can take down in plain letters; write it, quickly, write it all; if you are too much hurried, write the principal words: what have you got? This! Blessed be God. This much we seem to have overheard. As to what went before and what shall come after, no man may now know. But do not regard the Bible as a separate, independent, and self-complete publication; think of it as something that has been overheard, and stenographically caught by prophets and minstrels and evangelists who had the seeing eye, the hearing ear, and the skilled hand.

The Apostle, having put all this right, namely, that there was an unbeginning beginning—"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"—now comes down in what may be called concrete history, that is to say, history shaped into facts and accidents and measurable movements—the lower, smaller kind of history; the chatter and the talk of men who but imperfectly know the lesson which they wish to teach. Coming into this region, what is John's own

personal testimony? He will not speak in the first person singular, he will speak in the first person plural, because the revelation was given, not to one only, but to several, and through several to many: therefore the Apostle says, "That which"—not "He who," but "That which,"—a neuter, nay, not a neuter, a common gender; that is better: it includes all other thought, life, personality, and action:—"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life." Literally, That which we have eaten bushels of salt with. The familiarity was perfect. Not a God we saw walking out now and then by himself, not a God that we whispered to one another about as a kind of ghost that came to make night hideous, and that was reported to some Hamlet who went out to see the airy thing: but that which we have eaten bushels of salt with;—and to eat salt with a man in the olden time was to have companionship with him, to trust him and make covenants with him. When men laid salt upon the sword, and dipped their fingers in it, that dipping dissolved the sword; it was no longer a symbol of war, but a symbol of peace. The Apostle says, We have eaten salt with Christ; we have heard him, touched him, looked at him, talked to him,—why, we perfectly know him. It will be interesting, therefore, to hear what this man has to say upon the higher subjects. He has not only heard of Christ, but has sat down with him, talked with him, and taken hold of his hand; has been melted into tears under his talk, has looked at him as a man might look at God.

Now the Apostle says something worth listening to of a personal kind:—"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you." That is what we want to know. We do not want to know what you have imagined and speculated and doubted; we do not want a history of your mental wriggings and turmoils and tumults and terrors; we have enough of that kind of literature of our own; if you can tell us what you saw and what you heard, let us hear it. "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you." Now listen: what is it? Oh, tell us in our mother tongue, tell us in little words that we cannot forget; if there be any large words in the message,

break them up into little child-words, into little baby-terms; we want to hear it in such simple speech that the very poorest and most stupid of us can catch the meaning in a moment: what is it? This is it—"God is light." This man must be great. Never were little words called upon to say so much before. "Light"—what is light? No man can tell. Science itself says it cannot describe perfectly the frame of a soap-bubble. Light is distance. There is no distance in darkness. Darkness is limitation, darkness is imprisonment; there is no gaol with walls so thick and impenetrable as darkness. You may stand upon a moor forty miles in diameter, and it can be so dark there that you dare not stir. You can thrust your arm through the darkness, but not your feet—take care! Light is distance, amplitude, vastness, infinity. Light is creative. The light is not passive, the light is working all the time; a curious actinism is proceeding, changing even it may be essence, certainly changing colour and form and uses and possibilities. The ministry of light is an eternal ministry. God is light. Light is another name for morning, midday, summer, heaven. "God is light." How do we know that? Through Jesus Christ his Son. What did Jesus Christ say of himself? Jesus Christ said, "I am the light of the world." "God is love." In such consistencies find the deity of the Son of God.

PRAYER.

HEAR thou our prayer in heaven thy dwelling-place, and when thou hearest, Lord, forgive. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us; but if we confess our sins, which we now do, heartily and unfeignedly, before the Cross, they shall, by the power of the love of Christ, be all forgiven, gone from out of the memory of God, and be as if they never had been. This is the miracle of the Cross, this is the triumph of eternal grace; this lies not within our power, but with God all things are possible. Lord Jesus, it is still lawful for thee to heal on the Sabbath day: behold the sick, the impotent, the halt, the blind, the helpless of every name, and work out amongst us and upon us thy miracles of love. Thou dost not cast men down, thou dost always bring them up; thou dost not bring the cloud into the sky, but the sunshine: thy smile is morning, thy look is resurrection, thy blessing is heaven. Lord Jesus, make the Sabbath day still more Sabbatic, fill it with a deeper peace, breathe into it a mysterious calm, and let the soul feel how near the Lord is when the soul is in the sanctuary. We bless thee for every spiritual touch; we thank thee for every flash of light that falls upon our darkness, and gives us hope of a land beyond: without such light we should sink into despair, but with such lights we hold all time and space as nothing, we are so near the Living One, the Eternal God. Give us such uplifting of soul that we shall have no more fear, or sorrow, or pain, or death; so fill us with the Spirit that we shall know nothing of the body; take us up into thine opening heavens, O Lord God of light, and show us the wonders which time has never seen; give us one moment's release from this body-prison, and let us see enough of heaven to make all our after-days days of the Son of Man upon the earth. Oh, for one look of heaven, for one over-hearing of its music, for one touch of its reality; then the grave would be the most beautiful part of the garden, then the river that separates us from the land of Canaan would be so narrow that we could step over it. Deliver us from all darkness, fear, narrowness of mind, selfishness, worldliness, and lead us into that upper life, all light, all peace; the way to that life lies by the Cross of Christ. Show thy saints that in Christ Jesus life and incorruptibleness are brought to light. Help the busy man to do his work, because it must be done; it is trifling with the soul in its higher aspects, yet the body must for a year or two be fed: but whilst men care for the body may they not be careless about the soul, the mystery divine that makes them men. Be with all our loved ones who are sick; the chamber is too familiar to those weary eyes, the sufferers have lain there so long that they wonder whether God's creation is being narrowed down to their four walls: send thine angels into the little church, and make it glad with new brightness this very day. Amen.

I John i. 5-10.

5. This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

6. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth :

7. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

8. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

9. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

10. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

THE MINISTRY OF LIGHT.

LIGHT is not only, as we have already said, distance, as suggesting the ideas of largeness and liberty : light is also revelation. It shows a thousand things we could not have seen, but for the very degree of its intensity. A little light is a little revelation, a great light is a great disclosure ; the light seems to create what it only displays. We point out to one another, as we stand in the valley, objects of beauty on the hill-top ; perhaps these objects of beauty are quite little shrubs, but how well-defined they are against the silvery sky ! how clear, how almost eloquent ! it seems as if presently they might have something to say to us, returning our admiration with some words of grateful recognition. Even a grassblade looks more beautiful in a high light than it ever could look in twilight ; we seem to see its green blood running all through its wondrous economy. The more light there is, the more knowledge, the more truth, the larger, clearer recognition and realisation, of things innermost and things most precious. What we want is more light. Persons will say, We do not want novelty. That is perfectly so, but light makes no novelty in any sense of frivolousness or mere experiment ; light reveals, shows things that have been there all the time, and we never saw them because the light was never sufficiently intense and glorious. So with Bible-reading. Many a man sees things in the Bible which other people do not see, simply because he lives in a larger, truer light. It is difficult for twilight to believe in noonday. You cannot persuade morning twilight that it will grow into noon-tide glory ; nor can you persuade evening

twilight that but a few hours ago the whole heaven was dazzlingly effulgent. So there are some persons you cannot persuade in relation to the larger light which other readers possess. Hence they call those readers novelists, dreamers, heretics; persons who want to be wise above that which is written. Impossible! What *is* written? Yes, that is the question. What is written to the blind man? Nothing. What is written to the man of imperfect sight? Just what he can see. What is written to those eagle eyes that wander through eternity? God, all love and truth and light and wisdom. We should rejoice in the larger, keener sight of other men; we should call them our better brothers, our elders, teachers, friends, companions with an interval, but companions with no interval in the matter of true sympathy: thus we should have great teaching, wide, varied teaching, and instead of finding fault with one another for variety of sight and variety of revelation, we should claim all good and true teachers as our helpers in the faith, as angels and messengers of heaven.

Light is not only distance, and revelation; light is welcome, in the sense of offered hospitality. See how the people go out when the sun shines! Why these crowds upon the thoroughfare? They are obeying the invitation of the sun—kind, hospitable, father-mother sun. He calls everybody to his bounty. They are not all rich people who are going out in the sunlight; they are not all driving forth in gilded and crested chariots to see the sun: there are little children, poor, ill-clad, but still under a strange fascination. Whither go ye, little feet? What is the answer? The answer is perhaps incoherent or partially beside the mark, yet in it there is a hiding of the light of the sun: they are going out to see the light, to feel the warmth, to hear the birds, to cull the flower, to splash in the river: it all means that the ministry of light is acting upon them and calling them to the larger table spread by hands unseen. See! there is a threatening of thunder, there is a great cloud hastening up from the west: why are the parks being emptied? why are the gates being sought by eager crowds? Because of the darkness. The light took all the throng away to sit in God's great parlour of grass, his great drawing-room of shaded forests; but the darkness, the gathering rain-clouds, the threatening storm, these sent the people away to

smaller hospitality, and to what they sometimes foolishly imagine to be securer protection. Light is welcome. Light says, Come away: an hour of my ministry will make you young again; come into the broad sanctuary; see what God has done; here is the summer God, he will not frighten you like the God of freezing, chilling winter: come! the Spirit and the Bride of light say, Come; whosoever will, let him come. He will come to bounty, to release, to larger life.

Light is not only distance, revelation, welcome; light is joy. Who could be really sorrowful in summer light? It seems to say to the heart, Why art thou cast down, O child of the Infinite, offspring of eternity, kin of God? why this downness of soul? thou shouldst rejoice and be glad and sing for very delight of heart. Men who are not musical can hardly forbear a little strain in the light. They shape their lips as if they meant to utter something in tune, and if they searched into the reason of that action they would find it was the result of the ministry of light. Putting all these considerations together they help us to understand a little—so little—of our Father in heaven, who has sent us this message concerning himself—God is light, and in him is no darkness at all: he is all glory, all splendour; he lives in light, nay, the light is but the robe which he throws around himself to give somewhat of definiteness and figure to that which otherwise would be without shape and palpability. The Bible is full of light. All truth lives in light. All real fearlessness of imagination and soul, conscience and understanding, calls out for more light. God is the giver of light. Christians themselves are secondarily lights of the world. Jesus said, speaking of himself, "I am the light of the world," and on another occasion, speaking of the disciples and to them, he said, "Ye are the light of the world"; and the apostles, urging and exhorting Christians to realise the breadth and grandeur of their vocation, call upon them to walk, not as children of the darkness, but as children of the light and of the day, sons of the morning, children of the midday. All these considerations should destroy slavish fear in relation to God. They should bring to our hearts a sense of vastness, of revelation, and of welcome, and of hope, and of joy. God is not a frown; God is not a living and penetrating rebuke:

God is light, God is love; his mercy endureth for ever. The blackest sinner may stand before him, and with bent head may cry, God be merciful to me!—a prayer to which he never said No, when it went up from a ruined heart.

This would be meditation or contemplation worthy to be classed with the highest sentimentality. The great difficulty with the Bible is that we are no sooner into its poetry than we are out of it and into its morality. If the Bible had been all poetry it would have had few hostile critics. The morality of the Bible vexes men. So long as the Bible condenses itself into the twenty-third Psalm—certainly there is nothing like it for sweetness, comfort, minor tone, and soothing music—we could read it again and again with growing passion of sympathy and delight; but the Bible soon takes us out of that kind of Psalm and says to us, To-day we will try your scales. Then the Bible loses popularity. To-day we will go home and see how you behave yourself in your own family. Then the Bible loses a large following. To-day we will go into heart analysis, we will search into motives, we will try the purposes of the soul in the light of heaven: we will test all action in presence of the agony of the Cross. Then men go away: and the Bible says to them, Will ye also go away? The Bible will have every debt discharged, every duty fulfilled; it will have nothing to do with dishonesty, or indolence, or self-consideration; meanness, conceit, greediness: the Bible will have us all like God; and God is light; and light is revelation, welcome, joy, bounty. Light is always giving itself away, and yet the fountain thereof remains unshorn or undivested of a single beam. The Apostle therefore will have us walk in the light.

“If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth.” By “darkness” in this passage understand evil,—If we say that we have fellowship with God, who is light, and yet walk in darkness, which is evil, we contradict ourselves; not in the sense of telling a momentary lie, but in the sense of revealing the essence and nature of our heart: for we do not the truth, and the truth is not in us. Observe, we are not startled into a slip of the tongue, we simply

reveal ourselves, and say we want a sublime theology, if its sublimity may only be used as a cloak for an imperfect morality. God will not have this, for God is light; Christ will not have this, for Christ is light—the light of the world, the light of holiness, the very glory of heaven, superseding the sun, of which there is no need where he sits as King.

“ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another ”: we enter into the spirit of trust, mutual confidence, social regard; we are united by bonds as indissoluble as they are tender and helpful. This is the secret of true society; this is the basis on which a lasting commonwealth rests. We have not a compact as between men in regions where language changes, and where covenants will bear one construction under one set of criticisms and another under a different set; we are first united in God, then social union becomes consequential, fluent, easy. These are the two commandments:—Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul: and the second, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. You could not invert the commandments; you cannot start with a true love of neighbourliness; if neighbourliness is to be more than a compromise, a weak and uncertain concession, it must be founded upon eternal principles, and notably upon the principle that God has all the heart's love, and that the greater love includes the less. Why seek—let me ask once more—to scale the heavens with a ladder? Why try to do an action so easily convicted of frivolity and impossibility?

“ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” The Apostle here seems to anticipate the theory that sin is an invented term; that sin simply refers, in the estimation of some critics, to a degree of colour; so sinfulness is a state of the character, being off-colour. You take up a diamond and say it is large, and the price is very greatly reduced because the diamond is a little off-colour; had it been of a pure white, it would have been worth ten times the money: sinfulness, in the estimation of such persons, is a lapse of conduct, a momentary lapse, so that a man may presently recover himself, and walk on as if nothing had happened. Where that theory of

sin lives in the mind the gospel is of necessity foolishness, because the remedy is so much greater than the disease; the idea of proportion as between a dying God and a soul that has made a momentary slip is infinite and incredible. The idea of sin in the Bible is that it is the abominable thing which God hateth; it is not being off-colour but off-life, off-truth, away from holiness and all moral beauty. In the estimation of the Bible sin is soul-poverty, soul-helplessness, soul-ruin. Now there is a proportion between the gospel and this condition of affairs: where sin has ruined the soul, the soul is unable to recover itself, and when there is no eye to pity and no arm to save, God's eye is filled with tears and God's almightiness is put out in an act of salvation. So we have no longer to deal with ourselves as if we were the victims of the fallacy that we have no sin, or no sin worthy of the name, no sin that goes really into the root and core of things. So long as a man is in that state, he will be a flippant self-excusant, he will be able to manage his own moral affairs, he will have no need of the gospel: but when a man says, "I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son," then he needs all Calvary.

Supposing a man to have this consciousness, what is his overt act to be? His overt act is to be an act of confession:—"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." There must be no keeping back. We must plainly say to ourselves what we have done; we must write down in blackest ink everything we have done that is wrong. By no euphemism, by no crafty ambiguity of expression, are we to avoid the devil that we have created within ourselves. He must be delineated, portrayed, graphically, lineally, appallingly; and when we see the hideous sight we must say, My transgression is ever before me: God be merciful to me a sinner! I wronged that life, I slew that beauty, I burked that obligation, I told that huge lie, I was a party to that subtle craftiness, I told lies to myself, and I created a noise, that in the tumult I might escape the twinge and agony of conscience: God be merciful to me a sinner! When a man comes into that state of mind he knows whether he needs the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, or not, and he hears no word so large,

so tender, so musical, as "The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth from all sin": then these words are taken out of the hands of the grammarian and the critic, and even the theologian, and become a great, sweet, mighty gospel, filling the whole life, and making the heart glad as with descending heaven.

"If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." God therefore stands before us as the accuser; it is God who has discovered the sin, it is the Lord who has said, This is wrong, you ought not to have done this. It is not an offence that can be expunged, it is a wound that can only be healed by the medicament of blood.

So the great story stands; so the wondrous music of gospel and tragedy rolls on; so the river of God passes through all the tangled forests and deep valleys and mysterious places of this human life. This is a glorious gospel. It does not trim or compromise or deal superficially with the great questions of life; it gets down into deepest experience, into bitterest consciousness. This is the everlasting gospel. If any man will turn away from it he takes with him his own soul, and must not invoke me at the last as one who dealt falsely with him and whispered pleasant things to him when I ought to have told him burning, scalding truths. Nor will I allow this to be the last word. If we have entered into this mystery of life and this scheme of Divine forgiveness we are to prove it by our conduct, by love and charity, by pureness and nobleness of soul. If we say that we had fellowship with God, and yet our conduct is as bad as it can be, John says we are "liars." That is a hard word to use, and John was not given to the use of hard words when he was called to the discharge of duty, but when duty called upon him to be plain no man could be so definite. Here then we stand. It is possible for men who profess Christianity to be liars. Which would you rather be, an infidel or a liar—a speculative infidel, a man who says, "I wish I could see as you do, but I really cannot," or a man who says, "I see the truth, I admire it speculatively, but I am the servant of lies, the slave of darkness"? Behold, I set before you this day life and death. Choose ye. The choice is yours, and yours must be the destiny.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou art training us for thyself day by day, by ministries we do not fully understand, yet the benefits of which are shed abroad in our hearts, and are found again in our conduct. The Lord will work according to his own way, and none may say unto the Eternal, This is right, or, This is wise. The will of the Lord be done. If our school be on the mountain top, so be it; we shall enjoy the opening heavens, the fresh winds that blow from the skies, and the light will be plentiful: if our school be in the deep valley where we have to wait long for the light, a cold dreary school, where the learning is very difficult, and the teaching is not easy to be understood, the will of the Lord be done; the valley is the Lord's as is also the top of the hill, and if so be the Lord himself will teach us, all shall be well at the latter end, we shall be prepared to sing the song of the redeemed in fuller and nobler tones. We bless thee for thy providence; it is kind, sweet, continuous: behold, thou knowest what we need, and when it is best for us to receive it. Thou dost turn our notions upside down, we cannot tell when thou wilt come; it is enough for us to know that come thou wilt, and that thou art ever coming, if we did but know the way of the Lord. Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly: come in any one of thy chariots, the thunder or the tempest; we would, if we might speak to thee, ask thee to come as a still small voice, for we are weary, and our hearts are often ill at ease. We have seen thee in the daytime, a great brightness; we have known thy nearness in the night season, because of a blessing that comforted the heart, and because in the darkness we have seen somewhat of the light that lies farthest away. Thou hast brought us up from being little children, thou hast never forsaken us; sometimes we thought thou hadst gone a long way from us, and lo, thou wert watching us in the very nearest shadow, and when we were about to fall thou didst guard us from stumbling, and in the darkness thou didst find for us a sanctuary. Thou hast kept our eyes from tears, our feet from falling, our soul from death; and amid all the controversies of the time thou hast blessed us with peace imperturbable, the very peace of God which passeth understanding. We bless thee that, if thou thyself art beyond understanding, so are thy gifts; we cannot understand thy peace which we have in our own hearts: how then can we understand the Giver of that peace? The joy thou dost create within us is joy unspeakable: how then can we tell the mystery of thy being and explain our faith in God? We bless thee for a silent theology, we rejoice in a worldless trust, we love to live in the region where there is no speech. Grant unto us daily wisdom for daily need; may we be anxious about this moment and not the next; at all times may we be found resting in the Lord and waiting patiently for him, that we may abound in all these virtues and graces: but what pray we for but for a double portion of thy Holy Spirit, but for a deeper acquaintance with the very heart of the Son of God who loved us, and gave himself for us? Amen.

I John ii. 1-3.

1. My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous :

2. And he is the propitiation for our sins : and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

3. And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

THE PATRIARCH IN THE CHURCH.

JOHN will not have any sin. He was an old man, but he would not set apart any margin for sinning, self-indulgence, worldly-mindedness ; he would have the heart absolutely consecrated, fully, wholly, intensely consecrated, to God. How paternally and tenderly he talks, as he had a right to do. When a man is a hundred years old, all other men are looked upon as quite juvenile and inexperienced. Some want to play the *rôle* of old men and try to look very venerable at seventy ; that is a mere trick of old age, juvenile old age. When John came into an assembly of septuagenarians he said, "My little children." It seemed as if he had a right to say so. What a wonderful thing is right, liberty, franchise ! Some men can say what they please, and it is all right ; it was the very thing to be said, and it was said in the tone that was proper, and everything about the whole atmosphere was exactly what the finest taste and keenest feeling would have it be. Other men say just the same things, and they are all wrong ; they are rough, they are rude, they are out of place ; they spoil the fitness of things, the inner subtle harmony that ought to hold life in quick responsive balance and union. We must imagine ourselves, therefore, in the presence of a long white-haired, wrinkle-faced, genial patriarch. He was a veritable old man, a right mature saint of God. What will he say ? Has old age made him morally blunt ? Will he now say, Brethren, on the whole, it is impossible to be just what we ought to be, we must have some little liberty allowed ? Has old age blunted his ethical faculty, his idea of soldierly discipline ? Will he be lax, will he be blind in his senility ? On the contrary, he says, My little children, we must be good up to the very highest point ; we must live at highest-water mark ; we must not try to compromise with duty, with righteousness, with the finest

morality, and its holiest issue, and practical character : we must never sin. He is as hard as James. We have had to remark upon the sternness of James, but when John is stern, there is no sternness like his. We call him the disciple of love, we think of him pillowing his head upon the bosom of his Lord ; but when love burns it puts out every other fire—it is the wrath of the Lamb. My soul, come not thou into that secret when thou standest in the presence of thy Judge !

But we do sin. What have you to say in reply to that tragical and indisputable fact, O man of the snowy hair and the wrinkled face ? What have you to say to that, patriarch of the Church ? Hear him ! “If any man sin.” How wisely he provides for what may be termed contingencies which are yet of the nature of necessities. Who could live in eternal cloudless light with such bodies and such eyes as these ? None. We must have atmosphere, we must even have cloud. Who can live an absolutely holy life under conditions of the flesh, the world, and the devil ? Why, we sin in prayer ; we pollute with our lips the cup of sacrament ; we look blasphemies. Is there no provision for this state of things ? Hear the old preacher, listen how his voice trembles—that trembling is the hiding of true strength ; he says, “If any man sin,”—O Apostle of Christ, we all sin. Saith he, I know it, and I am speaking to that fact, and I may tell you that if any man sin there is a certain circumstance to be distinctly and comfortably remembered : instead of saying to you boldly and bluntly, “Every one of you sins,” I prefer to approach the delicate subject in another way, and to say, “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father.”

What is an “advocate” ? The same word is translated “comforter” in the Gospel ; we have a Comforter with the Father, a Paraclete with the Father,—the very word that is applied to God the Holy Ghost is applied to God the Son. Why, they are all one ! “Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord.” Putting the rendering into modern English, we might even say, If any man sin we have an attorney with God ; a man who holds the whole case in his hands, and can represent it to the Father, and can tell him all about it, how it came to be as

black a case as it is. Oh, the winsomeness of his look, the music of his voice, the passion of his advocacy! Trust your case with him. Now I know what to do: I will go to my Saviour with my sins, and say, Lord Jesus, they are here, they hurt me while I hold them; I did them every one, I am sorry in my soul that I ever did them: take my case in hand; other refuge have I none. I will risk eternity in that spirit, I dare not risk eternity in any other spirit. I do not know what eternity is, what eternity means, what eternity implies: I know nothing about it, but that it is the most appalling of all mysteries that relate to duration and experience; and in the face of that mystery I would rather trust this Paraclete than any theory, invention, hypothesis, assumption, I ever heard of. Beyond personal testimony I cannot go; I can only say, This is where I personally stand and wish to stand, and I invite others to be participators of the same rational, profound, and inexhaustible comfort.

But is the Attorney, Advocate, Paraclete, or Mediator, merely a skilled pleader, one who is skilful in the use of words, sharp in the anticipation of objections; is he but a *nisi prius* lawyer who will take advantage of any precedent or contingency or ambiguity that will help his cause? The answer is found in the character which is assigned to him in the text—"the righteous," always the righteous, the right One; right in soul, right in purpose, right in feeling, mighty because he is right. Leave your case with him. Do not peddle with it yourselves; you cannot mend a shattered soul: go plaster the skin you have wounded, the doctor will find you some emollient you may apply: but when it is a question of the soul, To Christ! is the only gospel worth preaching.

But if he be so righteous he will be to us as burning and awful in criticism as God himself. The Apostle John anticipated that difficulty and provided for it; continuing his music thus, "And he is the propitiation for our sins." Righteousness and mercy have embraced, have kissed each other. So long as he is righteous he is fearful, we dare not go to righteousness with our sins; then hear the further strain. "And he is the propitiation for our sins." That propitiation is a theological word, and all theological

words are to be jealously regarded and, where possible, to be thoroughly avoided. Yet we could not do without this word "propitiation," in whatever signification it be adopted. Say it means Kopher, cover; so that our sin being there he is the Kopher, the cover, under which they are all hidden. We have comfort even in that signification of the term. Say "the propitiation" means propitiator; a man who seeks to placate, please, reconcile, soften the other side. There is comfort in that signification of the word. It is perfectly possible for God to be love, and yet for God to need reconciling. I am not able to see that there is any sound and all-covering reason in the suggestion that because God is love he can need no reconciling. God is more than love. The term "God" is a symbolical term as well as an eternal term; it represents all that ever can be known or conceived of law, harmony, beauty, righteousness, continuance, and steadfastness of judgment. What a sphere is there for the action of all possible beneficent ministries! I do not therefore shrink from the statement that God needed reconciling: but that does not prevent my seizing with avidity on the counter-statement that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. The action is multifold, and is not to be dismissed with fluent ignorance. By "propitiation" I want to understand that Christ did something for me which I never could have done for myself. Say he bare our sins, and carried our sickness and our sorrow; say that our sins gathered upon him, and that he bare them in his body on the Cross—it is a mystery: but, on my soul, it is a mystery of love, and every mystery of love should be carefully considered, lest in despising it or undervaluing it we offer affront to an angel of God.

The Apostle anticipated a misuse of this sublime theological doctrine. He thought the Jews or the Christians would say, How comforting! Christ saved us, Christ has his arms round about us, and come what may we are right. The venerable Apostle says, "He [Christ] is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only"—let us have no Pharisaic pride, no pomp and self-trust, no religious vaunting and boasting—"not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." When does Christ perform any little miracles? When does Christ half-heal a man?

When did Christ merely relieve the burning pain? When did he simply lower the action of the leprosy, and leave it still the torment of the blood? Never. To John there seemed to be quite a round entirety, a noble and majestic integrity, about the expression "the whole world." This world has had a false reputation. It has apparently, I do not know whether really, given itself out as if it were a big place. Civilisation has overtaken it, and put its vaunting, if it ever had any vaunting, to silence, and plainly told us exactly what size it is. Yet the expression "the whole world" is about the largest expression we shall ever know under heaven; because "the whole world" is not a topographical term, it is more, it is a time term, it is a generation word: "the whole world"—in the first age, and the second, in the thousandth age, and in the ten thousandth; it is a term that may go backwards as well as forwards. Who can tell what he did, that Son of God, when he died for the whole world? I cannot tell what he did; I know not how that agony affected the graves; I cannot say that there are any limitations to the love of God; I know not how the flood of heaven flowed backward through time's uncounted yesterdays. There we can but be still, thoughtful; there we can but wonder and even hope: but even if the renewed human heart looks back through the dead ages, which in verity are not dead, and yearns over those who long to see Christ in the flesh but did not see him, how know we but that the infinity of the divine love magnifies this yearning into its right proportions, and fills the sphere with overflowing glory and redeeming healthfulness! Leave it: but know that certainly through all the future this propitiation shall be the mightiest agency in the history of man.

What a curious expression there is in the third verse! Read it:—"And hereby we do know that we know him." There is about as little agnosticism in that verse as any verse I ever read. This amounts to a double affirmative—"hereby we do know that we know him." What if, after all this pother of words in angry criticism, God be the only Thing, Quantity, Force, or Personality, that we do really know? That would be just like human education and the secret of human progress, to be ignoring the very thing that we do most truly know; that we know so

well, in the sense of intensity of feeling and powerfulness of inspiration, that we actually fail to realise the fact that is so potent and so powerful. If you make the matter one of intellectualism, I think that agnosticism is about the cleverest thing that ever was invented to snub the pride of intellect ; it balances that pride admirably ; but if you leave the pure intellectualism of the case and take in all the other elements that constitute true and vital and influential knowledge, then I will repeat the bold assumption, that it may be that God is the only Quantity, Force, or Personality that we really do know. We know by feeling, we know by experience, we know by that large comprehension which is called consciousness ; sometimes we know without words : there are songs without words, why should there not be theologies without words—great, reverent, marvelling apprehensions and outgoings after God, that can have no fit expression in human words ? When your soul is at its highest and its best, when it has prayed itself half into heaven, then say what you really believe. You can never say your soul's creed in cold blood. It is not a form, it is an inspiration, a passion, a storm, yet a calm of the soul.

But how are we to know that we know Christ, and know God ? The Apostle says, " If we keep his commandments." We cannot get rid of this moral element in Christianity. Christianity will never allow us a vacancy in which we can serve the devil. It is always : Pray without ceasing, Watch without slumbering, Beware, for in the space required for the closing of an eye the enemy may smite you, and your soul may be slain. Never rise from your knees : you fight best when you kneel most. So Christianity is not a fine sentiment, but a daily personal discipline. And if any man be hugging his own soul and saying that, be saved or lost who may, he is right, and need take no further care about the matter, be it known to him that this is the law Johannine, the law divine ; that, if we would prove our knowledge of God, we must keep God's commandments, we must be moral, we must attend to the discipline of the soul, we must watch ourselves. Blessed is that servant, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou canst not show us how large thy love is, because we could not bear the infinite vision : thy love it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive. The great God loveth all ; there is nothing that thou hast made that is excluded from thine affection, thou didst only make what thou didst love : thy love is the creating force, and thy love inspires and directs all things created. Thou hast set thyself a difficult task in making man : in that thou didst make him like thyself thou didst make the task more than any miracle we have yet known of ; for being like thyself he could wound thee, disobey thee, leave thee : none can hurt the parent's heart so much as the child can. Yet thou shalt not be judged by to-day or to-morrow, or by any little speck which we call time ; the Lord shall be judged in the sanctuary of his own eternity, the Lord shall vindicate himself in his own infinity. We need patience ; we are impetuous, we want to seize conclusions, we are vexed by processes which wear the mind and irritate the whole nature : to work this patience within us is the miracle of the Holy Ghost. Take away from us all that is impetuous, fiery, urgent, and that is determined to throw off all restraint ; enable us to accept the yoke lovingly, meekly, and often to do everything by doing nothing : teach us how to perform the miracle of praising God in silence, and doing God's will by having no will of our own. Surely this also cometh through the Cross ; man cannot be taught this elsewhere than at a place called Calvary : there we see thy Son, our Saviour, our Priest, our Infinite Redeemer ; he has said, Not my will but thine be done : and having so said the bitterness of death was passed, and the Cross could hurt him no more. Enable us to follow Christ in this great act ; we cannot do it without him, we can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us : may we be crucified with Christ, not on one side of him, but with him, on his Cross, that knowing the fellowship of his sufferings we may afterward know the power of his resurrection. Thou dost enable thy loved one to say : I am crucified with Christ : nevertheless I live ; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me : and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. Amen.

I John ii. 4-9.

4. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

5. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected : hereby know we that we are in him.

6. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

7. Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning.

8. Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you : because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.

9. He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.

LIVING LIARS.

WE say that the Apostle John was all for love. In so far he was true to his own loving nature. He was above all things affectionate. Some souls have no affection. They are not wholly to blame. "That which is crooked cannot be made straight ; and that which is wanting cannot be numbered." They do not mean to be wanting in affection ; they do not know that they are wanting in affection. It is impossible to live with them ; you may be compelled to live beside them, but "with" is a larger word than "beside" ; it implies indentification, unity, sympathy, oneness. You did not know that there was any want of love ; you could only make that disastrous discovery after long experience : hence we have so many shattered, ruined lives, where there is absolutely no cruelty of any kind that can be expressed in words. Homes are made unhappy not by cruelty only, some overt and infernal act of shameless cruelty ; but in one heart or the other there is a great gap, an awful vacancy, a piece of leather where there ought to be a living, sensitive, all-answering heart. John was, on the contrary, affectionate, loving, clinging, caressing, always wanting something else to complete the measure of his heart-satisfaction. Yet the fourth verse gives a totally different aspect of the man. In that verse there is no flowery sentiment. A soldier could not be more concise, and soldiers must not indulge in rhetoric before the battle. Here we have the stern disciplinarian. John comes to the Church and rouses everybody :—Move on ! is the cry of this monitor. Where he finds a man with a whole gobletful of religious liquid, and finds that gospel-bibber drinking it, and saying how good it is, and how delightful a thing it is to be released from the grip of law, John says, You are a liar : that is your name, that is your nature ; you are not a Christian man at all, you have no right to any of the promises, comforts, assurances of the Christian sanctuary : we only know that you are good in heart when you are industrious and faithful in service : to keep the commandments is the certificate of a

renewed soul. Yet it is difficult for a man to change his whole nature even under some gust of holy excitement.

Up to this time John had been speaking in the first person plural very much :—"We have heard," "We have seen," "If we say," "If we walk in the light," "If we confess," "Hereby we do know": why not continue the first person plural? it is a cordial utterance; it is a kind of masonic word; it keeps us near to one another, as if we belonged to the same household and brotherhood: why change the grammar? Yet the grammar is changed in this very verse; suddenly the Apostle goes into another direction, speaking in the third person—"He that saith." How could that great, warm, ardent heart say, "If we say we know him, and keep not his commandments, we are liars"? Some possibilities cannot be entertained; they distress the imagination, they even defy the fancy: only in some hideous nightmare could we perpetrate the madness of supposing that a Christian professor could do certain things. Better put the case abstractly; better indicate some anonymous stranger—a "he" without an address. Here is delicacy, here is exquisite spiritual taste, keeping the man right even in his grammar. With how fine a delicacy are some men gifted! They did not learn it in the schools, they brought it with them from eternity, it is part of heaven's dower. Other men seem fated to hurt everybody; they are all elbows, they are all angles. They do not mean to get wrong, but they never happen to be right. When they are told that they have offended or tried or distressed some person, they are really amazed to hear that they have been guilty of such an offence. When men are amazed in that way you can do nothing with them; there is nothing to work upon: even a bog has been concreted into strength, but the bog of the heart swallows up all the concrete of exhortation and civilisation, and is more a bog than ever. You bray a fool in the mortar, and he comes out just as he went in. Here is a lesson in literature, a lesson in manners; here is more than Chesterfield, no pedantic letter-writing here, but the sweet and easy and graceful expression of the very quality of the man's soul. When we are quite sure that every time we open our mouth we may offend somebody, the best thing we can do is not to open our mouth.

How stands the case in the estimation of this penetrating and candid critic? "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." Did you ever meet a liar? Not often. We have often met men who told lies, but men who tell lies may not be liars. A very subtle thing is this life of ours. A man may be better than his speech. I do not say that Peter was a profane and impious blasphemer even when he cursed and swore and denied his Lord. Man is dual. In every man there are two men. The lips are sometimes traitor to the soul. The soul has delivered a message to them which they have not delivered to those to whom they were called upon to communicate the message. Within us there goes on an incessant dialogue. When I do good, evil is present with me: the thing that I want to do I cannot do: the flesh wars against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and life is a continual conflict. But some men are without the truth—"the truth is not in" them. They are false through and through. If you could take them to pieces fibre by fibre, you would find that every fibre is a separate lie. Nor are they to be judged by their method of looking at you. There is a short and easy method with liars, which is just as superficial as it is short. Men say, "He could not look you in the face." The finest, sublimest, grandest liar I ever knew could look at you in the face all day long. He had no difficulty about looking you in the face. His fine blue eyes, in which the morning seemed to rest as if a native of those well-shaped orbs, looked at you with ineffable frankness and ineffable trustfulness; and the lies flowed over those soft young lips like water over some grassy torrent-bed. One of the most truthful men I ever knew never lifted his eyes from the ground when he could help it; the word "liar" seemed to be written all over his bent head. So we go with these superficial and false judgments of one another. To be a liar is to be lost. You can do nothing with a liar. You cannot make him a man of business, an accountant, a confidential servant, a friend; you cannot make him a teacher of your families, you can have no useful and profitable association with him. I do not know what is to be done with liars. They cannot pray, they cannot read the Bible, they cannot hear a sermon: we must leave them with God.

Here is a lesson which every man may learn. When a man is very anxious about his spiritual state, let him ask whether he is keeping God's commandments. Many persons are very anxious about the matter of the unpardonable sin. Such people are always either too mad to be ministered to by pastors, or too self-conscious to receive any really wise instruction. I have sometimes ventured in the case of people who have come to me about the unpardonable sin to recommend them to take an ice-cold bath every morning at five o'clock till they get better. Do not allow your souls to be swindled by this continual morbidity of self-vivisection, taking yourselves to pieces to know whether you are right with God: judge your morality, your honesty, your behaviour: why make a metaphysical puzzle of a thing that could be settled by a reference to your own wife and children, and customers in your daily business? This is the severity that kills, that may afterwards melt into the gentleness that saves and heals.

The Apostle now puts the matter in another way, and yet not in another, saying, "But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected." To keep God's word is the object of the whole of this great Christian economy. Say it is an economy with a Cross at the centre; the object of that Cross is to create and sustain and perpetuate character. Is the love of God perfected in the monk, who hides himself from the world that he may read his sentimentalism and go through his ceremonial services? He knows nothing about the love of God. He does not know the love of God who runs away into some quiet resting-place, and sits down there, after having shut the door, and says to himself, Now we shut out all the world. Whoever shuts out all the world shuts out God. Whoever severs himself from his own flesh, from humanity, whoever ceases to take an interest in the evangelisation and education of the world, has not begun to pray, he has begun to blaspheme. This is very stern teaching on the part of the Apostle. James is blunter, but really not sterner. James' sword is all blade; we are always afraid that he will cut himself when he lifts it that he may smite others. John's sword is long-handled, velvet-covered, and the edge of that sword is every whit as keen as the edge of

the sword of James. It is a mistake to suppose that one apostle takes care of the sentiment, and another apostle takes care of the doctrine : John takes care of them both, so does Paul, and so does James, when rightly read. Many persons are afraid of good works ; they have a right to be ; and good works have more right to be afraid of them. Some persons are afraid to do anything that is good, lest they might seem to be ostentatious. What self-delusion, what immoral phantasy is this ! We must do one of two things ; that is to say, we must either do good or do evil. To do nothing is to do wrong. How, then, is it to be ? Some men will not let the left hand know what the right hand has done, or the right hand know what the left has done : very good : there is perhaps not much to communicate : who can tell ? It would be a pity to annoy the right hand by the left going to it and saying, Brother, I have done nothing to-day : but I did not want to mention the matter to you. There is a school of theology which is very much afraid of morality, that is of keeping the Word of God ; very much afraid of what is termed conscience ; and extremely sensitive lest we should begin to count up our good deeds and make a virtue of them. I would rather belong to a thoroughly good moral school than to a questionable theological school. Sometimes men are trying to hammer their way into the inner kingdom by trying to do good to little children, to the poor, to the ignorant, and to others who are in need of help : interrogate these persons as to theology, and they know nothing about it—blessed be God ! Herein it is true that “A little learning is a dangerous thing.” If a man could be a theologian, in the real, deep, full sense of that term, there would be nothing more to be ; but to suppose that we are theologians because we know certain phrases is to delude ourselves, and is to commit ourselves to a policy of wrong-doing and mischief-making.

“He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.” So John would say to us, How do you walk ? do you walk on both sides of the way at once ? do you reel in the path ? do you walk straightforwardly ? do your eyes look straight on ? do you walk as those who are walking in the light and are going about on useful business ? In the Bible, religion is often described as “walking,” and walking is another

term for conduct. We may often read a man by his walk. I never fail to do this. I do not want any certificate about the man, I want simply to see him walk down the road when he is unaware that I am looking at him, and I know all about him. "Walk" is a large word in the Christian vocabulary. You can tell by a man's walk whether he is frivolous, or earnest, or solid, or self-conscious; whether he is capable of passion, enthusiasm, devotion; or whether he lolls and dawdles and fails to take grip of the earth he is walking on. So the Apostle John will not allow us to go behind carefully drawn and finely scented curtains that we may examine our souls; he says, You have no business to be examining your souls, your business is to be examining your lives, your character, your walk, your purpose in life; by these things shall all men know whether you are the disciples of Christ or not.

The Apostle will not have it that he is writing anything new. He resents the idea:—"Brethren," saith he in verse 7, "I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning." God's religion never changes. True religion may be a development, but it never shakes off its past in any sense of inflicting disgrace upon it. Truly developed religion never says, I have made mistakes, and now I apologise and take a new departure. The blossom does not apologise for the root, it tells in beauty what the root is all the time trying to say in darkness. But, saith John in verse 8, if you do want novelty, newness, real originality, then arise and be honest and true to your faith and your profession:—"Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth. He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now" (vers. 8, 9). So the Apostle is not afraid of morality, he glories in it; he says, in effect, People who never can understand your metaphysics can always understand your conduct, and if they find you wrong at the point they can understand, they will not care to go much farther into points which lie beyond their intelligence. Brethren, it is in our power to stun the world by doing good!

1 John ii. 24-29; iii. 1.

“Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning”—(ver. 24).

ABIDING IN CHRIST.

IN this verse the Apostle is bound down in his mind to one thought, and almost to one word. He varies the word, and yet it is the same. “Abide,” “remain,” “continue.” These are in some sort an old man’s words. John will have no shifting, no experimenting: he will not have us as butterflies in the garden of God, here and there, a moment on the wing and a moment resting, and then flying again; and doing all simply because the sun is shining. The Apostle insists upon abiding, remaining, continuing, enduring, holding on. “He that endureth unto the end shall be saved.” This is true in all things that are honest and right; even in commerce; also in scholarship; also in the highest life known to heaven. Salvation is in continuance. There are those who want to be saved and completed as if by one magical act. This cannot be done; such is not the Divine plan. The economy of God is an economy of growth, of slow progress, of imperceptible advance; but the growth, the progress, and the advance being assured. How many there are upon whom no reckoning can be made! We do not know where they are, we cannot tell what they believe; not that we want to know the detailed particulars, but we do want to know the inner, constant, unchangeable quantity of faith: given that, and afterwards great liberty may be enjoyed as to imagination, and proposition, and formulation, and the like. The point of constancy must be found in the living faith of the soul. So then all new religion is forbidden. No religion can be new. If “religion” be taken in its Latin derivation, if it mean binding back upon, or binding down to, duty, it is an eternal term. Duty was never born. The incidents or accidents of duty may come and go, so that this shall be the incident to-day, and to-morrow the incident

shall undergo modification : but the constant quantity is duty, binding back, a fettering to certain acknowledged and unchangeable principles. Eternal terms have eternal rewards :—

“This is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life”—(ver. 25).

So, whether it be duty or whether it be promise, in each case we go back to eternity. There is nothing in time's garden worth plucking except for one moment. What we pluck we kill. No man ever plucked a flower and kept it. He praised it, he became wisely and gratefully poetical over it ; he called it lovely, sweet, beautiful, fragrant : and as he was pouring out his eulogistic epithets upon it the flower was dying all the time. But the promise which we have of God is a promise of eternal life. Who can explain the word “eternal” in this connection ? It is not an arithmetical term, it is not a term of time, of extended, expanded, immeasurable time. Eternity has no relation to time ; infinity has no relation to space, it mocks it, swallows it up, and spreads itself beyond all measuring lines, yea, and beyond the scope and bend of inspired imagination. It is difficult for the human mind to think of eternity in any other way than as a continuation of time. If eternity can begin, it can end ; if eternity can end, it is a paradox in phrases, it is a palpable irony and self-contradiction. So life eternal is not life never ceasing only, it is a qualitative term, it indicates a species and kind and value of life. As John Stuart Mill has said, immortality in the mere sense of duration may become a burden. Duration is a low and literal term ; eternal life means quality of life, divinity, blessedness, completeness, music, restfulness. Along the line of such explanatory terms must we find the real significance of the word “eternal.”

But there is to be an eternal element in us : that is to say we must love the eternal before we can enjoy it.

“Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you ”—(ver. 24).

What is that “beginning” ? An unbeginning period ; it is, as we have seen, a favourite word with John, both in his Gospe^l

and in his Epistle. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"—that same unmapped, unmeasured, unimagined Deity. If we are filled with theories, inventions, conjectures, and even hypotheses—whatever that dubious Greek may mean—we cannot go from these into eternal life. If we have taken up with that which was in the beginning, if it be in us, and we be in it, then this eternal life is not an arbitrary reward, it is a logical sequence, the infinite pressure of infinite laws. There may be some who suppose that the gift of heaven is extraneous, arbitrary; that it is given where something else might have been given in its stead. Such is not the reasoning of the Bible. Heaven is the culmination of all we have been passing through, as noon is the culmination of dawn, as the fruit is the culmination of all the mysterious, chemical action of spring and summer, the outcome and benediction of all. Some men are now nearly in heaven. Their translation can occasion but small surprise to themselves; they have daily fellowship with God through his Son Jesus Christ, by the power of the Eternal Spirit; they walk with God; they awake in the morning to praise him, they fall asleep with their heads pillowed in his promises, and in all the hours between waking and sleeping their one inquiry is, "Lord, what wilt thou have me do?" After such experience, heaven comes not as a novelty or a startling surprise, but as a necessary and blessed crowning of the whole process.

"These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you"—(ver. 26).

John was not only in a hortatory temper, he was also disposed to give caution and warning to those who were in danger of being craftily handled. In this connection "seduce" means, Lead you into by-paths. Observe the quaintness and the fulness of that expression. By-paths have a relation to the great turnpike, they are not wholly cut away, they are close at hand but they are not on the main thoroughfare: and I know not any promise that is given to those who are in by-paths, in out-of-the-way lanes and turnings and sequestered places; if there are such promises attached to such places they have wholly escaped my memory. The blessing is upon those who keep in the way, the old paths, the frequented way; and the young shep-

herdess is warned in the Song of Songs to keep close by them whose tents are builded by experienced hands. She is told to keep in company with those who have rich experience in shepherding, not to take her little flock away into by-paths, and to make roads and tracks for herself. The song says, Keep the old ones in sight; follow the way-worn, toil-worn shepherds, never be far away from them, so that if the wolf should come you may have assistance within call. John would therefore not have us try any by-paths. Some men cannot do without irregularity and incoherency; they cannot do with uniformity, they seem to be most in company when they are most alone, and they do not understand the mystery and helpfulness, the genius and inspiration of fellowship, comradeship, mutual exchange of love and trust. We must get out of this enfeebling and ultimately ruinous isolation. This caution is not directed against independency, courage, fearlessness, or heroism of mind. There is a leadership that is connected vitally with all the following body, there is also a leadership that cuts itself away from the body that has to be led, and therefore ends in loss of influence and ultimate ruin of soul and body. At the same time we must not think that a man is utterly lost because he has been seduced, led away into some leafy lane, where he thinks the flowers are brighter and the berries are sweeter than on the open turnpike; we need not pelt our lane-loving friends with cruel epithets, with murderous criticisms; we must not let them suppose that they are exiled and forgotten. The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost; let us say, even we ourselves who are now in God's open sunny thoroughfare and are going straight up to heaven by the power of the Spirit,—even we were like sheep that had gone astray, we had turned every one to his own way, but now we have returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. They may follow our example; some day we may find the lanes or by-paths all deserted, and our friends who have been momentarily lost may rejoin our friendship, and not know how to make enough of it because of their remembered loneliness.

The Apostle continues in the 28th verse in the same tone—

“And now, little children, abide in him.”

“Little children” is the same word that has been already used

as a term of endearment. But the exhortation is unchanged—abide, continue, watch, wait, keep on. We need all these exhortations; we are the victims of sudden passion. Imagination itself is challenged sometimes to go to the very pinnacle of the temple and behold the possibilities of religious progress and conquest, and all the progress and conquest may be realised by simply worshipping at some forbidden altar, or taking some ruinous leap. Blessed are they who have no imagination; they who know only the letter have no doubt, no fear, no trouble: other minds are all imagination, not in the nightmare sense of supposing that things are real which are non-existent, but in the high ideal sense of multiplying the actual into the possible, and that mysterious power which puts back the horizon and makes larger heavens every day. These are the men who are so various in mental action as sometimes to be accused by those who never dreamed a dream or saw a vision. On the other hand, it is within the power of the Spirit of God to direct the imagination which he has created, and in being so directed we owe to that imagination, some of our richest treasures of Christian poetry and spiritual thought. Evermore, therefore, the Apostle says you must abide in him.

John was familiar with this word “abide.” He caught it from the lips of the Master; he chronicled it as part of the discourse delivered by the Saviour about the vine and the branches and the husbandman; said Christ, “I am the Vine, ye are the branches; as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.” And when the Paraclete was promised, John says he was promised to abide. He came to stay till the work was completed. Some one must come from heaven to remain. Jesus came, and we hardly saw him before he vanished: and when he was going, he said, I am going for your sake, it is expedient for you that I go away; but I will send the abiding Personality: and no personality could abide with us that could be seen by us; familiarity would ruin even the ministry of God; Christ himself could have stayed so as to have survived himself: such is the mystery of all fleshly action and all fleshly contact and vision: we become familiar with it, we want some new wonder, some novel fame, some

miracle of revelation : blessed be God, here is one of the subtlest, profoundest proofs of the divinity or the inspiration of Christianity, that it relies upon the presence of the invisible, upon the action of the impalpable, upon the ministry of One who is called the Ghost, the Spirit, the fleshless One, unseen, almighty. Even if this be but a conception, it is one of the finest, grandest conceptions of the human mind. It is more than a conception to the Christian heart, it is a distinct revelation. Again John becomes gently practical :—

“If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him”—(ver. 29).

Here we have a claim which the Church has forgotten to insist upon. We ought to claim every good man as belonging to God—“every one that doeth righteousness is born of God.” Never admit that there can be righteousness outside the Church. You must enlarge your Church to take in all righteousness. If your walls are too narrow to accommodate with sufficient hospitality all the good men of the world, you must put your walls farther back, at what cost soever ; it is the wall that must be extended, not the man that must be kept outside. “Every one that doeth righteousness is born of God,” whether he technically and formally acknowledge it or not ; whether indeed he is conscious of it or not : we must not allow even human consciousness to be the measure of all things, we must not so exalt human consciousness as to outbuild God from his own human creation. God is doing many things for us that we do not recognise in all their simplicity and reality. Whenever a man lifts his eyes to heaven in religious expectancy, though he has no words, he is under divine influence. If a man shall say to himself, “I will try to be good, without having any connection with churches and religious organisations,” he cannot perform that miracle except God the Holy Ghost be with him. Never admit that morality can be grown in any garden but the garden of God. If you find good in heathenism, it belongs to Christ. If ever Confucius or Buddha or Mahomet spake one living, loving, true, musical word, it belongs to him whose are the riches of the universe. The Church must make larger claims. Do not take some ecclesiastical standard with you and say, “Except you come up to this standard you have no relation to

the Kingdom of heaven"; it is your standard that must go down, not God's kingdom that must be narrowed and humiliated. Along this line I feel as if God's ministers might house many who are apparently outside the Church, and who suppose themselves to be heterodox and outcast and alien. Nothing of the kind. If you ever yearn for your Father in heaven, take heart, hope on, yearn on: such yearning ends in vision and benediction. Once let the notion get rooted that men can be good without Christ, and the whole Christian argument is surrendered. Jesus Christ never allowed any good worker to go unrecognised. Whenever he heard of persons doing good, though they followed not with him, he would not have them forbidden; he knew that whoever was trying to help a child was in that form praying; whoever was struggling to shake down a boundary that he might enjoy a healthier liberty was really beating upon the door of the kingdom of heaven. This larger definition must give hope to the world.

"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" [literally, the children of God (iii. I)].

There is but one Son of God, yet somehow the Lord hath made his household so capacious and inclusive that there may be many children of God. What happens when human character is so sublimated as to be made akin to the very nature and quality of God? Agnosticism happens. Hear the argument—"therefore the world knoweth us not." This is practical agnosticism. The Christian is in his own degree as great a mystery to the world as Christ was. There be those who say they do not know God; and these same people do not know God's children. They deny their existence, they smile upon them as fanatics, they dismiss them in literary footnotes, they give them a humble place in the marginalia with which they adorn their literature; but they do not know the Christian, the man who prays, the man who trusts, the man who endures as seeing the invisible: that is as great a mystery to the worldly mind, whether it be mercenarily worldly or vainly worldly, in an intellectual and literary sense, as is the Godhead itself. Observe the same word is used "knoweth us not, because it knew him not": not "know" merely in the sense of recognising; not "know" merely in the sense of saluting, as who should say, There are certain figures there the existence of

which we must acknowledge, if we would not suffer our politeness to be extinguished ; not that kind of knowledge, social, conventional and complimentary ; but "knoweth us not" as to the secret of our action, the motive which impels us, the consideration which governs us. Christians are the misunderstood men of the world. Why are Christians misunderstood ? Because Christ is misunderstood. Why are good men not known ? Because God is not known. Only he who knows God can know God's children. Blessed is the time, come when it may, when God's children shall be such examples of moral beauty and nobleness as to confound the imagination of the worldly mind. This weapon is always left to us in the great spiritual warfare. We may be so good as to pass beyond the ken of low minds, worldly minds, vain, self-conceited minds. We can be so lowly minded, so longsuffering, so patient, so gentle, so forgiving, as to be counted fools. Wise are they who are fools for Christ's sake. You may not convince agnosticism or any form of scepticism or question-asking, by sheer intellectual argument, but you can confound all enemies by the sublimity of unselfishness, by consummating in obedience to the Holy Spirit the whole character of him who died upon the Cross to save the world. The fate of Christianity often seems to depend upon the character of Christians. Awake ! As the battle is ours, ours through the Holy Spirit may be the victory !

1 John iii. 2.

“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be : but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him ; for we shall see him as he is.”

PRESENT AND FUTURE.

JUST for one moment return to our last point, which was the agnosticism or know-not-ism which refers to Christians, as well as to Christ and Christianity. That point we found in the first verse : “Therefore the world knoweth us not.” That is the agnosticism that is often overlooked. People who want to be very mentally superb and shining think themselves agnostic in relation to infinity, divinity, everlastingness, supernaturalness, and the like, involving the whole genus and every species of polysyllable. The Apostle tells us that there is another agnosticism or know-not-ism that goes along with that—viz., the ism that does not know the good man. That is to say—the good man is a puzzle, a problem, a mystery, an impenetrable cloud of character ; nobody can account for his motives, or follow the range of his purposes, or understand that solemn and tremendous Cross that is at the heart of all his thought and action. Understand that men who do not know God, do not know the sons or children or disciples of God. The motive of a good man must be an absolutely inscrutable mystery to everybody who bounds himself by space and ticks off his little duration by time. The good man is to such an observer a fool. He is losing his life that he may save it ; he is throwing away seed with both hands in the hope that it will multiply itself and come back a golden harvest : oh, fool is he ! Why trouble yourselves about infinity when you cannot understand the good man, when you cannot understand your own saintly mother ? Why all this evolution into empty intellectual grandeur about the immeasurable and inexhaustible, when you do not understand your own companion in life ? Away with

your solemn fudge, and remember that you do not understand the very man or the woman to whom you are bound for life. This is humiliating, because some of us would love to pose as those who have not capacity enough to entertain the Infinite. That would be delightful to us, to lay our head back on some velvet pillow and contemplate the astounding fact that in our measurable breast there is no room for the immeasurable God. That would be something to talk about. But to be told that we do not know a good soul, in its motive, inspiration, purpose; that we cannot follow all its dream and poetry and idealism—it seems as if one ought to be able to understand another, but he is not. He who does not know God has no key with which to open anything; he is in the midst of ten thousand cabinets each of which contains gold and rubies and all manner of gems, but he has no key. To understand God through love is to understand everything else; then like God we take up the hills as a very little thing and handle constellations as if they were mere toys. He who lives in God turns the water into wine, raises the dead, makes flowers grow out of flints, in the wilderness sets up fountains of water. It is cruel on the part of any teacher or preacher to take away from a man the only idol which that man thinks it respectable to worship: such a fine golden idol, such a beautiful, noble-looking thing: what a felon is the true preacher! what a robber is he who is zealous for the living God! Even this old snow-haired patriarch will presently say, "Little children, keep yourself from idols." But what a port a man has as he walks along the thoroughfare to Parliament, to commerce, to journalism, and he says, I cannot understand or comprehend the supernatural. It seems a great pity to tear his cloak off when it is so bedizened with little daubs of gilt which those who do not know the higher metals mistake for gold. He who thus poses and imposes upon himself loses more by his non-religious knowledge than he supposes: he does not understand any good deed, any true heroism; he can only follow heroism to the higher grades of selfishness; when it lives thus and goes out to seek and enjoy inspiration and motive beyond the common ken, the agnostic knows no more about that motive than he knows about the supernatural, simply because that motive is supernatural, extra-natural, natural *plus*, nature in her best attire.

The Apostle is still talking about love, divine sonship, a possible future metempsychosis such as never entered into the dreams of theology. Hear him—"Beloved, now are we the sons of God." He who uses terms of endearment now is looked upon as sentimental. Probably there is only one preacher in the world that addresses his congregation as "Beloved," and he is sometimes thought to be fanatical: certainly he is apostolic; but perhaps to be apostolical is to be fanatical in the estimation of those who never get beyond the commonest prose in their interpretation of life and character and development.

"Now" is a term on which I should fix special and expectant attention. It is something to have a "now" in our religious experience. That is the sad defect of the experience of many; that is to say, want of immediateness of conviction, presentness of real feeling. We may be too much in process or transition or action to have a definite and nameable present identity; we may be so fond of development as to have no present address. That would not be development, that would be lunacy. What are we now? What are we in thought, in feeling, in purpose, in recollection? How does our character total itself at this immediate moment? Reflections of this kind apply to thought as well as to conduct. Orthodoxy is a growth. There is nothing abiding in orthodoxy. It never reaches a point except for the purpose of leaving it. Yet right thinking has its points, and the points never contradict each other; they are in succession, in regulated and advancing series, the one taking up the other and abrogating it by consummation. Thus the Bible itself is one, and Genesis and John are the same:—"If ye believed Moses, ye would believe me," said Christ, "for he wrote of me," and hardly knew it, sometimes did not know it at all. Men do not always know what they are writing or what they are doing. Every time a man passes his fellow-man he leaves behind an impression for which there are no words, and of which he is utterly unconscious at the moment; and so are the men through whose society he thus passes; yet a great work may be done, an abiding influence may be started. Sometimes we think that Moses would be startled, if he could hear us preaching evangelical sermons from the Pentateuch. That is what Jesus Christ himself did. Sometimes

the reader has to tell the writer what he meant. That is a mystery, but it is a fact. In the matter of thought, we are at a certain point now, and that point is the present orthodoxy: to-morrow we shall be a point farther on, then that will be the orthodoxy, and the man who keeps to the first point becomes heterodox. Whatever opposes progress is heterodox and unworthy, is selfish and worldly. We should take care that we do move, and that our conduct moves along with our thinking. To have high thoughts, and low lives, what a tenantry is that with which to crowd and decorate the soul! It is everything to know what we are at any given moment. The difficulty is that some people will not advance as quickly as others. They have turned religion into a kind of sighing for things which other men have forgotten. A child of two struggling with the alphabet, writing *a*'s and *b*'s of elephantine size, is a poem to look at, a right beautiful and wholesome thing all over; but for a man of twenty to be doing that is ridiculous, unless he is writing for babies, which in itself is a beautiful thing.

What is our "now," our immediate self-hood, our present active consciousness? John gave an answer, he said, "Now are we the sons of God." That word "are" ought to be pronounced with unction. Every part of the verb *To be* is juicy. Some other verbs may be dismembered in conjugation and lose next to nothing; in fact, we could do without the verb in some cases: but this verb *To be* is the spinal verb in all tongues. Whatever language you learn, first master the verb *To be*. All other verbs are little twigs of that parent stem. There could be no language but for this verb. Now *are* we,—not, we think, we imagine, we suppose, but we are inverbed, inlived, we are part and parcel of this very substance and quality. What a new view this gives us of religion! We do not now talk about the rise and progress of religion in the soul, we talk about the rise and progress of the soul in religion. If our religion is put upon us as a mere robe it may be laid off suddenly or forgotten sometimes, or it may attract the dust and mud of the world through which we pass; but if our religion, our Christianity, is part of ourselves, part of our very soul, then we have an immediate present of which we are not ashamed any more

than we are ashamed of the identity of the best aspects of our character.

“The sons of God.” We ought to be that. There is a tone of kinship in that definition. We do not know what it means, but it means what is right, and we feel it to be so. In the Revised Version we have translated “the sons of God,” in the first verse, into “the children of God,”—a sort of larger or more inclusive term: but “sons of God” will stand as carrying with it all possible endearment, all affectionateness of suggestion, all nearness of kin. Literally, Now are we the sons out of God, struck out of him like sparks; part of his very fire: see how the spark flies when the stone and the metal strike one another sharply! So we seem by a kind of friction to be struck out of God, sons out of God, carrying with us his quality, his Deity; we are partakers of the Divine nature.

What wonder then that the world does not know the sons of God? You must know the father before you can know the children. If you would know the father well, you must study him oftentimes through the children: the action is an interaction, now started from this point, now from that, but always going back upon itself in definite and profitable lines. The apostles were never content with the immediate present; they always said, There is more to be seen, there is more to be felt, there is more to be heard; we have not begun yet. It is thus we feel about the Bible. When we have concluded it, it is only that we may begin it again with new energy and new delight. The old student says, O spare me, Father of Light, a little longer! I would read again the roll prophetic, again I would read the psalter that resounds with the music of heaven: spare me that I may once more read the fourfold story of Bethlehem, and Calvary,—the endless story.

Hence we find the Apostle saying here, “And it doth not yet appear what we shall be.” He is still in the verb *To be*; he passes from the indicative to the future, but he is still within the same range; it is a question of being, identification, absorption. “What we shall be.” But are we not measurable? No, we are

not measurable. Can we not guess at the possibilities of development? Never. You never could guess the harvest from the seedtime if you had never seen the harvest. No man can imagine a harvest. Granted that he has seen one, then he can multiply it, he can fancy it still more abundant and still more golden, but given only the seedtime and a harvest never seen, no man could imagine a wheatfield, matured and goldened for the sickle: it is the mystery of growth, it is the apotheosis, the very deification of the agricultural idea.

“But we know.” John never leaves this point of knowledge. He always holds something in his hand; he has not got the whole chain, but he has got hold of one link, and that he holds as if he meant never to forego the treasure. What do we know? The answer is—“when he shall appear, we shall be like him.”—Why?—“for we shall see him as he is.” We see nothing at present. We have instruments by which we come into contact with space and magnitude, those instruments we call our eyes, but our eyes themselves are often glad to call in little helps, that through pieces of glass they may see the reality which they themselves unaided could never discover. So the microscope helps the eye; the telescope brings the worlds within the range of the vision. Who can see? Sight is not a question of the eyes exclusively. Sometimes we exclaim, “I see!” What is the meaning of the exclamation? is it an optical act? Nothing of the kind; it is a larger, an intellectual, act,—I see, I perceive, I observe, I follow you completely. That is the larger sight. “We shall see him as he is”: we have only seen him hitherto in appearances of a superficial kind, in facets, little aspects, transitory movements, but we shall one day see him, comprehend him, perceive him, grasp him as he is, touching his quality, his central virtue, the element that makes him God, and the Son of God and the Spirit of God. The old philosophical theory was that a man is turned into what he looks upon lovingly; that is to say, there were philosophers who would contend strenuously that if we looked at beauty we should become beautiful, if we looked at hideousness we should become debased by the sight. There is an element of truth in that theory; that element of truth finds its culmination, its glorifica-

tion in this very doctrine, of seeing God, whether the Father, the Son, or the Holy Ghost: and seeing him is to be transformed by the sight into the same image. But there must be responsiveness, sympathy; there must be a real love of the object that is gazed upon, or no action of that kind will ever be set up: else then those who live in mountain scenery would be men of the finest intellect, absolutely independent of all narrowness of thought; every conception would be enlarged, every outlook would be ennobled, every speech would be punctuated as by the mountain within which the birth took place. It is not so: or the florist would be the most beautiful man on earth. But you may so handle a flower as to do it merely for the sake of getting wages; then the flowers work no wizardry upon your face, they do not help your wrinkles into furrows for the reception of the seed of heaven. You must love your art, and you will be affected by it: love your flowers, and you will become beautiful, if not in form yet in spirit and aspiration, in desire after the celestial. Love your Bible, and you will become beautiful; not in form or in feature, but in spirit, in thought, in chastened feeling, in inspired and ennobled ambition. One day, we are promised, that we, being sons of God now, shall see God, and seeing him shall become like him; then shall come to pass the saying that is written, "God created man in his own image and likeness." Blessed Gospel! Without this music our lives would sink into monotony!

PRAYER.

FATHER in heaven, how wonderful is thy word unto the children of men ! how much there is in it that we can never fully see ! Holy Spirit, open our understanding that we may understand the Scriptures ; open thou our eyes that we may behold wondrous things out of thy law. Teach us that we have not yet begun to read thy Book : Lord, increase our light ; Lord, grant unto us that sensitiveness of spirit which omits nothing, but feels all the life and knows all the music of God. To this end do thou abide with us, Holy Paraclete ; dwell with us, take up thine abode with us ; call us thine. Help us to read thy Book so that we may become established in our faith, lest the slippancy of ignorance should deprive us of part of our inheritance in Christ. Thou knowest those who go about because they cannot rest, who are continually moving hither and thither because they have no soul-home in which to worship and in which to rest ; they would destroy or disturb our faith, or breathe upon its pureness some breath from lower places. May we know that thy Word is full, deep, complete, eternal ; there may we rest in sweet, undisturbed repose. To this end do thou send unto us thy Holy Spirit, through godly ministers, teachers, and friends, who shall be able to read the Bible to us ; yea, when we take it into our own hands may our minds be under divine illumination, so that we may see afar, and hear music which comes to us from the very temple of heaven. How rich is thy Word ! how noble in all grandeur ! how it stretches forth itself to every one, near and far, of every clime and colour and name, that it may bring every man home to God, to acquire his right status and claim the inheritance bought with blood. Save us from all ignorance, superstition, folly ; save us from all superficial views of things, as if we could judge anything by the outside and by one little moment of its history ; show us that our longest life is but the twinkling of an eye ; prove to us that we were of yesterday and can know nothing, and that not until we have been with thee countless ages do we even begin to be with God. Thus do thou chasten us, and ennoble us by modesty, and enrich us with the spirit of reverence, yet the spirit of expectation ; and fill our souls with good things from heaven. We bless thee for what little we have seen ; if we have multiplied it sometimes foolishly, thou knowest that we are dust, children of the earth on the one side, whilst children of heaven and eternity on the other ; pity us and smite us not in thy great power. Sometimes we think we have knowledge, whereas we have none ; help us to feel that we are only little scholars in God's great and everlasting school, where there is no vacation, where there is no time for frivolity, where all the ages constitute the first point of the span thou hast given us wholly to compass. Whilst we are here, help us to accept our little lot meekly and lovingly, and to work all the day right

industriously, not considering what we have to do but how we have to do it; and may we do everything for the Master, whom we call Christ, because he lived for us, and died for us, and lives again evermore for us, that from the fountains of eternity he may replenish the streams of our existence. Thus do thou give every man a new view of life and a new sense of responsibility. We have played the fool before God, thinking we knew when we did not know, and undertaking things we had no right to undertake, because of the littleness of our power, and our inability to do what was to be done. May we be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, always wondering whether we are not too ignorant even to pray. Lord, teach us how to pray,—how to put our own wants into words. We do not know our own wants when we hear them put into speech, the speech is so far below them, so wanting in the agony of their desire. The Lord help every man to do his work simply, kindly, meekly, and not in the spirit of an hireling; and teach every man that it is better to be wronged than to wrong, better to be treated unjustly than to treat any child with injustice. Thus may we all be good servants of Christ, willing, faithful, self-sacrificing, and deriving all our power from him who is the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. Thou wilt judge us at the Cross, thy mercy endureth for ever; thou knowest our frame, thou knowest all the weariness of our life, thou knowest our unspoken and secret troubles and sorrows, and thou wilt heal us with great healing, and wilt find for us balm in Gilead. Let our homes be beautiful places, though the poorest in the world; may they be beautiful with patience and heroism and self-sacrifice and all the noblest virtues and graces; may the walls be all hung round with instances of fine fidelity. The Lord hear us, make his word a new word to us. Amen.

1 John iii. 3-12.

“And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure”—(ver. 3).

PRACTICAL PROOFS.

SOMETIMES we think it is unspeakably comfortable to live in the society of John the Apostle, because he is so full of tenderness and love and fatherly clemency. He seems to have one subject, and to amplify it with the poetry of the heart; the subject of the Apostle is love:—Love God, love one another, love the brethren. In no other part of Holy Writ is the word “love” so frequently and tenderly employed. Yet, if we listen to John wholly, that is to say to his entire speech, we shall find that he is as disciplinary as James, and as doctrinal and practical as Paul. He has a way of his own in introducing practical admonition. It is the way of sacred cunning. The Apostle John never strikes a man down and says, You shall be good,

I insist upon it; if you are anything but good I will chastise you, I will hold you up to scorn, and you shall reap the consequences of your own wickedness even here and now, to say nothing of another place and another time. No such language does the Apostle John ever employ; yet, whenever he speaks of love, he makes it a kind of flowery road along which he passes, that at the end of it he may be practical in admonition; that at the close of his wondrous poetic exhibition of love he may state the moral, and enforce it with the omnipotence of tenderness. Sometimes we might think John almost weak in his way of speaking. It is not unusual to represent him as an old man, which he was indeed in years, borne into the Church when he could no longer walk into it, and to further represent him stretching out his hands as if in papal benediction, and saying, "Little children, love one another." That is only one aspect of his great character; none could sing more sweetly, none could drop his voice into a more touching and pathetic minor: yet who could be more like Sinai? who could hurl the Ten Commandments as if in one sentence with such tremendous force and unerring precision? We have just been revelling in the prospect of development. John has called us "sons of God," and said, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be," because life is a revelation, a continual unfolding and infolding, a marvellous and subtle and imperceptible advance, but a sure and inevitable progress: yet, looking over all the detail, he says, this will certainly occur: when our God appears, we shall see him with the vision of our love, we shall hail him with all the animation of our thankfulness, and the very sight of God shall transform us into the image of his divinity.

So the Apostle knew, and did not know. That is the very highest philosophy. To know precisely what we have and what we have not; to put the finger upon the possession, and then to lift it, and point to some other treasure not yet attained but sure to be possessed—that is knowledge, that is wisdom, and that is peace. There is no finality in Christian progress. What we know as heaven is only the beginning of our better being. We think of heaven as final, but heaven only opens; the brightest seer that ever peered through the clouds, and read the

apocalypse of the sky, only said: "Behold, I see heaven opened." That is enough: to see openings indicative of further progress, higher education, nobler life; that is heaven, and no other heaven is worth having. The formal conventional notion of heaven must be driven out of men's minds. We are either in heaven, or we are not in it, or never will be in it. Men are in heaven or in hell now; not in the full heaven, not in the intensest hell, but in our consciousness, our convictions, our spirits witnessing with other spirits, we know where we are. Some men are always talking to God. Others never speak to him; they chatter to the devil; they know his language, they like his style of speech, it suits the vulgarity of their soul, it sets fire to their worst passions and their unholy ambition. They never pray; what wonder if they dispute about prayer and ask if prayer is ever answered? What wonder that they tire of the altar? they were never there. He who has once prayed prays without ceasing. There is an attitude of prayer which is a posture of weariness: there is an act of fellowship in which the soul says, Disturb me no more, for I have come to the point of rest: here I would build my soul's tabernacle and here abide for ever.

The Apostle John now says to Christian men, You will know whether you have this hope in you by the degree in which you set to the work of self-purification. We will ask the Apostle to tell us by what signs we may know that we are sons of God. O thou sire of the Church, thou seer of the ages, thou to whose wondering eyes all heaven was revealed in pomp of glory, tell us by what tokens we shall know that we are sons of God. We expect him to give some sentimental reply, as who should say, Are you quiet in soul? do you enjoy a sense of luxuriating in the green pastures? do you know that you are walking by the still waters, the waters of rest, the streams of comfort? Nothing of the kind: he says, If you are good men, you will go with both hands and with all-growing energy at the work of self-cleansing. "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself." Here is John the disciplinarian, here is the poetry of love brought down to the prose of service. Yet in service, properly accepted and discharged, there is no prose: all work having a good object and a holy inspiration is poetry. When we lose the true idea of work

in any sphere of life we become hirelings, and serve with the narrow measure of eye-service and not with the affection and fire of the willing and assenting heart. Then the standard is accessible to every one. It is a practical standard. A man has only to ask himself such questions as, Am I really trying to get purer, tenderer, nobler? do I look as through a microscope at every spot that befouls the robe of my life, that I may get rid of it at once and for ever? have I relaxed my self-discipline? have I said, as a fatalist, I will simply take life as it comes, and let it work out its own consequence? or am I continually giving myself to self-vigilance and self-purification? If we answer these questions, we shall know at once and with certainty where we are in spiritual education and in spiritual prospect. This is reason; behold here, as in a thousand cases which have passed before us, we have our own method of life uplifted, glorified, and applied to its highest uses. In proportion to the measure of our expectation is the measure of our preparation. A man is going to a feast, he is going to sit with great men, he is for an hour or two to be associated with the best life of the metropolis: what does he do? We all know; he prepares himself for the event, he will not be out of harmony with the colour of the occasion, he will not appear without a wedding garment; he will even ask questions as to the etiquette of the occasion, that in no point he may fall short of the dignity of the invitation which he has accepted. O thou wicked and foolish servant, out of thine own mouth will I condemn thee: dost thou prepare for some social pleasure, and forget to put on thy best heart-ropes and life-garments in which to meet the King of Glory? I gather up all thy disused robes and rags, and say, Here by these signs I convict thee: thou didst prepare for little feasts, and empty banquets, and noisy revels; on no account wouldst thou walk to the feast; thou must needs ride in some hired, painted chariot: what preparation, what anticipation, what a desire to fall into the harmony and fitness of things! and yet see, O thou worse than beast of the forest, thou hast neglected to provide for the only interview which is worth securing and realising, the interview with thy God. The back-stroke of Christian appeal is tremendous. Christianity substantiates and authorises itself by reason. Christianity gathers up all our fashions customs, methods, and policies, and says at last when we begin

to stammer out some vain excuse, Thou wicked and foolish servant, out of thine own mouth do I condemn thee: thy tongue is the sword which shall be thrust through thy life.

By what standard are we to purify ourselves? The words are comparative. Purity admits of degrees; comparing ourselves with ourselves, we may be honourable men. The standard is—"as he is pure." Why, John must have heard the Master say these very words—"Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect; be ye holy as your Father in heaven is holy." He brings this flower, this lily, fairer than snow, from the garden of Christ, the paradise of the heart of God. Who can set up the ideal standard? We now say, It is impossible to do what Jesus Christ commands; he must have had some other meaning; when he tells us to resist not evil, we say he must have meant that we are, as far as in us lies, not to strike back when we are struck. He did not say so; if he meant that, it is a pity he did not say it. When Jesus Christ says, "When thou art smitten on the one cheek, turn the other also to the smiter," we say, That is evidently and obviously impossible; this is idealism, very limpid and extremely beautiful, a thought of translucent idealism, a very fine celestial light shining on the other side of it, making it almost transparent: but it is evidently the higher poetry. It is not given in blank verse, it is not reduced to hexameters. Count Tolstoi comes forth and says, All this means what it says, and if we do not carry out these propositions and commandments to the letter, we have no right to the title of Christians. It would be easier to reply to the Count than to answer him. "Even as he is pure." Is there no hope? Our hope is in believing that final purity cannot be suddenly snatched; it must be grown up to, attained little by little: "Brethren," said one, "I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." In that "I press" is everything. He who wants to be pure is pure; he who says he will endeavour by the mighty power of the Eternal Spirit to be as pure as God, has already begun the lustration that will take out of him every taint and stain of evil, a detergence infinite, complete.

After this the Apostle protests against lawlessness. He talks

of "transgression." "Transgression" is only a kind of theological term for lawlessness. John will not have any lawlessness, any eccentricity that starts on its own account and its own motion to work out some other spheres and heavens in God's universe. John lays down the law after having spoken thus elaborately and poetically of love. Read the fourth verse and onward, and you will find that John talks as if he had never heard of anything but law. John's mountains faced north and south; on the south all the midday rested, on the north what darkness, and yet what sense of massiveness and majesty!

The Apostle points his appeal by a historical case:—"Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother,"—literally, "who cut his brother's throat." Cut-throats are an ancient race. And wherefore cut he the throat of Abel? "Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous" (ver. 12)—a theological conflict. Theology has shed more blood than ever wicked kings have shed. Theology is often a man-hater and a man-destroyer. The *odium theologicum* is the most fatal stigma that can be attached to any man. We cannot overcome it or forget it. The sects are fighting to-day, and cutting each other's throats to-day. The spirit of madness is in the so-called Christian denominations. They do not love one another beyond the point of occasional conference, and the point of an occasional enthusiastic resolution which means nothing. This is another test of Christian progress. Let men drop all theological conflict, and say, Brother, you have as much right to think as I have to think, but, before either of us begins to think farther, let us pray. What unity there is in prayer! what diversity in opinion! Hear these theologues as they resolutionise one another. What statements, what anger, what holy or unholy feeling! so that we say, with the ancient poet, "Can anger dwell in such celestial hearts?" What striving for the victory, what protestations about orthodoxy and heterodoxy! When they come to pray, they say, as they bow, hand-in-hand, "Our Father, which art in heaven." Let us have no more conflict—let us pray without ceasing.

THE SECOND EPISTLE

OF

JOHN.

[NOTE.—“This Epistle is addressed *ἐκλεκτῇ κυρίᾳ*. This expression cannot mean the Church (Jerome), nor a particular Church (Cassiodorus), nor the elect Church which comes together on Sundays (Michaelis), nor the Church of Philadelphia (Whiston), nor the Church of Jerusalem (Whitby). An individual woman, who had children, and a sister and nieces, is clearly indicated. Whether her name is given, and if so, what it is, has been doubted. According to one interpretation she is ‘the Lady Electa,’ to another, ‘the elect Kyria,’ to a third, ‘the elect Lady.’

“The object of St. John in writing the Second Epistle was to warn the lady, to whom he wrote, against abetting the teaching known as that of Basilides and his followers, by perhaps an undue kindness displayed by her, towards the preachers of the false doctrine. After the introductory salutation, the Apostle at once urges on his correspondent the great principle of Love, which with him means right affection springing from right faith and issuing in right conduct. The immediate consequence of the possession of this Love is the abhorrence of heretical misbelief, because the latter, being incompatible with right faith, is destructive of the producing cause of Love, and therefore of Love itself. This is the secret of St. John’s strong denunciation of the ‘deceiver’ whom he designates as ‘anti-Christ.’ Love is, with him, the essence of Christianity; but love can spring only from right faith. Wrong belief therefore destroys Love and with it Christianity. Therefore says he, ‘If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed, for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds’ (Ep. ii. 10, 11).”—SMITH’S *Dictionary of the Bible*.]

1. *He exhorteth a certain honourable matron, with her children, to persevere in Christian love and belief, 8 lest they lose the reward of their former profession: 10 and to have nothing to do with those seducers that bring not the true doctrine of Christ Jesus.*

1. THE elder [signifies no official position, but is used to indicate one who belongs to the first generation of Christian believers] unto the elect lady [an individual Christian woman, Kyria] and her children, whom I love in

the truth [with true love]; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth ["Truth" is used five times in this Epistle, six times in 3 John. The best way of loving *in* Truth is to love for Truth];

2. For the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever [an instance of the *oratic variata*].

3. Grace be with you, mercy, and peace [a reference possibly to St. Paul's Apostolic salutation in two Epistles only (1 Tim. i. 2; 2 Tim. i. 2)], from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ [omit the word God], the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

4. I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children [some of the number of thy children] walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father.

5. And now I beseech thee, lady [I beseech thee, Kyria! Vers. 5 and 6 carry with them irresistible evidence of coming from the heart and pen of St. John], not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another.

6. And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.

7. For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. [The incarnation is here viewed as a present living principle.] This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

8. Look to yourselves [the emphatic *to yourselves* implies St. John's absence very strongly. Cf. Phil. ii. 12] that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.

9. Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.

10. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed [and good speed him not. The liturgical practice of repeating "the Lord be with you" after the Creed, as "a symbol and bond of peace" has been traced to this verse]:

11. For he that biddeth him God speed [the Greek form of salutation (James i. 1; Acts xv. 23.)] is partaker of his evil deeds.

12. Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink: but I trust [hope] to come unto you, and speak face to face [*lit.* "mouth to mouth," Cf. Gal. iv. 19, 20] that our joy may be full.

13. The children of thy elect sister greet thee. Amen.

NOTE.—The annotations in this and in the following chapter are taken from *The Speaker's Commentary*. (London: John Murray.) Strongly recommended as a guide in verbal criticism

THE THIRD EPISTLE

OF

JOHN.

[NOTE.—“This Epistle is addressed to Gaius or Caius. We have no reason for identifying him with Caius of Macedonia (Acts xix. 29), or with Caius of Derbe (Acts xx. 4), or with Caius of Corinth (Rom. xvi. 23; 1 Cor. i. 14), or with Caius Bishop of Ephesus, or with Caius Bishop of Thessalonica, or with Caius Bishop of Pergamos. He was probably a convert of St. John (Ep. iii. 4), and a layman of wealth and distinction (Ep. iii. 5) in some city near Ephesus.

“The Third Epistle was written for the purpose of commending to the kindness and hospitality of Caius some Christians who were strangers in the place where he lived. It is probable that these Christians carried this letter with them to Caius as their introduction. It would appear that the object of the travellers was to preach the gospel to the Gentiles without money and without price (Ep. iii. 7). St. John had already written to the ecclesiastical authorities of the place (*ἐγγραψα*, ver. 9, not ‘scripsissem,’ *Vulg.*); but they, at the instigation of Diotrephes, had refused to receive the missionary brethren, and therefore the Apostle now commends them to the care of a layman. It is probable that Diotrephes was a leading presbyter who held Judaizing views, and would not give assistance to men who were going about with the purpose of preaching solely to the Gentiles. Whether Demetrius (ver. 12) was a tolerant presbyter of the same community, whose example St. John holds up as worthy of commendation in contradistinction to that of Diotrephes, or whether he was one of the strangers who bore the letter, we are now unable to determine. The latter supposition is the more probable.”—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible.*]

He commendeth Gaius for his piety, 5 and hospitality 7 to true preachers: 9 complaining of the unkind dealing of ambitious Diotrephes on the contrary side, 11 whose evil example is not to be followed: 12 and giveth special testimony to the good report of Demetrius.

I. THE elder unto the wellbeloved [beloved, as in vers. 2 5, 11. The word occurs four times in this short letter. It is characteristic of St. John (1 John ii. 7, iii. 21, iv. 1, 7, 11.)] Gaius, whom I love in the truth [or truly].

2. Beloved, I wish [*or pray*] above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.

3. For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth.

4. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. ["Greater joy than these (joys) I have [not], viz., that I should hear of my children walking truly," *i.e.*, sincerely, as at the close of the last verse—each child so walking is a separate joy.]

5. Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers;

6. Which have borne witness of thy charity before the Church [*i.e.*, the Church from which they had been sent forth—the Ephesian Church to which they had now returned]: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well:

7. Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles.

8. We [the pronoun here standing markedly at the beginning of the sentence is full of significance. It is beautifully like St. John's humility to include himself in a confession of sinfulness] therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellow-helpers [may become fellow-workers] to [for] the truth.

9. I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them, receiveth us not.

10. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember [bring to remembrance. The same word in John xiv. 26. To bring "evil deeds to remembrance" is practically to reproach, bring to shame] his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious [wicked] words: and not content therewith [contented hereupon], neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.

11. Beloved, follow [imitate] not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.

12. Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself: yea, and we also bear record [are bearing witness]; and ye know that our record [witness] is true.

13. I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee:

14. But I trust I shall shortly see thee [I am hoping straightway to see thee], and we shall speak face to face. Peace be to thee. Our friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name. [May we not see a beautiful allusion to the Good Shepherd "calling his own Sheep by name?" (John x. 8.) These simple words are the last which we can trace up to the heart and pen of St John. Their quiet tender *individualism* form a fitting transition from the superhuman dignity of the Apostolate, to the more ordinary pastoral office. . . . A hush as of evening rests upon the close of the note].

THE GENERAL EPISTLE

OF

J U D E .

(SYRIA, A.D. 75, OR 64.)

[*Annotations from the best available sources.*]

[NOTE.—“The object of the Epistle is plainly enough announced, ver. 3: ‘It was needful for me to write unto you and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith that was once delivered unto the saints:’ the reason for this exhortation is given ver. 4, in the stealthy introduction of certain ‘ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.’ The remainder of the Epistle is almost entirely occupied by a minute depiction of these adversaries of the faith—not heretical *teachers* (as has been sometimes supposed), which constitutes a marked distinction between this Epistle and that of St. Peter—whom in a torrent of impassioned invective he describes as stained with unnatural lusts, like ‘the angels that kept not their first estate’ (whom he evidently identifies with the ‘sons of God,’ Gen. vi. 2), and the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah—are despisers of all legitimate authority (ver. 8)—murderers like Cain—covetous like Balaam—rebellious like Korah (ver. 11)—destined from of old to be signal monuments of the Divine vengeance, which he confirms by reference to a prophecy current among the Jews, and traditionally assigned to Enoch (ver. 14, 15).

“The Epistle closes by briefly reminding the readers of the oft-repeated prediction of the Apostles—among whom the writer seems not to rank himself—that the faith would be assailed by such enemies as he has depicted (vers. 17-19), exhorting them to maintain their own steadfastness in the faith (vers. 20, 21), while they earnestly sought to rescue others from the corrupt example of those licentious livers (vers. 22, 23), and commending them to the power of God in language which forcibly recalls the closing benediction of the Epistle to the Romans (vers. 24, 25; cf. Rom. xvi. 25-27).

“This Epistle presents one peculiarity, which, as we learn from St. Jerome, caused its authority to be impugned in very early times—the supposed citation of apocryphal writings (vers. 9, 14, 15).”—SMITH’S *Dictionary of the Bible*.]

1. JUDE [may be described as an anonymous name, a name only], the servant of Jesus Christ [rather, a servant], and brother of James [without

which relationship he would hardly have any identity. He does not claim to be an apostle; no man was an apostle that ever ignored that fact, the principal fact in any man's history], to them that are sanctified [rather, beloved; for that is the keynote of the exhortation which crowns the Epistle, —beloved] by [in] God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called [men bound by a threefold call: beloved, preserved, called: there was no mistake about their identity]:

2. Mercy unto you, and peace, and love [a threefold blessing to the threefold captivity] be multiplied [a rare word in the New Testament, coming in wave after wave, and ocean upon ocean].

3. Beloved [Jude is inventive, fertile; he almost alone uses this word as a designation of the saints: John used it], when I gave all diligence [both hands and my whole heart] to write unto you of the common salvation [the salvation which is common to us all], it was needful for me [there was a pressure of necessity upon me I could not escape] to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend [stand over and fight the foe] for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints [in the sense of once for all].

4. For there are certain men [with a tinge of depreciation, with the remotest hint at a sneer:—there are certain men: a handful at the most] crept in unawares [the controversies of the Church do not arise from within the Church; they are created by men who have crept into the Church without having any right to be there] who were before of old ordained to this condemnation [not a Calvinistic term, not the “before of old” which embraces eternity, or the “ordained” which involves any Bible decree: a purely historical term, and nothing more], ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God [negative men: “ungodly,” “denying.” The enemy always takes the easy part of the task; he builds nothing, so there is nothing to throw down], and our Lord Jesus Christ.

5. I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterwards destroyed them that believed not. [Jude goes back to very old history it takes history a long time to prove its own reality; it is the better for ripening: ancient history is the most modern.]

6. And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation [wandering lunatics], he hath reserved [better: he hath kept,—they kept not their first estate, but he kept] in everlasting chains [that they might be kept] under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

7. Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them [Admah and Zeboim] in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire [a quality of fire rather than a duration of flame: not a time term]

8. Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities [not of earthly dignities, for they could toast them

every night in the week; not royalties and magistracies: but spiritual dignities, upper ministries, subtle, eternal influences that play upon the soul creatively].

9. Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him [remembering his own estate] a railing accusation, but said [with an intelligible reverence], The Lord rebuke thee [I keep no lightning fit for occasions of this kind: the Lord undertake the case].

10. But these speak evil of those things which they know not [and they speak the more freely because of their ignorance: ignorance is not troubled with boundaries and laws of trespass]: but what they know naturally [the word "know" in this verse being taken in two senses], as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves [a present action—they work their own ruin: suicide is not only a question of blowing out the brains or stabbing the heart—they work their own ruin: many are suicides who would shrink from the application of the term to their particular cases].

11. Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward [they have been filled with envy and covetousness], and perished in the gainsaying of Core [the separatism that is pride, vanity, self-sufficiency].

12. These are spots in your feasts of charity [literally: these are rocks in your love feasts, wave-covered rocks: take care, for the ship may strike upon them], when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear [turning sacrament into banqueting, gorging, gluttony]: clouds they are without water [shapes, outlines, spectral hints], carried about of winds [even when there is any rain in them the wind comes and blows them away]; trees whose fruit withereth [literally, autumn trees, trees that ought to be rich with fruit: yet] they are without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots;

13. Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever. [Jude does not pause to say, "If I may change the figure": he uses all metaphors, holds them well under hand, and uses them for the more graphic representation of his ardent thought—"wandering stars": not comets; comets do not wander in any licentious sense: wandering stars in the sense of being cut off from the central fire, plunging deeper and deeper into the unfathomable darkness, "to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever."]

14. And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints,*

15. To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him. [That word "ungodly" seemed to fit Jude well. There are certain terms that are characteristic of certain speakers. He used this instrument "ungodly" with tremendous force.]

* See Note, *post*, page 408.

16. These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts ; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage. [They would applaud anybody they could plunder].

17. But, beloved [a repetition of the title in verse 3], remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ [thus again not claiming apostleship for himself] ;

18. How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.

19. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit [not a reference necessarily to the Holy Spirit, but might be read thus :—"sensuous, having no spirit "].

20. But ye, beloved [the third time], building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost,

21. Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

22. And of some have compassion [whilst they are disputing with you ; in the very act of expressing their doubt pity them], making a difference :

23. And others save with fear, pulling [plucking] them out of the fire ; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

24. Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling [more sweetly and tenderly in the Revised Version, able to guard you from stumbling], and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,

25. To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. [After that there could be no music.]

Jude 21.

"Keep yourselves in the love of God."

INFINITE LOVE.

I N the first verse we read, "Beloved in God the Father" (R.V.), —or, keeping the preposition as we find it, "Beloved by God the Father." Then the exhortation "Keep yourselves in the love of God,"—often read thus : Keep on loving God,—watch the state of your affections ; be very careful not to relax the grasp of your love as it lays hold upon God. That is not the meaning of the text :—Keep yourselves in the fact that God loves you, not in the fickle circumstance that you love God. The distinction is vital, the distinction is infinitely consolatory, the distinction is what we need every day to keep us right and to give us peace. Men cannot be lectured into love. Jude is

not telling us to be very careful about our love; for then we should be mechanics, artisans, interested in keeping our love bright and pure, and in an interesting state, so as to attract the Divine complacency—that fickle feeling that rules the universe so waywardly. This would be impossible and absurd. Yet this is the ruin of the Church; this it is that brings so many weaklings to profess Christianity. They are always complaining about themselves, as who should say, My love is weak and feeble, and I am afraid I am not in the right way; my heart misgives me when I think of my relation to God and eternity. That is blasphemy. Your relation means nothing, except in a very secondary and remote sense. What is God's relation to you? God does not change. The one thing you have to be certain of at the beginning is that God loves you, then leave it. We have had far too much self-analysis, personal vivisection, taking, so to say, the soul to pieces, fibre by fibre, and filament by filament, to see how it is getting on. We have forgotten that we have to keep or guard ourselves by God's love to us. His is an unchanging love.

What is the consequence of forgetting this simple but vital truth? The consequence is that we have an atmospheric piety: a west wind makes us buoyant in the faith, an east wind plunges us into dejection and covers us with a cloud of fear, wherein we say, The Lord hath forgotten to be gracious, and we seriously think of withdrawing from the Church. No man who belongs to the Church can withdraw from it. Certain men have crept in unawares, crawled in by the interstices, oozed in through the doors when they did not closely fit, crept in in the gloaming before the lamps were lighted: they will go out again; they would leave heaven if they could get into it; they do not belong to celestial quality or society, and they would soon discover the discrepancy between themselves and their circumstances, and they would first endeavour to create an insurrection, and secondly endeavour to creep out more humbly than they crept in. The consequence is that we have a stomachic piety; the question becomes, How is your digestion to-day? Given a good digestion, and we shall have a good creed, and a good hope through anything but grace of acceptance: given an ill-working digestion,

and we shall have fears and complaints, and sink into poor creatures and miserable sinners and unworthy worms. That is stomachic. It is not intellectual, it is not moral; there is no point of intelligence in it: these be thy worshippers, O dyspepsia! The consequence is that we have a circumstantial piety. Given an abundant harvest, and we stand up for the creeds one and all, for nine-and-thirty articles, and nine-and-thirty thousand articles if anybody cares to write them: the table is spread plentifully, the vineyard blushes with purple, the herd in the stall is abundant, and as for the fig tree, it droopeth, so heavy is the fruitage; now we shall have song and psalm, now the Church will be uppermost, and Christian fellowship will be sweet,—being but another aspect of personal covetousness and personal vanity. The true religion is that which continues to sing its psalm as cheerily in the winter as in the summer, as cheerily when there is no herd in the stall as when their owner can hardly count the cattle upon his hills, and worth gold untold:—Though the fig tree shall not blossom I will joy, yea, I will rejoice in God who is my salvation. As if the prophet had said, Mine is not a circumstantial piety, depending altogether upon my business returns, my agricultural success, my social promotion and standing: I believe in God, I guard myself in the love of God. That distinction has often saved a soul from death. Said a young man to one of the greatest Anglican ecclesiastics of this century, “I feel, Mr. Maurice, as if I had lost my love to God.” “That may be, but God has not lost his love for you,” was the reply. That saved the man.

We start the argument from the wrong point. A man of learning says he has been obliged after long studies to surrender certain points in the Christian faith, and inquires what he is to do. He must throw away his long studies; he is working from the wrong point: it is as if he had taken out a ladder, saying, I am in search of the stars. We cannot get at the stars by a ladder, we get at them through a telescope, and the telescope must be the heart,—love, trust, childlikeness, the very spirit of self-renunciation and self-disgust. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him: he will do nothing in the city without telling

his servant:—Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God: Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. A man who goes forth to keep himself right by what he terms “fact and logic”—the two great murderers of souls—will come home at eventide weary, disappointed, and full of shame. There is nothing so small as “fact”; there is nothing so detestably mean and irresponsible as what is called “logic,”—the little, narrow, syllogistic logic that is not reasoning at all, that lights a match that it may study the universe. We must get rid of this self-analysis and vivisection and pious consideration of what we are doing within: our creed must be—I believe God. Guard yourselves in God’s love to you. Then the Church will become healthy. We have times of trial: what is to be our answer to all the mysteries of probation that tear us and wound us and grieve us? What reply have we to the sharp-toothed tribulum that tears part from part of our nature? We must not offer in reply our own steadfastness, our own evidences of acceptance, or our own anything: we must oppose to all trial the love that God has for us in Christ Jesus. He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? In that God hath given us his Son he means to win, he means to complete the work he has begun, he means that he will never erect a pillar and leave it without a capital. Guard yourselves in God’s love for you, as shown in providence, as shown in the Cross, as shown in spiritual ministries operating upon mind and heart and thought. Entrench yourselves behind the fortress of the infinite love. In times of mystery what are we to do? Nothing is so easy as cloud-making. The enemy always tries the evil, easy, little task of asking questions, suggesting doubts, conducting processes of cross-examination; his only object being to bewilder the mind and distract the attention and unsettle the soul. There are mysteries enough to cover any heaven we ever looked upon, and to trouble the whole earth with long-continued night: what have we to do with mysteries? Nothing. Then what have we to do with? Only with God’s love to us. If we doubt that, then the whole life falls; if our doubts relate to God’s sovereignty, God’s fatherhood, God’s redemption of the world through his only begotten Son, then there

is no answer to us even in God ; we do not belong to God, we are ungodly, non-godly, anti-godly ; we have sinned against the Holy Ghost. In mysteries we rest on God. In all controversy we take no part. Controversy never does any good when it relates to the supreme subjects. It is useful in commerce, it is useful in politics, it is useful in intellectual education ; we must discuss, if we would come to broad and generous conclusions, all matters that come within the sphere of our understanding, and that can be handled by trained fingers : but controversies that relate to eternity, the infinite, the Deity, we have no part or lot in them : we know nothing : what little we do know in practical directions is only in part. Our prophecy therefore should be in part only, and our expectation should be wide as heaven, and more lasting than time.

Are we then conducted to a condition of indolence ? Are we invited by Jude to stand still, to do nothing, to throw ourselves simply in wise and tender contemplation upon God's eternal Fatherhood, and let all the rest take care of itself ? No baser interpretation could be put upon a good man's words. Jude will not give us the comfort unless we attend to the exhortation,—“ But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, guard yourselves in the love of God ” ; build, then rest ; edify yourselves in the faith, and then leave all consequences ; be industrious, and you shall be blessed ; attend to responsibility, and God will do the rest : he will never leave you nor forsake you. We have to proceed upon a policy of increase. “— building ” is adding, raising up, strengthening foundations that they may carry the whole superstructure with ease. Our business therefore is practical, not sentimental ; not to be examining ourselves, but putting ourselves out to work ; not sitting at home, saying, I wonder if I am worthy to go out to-day and plough the field. You have been suffering from poisoned air, you are not yet fully awake, you are half-dazed : go out into the fresh wind, seize the plough with both hands, and the rest will come ; your blood will answer the appeal of the fresh air and the sunlight, and you will come back with the hunger that is the beginning of satisfaction. We die for want of fresh air and for want of activity. No worker

ever complains; he has no time to complain: he has to find food for a dozen mouths; fifty little children are waiting for him and cannot go to bed until he has found them their supper, and he will go and find it: and will you suspect that man on the road wondering if after all he is accepted? No! When he goes on these errands he never takes the devil with him. But your over-fed and over-salaried Christian, and the man who has to pull down his barns and build greater, often wonders whether after all——, and then he is thought to be very humble, and though so wealthy yet so pious—it is a lie! He has his own idol, he is operating on the base of his own love; he wonders how far he is attracting the notice of God: whereas real, healthy, deep, eternal life in Christ says, God loves me, God stooped to die for me in the person of his Son, God has given me every pledge of his love: now what I have to do is to build, to edify, to grow higher and higher, to pray more boldly, and to live the life of faith, not to whine the sentiment of doubt. That would reduce the numbers of the Church, you suggest? So it would, thank God! We do not live in numbers, we live in quality. There are those who are ruining, so far as man can ruin, the Church,—not by argument or doubt or controversy or high intellectual ambitious thinking, but by representing to the world that a new responsibility has been incurred, the responsibility of keeping the garden of the heart, and watching it lest there should be a single weed within the enclosure. That is selfishness. On the other hand, if our assurance and absolute certainty in the love of God leads us to say, “Now I must live a life corresponding to that assurance,” then all is well; it is thus that the balance is wrought out. We do not warm God into greater complacency, for he so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son to die for it: we have not therefore to warm the Lord into some higher temperature of love, we have to work so as to redress the balance on our side. No man can have the assurance that God loves him, and yet be idle: if he be idle he destroys the assurance. The sophism is that he should look to himself first, and then to God afterwards, as if his sole business was to please God: whereas God has loved us, died for us, sent his Son to save us, and his Spirit to regenerate and sanctify us: and believing these things we say, “Having then, dearly beloved, these promises,

let us purify ourselves." Thus all self-attention comes from the highest motive, thus when we begin to examine ourselves we do so in the right light: not that we may please God when he comes on an unexpected visitation, but that we may answer God's eternal love with trust, simplicity, and beneficence.

NOTE.

"The Book of Enoch is one of the most important remains of that early apocalyptic literature of which the book of Daniel is the great prototype. From its vigorous style and wide range of speculation the book is well worthy of the attention which it received in the first ages; and recent investigations have still left many points for further inquiry.

"The history of the book is remarkable. The first trace of its existence is generally found in the Epistle of St. Jude (14, 15; cf. Enoch i. 9), but the words of the Apostle leave it uncertain whether he derived his quotation from tradition or from writing, though the wide spread of the book in the second century seems almost decisive in favour of the latter supposition.

"In its present shape the book consists of a series of revelations supposed to have been given to Enoch and Noah, which extend to the most varied aspects of nature and life, and are designed to offer a comprehensive vindication of the action of Providence. It is divided into five parts. The *first part*, after a general introduction, contains an account of the fall of the angels (Gen. vi. 1) and of the judgment to come upon them and upon the giants, their offspring (6-16); and this is followed by the description of the journey of Enoch through the earth and lower heaven in company with an angel, who showed to him many of the great mysteries of nature, the treasure-houses of the storms and winds, and fires of heaven, the prison of the fallen and the land of the blessed (17-36). The *second part* (37-71) is styled 'a vision of wisdom,' and consists of three 'parables,' in which Enoch relates the revelations of the higher secrets of heaven and of the spiritual world which were given to him. The first parable (38-44) gives chiefly a picture of the future blessings and manifestation of the righteous, with further details as to the heavenly bodies: the second (45-57) describes in splendid imagery the coming of Messiah and the results which it should work among 'the elect' and the gainsayers: the third (58-69) draws out at further length the blessedness of the 'elect and holy,' and the confusion and wretchedness of the sinful rulers of the world. The *third part* (72-82) is styled 'the book of the course of the lights of heaven,' and deals with the motions of the sun and moon, and the changes of the seasons; and with this the narrative of the journey of Enoch closes. The *fourth part* (83-91) is not distinguished by any special name, but contains the record of a dream which was granted to Enoch in his youth, in which he saw the history of the kingdoms of God and of the world up to the final establishment of the throne of Messiah. The *fifth part* (92-105) contains the last addresses of Enoch to his children, in which the teaching of the former chapters is made the ground-work of earnest exhortation. The signs which attended the birth of Noah are next noticed (106-7); and another short 'writing of Enoch' (108) forms the close to the whole book."—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible*.

THE REVELATION

OF

ST. JOHN THE DIVINE.

(PATMOS, A.D. 96.)

[NOTE.—“This book is styled the Apocalypse, or Revelation (*i.e.* the revealing or unveiling of that which had been hidden), as consisting of matters chiefly prophetic, which were revealed to John by our Lord Jesus Christ. This took place when he was in the Isle of Patmos, in the Ægean Sea, whither he was banished, as is generally supposed, by the Emperor Domitian, A.D. 94 or 95. Some, indeed, are of opinion that this happened much earlier, during the persecution of Nero, A.D. 67 or 68; but the arguments adduced in support of this opinion are by no means conclusive. Irenæus, Eusebius, and, in the 3rd century, Victorinus expressly refer the book to the age of Domitian; a view favoured by the testimony of Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Jerome, nor is there any other tradition in the early Church. Internal evidence also confirms it, such as the prevalence of persecution, and the great declension which appears to have taken place in the Ephesian Church, which as late as A.D. 62 was warmly commended by Paul, for the fidelity and love of its members. No book, it may be added, was earlier commented upon, nor is it surpassed in dignity and sublimity of composition.

“This book greatly resembles those of Ezekiel and of Daniel, both in form and in substance. It appears, indeed, to be a continuation of the prophecies of Daniel; but given with greater fulness of detail; the principal topics being the same, and the termination exactly identical.”—ANGUS’S *Bible Handbook*.]

Revelation i. 9–19.

IN PATMOS.

IN the Book of the Revelation of John, chapter 1, from the ninth verse onward, we have a personal experience. The Apostle John tells us where he was, what he was, what he saw,

what he heard, what he did. He tells us the whole story in his own name and in his own person. Anything that is autobiographical, when the person speaking is a noted or great or useful man, is ever intensely interesting and is likely to be vivid and piquant. The men who write in the Scriptures often write in their own personality. They give us a part of their own history; they vouch for their evidence. It is not second-handed; it is uttered with the frankness, sometimes with the abruptness, always with the sincerity of eye-witness.

How certain days engrave themselves on the memory! This would seem to be the day's work of the particular occasion referred to by the Apostle John. There are days of which no written record is needful. Their history is on the tablets of the heart. We could not write all that we heard or saw or did. Our completest narration is but a gathering-up of almost incoherent memoranda; we who passed through the living scene can fill up all the spaces, but when others come to read our words they will hardly know what we meant to convey, so poor is language, so empty is eloquence, so useless altogether is any yet discovered medium of communication as between mind and mind, when the very highest utility is aimed at. Every man has his own sunny day. There is always one day that shines more brightly than any other time with which the memory is familiar; there are days which may approach it in glory, still it stands out with a radiant singularity that can never be mistaken. Every soul has its own misery—the recorded woe that even the most eager and fullest joy cannot obliterate: it may have been a disappointment, a loss, or a bereavement, it was an overturning of the lot, it was the first grave dug; something in it was unique, that never could be repeated. Having dug one grave you are used to it; you may now dig a thousand: but who can dig that first grave and forget it? There are heroic days, as well as days sunny, and days all night, times when great vows were spoken and great deeds were done and holy promises were carried into their fullest realisation; times when we said No to the devil—a great heart-No that falls upon the tempter, like a bomb from heaven, under which he reels and retires, at least for a season.

John refers to a memorable day he had. It was also in a place which he made memorable, in the isle called Patmos—a Mediterranean isle which owes all its fame to its prisoner. The place would have been forgotten but for John, but through John it is glorified for ever; it is the isle we would like to see, it is a kind of sanctuary in the ocean. Whatever Christianity touches it glorifies. Wherever you find the deepest human experience of Christianity you find place and time memorialised for ever. What if this little earth owe all its fame among the stars to the fact that once there was set up on its rocks the Cross of Christ? Astronomy would never save the earth from contempt. Astronomy takes no count of the earth; astronomy tells us the earth could be blown out and nobody would ever miss it; even our neighbours in the nearest planet would hardly know that such a puff of smoke had vanished from the clouds. We do not owe our fame in the world to anything astronomy has ever done for us; our fame as a planet all comes from Christ having been born here. He made this Patmos the favourite isle in all the ocean space, the very sunniest, dearest, sweetest spot on all the unmeasured universe of God. We memorialise places. Passing through some little or obscure village we are arrested by the legend that long years ago the queen halted here. That is the only repute the place has beyond its own boundaries. Yonder is another legend in a farther village:—Here fifty years ago and more the king planted this oak. Man likes something of fame, something of royal association and royal reputation; and so we put up our little signs and memorials indicating the stupendous fact that one, called monarch, halted here for an hour. What if the earth be spoken of among the other worlds as the place to which Christ went on his redeeming mission? What if the angels say as they are coming away through all the gallery of the stars, Now we are almost within sight of the little place where the Son of God was cradled as a Child?—hush! This may be so: why should it not be so? Certainly to ourselves there is no greater fact in all history, no greater confidence and certainty in all consciousness than that Jesus Christ lived and died and rose again on this very earth—whoever he was. The historical Christ cannot be laughed out of court. Even if the theologians were all disallowed, as witnesses, there would come up historians of an unsuspected type who would

declare that one called Jesus Christ did live, was born, was developed, was taught, himself instructed others, and was finally put to death on the Cross. All these facts are glorified and continued by Christian interpretation: and this being the case what world can there be amid all the constellations so brilliant in reputation, so glorious, so pensive, yet so triumphant in its recollection?

John was in Patmos. He did not say he was in prison in so many words, yet he said it by very vivid suggestion, for his language is: "I . . . was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." We need not always in set and blatant terms tell our deepest and hardest experiences. There is an ellipsis in language more eloquent than the most cunningly devised succession of phrases. He was not in the isle called Patmos for the purpose of studying the word of God and entering critically into the historical evidences for the testimony of Jesus Christ; that is not the right filling up of this ellipsis. Why in the isle called Patmos?—for a summer vacation? for a period of rest? Was he there as an earnest discoverer, an explorer, a geographer? He says he was there "for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." That is how the apostles took their holidays. John was really in prison, Patmos was his jail; however beautiful it may have been or however dreary, that was his Norway: but the crime for which he was there, namely, the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ, took all the sting out of his residence. Whenever a man is sent anywhere for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, he is not in prison, he is not in Patmos only. Jesus Christ said "the Son of man who is in heaven" at the very moment when he was sitting upon the earth and was visible to spectators: and so John might have said—I was in Patmos yet I was in heaven; in the body I was confined to a limited island, but in the spirit I was with my Lord in the sanctuary of the skies, lost in contemplation and adoration, and preparing to return to the earth with fuller equipment as a gospel preacher. This is the explanation of how men are able to endure prisons. There are two causes which will enable a man to abide almost comfortably in prison. The one is a certain

sense of his guilt, and therefore of his deserts : otherwise the murderer could not live ; but he is thankful for his condemned cell. Thus extremes meet. The martyr could accept the condemned cell, and say, This is only one of the stepping-places, my foot is here for a moment, my next bound will be into heaven : what care I for this rock-prison, this place of humiliation ? I am here but for a moment. Thus, let me repeat, extremes meet. The self-convicted murderer says, This place is too good for me : may God grant that I may never see the light again ; I have offended against light, I have affronted every flower that blooms, every star that shines : oh, I hug this cell, I love it, because I have deserved its humiliation and its bitterness. The good man says, Patmos is but a calling place, I am on the road to wider liberty ; this is one of the necessities of the journey, and as the traveller when he has passed through a long career forgets all the mere detail of the road, all the dull little vexatious inconveniences, and brings back with him only the wondrous apocalypse, many-imaged and many-coloured, so when I am through this journey even Patmos itself will set into the right perspective, and I shall see all its growths and all its beauties as I cannot see them now. Say thou this, poor soul, now in poverty and trouble and disappointment, now in the agony of temptation and now in the bitterness of contrition. It is but for a moment, after that moment Heaven !

“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day,”—I became in the Spirit ; I got into the spirit of the occasion ; I experienced the joy of a new birth ; not a birth which means conversion, as if I had been doing something wrong, but a birth into a fuller, more vivid, and passionate consciousness. Who can interpret the word “consciousness” in all the fulness of its significance ? Who can tell what the word “know” really means ? We have a superficial meaning of it, and we are often victimised by the very superficiality of our notion : but we cannot know through the intellect alone, we can only know when the whole man is on fire, when every finger becomes a medium of communication between us and the stars, when every hair of the head is turned into a channel through which God pours some blessing, when all the blood is a-boil with heavenly flame.

When we are in a paroxysm, then only can we know what life is, or man, or God. "In the Spirit" means in sympathy with the Divine, in touch with the Infinite, in the conscious presence of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; in a passion, in an ecstasy ineffable. Some persons have never been in that ecstasy, and therefore they are not fit to criticise it. It is not given to every man to realise the fulness of himself. Therefore we have but few prophets, few poets, few diviners to whom all time lies bare as to the issues of providence and history. Is it for men whose blood was never aflame to criticise the prophets? What could a man of ice make of Isaiah all fire? Never call upon winter to bear testimony to summer, or to offer any opinion at all about summer; never call for a man who did never for one moment realise the higher passion to tell you what he thinks of seraphic Isaiah or glowing Ezekiel or apocalyptic Daniel: the men live in different universes, and no telegraph has been laid between the immeasurable distances. John was "in the Spirit," in the paroxysm, in the ecstasy; he was a transformed and translated man; he had shuffled off his old and little self and gone onward to his angelhood. Sometimes we have had glimpse of such possibilities, and our eyes could not bear that stinging light long; we desired to be permitted to return to our customary atmosphere that, in our usual commonplace, we might beat out the remainder of our pulsations. Yet when men have suffered for us in this way we should be grateful to them; we should be thankful to the prophets who have undergone the divine madness that we might know something of the divine wisdom; we should count our great intercessors men, who hold the key of prayer, as amongst the greatest benefactors of the race. When we ourselves are dumb with sorrow we go to David and say, Pray for us: thou knowest the road to the throne, thou hast the speech of the heavens at command: oh, find for this agony words worthy of its sorrow! Do not imagine that all men are equal, or that all men live upon one spiritual plane, or that all men are gifted with a common consciousness. We must always have a consecrated and ardent ministry of prophecy, of poesy, of philosophy, of theology, of devotion: these be the ministers of God, however varied their gifts, or divergent their manner.

“I was in the Spirit . . . and heard.” Mark the sequence. This is not a succession of literal words; this is an oncoming of real, natural, if you please supernatural, consciousness. I was silent, I was solitary, I was in the Spirit, I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard. You can only hear when you are in the Spirit. You expect ministers to perform miracles for you. If you enter a place of worship directly and immediately from the market-place without a preparatory thought concerning the sanctuary or the altar, and expect some poor human creature to take hold of you, and in a moment translate you into the higher consciousness, you are expecting miracles where you have no right to expect them. He who comes into the sanctuary “in the Spirit” will hear. He will hear for himself, he will hear what no other auditor hears. Every man hears his own sermon: every man hears his own gospel: the discourse is one, but the interpretation of it by a thousand men is a thousandfold. No one man can report the sermon! He can report the letter, but what a thousand hearts thought and felt about it at the time must be subject for talk in other and larger spaces.

I heard “a voice,” “a great voice,” “a great voice, as of a trumpet.” Have we ever heard that voice in history before? Never. What voice have we heard? A gentle, tender, insinuating voice, persuasive; it never lifted itself up in the streets, or made itself heard in startling cry. Yet we always knew that there was no voice like it. We felt sometimes that when that voice gave itself its fullest power it could call the universe to order; nay, it must have made the universe. There was a quality in it we never heard before, there was an undulation in its music which meant mountains and waves and valleys and wonders of nature; sometimes there was for one brief moment a loftiness in it which curled around the stars as if by right of proprietorship. Now that the body is away, now that the grave has had its poor little banquet, now that death has been worsted, we shall hear that voice. Tell us, thou seer of visions, what the voice was like. He says it was “as of a trumpet.” Any other figure? Yes—it was “as the sound of many waters.” There was a clear blast in it, a ring, a resonance, that made the mountains leap and the rocks vibrate and the stars pulse as if hastened

in their courses ; and there was a softness, a roll and plunge and splash—gentle, soft, mighty, tremendous. Now the Son of God is coming to the fulness of his power. We saw the grain of mustard seed, now we see the full-grown tree ; we heard the infant's cry of weakness, now we hear the thunder of the divine power. This is how revelation will always proceed. We shall have higher and higher revelation, broader and broader light, ever-increasing space : and there will be no noise when God rolls back the horizon, and gives us to feel that growing life is growing liberty.

What was he like ? “ His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow ; and his eyes were as a flame of fire ; and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace and his voice as the sound of many waters. . . . His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.” Then who was he ? Not Jesus, because we read of Jesus in another book, and we heard there that he was “ as a root out of a dry ground : he hath no form nor comeliness ; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men ; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief : and we hid as it were our faces from him ; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.” We have read of the coming Messiah, and the prophet said his countenance was marred more than any man's : and now over the grave his countenance is “ as the sun shineth in his strength,”—the sun's sun. This is right. The beauty was in him ; it needed to be brought out. Everything about Christ was crushed down by the flesh, by space and time, by all the limitations inherent in the present existence. But the moment he passed over the little black line he was himself, his very self ; still the Son of man, still the Son of God.

Revelation ii. 1-7.

“Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name’s sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.”

LETTER TO EPHEBUS.

I.

THE Head of the Church has a minute knowledge of all the services of his people. First. There is distinguished labour. “I know thy works, and thy labour.” The church at Ephesus had been a working church. It had been operating on the surrounding regions of depravity, darkness, and death. In its early life it was eminently an aggressive church. For my own part, I would have Christ’s Church as ambitious as Alexander. As he waved his battle-flag over a conquered world, so would I that the Church might unfurl the banner of a nobler conquest over every nation, and kindred, and people, and tongue.

Second. There is distinguished patience. The “patience” is twice referred to. This patience may be understood as indicating long-suffering in relation to those by whom the saints in Ephesus were surrounded—long-suffering, both in waiting for the germination of the seed which they had sown in many tears, and in the meek endurance of fiery trials. God specially marked this

excellence. This meekness of love was known to the Head of the Church; and this suffering in silence was as acceptable as a chorus of praise. The point to be noted here is, that Christ is mindful, not only of the outward manifestations of the spiritual life—such as many labours and many offerings—but also of the hidden graces which cluster round the heart. He sees not only the moral warrior brandishing his sword in the thickest of the battle, but also the wounded and suffering soldier; and sweetly says to such, “I know thy patience.” We are too prone to attach high value exclusively to the conspicuous, the declarative, the many-tongued: we must, indeed, prize these as necessary in the assertion and maintenance of great principles; but let us never forget that, what garlands and diadems soever may adorn the heads of the great leaders in moral actions, there is a brilliant crown on the brow of holy, much-enduring, silent patience. It is often easier to fight than to be patient. This backwardness in having patience may be seen not only in the higher ranges of Christian life, but in the lower levels of philanthropic service. If it fall to your lot, for example, to sit through the cheerless day and the dreary night with a loved one who is in the grasp of a fell disease, many friends will offer to join you, if, as they say, they can be of any use: but what do they mean by being of “use”? Often they mean merely so long as they can be actively engaged: keep them in an excited state of action, and all will be well. But how few can quietly and reverently sit still, and watch in loving and hopeful patience the placid countenance of silent suffering! How few can tone themselves to the high strength of doing everything by doing nothing! Patience is undervalued by an excited world; but Jesus notes it in its long vigils, marks it trimming its dim lamp in the solemn midnight, and sweetly whispers his word of commendation, which is always invigorating as the breath of immortality.

Third. There is distinguished jealousy for the right. “Thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars.” It must ever be remembered that there is a spurious charity. It is morally impossible that Christians and anti-Christians can have any sympathetic fellowship. Can trumpet blast be

clearer than this?—"What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you." The Head of the Church applauds the saints in Ephesus, because they could "not bear them which are evil." There is, indeed, large scope for the exercise of Christian charity, and it is sometimes difficult to determine where her loving streams shall pause; but there is a "hitherto" even to the tides of charity. Woe unto the Church when moral distinctions are lightly regarded! To confound light with darkness, sweetness with bitterness, is to mock the first principles of holy government, and to destroy for ever the possibility of holy brotherhood. While, therefore, we would not presumptuously ascend the judgment-seat, we believe it is impossible to burn in too deeply the line which separates the sympathy of compassion from the sympathy of complacency.

Fourth. There was distinguished persistence in the right course. "And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted." In a Church correctly described by such language there may have been extraordinary fortitude, and this fortitude been attended with singular joyousness and cordiality. The eulogium might be read thus:—"I know thy labour, and yet thou dost not labour, *i.e.*, thou dost not make a labour of thy duties;" in such case duty was not a hard taskmaster. There was such a sunny joyousness and musical cordiality about these saints, that they came to their work—work so hard—with the freshness of morning, and under their touch duty was transformed into privilege. There is a lesson here for Christian workers through all time. Some men have the most unhappy art of turning every service they render into hard toil. When work is done with the hand only, it is invariably attended with much constraint and difficulty; but when the heart is engaged, the circle of duty is run with a vigour that never wearies and a gladness which never saddens. Not only so, the Ephesian saints eminently succeeded in uniting patience with perseverance. They were not only patient in suffering, but

patient in labour. They did not expect the morning to be spring and the evening to be autumn, but, having due regard to the plan of divine procedure, combined in wise proportions the excitement of war with the patience of hope. Among ministers in particular I have noticed two evils in the matter of exercising patience,—some exercising it too little, and others exercising it too much. A young minister, fired with a heroic enthusiasm, expects to extinguish the devil and his angels in the first twelve months of his ministry; and because at the end of that period the devil and his angels are just as actively assiduous as ever, he throws up his pastorate and seeks a new battle-ground. An old minister, to whom the vision has long been closed, and the testimony sealed, who has not a new idea to present, can keep his hold of the pulpit as though he could convince the very pews of sin, and turn the very lamps into saints. Both err. There is something fundamentally wrong in each case; yet not so far wrong in the impetuosity as in the obstinacy. The Ephesians were right: they blended persistence with patience, and were extolled by him who knew the hardest toil, and exemplified the most uncomplaining endurance. The fundamental point is, that Christ knew all this. "I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience." "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him." Though our Head is in heaven, not a service rendered in his name escapes his benignant notice. There is not a toiler in the vineyard on whose bent form the Master looks not with approbation. He sees the sufferer also. All that he observes influences his mediation, so that in every age "He tempereth the wind to the shorn lamb."

Such is the opening of the letter. It opens as with the noise of many waters. Here is a very cataract of eulogium. The bounding waters flash back the light of yonder countenance, and the very spray dances into rainbows. I would fain linger here; but there is a "nevertheless" which I would gladly escape; still duty calls for the unwelcome second point, viz.,—

II.

That the Head of the Church marks every declension of

piety,—“Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee ; because thou hast left thy first love.” Let me draw your special attention to the manner in which this “nevertheless” is introduced. In the first instance, Jesus acknowledges, with most ample commendation, all the good deeds which had been done by the Church. He gathers all the bright and beautiful flowers of service and suffering, and having wreathed these into a garland, places it upon the chief of the church, and then gently whispers—so low, methinks, that no enemy could overhear—“Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee.” This method of reproof is eminently suggestive. It gives a lesson to parents. Would you be successful in reproofing your children? Let commendation precede rebuke ; let your “nevertheless” be winged with love and hope, and it will fly to the farthest boundary of your child’s intellectual and moral nature, and showers of blessings will be shaken from those heavenly wings. It gives a lesson to pastors also. Our words of remonstrance or rebuke will be more successful as they are preceded by every acknowledgment which justice and generosity can suggest. When the Master is compelled, so to speak, to rebuke his Church, he proceeds as though he would gladly turn. The rebuke comes with a hesitation which did not mark the eulogy. He resorts to a negative form of statement—“Thou hast left thy first love.” He charges his Church with a lowering of moral temperature ; the ardour and brightness of early love have waned. Paul is clear enough in his statement to Timothy that part of a minister’s duty is to “reprove” and “rebuke.” A difficult part for any man to undertake. A rebuke may be given with so rash and vengeful a tone as to create disgust and resentment in the offender ; or it may be uttered with so grieved and trembling a love as will melt obduracy into penitence. Rebuke is to be distinguished from coarse and brutal scolding ; it is not to be uttered with the frantic blare of trampled dignity, but with the solemn pathos of wounded affection. Jesus weeps even while he rebukes, and those sad tears carry the reproofing word to the innermost fibres of the heart.

Look at the declension spoken of. **First.** This declension is described as having begun in the heart. Christ does not charge

the saints at Ephesus with having changed their doctrinal views; but, placing his finger on the heart, says, "There is a change here." You know the enthusiasm of "first love." Love is blind to difficulties. She bounds up the steeps with alacrity and joy. She cannot be deterred from her purposes by any representation. Tell her of the river, and she answers, "I can swim"; remind her of awful precipices, the guardian walls of capacious and terrific sepulchres, and, spreading her golden pinions, she replies, with laughter, "I can fly"; tell her of burning deserts, on which no palm tree throws its shade, through which no river rolls, and her courage bursts into uncontrollable enthusiasm as she recounts the story of her past endurances. She burns up every excuse. She calls every land her home. "The range of the mountains is her pasture." "She rejoiceth in her strength; she goeth to meet the armed men; she mocketh at fear, and is not affrighted, neither turneth she back from the sword." A right royal force is this "first love." If any work is to be done in the Church—if any difficulties are to be surmounted—if any icebergs are to be dissolved—if any cape, where savage seas revel in ungovernable madness, is to be rounded, send out men and women in whose hearts this "first love" burns and sings, and their brows will be girt with garlands of conquest. Our business, then, is to watch our heart-fires. When the temperature of our love lowers, there is cause for terror. It is instructive to mark the many and insidious influences by which the gush and swell of affection are modified. Take the case of an admirer of his minister, and mark how the stream of love subsides. In the first instance, such an admirer thought that his teacher would ever play the harp of comfort or busy himself with abstract doctrines; but he finds that he has miscalculated—that his minister is master of many styles—that his pulpit is now a green hill, down which silvery streams roll, and in their rolling bid the traveller drink and be glad—and that anon his pulpit is an Etna, whose sides shake with surging billows of fire, and whence issue devouring flames; he finds that his minister can not only sing the sweet, soft songs of love and hope, but can command a sarcasm before which vice grows pale, and staggers with amazement,—that he carries a sword which has cloven many a vaunting foe. In course of time the

admirer cannot bear this. The minister is dealing too faithfully with his conscience. The man knows that he has broken both the tables of the law, and now that he is being smitten with the avenging stones, he decries the minister who was once his idol, and his fickle love is turned into another channel. Long ago a drum-headed lad said to me, "Your sermons make my head ache"; but he has never looked at me with a smile since I asked him whether that was the fault of my sermons or of his own head. Or take the case of one who has been distinguished for much service in the cause of God, and see how the fires pale. He becomes prosperous in business. His oblations on the altar of Mammon are costlier than ever. He toils in the service of self until his energies are nearly exhausted, and then his class in the school is neglected; the grass grows on his tract district; his nature has become so perverted that he almost longs for an occasion of offence, that he may retire from the duties of the religious life. Could you have heard him in the hour of his new-born joy, when he first placed his foot in God's kingdom, you would not have thought that he ever could have been reduced to so low a moral temperature. What holy vows escaped him! How rich he was in promise! He was like a fruit tree in the sunny spring-time, perfectly white with countless blossoms, and passers-by prophesied that every branch would be laden with luscious fruit. But look at him now; turn the leaves over, and with eager eyes search for fruit, and say, Is the promise of spring redeemed in autumn? Innumerable influences are continually in operation, which would cool the ardour of our first enthusiasm for Christ. Satan plies us with his treacherous arts; the world allures us with its transitory charms; our in-born depravity reveals itself in ever-varying manifestations; pride and selfishness, ambition and luxury, appeal to us in many voices, and beckon us with a thousand hands. Let men of rich, deep, manifold experience tell me how difficult it is to nourish and maintain our pristine love for Jesus, and how essential it is to fight our battles on our knees if we would keep our treasured love safe from the grasp of the arch-plunderer of the universe.

Second. This declension may be accompanied by an inveterate

hatred of theological heresy,—“But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.” The Nicolaitanes held corrupt doctrines, and indulged in corrupt practices, hence the Divine Head commends the church at Ephesus for protesting against such depravity; the point, however, on which we remark is, that while the saints were thus earnest in repelling a false theology, their own love for Jesus and his service was waning. The head may be right while the heart is going in a wrong direction. I am indeed anxious that we should maintain a Scriptural theology, that we should “hold fast the form of sound words”; at the same time we must remember that a technical theology will never save a soul; and that a mere verbal creed will never protect and increase our love for the Lord Jesus Christ. It is right to denounce heresy. We are bound by our covenant with Jesus to resist the devil, in what guise soever he may reveal himself. But beware, lest while you are hating the deeds of the Nicolaitanes your love is decreasing. It is not enough that you are able to put a multitude of heretics to flight; you must watch your love-fires, and continually supply them with the fuel of heaven.

Third. This declension evoked the most solemn warnings and exhortations,—“Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.” Observe the terrible consequences of heart alienation. These solemn words show: (1) that the Church in its collective capacity may incur the divine displeasure. There may be good individuals in the fellowship, yet the community as a whole may be under the frown of him who “walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.” (2) That the Church in its collective capacity must betake itself to repentance. This is evident when we remember that there is certain work properly denominated Church work. Take, for example, either home or foreign evangelisation. It is not my work solely as an individual to “go up and possess the land” of heathenism: but it is our work as a Church to carry the light of heaven into “the dark places of the earth.” It can only be done by individuals, in so far as they are atoms in a fabric—parts of a whole. If,

therefore, we have neglected to enter the door of opportunity as a Church, the cry of the angry Saviour is, "Repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly." (3) That Jesus will unchurch every organisation that is unfaithful to his name; he threatens to "remove thy candlestick out of his place." Such language may well make us pause. Organisation is not spiritual brotherhood. Tell me not of gorgeous temples, of skilful arrangements, of complete machinery; I tell you that you may have all these in an unparalleled degree, and yet "Ichabod" may be written on your temple doors! What is your spiritual life? Is your ecclesiastical mechanism the expression of your love? Is every wheel revolving by the breath of your sympathy? Is your heart the great motive power? I would turn you in upon yourselves, and in the name of Jesus adjure you to judge your hearts. Do this now,—not a moment is to be lost; you may lose your "candlestick," you may be unchurched, and your temple may become a pit for "the bittern and the owl to dwell in." We must determine our condition in the light of these assurances. The eye of Jesus is marking every declension: and as our love declines, his anger burns. There is a limit to his forbearing meekness. Those that continue to offend him shall assuredly "lie with the uncircumcised, and with them that go down to the pit"; and when he ariseth in his fury the earth shall stagger with amazement, and the sea shall retire from his presence. Oh, Church! hear the warning cry.

Jesus concludes his letter with words which warrant us in affirming,—

III.

That the Head of the Church has the richest blessings in reserve for all who overcome their spiritual enemies. "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." Almost every word in this promise is an idea:—"Overcometh"—the word tells of battle and victory. There is intimation here of an enemy. There is a hell in this word, and in it there is a devil. That your spiritual life is a fight you need not be reminded: every day you are in the battle-field; you live by strife. "Eat"—the word tells of

appetite. Desire is in this word, and desire satisfied. Our desire for more of God shall increase as the ages of our immortality expire, and yet increasing desire is but another way of saying increasing satisfaction.—“*The tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.*” These words are old ; they ring in the ear as familiar sounds, and such they are ; for hardly can we overpass the first page of the Bible, until we read of “the tree of life also in the midst of the garden,” and now that we come to the last pages, again we hear the rustling of its amaranthine leaves. It is but little we can say concerning such a tree : no worm is gnawing at its root, no serpent coils around its stem, no sere leaf trembles upon it as the prophet of a coming winter ; its every leaf is jewelled with purer dew than ever sparkled on the eyelids of the morning. A tree ! 'Tis but another word for beauty, for beauty walks forth in ever-varying manifestations. A tree ! 'Tis but another name for progress, for the circling sap bears through every fibre life and fruitfulness. A tree ! Shall we assemble around that central tree ? We cannot do so until we have assembled around the Cross. The Cross is at once our tree of death and our tree of life ; nay, the Cross is but the earthly name of yonder tree in heaven ; the Cross is that tree in dreary winter, shaken by savage storms, reft of every leaf, the throne of all-conquering death ; and yonder tree is but the Cross in the genial summer of the better land, bursting into leaf, blushing into blossom, struggling into fruit ; and I tell you that you can never stand beneath its branches until you have touched it in its old name—the Cross ! the Cross ! and having done so, you shall by-and-by approach the eternal tree, and you shall eat its precious fruit, and that fruit will be all the better for having been plucked and offered by your Brother's hand.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, we thank thee for voices that come from other worlds, bringing sweet music and saving gospels. We know thy word when we hear it. There is none like it ; that voice is as a rushing mighty wind from heaven. May we always listen for the voices from beyond, and reply to them with obedience and thankfulness. Thou hast set us in a great school : many are the teachers sent from God : thou hast taught us on every scale and according to every method ; thou hast addressed thyself to our understanding, and our love, and our conscience, and our immortality. In this great school we have had prophets, mighty men gifted with penetrating vision, charged with the thunders of eloquence, gentle souls that wept with us in our distress, mighty souls that could deliver us in our despair. If we have listened to common teachers when we might have listened to prophets, the good God of the prophets forgive us. Enable us always to listen only to the great, the tender, the wise, the sympathetic ; may we shed off from us all weakness, frivolity, pettiness, and cry mightily after that which is sublime, divine. We have a book of thine own writing in our school ; may we read none other, may we seize the Book of God and clasp it to our hearts, and read it with our inner eyes, and listen to no other. The Lord open our eyes that we may behold wondrous things out of his law ; may Christ himself open our understanding that we may understand the Scriptures. Whilst we are in the school do thou never leave it ; when we have done with the prophets may we be passed on to the angels, and evermore attend the school of God. May we be poor learners in the school of darkness, may we forget every lesson of iniquity ; may our memories be quick, vivid, tenacious in all matters in the school of the Father, and utterly forgetful of all things learned in lower schools. Forbid that we should be wise about the earth, and foolish about heaven ; able men in handling nothings, and fools in handling infinite quantities. The Lord give us sight, clear and penetrating ; the Lord give us eyes in our heart. Help us to show to the world that we have been with Jesus and have learned of him : write upon us the signature of thine approval as students of Christ : give us certificates and prizes from heaven ; may we be rich with assurances that we have not learned the Gospel of God in vain ; may we be as heroic in patience as we are heroic in service, may our resignation equal in brilliance any exhibition of fortitude thou hast enabled us to disclose ; may we add to our faith virtue, and crown the pillar with charity. The Lord look upon us according to our need ; our life is one long want, our days are supplications ; we awake hungry in the morning, at night we wonder what the day to come will bring forth. Thou hast put within us a very little, and that thou mayest take from us any moment ; we can only grasp according to

the breadth of our span, and our hand is so small there is nothing in it even when it is full: may our heart be a hand infinite in its grasp! We want the upper things, the better things, the summer of heaven, the beauty of eternity. Help us to pity those who have less than we have—less money, less strength, less enjoyment of life; who live in a cave when they would gladly swing and curve and sing in the firmament. Oh, the misery of the world! Its life is one long sigh; there is sighing at the wedding feast, there are tears among the flowers. Oh, the earth, the earth, the earth! scene of tumult and sorrow, despair and death. But is it not a redeemed one, though so little? Has it not been bought back with blood? Is it not the choicest of the stars? Is not the earth celebrated with infinite fame amid all the ranges of the worlds because it held the Cross? May we look upon the earth as a redeemed place; may we see at the root of every flower some drop of saving, all-vitalising blood. We thank thee for that red rain; the earth has never been thirsty since; behold, thou hast satisfied the longing of thy creatures, thou hast given thy saints delight. Look upon all those whose faces are turned down that their hearts may be turned up towards the heavens: fathers and mothers, widows, orphans, some lonely because the mother is dead, and some afraid to go out because the father's hand is missing. Look upon those who do not care for the morning because it can bring no brightness, and who are not afraid of the night because they have seen all that darkness can do. Oh the earth! the misery, the tragedy, the heart-break, the almost conquest of hell! Come, thou Son of man, Saviour known on Calvary, and turn the issue backward, and take thy place, for the crown is thine, since thou hast borne the Cross. Amen.

Revelation ii. 8-10.

“And unto the angel of the Church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”

LETTER TO SMYRNA.

I.

CHRIST reveals himself to his people according to their moral condition. In support of this assertion it is only necessary to read the superscriptions of the letters “unto the seven churches which are in Asia.” By the title or representation which the Son of man assumes, we may anticipate the revelation in which he is about to appear. His very names are vital with moral significance, as the very hem of his garment is impregnated with remedial power. A casual examination of the superscriptions will illustrate the point. Take for example:—

First. "To the angel of the church in Pergamos write ; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges." Given such a superscription to find the moral purpose of the epistle which it introduces, what may we expect from a Divine speaker who bears "the sharp sword with two edges" ? Can you expect him to utter words of gentle sympathy and consolation ? Would such words be in congruity with the attitude and weapon of battle ? From such a superscription may we not naturally infer a purpose to smite, to avenge, to "break in pieces the oppressor" ? You find that such an inference is justified by the exclamation of the offended Judge,—“Repent ; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.”

Second. "Unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write ; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass." Can there be any hesitation in foretelling the moral intent of such a superscription ? When the Son of God enters a church with "eyes like unto a flame of fire," that church may expect examination, scrutiny, trial, penetration that cannot be resisted. A glance at the epistle will show that the aspect and the purpose are in perfect harmony :—“I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts : and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.”

Third. "To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write ; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth." Is such a superscription at all enigmatical ? He who lays his hand upon the doors of the universe, and bears upon his shoulder the key of David, is surely about to commission his saints to arise and grasp some opportunity that is fraught with eternal blessing, to enter upon a course of service which will involve and sanctify the highest interests of humanity. Is such an anticipation warranted by the genius of the letter ? Let the letter answer :—“Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.”

Fourth. "Unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write : These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive.

The introduction prepares the way for a gush of tenderness ; such a reference to the most pathetic facts of his earthly history must anticipate a stream of infinite pity and tenderness, and that such anticipation is realised will be seen as we proceed. The Church in Smyrna was a suffering Church. It sat in the dust, and its lamentations were turned into mockery by a malicious and triumphant foe. Its history was one of toil and tribulation, and the prophetic throbs of the coming time foretold suffering, imprisonment, and death. The Church assumed a mourner's attitude and gathered sackcloth round its trembling frame ; and to such a Church how could the Saviour come, but in the tenderest aspect of his holy and blessed nature ?

Enough, then, may be seen from these four examples to, support the assertion that Christ reveals himself to his people according to their moral condition ; and when I say to his people, I mean to the saint alike in his individuality and in his confraternal relationship. In this, I am persuaded, we have an explanation of the varying experience of the Christian, and of the diversified and changeful mission of the Church. To one man, or to one Church, Christ presents himself bearing "the sharp sword with two edges" ; to another, with eyes blazing with penetrating light ; to another, as holding the key of opportunity ; and to another, as grasping infinitude, and girt with the memorials of death and the pledges of ascension. It is possible to have all these, and many more, visions of the selfsame Saviour. Our apprehensions of his identity are regulated by our moral conditions, so that every man has only to declare what aspect of Christ he beholds, in order to declare the attitude and tone of his own soul. With this before us as a general principle, it will not be difficult to show how such a superscription would animate and sustain the Church in Smyrna. The reasonings of that Church might easily fall into some such form as this :—

First. As our Saviour is the First and the Last, all things must be under his dominion.

"The First."—Who can reveal the mystery of these words, or number the ages we must re-traverse, ere we can behold the first gleam on that horizon which encircles God as an aureole of un-

waning light! The expression takes us back over immeasurable gulfs in which the centuries have sunk; we wing our way beyond the dust of every empire; pass every orb which burns in mysterious silence in the domes of creation; penetrate far beyond the sound of the song of the oldest seraphim; we enter the solemn pavilion of the unpeopled infinitude; no voices sing, no footfall resounds, no heart throbs; we stand trembling at our own temerity in the palace of the solitary God,—in a silence so terrible that it speaks; we are there, before the “Be” of infinite power has hurled the orbs through the silent voids; all this, and infinitely more, we must realise in order to attain the dimmest apprehension of the mystery of being the First.

“The Last.” Another mystery! This expression bears us onward until the surging sea of life is for ever hushed, until the divine government has answered all the purpose of Infinite Wisdom. Over what cemeteries we must pass, I know not; we must advance until the Creator exclaim from his throne, as the Redeemer cried from the Cross, “It is finished!” Thus far must we go, or remain for ever in ignorance of the secret which vitalises the declaration, “I am the Last.” Now see how the eyes of the suffering ones brighten! Their reasonings are set to music. “As our Saviour,” say they, “is the first and the last, all things must be comprehended in his dominion.” If we look back, beyond the birth of time, or the worship of angels, or the fabrication of worlds, behold, he stands in solitary sovereignty—divine, yet human—a God in the silence of his own unity, yet a slain Lamb receiving in anticipation the adoration of a grateful universe: and if we look forward, we behold him in the far-off horizon, King of kings, and Lord of lords, crowned with unnumbered crowns, human as when on earth, yet divine as in the unbeginning eternity.

Second. As our Saviour was dead and is alive again, so we, who are now enduring the fellowship of his sufferings, shall know the power of his resurrection. The process is—suffering, death, resurrection: all who follow Christ pass this discipline. The story of the resurrection is far from having been fully told. The angel sitting at the head of the grave could tell us much more, could we but command the courage to listen to the radiant

messenger. "I was dead." The counsels of eternity are epitomised in this declaration. The problem over which the ages bent in perplexity—at which they looked again and again in the wonder of a great agony, and which they bequeathed to posterity with a hope that was broadly streaked with the blackness of despair—is, in reality, solved by this fact. All the love which glows in the infinite heart is expressed in words so simple,—“I was dead”—“Alive again.” Let me inquire around what centre the Church assembles. Do you hasten to reply, The Cross? I answer, Not there only. The Cross first, but afterwards the grave! “If Christ be not risen from the dead, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.” In the centre of the Church is an empty tomb, and to a doubting world the Church can ever answer, “Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” And, “seeing” it, what then? Why, from the sacred rock a living stream breaks, and as the countless multitudes drink, they exclaim, “These are the waters of immortality.”

Need more be said to establish the congruity between the method of revelation and the moral condition of the Church in Smyrna? Could suffering have been approached with greater tenderness? Never was Grief asked to look through her weary and swollen eyes at an image so beautiful and inspiring as this; and all the saints of God who are called to the discipline of pain may gaze on the same aspect. When thou art in sadness, O child of God, go, see the place where the Lord lay; when all thy aspirations darken into clouds, and hang heavily around thee, go, see the place where the Lord lay; when thy questionings, and wonderings, and yearnings beat back upon the soul whence they issued, finding no rest on earth, no entrance into heaven, go, see the place where the Lord lay; and as thou art gazing in thickening perplexity on the forsaken rock, a voice, tremulous with music which cannot be described, shall, by the sympathetic pronunciation of thy name, recall thy fondest memories, and unseal the fountains of unutterable love.

II.

Christ assures his people that he is intimately acquainted with every feature of their history. “I know thy works, and

tribulation, and poverty." You can conceive the thrilling joy with which these words would be heard by the suffering saints of Smyrna. It is something to know that every wound, every pang, every sorrow we endure for Christ is perfectly known to him, who carried our sorrows and bare our sicknesses. How deep soever the secrecy in which your tears are showered, the eye of Jesus is full upon you in every crisis of woe; and when, in the bitterness of imagined solitude, you exclaim, "Oh, that I knew where I might find him!" He reveals himself through the darkness of your grief, and says, with his own infinite gentleness, "I know, I know." Is not that enough? The "I know" of love is the smile of God. There is a child, let us suppose, who is called to suffer much on behalf of his father; that father is in a position which enables him to observe every action of the sufferer, without the sufferer himself being immediately aware of the paternal supervision. The watcher marks how bravely his boy conducts the defence; how he resists every blow, and hurls back every bolt, having first made it hot by his eager grasp, on the head of his enemy; sees the quiver of his lip, and the gleam of his eye, and all the passion of his insulted love; and as the suffering child looks around in his weakness, and pants for greater power, the strong and all but adoring father clasps him to a grateful breast, and interrupts the hurried utterance of the weary one by saying, "I know, I know." And it was well he did know, for among the many things which must be seen to be appreciated, filial heroism occupies no obscure place. You may tell that the lip quivered,—but to have seen it! You cannot describe the flush of passion in words worthy of its warmth: your own eye must be upon it, and you must immediately receive the mystery into your own wondering and thankful heart. Men make but poor work of painting a sunset; and a thunderstorm is never so degraded as when it is talked about. Thank God! Jesus sees our sufferings, is present in the cloud of our sorrow, needs not to be told what the soul has undergone, but breaks in upon the gathering darkness with words which bring with them the brightness and hope of morning, "I know, I know."

The fact that Jesus knows all that we suffer for him should

serve three purposes :—(1) It should embolden us to seek his help. He is within whisper-reach of all his saints. All the desires of the heart may be expressed in one entreating sigh—one appealing glance. The soul's necessities may be too urgent to set forth in words. We have seen a little child lift its tiny finger and point to an object which it desired to possess, and that outstretched finger has been prayer enough to avail with the loving mother. Ay, and there have been hours in the experience of every saint in which he could but point, or yearn, or glance, or groan, without uttering a word; and in such hours the heavens have often dropped upon him the most golden blessings. Seek the help of the all-knowing Saviour; he stands by thy side, only shrouded lest his glory might quench the flickering of thy frail life. (2) It should inspire us with invincible courage. As the presence of a valorous leader stimulates an army, so should the assured guardianship of the Son of God inspire every soldier of the Cross. The shadow of Christ falls upon us, and that shadow is stronger than a thousand shields. "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world," is an assurance which strengthens our faith that "if we suffer, we shall also reign with him." Does your courage fail? I point you to the Son of God, whose eye is evermore gleaming upon you. He knows your frame; he remembereth that you are but dust; he giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. You fail, but he never! "He fainteth not, neither is weary." I say, then, that his presence amongst us, and his consequent knowledge of all the circumstances which constitute our history, associated as that presence is with "exceeding great and precious promises," should inspire the saint and the Church with invincible and immortal courage. (3) It should clothe us with profoundest humility. That we can do anything for Jesus is a fact which should extinguish all fleshly pride. The true honour is that which most abases the carnal man. That Jesus should permit his Church to receive a single blow, which was intended for his own heart, is a circumstance which should not only awaken the most rapturous joy, but overwhelm us with the profoundest sense of our unworthiness to sustain so transcendent a dignity. He might have deprived the Church of this luxury of suffering in his stead; but it hath pleased him, in the infinite fulness of his love,

to permit us to be wounded for the sake of his name. The apostles appreciated their high calling in this matter of doing and suffering: when their cheek was smitten, and their honour insulted, and their name cast out as an abomination, their hearts were filled with ecstatic joy—"they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for his name." Humility and joy there held sweet fellowship. The voice of God and the history of believers upon this question concur in a loud and penetrating call upon all ages of the Church: "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." "We glory in tribulation, . . . knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience experience; and experience hope: and hope maketh not ashamed." "I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong." Such is the sweet assurance of Christ, and such the resulting experience of suffering saints. Are you a sufferer? To thee Jesus says, "I know." Is not that enough? The tear, indeed, falls downward, but the sound of its falling flieth upward to the ear of God.

III.

Christ reveals to his suffering saints the fact of their imperishable wealth. Turn your attention to the ninth verse, and determine which is its brightest gem. The verse is this:—"I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan." Can there be any doubt as to the most golden expression in such a verse? Look at the parenthesis, and you have it! Such a parenthesis could have been dictated only by the Son of God. How like the effusion of the Infinite mind! A volume in a sentence—noontide in a glance—eternal harmonies in a breath—heaven in a parenthesis! Often, in hours of trouble, I have looked at this sentence and its surroundings. It flashes upon one so unexpectedly. It is a garden in a wilderness, a song of hope mingling with the night-winds of despair. Slowly we pass over the dismal words, "Thy works, and tribulation, and poverty," and

with startling suddenness we overpass the separating parenthesis, and then—then ! Outside of it we have cold, shivering, desolate “poverty”; and inside “an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away” ! Think of it ! The very typography is suggestive ; only a parenthesis between “poverty” and “rich” ! And is it not so even in reality ? What is there between thee, O suffering saint, and joys immortal ? What between thee and heaven ? What between thee and thy soul’s Saviour ? Only a parenthesis—the poor, frail, perishing parenthesis of thy dying body. No more. There is but a step between poverty and wealth. The history of transition is condensed into one sentence, “Absent from the body, present with the Lord.” Let the parenthesis fall, and you will see him as he is. Sometimes, indeed, it becomes, as it were, transparent, and the saint has seen the coming wonders, while as yet they were unrealised. Hear the words of a dying martyr,—“Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.” Hear the words of another, who was bound to the altar,—“I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith : henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day : and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”

When, therefore, we estimate the wealth of a good man, we must remember that there is a moral as well as a material, an invisible as well as a visible, property. The good man is an heir, and his heirship relates to possessions which no human power of calculation can compute. In the days of our inexperience, we imagined that one word could be amply explained by another ; we deemed that all interpretations of language could be discovered through the aid of the lexicographer. We have lived to see the vanity of such imagining. Some words alter their meaning according to the character of the speaker who employs them. Character is the lexicon which gives the true meaning of moral terms. A word often alters its meaning according to the position of the circle in which it is employed. Take, for example, this word in the parenthesis,—the word “rich.” Of this word almost

every man has a definition of his own. You may have had occasion to visit a poor man, and, as you have encouraged him to talk, he has told you that if he had from twenty to thirty shillings per week he would account himself "rich." But go to the lord whose land the poor man cultivates, and see whether the poor man's definition of "rich" will be accepted by the baron. And so, the higher the circle into which you penetrate, the more will significations vary. Pass, then, into the highest circles of all, where the Lord Jesus sits enthroned amid his own unsearchable riches, and ask him what is the meaning of the word "rich." O Son of God, in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead, by whom were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers, reveal to us the meaning of thine own language; make this word, as it were, a rent through which we may catch a glimpse of our bright reversion in the skies, and give to us the exceeding comfort of an imperishable hope! Happy the Church into whose history this parenthesis is interjected by the Son of God. If you as a Church ask me how you may ascertain whether you are "rich," I should answer, (1) Is your faith strong? (2) Are your labours abundant? (3) Are your spiritual children numerous? Every holy, faithful, laborious, humble, trustful Church may claim this divine parenthesis; and how much soever the tempests may howl around it—there may be poverty on the one side and persecution on the other—the time shall come when this parenthesis alone will express your glorious and blissful destiny. But mark, you cannot enter, so to speak, the parenthesis without going through the exterior discipline. This parenthesis sums up the results of many a battle, intermingles the grace of God, and the work of Jesus, and the response of man; it marks the ultimate evolution of a history in which the light of heaven and the darkness of earth have played mysterious parts; it is the dawning of eternal day upon those who have served the Saviour through the weary watches of the tempestuous night.

IV.

Christ comforts his suffering ones by disarming their fears. "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the

devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried, and ye shall have tribulation ten days." I cannot arbitrate between contending critics as to the precise signification of the expression "ten days." It may, indeed, be that the word "day" is to be regarded as equivalent to the word year, and that the "ten days" refer to the ten years of sore persecution which befel the Asiatic Churches during the reign of the tiger-hearted Diocletian. This may be the case, but I care not to fabricate a strong plea in its favour. It is enough for me to secure a firm footing on the general principle which underlies the prediction. That general principle is, that there is a limit to the suffering of the Church. Persecution is an affair of "ten days." Diocletian is the tyrant of a vanishing hour. To-day he raves in madness, to-morrow his last yell has for ever expired. "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment." The Apostle triumphantly contrasts the brevity of suffering with the duration of glory. Hear him! the words seem to quail under the weight of thought with which they are charged; brighter and brighter flames the vision as the Apostle towers to the summit of his climax. "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." The "ten days" of oppression vanish in the infinite perspective; the fires of martyrdom pale before the effulgence of a sun which burns with eternal lustre; the sigh of suffering is lost in the pealing harmonies of unceasing song. In prospect of suffering, Christ says to his people, "Fear not." But why this counsel? Does it not stiffen the heart as a word of chilling mockery? O Son of God, why tell the people not "to fear"? It is because he knows the full interpretation of suffering. Suffering is education. Grief is discipline. Let me remind you that the suffering referred to is external. The house is smitten, but the tenant is infinitely beyond the sphere of flood, or flame, or steel. Let me further remind you that those sufferings have been overcome. Suffering is a vanquished power. "I have overcome the world." We have fellowship in our suffering, a fellowship that is mastery. Are you in Gethsemane? Do the winds howl drearily around you? Is it a sevenfold darkness that shuts out the light of the stars? Ah me! I know full well the meaning of your great suffering; the iron hath been crushed through my own swelling

heart, and I can therefore sympathise with the children of grief. You say you hear the approach of the ruffianly band, and that the flare of the traitor's torch falls upon your drenched cheek. True. Yet, courage! Snatch that torch from his grasp, hold it to the ground—close! What see ye? A footprint? Ay! Any inscription? Ay! Read it—dash off the new-starting tear, and read! Speak aloud! Refrain not! “Be of good cheer; I have overcome.” Why, it is the footprint of Christ! He has been standing just where you are! You have not gone farther down the troubled valley than your Master; you cannot get beyond the sphere of Christ; your suffering cannot lay claim to originality; every pang has been anticipated; your streams of grief mingle with his rivers of sorrow. We “know the fellowship of his sufferings.” Every woe bears the inscription, “Overcome.”

We can identify this “Fear not” as the solemn word of Christ. It is a form of expression peculiarly his own. It bears his image and superscription. We often heard him employ it when he walked amongst us in the form of a man. When we were tossed on the troubled sea, he came near and said, “Fear not; it is I.” When we were few in number, and the objects of a haughty scorn, he gently said to us, “Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” When he told us that bonds and imprisonments awaited us in every city, he added, “Fear not them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.” We were well accustomed to his “Fear not”; and now that he has ascended to the throne, and once more addresses us in this familiar tone, we exclaim with reviving courage, It is the voice of the Conqueror—the cry of the King!

V.

Christ soothes and nerves his suffering saints by the promise of infinite compensation. “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” The word compensation is to be accepted in this connection with the fullest recognition of those limitations which the regenerate mind will instantly suggest. The help which analogy can afford in the understanding of Christ's promise is but partial—necessarily and most happily partial—yet it may shed a trembling ray on the central question before us.

The saints are not for ever to lie under the cruel imputation of unworthiness. As in the case of a man who has been wantonly defamed and injured, is it enough that his peers pronounce him merely "Not guilty"? Is no account to be take of the wrongs he has endured? Are his wounds to be unmollified, except by the healing power of tardy time? In the name of humanity, No! "Not guilty" is to be translated into "innocent"; justification is to be succeeded by compensation; well-attested faithfulness is to be adorned with a crown. It is so, only in an infinitely higher degree, in the spiritual life. Jesus Christ will not only deliver his saints from the sphere of suffering; he will introduce them into the sphere of eternal rest and joy. There is "a recompense of reward." The languid eye of the suffering saint is turned to no merely negative heaven; it kindles into eloquent brightness as it gazes upon the "inheritance incorruptible," and the crown radiant with immortal glory. Every pang is to become a pleasure, every scar an abiding memorial of honour. We have to do with the faithfulness; Christ with the crowning. Long endurance on our part will not tarnish the promised diadem. It is there, look ye!—there, just on the other side of the golden clouds; and when life's last gasp shall expire, ye shall stand as crowned kings in the Infinite presence.

Blessed conjunction—"Thou" and "I," the suffering saint and the promising Saviour! "Be thou faithful, and I give." As it is personal suffering, so also shall it be personal reward. And what will the glorified saint do with that crown of life? Wear it? Methinks not. It will suffice him to feel its first pressure—that will be heaven enough!—and, having felt that, surely he will cast the crown at the feet of the Lamb, saying, "Thou only art worthy to be crowned."

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. 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 cleansed by the precious blood of 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. Show to us, more and more, the meaning of the mystery of the Cross. May we find all that is deepest and truest in our own life symbolised in that Cross. May it be the answer to our sin, the remedy of our diseases, the one hope of our wondering and anxious souls. Now unto him that is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

Revelation xv. 3.

"They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb."

MOSES AND THE LAMB.

THIS is a marvellous conjunction of names. The song sung by the saints who overcame is a song of the human and divine; a song of the servant and the Son; and it may be worth our while to trace, so far as we may be able, this remarkable and even startling conjunction. It is not proposed to go in quest of remote analogies or resemblances, or to force meanings upon passages contrary to their plain import. We know that Moses was very meek above all men upon the earth, and that Jesus Christ was meek and lowly in heart. We know that Moses was the deliverer of Israel, and that Jesus Christ was the Redeemer of the world; and we are not prepared to deny that many just and impressive analogies might be wrought out by comparing the work of Moses in Egypt and the wilderness with the work of Christ among men; there is undoubtedly abundant scope for legitimate exercise of sanctified genius in giving spiritual and Christian interpretations to many points in the eventful ministry of Moses; and if I do not avail myself of the goodly stores which may be found in such interpretations, it is because I have in view a task, which is sufficiently comprehensive to engage our attention during the whole time allotted to our studies. Let us read, in order, a set of passages which will indicate the ground which it is intended to traverse:—

"Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river" (Exod. i. 22).

"Herod will seek the young child to destroy him" (Matt. ii. 13).

"This Moses whom they refused . . . the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer" (Acts vii. 35).

"The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner" (Matt. xxi. 42).

"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" (John iii. 14, 15).

"The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John i. 17).

"They sing the song of Moses . . . and the Lamb" (Rev. xv. 3).

The first remark that occurs upon reading these texts is that

the highest human powers are quite unable to baffle the schemes of God. Pharaoh and Herod were intent upon murder. Bad kings have always been afraid of young life; they have never been the friends of intelligent and progressive manhood. History convicts them of the direst crimes which human wickedness can perpetrate. Their short but never easy method has been summed up in the decree, Slay all who threaten you; throw them into the river—kill them with the edge of the sword! May not we learn something from this ruthless method of upholding bad purposes? If wicked men have been afraid of young life, is there not a power in young life which may be trained to the highest uses? Ought we to be indifferent when kings have been struck with mortal terror? Where they have seen vengeance, ought not we to see energy that should be sanctified? Where they have proposed murder, ought not we to propose education? Train your children as if God had called them to a special ministry; do not set up a low standard of possibility; not that you are to overtax their powers, or encourage them in unnatural conceit; set before them the highest examples, animate them by the noblest considerations, point out the road which lies towards heaven, aid them in every endeavour to lighten human misery, and work diligently, as God may put opportunities in your way; and you will help to train a race of men, before whom all throned evil and all sceptred terror shall quake, and perish in unpitied and irrecoverable ruin. The devil gives ungracious welcome to every child that carries the faintest sign of moral nobility or special destiny. Moses was laid upon the river; the Lamb was pursued by the sword of Herod. It was a hard beginning, but the world has had history enough now to know that hard beginnings are the winters out of which spring is quickened, and by which summer is enriched and glorified. Have any of you had a hard beginning? Look at Moses and the Lamb! Write a list of men who have ever done anything remarkable for the world, whose beginning was bright, and full of joy, and I will engage to throw it into insignificance, by a list long, illustrious, and imperishable, of men who have been cradled in the manger, exposed on the river, pursued in early life by unkindness, by malice, and by all uncharitableness, which darkens in the direction of murder itself.

"This Moses, whom they refused, the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer. . . . The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner."

Here we come to a different class of opponents and enemies, but to an opposition, if possible, more malignant and wicked. When a man's enemies are those of his own household, he has reached almost the last trial of his faith and patience. When David's equal, and guide, and acquaintance, with whom he took sweet counsel, and walked to the house of God in company, reproached him, and magnified himself against him, David's heart failed, and he spake bitterly with his tongue. Jesus Christ came unto his own, and his own received him not; he was in the world, the world was made by him; and the world knew him not. No man received his testimony. He was as a king of whom his own citizens said, "We will not have this man to reign over us." Yet God hath set this stone of stumbling and this rock of offence as the head of the corner, and on him the spiritual house is established for ever. Very wonderful is God's method of electing and calling men to his service; so wonderful as to throw into confusion all human probabilities and calculations. He raiseth the poor out of the dust, and lifted up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory. He destroys the wisdom of the wise, and brings to nothing the understanding of the prudent; he chooses base things of the world, and things which are despised; yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are. By the foolish things of the world he confounds the wise; and by the weak things of the world he confounds the things which are mighty. God's election fell not upon Eliab, but upon David, the keeper of sheep; he called Elisha from the plough, and set Amos, the herdman and gatherer of sycamore fruit, to prophesy unto Israel. Men are confounded when probabilities are upset, and when their inductions from what they mistake for facts are contradicted by unexpected events. Men talk about cause and effect; they say that the cause must be equal to the effect; they read life, and work in life in the light of theories which have a great deal to recommend them; yet God often baffles them—often calls the unlikeliest men to the front—often gives the race to the slow, and the battle to the weak—and gathers the whole kingdom of

heaven around a little child, as its best earthly type and illustration. "This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes."

"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up."

Here the names of Moses and the Lamb are brought into conjunction by Jesus Christ himself. No sign of inferiority is attached to Moses. There is nothing in the terms of the conjunction to denote inequality. Is Jesus Christ degraded by such a remarkable association? Ours is a poor reverence—in fact only a drivelling superstition—if we tremble lest Christ's honour be divided. Was not the lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness a divine arrangement? Is not the apparent insignificance and contemptibleness of the device quite consistent with God's method of doing his work? It was not the scheme of Moses; it was not the proposition of the suffering Israelites; it was the direct command of God, and, therefore, not unworthy of being spoken of in illustration of the Great Redemption. But is not every human attempt to recover and heal the world, a movement in the direction of the Christian redemption? Men are not always aware of the full significance of their work. Every man who studies and toils that he may alleviate human suffering, is moving in the line of divine beneficence. He may not see all that he is doing; it may be an unconscious and, in fact, an unintentional movement, yet not the less certain, and not the less a basis of appeal to himself on higher concerns. God's argument with men regarding the recovery and sanctification of their souls is strengthened and made logically irresistible, by their own efforts in the lower region of healing, and education, and satisfaction. The text may be expanded so as to embrace all those efforts. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness; as physicians seek healing virtue in plants and minerals; as parents strain their affections and their outward resources for the advantage of their suffering children; as philanthropists make great efforts to better the state of society; as human life, in its best condition, is a continued attempt to raise and bless the world; even so is the lifting up of the Son of man, the whole scheme of divine mediation, the great, the transcendent expression

of divine love, the all-inclusive and sublime consummation of all your human processes—and if you did but understand your own care about the welfare of the world, you would see in it a sign of God's infinite love as shown in the lifting up of the Son of man. In this union of the names of Moses and the Lamb you have a hint of the co-operation of the human and the divine, which should help to an understanding of the great special work which is entirely of God, and cannot be shared by men. In all our attempts to do good, though they be divinely suggested, we are but working with broken faculties, and our sinfulness mars the beauty of our ideals: we cannot work with whole-heartedness and purity; we struggle and blunder; we become discouraged and weary—but God works from the other end. With infinite power, infinite wisdom, infinite love, he answers the cry of the heart, and reveals the Cross bearing his own Son, as the great end towards which we have been moving, but which of ourselves we could never have attained.

“The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.”

Here we have at once a parallel and a contrast—a parallel, in that law and grace are both of God, and a contrast, in that while law came by the servant, grace and truth came by the Son. Yet grace is not lawless, nor is truth an unregulated sentiment. We could never have known grace had we not first known law; nor could we, as sinful men, ever have come to the spirituality of truth, but through the definiteness and severity of commandment. In a very important sense we have to begin with Moses, and to traverse the initial and preparatory stages of the old Testament; the Old Testament and the New are yet to be to us as Moses and the Lamb. They are distinct, yet united; and as Jesus Christ himself began at Moses and all the prophets, and found in all the Scriptures things concerning himself, so we may find in the ancient records of inspiration the law which, unchanging as the Lawgiver, is yet carried to fulness of grace and truth in the work of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world. There is a difference between law and grace, and law and truth, which need not be pointed out at great length in this connection, as the one object of our discourse does not require any collateral discussion. It is enough for us to lay hold of the fact that in the

working out of his purpose God sent us a schoolmaster, to conduct us through a severe yet invigorating discipline, that we might be prepared to enter upon the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Children can understand a command when they cannot understand the reason on which it is based; they can obey the law, when they cannot explain the truth; they can walk by the letter when they cannot comprehend the spirit. Yet there comes a time in their growth, if they grow according to the divine law, when, under the sternness of the commandment, they see the tender purpose of grace, and through the hardness of the letter they see the brightness and beauty of truth. Jesus Christ, then, did not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil it; he did not depose Moses and the prophets, but gave them exceeding honour; he did not relax the law of the seasons, but showed that in himself alone came the bloom and splendour of eternal summer. It is true, blessedly true, that we are not under the law, but under grace; yet I question whether any man can be under grace until he has first been under law; and I deny that any man who is in grace can make light of law; on the contrary, he will see in law the first motion of the divine love which culminated in the grace of Jesus Christ. If any man is carrying the law as a burden, which prevents his coming to the gospel, he is abusing the law; and if any man says that because he is under grace he can therefore dispense with the law, he is dishonouring grace. But, being under grace, we are the servants of righteousness,—we are not without law to God, but under the law to Christ.

“They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.”

Wonderful is the song of Moses and the Lamb—the song of the human and the divine—the song of law perfected in grace—the song of earth and heaven. How human nature is thereby glorified,—apostate, ruined human nature associated with the Lamb in the song of heaven! Christianity, instead of depreciating human nature, exalts it,—it is only in Christianity that we see the real worth of human nature. If a man would know what he really is, and what he may become, let him look, not at himself, but at Jesus Christ. Was not man made in the image

and likeness of God? True, he is a fallen creature; yet in his fall he attests his origin—there is not a fragment of the shattered temple which does not prove that its builder and maker was God.

The song of Moses and the Lamb are not two distinct songs; the song is one and the same. Nor is the Lamb dishonoured by being thus associated with the great representative of the human race; it is his own doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes! It is not the song of Peter and the Lamb, though Peter was the first Christian disciple; it is not the song of John and the Lamb, though John pointed out the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. It is the song of Moses and the Lamb—the Old Testament and the New are one; the law and the gospel are one.

“Awake, and sing the song
Of Moses and the Lamb;
Wake every heart and every tongue,
To praise the Saviour's name.

“Sing of His dying love;
Sing of His rising power;
Sing how He intercedes above,
For those whose sins He bore.”

From the beginning to the end the divine dispensations are one; God's love, as shown in Jesus Christ, was not a merely chronological development. From eternity to eternity God is love—now thundering on the mount that burned with fire, now entreating upon Mount Sion; now smiting the nations with the rod of destruction, and now sending the gospel to every creature; now commanding the pestilence to make havoc in the earth, and now causing the sun to arise with healing in his wings. God's love has many servants; Moses, Elias, and Jesus are to us separate names; are they not, viewed from an earthly point, as Faith, Hope, and Charity?—all God's gifts; yet the last, and best, and greatest, is Jesus.

From the outset I have spoken of THE PEOPLE'S BIBLE as my life-work. God indeed has enabled me to set up other memorials, but this is peculiarly the witness by which I would remember

his daily ministry in my spiritual education. Wherein the work is likely to be useful to others I wish with my whole heart to ascribe all praise and honour to the Divine Spirit. "This is the Lord's doing." As the five-and-twenty volumes have nearly all been reported, and printed from the reporter's notes, there has been no attempt at literary composition or polish. It is not my habit to write sermons. All the discourses, with hardly an exception, were delivered from the briefest possible notes. The language is the language of the moment. This will explain whatever may be observed of verbal crudeness, repetition, abruptness, and ellipsis. It is mainly for this reason that attention is called to what may or may not be a defective method of pulpit preparation. Every man can best follow his own method. I have followed mine. THE PEOPLE'S BIBLE is the result.

From the beginning, even whilst THE PEOPLE'S BIBLE was merely a prospectus, I promised to annotate much of the sacred text with the best available criticism. In this matter I gratefully acknowledge the careful assistance which others have rendered, for in many cases they have happily illuminated the inspired text. By this arrangement THE PEOPLE'S BIBLE has become, in an important sense, a conspectus of critical opinion and suggestion.

The work is done. "What is writ, is writ: would it were worthier." Life hastens to the evening twilight. Even my pensiveness veils a most inspiring joy. Others must increase: I must decrease. I close my book amongst the fast-thickening shadows of the nineteenth century. I believe that the New Century cannot do, and will not attempt to do, without the Bible. No poet has surpassed its sublimity, no dramatist has deposed its tragedy, no moralist has rivalled its purity. The Bible stands alone. Other books are as trees which men have planted and trimmed and pruned with periodical care; but the Bible belongs to that forestry of thought, event, direction, and sovereignty, which human hands never planted,—a church built, and aisled, and lighted in a way beyond the ways of man.

In my judgment, the only preaching that can do profound and lasting good must be Biblical. Such preaching cannot be

monotonous, nor disappointing, to men who sincerely wish to commune with God, and obey his will. Any pulpit that founds itself on personal invention, cleverness, ingenuity, audacity, or affected originality, will most surely cover itself with humiliation, and pass into merited oblivion. Revelation enriches us with truths, which Reason never could have discovered, but which, being given, Reason can accept without loss of dignity or remission of responsibility. To me the Bible is a Divine revelation—a revelation of God, Providence, Sin, Atonement, Faith, Immortality. The Bible is not a book containing a revelation, it is a revelation accepting the risks and limits of a book. Man is not a body containing a spirit, he is a spirit inhabiting a body. In both instances I think the distinction of vital importance. It is upon this distinction that this work is largely based. This, indeed, is the key of my interpretation of the whole Kingdom of God as brought near in Nature, Providence, Humanity, and Revelation. Within the suns is the God who made them, and who wears them as a robe: in all history there is a directing and controlling mind: in humanity there is a Divine purpose: in Revelation there is a Godhead accessible to faith and love and penitence.

We assume an immense responsibility in claiming that any book is a final and authoritative standard in faith and morals. We place the Book itself in an awful position. We separate it from all other books, we make sceptical criticism a profane offence, and devout obedience an essential element of spiritual character. The mind has simply to receive, the will has simply to obey, the heart has simply to trust. The Book is to us verily as God himself. Are we, in nineteenth century light, to stand by such a position or to abandon it? Is the Bible still to stand alone, and to demand the obeisance of all other books; is the dream-book to stand in the harvest fields of literature and to receive the homage of the bending sheaves? There is only one Book in the world which can prove the inspiration of the Bible, and that is the Bible itself. Possibly in our early reading of the Scriptures we put ourselves into a false relation to the Book by taking with us some preconceived notion or theory of inspiration, and trying to make the Bible exactly fit our mechanical orthodoxy.

This was like timing the sun by our chronometers, instead of timing our chronometers by the sun. What wonder if we have lost much by this process? What wonder if the supposed orthodoxy has originated the real scepticism? Inspiration, like its author, is a term which has no equivalent in other words, and therefore can have no complete theory. Strange as it may appear, there are some words which lexicography cannot break up into explanatory syllables, and amongst them the word Inspiration holds a foremost place. We must feel some meanings, as blind men feel the morning light. Illustrations of inspiration we can have, also reverent suggestions respecting it, also such confirmations as arise from coincidence, unity, purpose, and issue,—here, indeed, is the most inviting and productive field of devout and even intellectual research; but to say authoritatively where Inspiration begins, where it ends, how it operates, what it involves, where it separates itself from genius, how it burned for a brief day in shepherd or king, fisherman or tent-maker, and then was withdrawn to heaven, nevermore to glow upon earth, would be to have the very inspiration which is said to have completed itself in revelation. Unless in the most limited and severely guarded manner, I cannot but think that the less we theorise about Inspiration the better. Theories are human. As such, they are, as to their verbal form, matters of opinion and subject to change. Every man has of course the right to form an opinion, but no man has the right to say it is the only opinion that can be formed; otherwise it would be inspired, and inspiration is said to have ceased. My counsel would be, Let the Book speak for itself. When inquirers come with their questions, objections, and difficulties, insist, as a condition of conference, that the Book itself be read through and through from end to end until the inquirer is thoroughly acquainted with its contents.

That reading will do its own work. That reading has made me an unquestioning and grateful believer in the plenary inspiration, the divine authority, and the infinite sufficiency of Holy Scripture, and, therefore, I can the more earnestly and definitely encourage others to impose upon themselves the sacred task. I now know that the Bible is inspired. It

addresses itself to every aspect and every necessity of my nature ; it is my own biography ; I seem to have read it in some other world ; we are old friends ; the breathing of Eternity is in us both, and we have happened together, to our mutual joy, on this rough shore of time. I never know how great a Book it is until I try to do without it : then the heart aches ; then the eyes are put out with the great tears of grief ; then the house is no home of mine ; then life sinks under an infinite load of weariness. In great moods of moral exultation I cannot stoop to the unworthy fray of intellectual encounter, to compare theories, to discuss contradictory scepticisms, and to institute comparisons between the cleverness which baffles me and the faith which impels me to service. I know well all the criticisms which this kind of confession never fails to evoke ; if I knew less of them I would make more of them, but knowing them well, in all their scope and meaning, I will no longer allow them to rob the heart of its most sacred joys.

Has Inspiration really ceased out of the Church ? Is the Holy Spirit but a term in ancient theology ? Is he not the abiding Paraclete ? Jesus Christ distinctly promised that the Paraclete should abide "for ever," and can he be in the heart without inspiring the whole range of the mind ? I have no doubt as to the continuance of Inspiration in the Church, for it seems to me to be the one gift which must, of gracious necessity, abide for ever—the gift, indeed, without which the Church could not exist. But the gift is not always to be used in one direction. There are inspired readers as certainly as there are inspired writers. "There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding," in the deep and true reading of the Word.

I am not alarmed by the perils which must instantly suggest themselves to apprehensive minds, though some of those perils, viewed from unequal distances, are unquestionably portentous in outline. The gift of inspired reading is the gift of the whole believing and suppliant Church. There is no inspired class in the Church, divinely marked off for special reverence and remuneration ; indeed, it seems to me that the so-called

priests are the only uninspired followers—the mere craftsmen and pensioners—of the Church; they are “shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter.” “Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind.” You need not, therefore, fear that I am pointing to a priestly class. The kind of inspiration I mean can be had for the asking by all humble souls. “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 to them that ask him?” The proof of such inspiration will be found less in intellectual splendour than in spiritual docility and childlike obedience; we shall be unconscious of the shining of our face, but shall know that in our hearts there is a great softness of love, a holy yearning after our Father’s perfectness; we shall be most inspired when we are most teachable; we may be sure that the purpose of the Holy Spirit is being accomplished within us when we say, “Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth,” and ask him, beside whom are the two anointed ones, not to withhold his revelation from babe-like souls. Verily, Inspiration hath not ceased. Let us pray for an inspired ministry, in other words, that our ministers may be blessed with a double portion of the Holy Spirit. This is our protection against priestism. This will sanctify every man, body, soul, and spirit, and make the whole Church the living temple of the Holy Ghost.

When ministers are divinely inspired, their public reading of the Scriptures will be an exposition; every accent will be as a tongue of fire, and every emphasis will give new hints of meaning. The inspired writers wait for inspired readers. How the Holy Book leaps, so to say, in recognition of the sacred touch and the loving glance! Inspired reading gives us a Bible which cannot be taken from us; not a mechanical Bible, which cunning hands can disjoint; not an artificial Bible, which relies upon scattered proof-texts; but a living revelation, a voice which awakens faithful echoes in the heart; a self-attesting Book; its own mystery and its own lamp; without beginning or end; an infinite surprise, an infinite benediction. Have no fear that the Ark of the Testimony will be taken. We lose our inspiration when we lose our Faith, and then we are the subjects of irrational

panic. Rather say, "Come up, ye horses; and rage, ye chariots; and let the mighty men come forth; . . . for Pharaoh king of Egypt is but a noise." Theories and dogmas, propositions and controversies, orthodoxies and heterodoxies, come and go, but the Word of the Lord abideth for ever, "surely as Tabor is among the mountains, and as Carmel by the sea."

The following concordances are useful in Bible Study:—
Young's "Analytical Concordance," Strong's "Exhaustive Concordance," Bullinger's "Critical Lexicon and Concordance."

JOSEPH PARKER.

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THE END.