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**Expositions of
Holy Scripture:
Matthew IX to
XVIII**

Alexander Maclaren



Expositions of Holy Scripture: Matthew IX to XVIII

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Description: Called the "prince of expositors," Alexander MacLaren was a renowned preacher of the 19th and 20th century. *Expositions of Holy Scripture* brings together many of the sermons over his fifty years in ministry. Although it discusses many different books and passages of the Bible, *Expositions of Holy Scripture* isn't a commentary in the fullest sense--for example, MacLaren doesn't comment on every verse. Rather, these volumes are MacLaren's powerful sermons, arranged by the text of the sermons. Broadly evangelical in nature, MacLaren's sermons are not historical--rarely referring to the current events of his day--allowing them to retain their interest and power since he first gave them. *Expositions of Holy Scriptures* is thus highly practical and lively. It makes a wonderful companion to more textually oriented commentaries. To read *Expositions of Holy Scripture* is to be in the presence of one of the greatest preachers of the last few centuries.

Tim Perrine

CCEL Staff Writer

Contents

Title Page	1
Expositions of Holy Scripture: St. Matthew Chaps. IX to XVII.	2
Table of Contents	3
Christ's Encouragements.	5
Soul-healing First: Body-healing Second.	9
The Call of Matthew.	15
The Touch of Faith and the Touch of Christ.	21
A Christlike Judgment of Men.	28
The Obscure Apostle.	35
Christ's Charge to His Heralds.	42
The Widened Mission, Its Perils and Defences.	46
Like Teacher, Like Scholar.	52
The King's Charge to His Ambassadors.	58
A Life Lost and Found.	63
The Greatest in the Kingdom, and Their Reward.	68
John's Doubts of Jesus, and Jesus' Praise of John.	75
The Friend of Publicans and Sinners.	81
Sodom, Capernaum, Manchester.	86
Christ's Strange Thanksgiving.	92
The Rest Giver.	95
The Pharisees' Sabbath and Christ's.	101
An Attempt to Account for Jesus.	106
'Make the Tree Good'.	111
'A Greater than Jonas'	117
'A Greater than Solomon'	120
Four Sowings and One Ripening.	123

Ears and no Ears.	129
'To Him That Hath Shall Be Given'.	134
Seeing and Blind.	140
Mingled in Growth, Separated in Maturity.	143
Leaven.	149
Treasure and Pearl.	154
The Martyrdom of John.	160
The Grave of the Dead John and the Grave of the Living Jesus.	164
The Food of the World.	171
The King's Highway.	180
Peter on the Waves.	184
Crumbs and the Bread.	189
The Divine Christ Confessed, the Suffering Christ Denied.	194
Christ Foreseeing the Cross.	200
The King in His Beauty.	206
The Secret of Power.	212
The Coin in the Fish's Mouth.	224
Expositions of Holy Scripture: St. Matthew Chaps. XVIII to XXVIII.	231
Contents	232
The Law of Precedence in the Kingdom.	234
Self-mutilation for Self-preservation.	239
The Lost Sheep and the Seeking Shepherd.	245
Persistence of Thwarted Love.	250
Forgiven and Unforgiving.	255
The Requirements of the King	260
Nearest to Christ.	266
The Servant-Lord and His Servants.	275
What the Historic Christ Taught about His Death.	280
The Coming of the King to His Palace.	285
A New Kind of King.	290
The Vineyard and Its Keepers.	296
The Stone of Stumbling.	302

Two Ways of Despising God's Feast.	308
The Tables Turned: the Questioners Questioned.	313
The King's Farewell.	316
Two Forms of One Saying.	321
The Carrion and the Vultures.	326
Watching for the King.	332
The Waiting Maidens.	337
Dying Lamps.	341
'They That Were Ready!'	346
Traders for the Master.	350
Why the Talent Was Buried.	356
The King on His Judgment Throne.	361
The Defence of Uncalculating Love.	366
The New Passover.	369
'Is It I?'	373
'This Cup'.	379
'Until That Day'	384
Gethsemane, the Oil-press.	390
The Last Pleading of Love.	395
The Real High Priest and His Counterfeit.	404
Jesus Charged with Blasphemy.	407
'See Thou to That!'	413
The Sentence Which Condemned the Judges	419
The Crucifixion.	423
The Blind Watchers at the Cross.	428
Taunts Turning to Testimonies.	432
The Veil Rent.	437
The Prince of Life.	442
The Risen Lord's Greetings and Gifts.	448
On the Mountain.	453
Indexes	459
Index of Scripture References	460



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EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D., Litt. D.

ST. MATTHEW
Chaps. IX to XXVIII

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CONTENTS

CHRIST'S ENCOURAGEMENTS ([Matt. ix. 2](#))
SOUL-HEALING FIRST: BODY-HEALING SECOND ([Matt. ix. 6](#))
THE CALL OF MATTHEW ([Matt. ix. 9-17](#))
THE TOUCH OF FAITH AND THE TOUCH OF CHRIST ([Matt. ix. 18-31](#))
A CHRISTLIKE JUDGMENT OF MEN ([Matt. ix. 36](#))
THE OBSCURE APOSTLES ([Matt. x. 5](#))
CHRIST'S CHARGE TO HIS HERALDS ([Matt. x. 5-16](#))
THE WIDENED MISSION, ITS PERILS AND DEFENCES ([Matt. x. 16-31](#))
LIKE TEACHER, LIKE SCHOLAR ([Matt. x. 24, 25](#))
THE KING'S CHARGE TO HIS AMBASSADORS ([Matt. x. 32-42](#))
A LIFE LOST AND FOUND ([Matt. x. 39](#))
THE GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM, AND THEIR REWARD ([Matt. x. 41, 42](#))
JOHN'S DOUBTS OF JESUS, AND JESUS' PRAISE OF JOHN ([Matt. xi. 2-15](#))
THE FRIEND OF PUBLICANS AND SINNERS ([Matt. xi. 19](#))
SODOM, CAPERNAUM, MANCHESTER ([Matt. xi. 20](#))
CHRIST'S STRANGE THANKSGIVING ([Matt. xi. 25](#))
THE REST GIVER ([Matt. xi. 28, 29](#))
THE PHARISEES' SABBATH AND CHRIST'S ([Matt. xii. 1-14](#))
AN ATTEMPT TO ACCOUNT FOR JESUS ([Matt. xii. 24](#))
'MAKE THE TREE GOOD' ([Matt. xii. 33](#))
'A GREATER THAN JONAS' ([Matt. xii. 41](#))
'A GREATER THAN SOLOMON' ([Matt. xii. 42](#))
FOUR SOWINGS AND ONE RIPENING ([Matt. xiii. 1-9](#))
EARS AND NO EARS ([Matt. xiii. 9](#))
'TO HIM THAT HATH SHALL BE GIVEN' ([Matt. xiii. 12](#))
SEEING AND BLIND ([Matt. xiii. 13](#))
MINGLED IN GROWTH, SEPARATED IN MATURITY ([Matt. xiii. 24-30](#))
LEAVEN ([Matt. xiii. 33](#))
TREASURE AND PEARL ([Matt. xiii. 44-46](#))
THE MARTYRDOM OF JOHN ([Matt. xiv. 1-12](#))
THE GRAVE OF THE DEAD JOHN AND THE GRAVE OF THE LIVING JESUS
([Matt. xiv. 12; xxviii. 8](#))
THE FOOD OF THE WORLD ([Matt. xiv. 19, 20](#))
THE KING'S HIGHWAY ([Matt. xiv. 22-36](#))
PETER ON THE WAVES ([Matt. xiv. 28](#))
THE CRUMBS AND THE BREAD ([Matt. xv. 21-31](#))
THE DIVINE CHRIST CONFESSED, THE SUFFERING CHRIST DENIED ([Matt.
xvi. 13-28](#))
CHRIST FORESEEING THE CROSS ([Matt. xvi. 21](#))
THE KING IN HIS BEAUTY ([Matt. xvii. 1-13](#))

THE SECRET OF POWER. ([Matt. xvii. 19, 20](#))

THE COIN IN THE FISH'S MOUTH ([Matt. xvii. 25, 26](#))

CHRIST'S ENCOURAGEMENTS

'Son, be of good cheer.'—[MATT. ix. 2.](#)

This word of encouragement, which exhorts to both cheerfulness and courage, is often upon Christ's lips. It is only once employed in the Gospels by any other than He. If we throw together the various instances in which He thus speaks, we may get a somewhat striking view of the hindrances to such a temper of bold, buoyant cheerfulness which the world presents, and of the means for securing it which Christ provides.

But before I consider these individually, let me point you to this thought, that such a disposition, facing the inevitable sorrows, evils, and toilsome tasks of life with glad and courageous buoyancy, is a Christian duty, and is a temper not merely to be longed for, but consciously and definitely to be striven after.

We have a great deal more in our power, in the regulation of moods and tempers and dispositions, than we often are willing to acknowledge to ourselves. Our 'low' times—when we fret and are dull, and all things seem wrapped in gloom, and we are ready to sit down and bewail ourselves, like Job on his dunghill—are often quite as much the results of our own imperfect Christianity as the response of our feelings to external circumstances. It is by no means an unnecessary reminder for us, who have heavy tasks set us, which often seem too heavy, and are surrounded, as we all are, with crowding temptations to be bitter and melancholy and sad, that Christ commands us to be, and therefore we ought to be, 'of good cheer.'

Another observation may be made as preliminary, and that is that Jesus Christ never tells people to cheer up without giving them reason to do so. We shall see presently that in all cases where the words occur they are immediately followed by words or deeds of His which hold forth something on which, if the hearer's faith lay hold, darkness and gloom will fly like morning mists before the rising sun. The world comes to us and says, in the midst of our sorrows and our difficulties, 'Be of good cheer,' and says it in vain, and generally only rubs salt into the sore by saying it. Jesus Christ never thus vainly preaches the duty of encouraging ourselves without giving us ample reasons for the cheerfulness which He enjoins.

With these two remarks to begin with—that we ought to make it a part of our Christian discipline of ourselves to seek to cultivate a continuous and equable temperament of calm, courageous good cheer; and that Jesus Christ never commands such a temper without showing cause for our obedience—let us turn for a few moments to the various instances in which this expression falls from His lips.

I. Now the first of them is this of my text, and from it we learn this truth, that Christ's first contribution to our temper of equable, courageous cheerfulness is the assurance that all our sins are forgiven.

'Son, be of good cheer,' said He to that poor palsied sufferer lying there upon the little light bed in front of Him. He had been brought to Christ to be cured of his palsy. Our Lord seems to offer him a very irrelevant blessing when, instead of the healing of his limbs, He offers him the forgiveness of his sins. That was possibly not what he wanted most, certainly it was not what the friends who had brought him wanted for him, but Jesus knew better than they what the man suffered most from and most needed to have cured. They would have said 'Palsy.' He said, 'Yes! but palsy that comes from sin.' For, no doubt, the sick man's disease was 'a sin of flesh avenged in kind,' and so Christ went to the fountain-head when He said, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee.' He therein implied, not only that the man was longing for something more than his four kindly but ignorant bearers there knew, but also that the root of his disease was extirpated when his sins were forgiven.

And so, in like manner, 'thus conscience doth make cowards of us all.' There is nothing that so drapes a soul with darkness as either the consciousness of unforgiven sin or the want of consciousness of forgiven sin. There may be plenty of superficial cheerfulness. I know that; and I know what the bitter wise man called it, 'the crackling of thorns under the pot,' which, the more they crackle, the faster they turn into powdery ash and lose all their warmth. For stable, deep, lifelong, reliable courage and cheerfulness, there must be thorough work made with the black spot in the heart, and the black lines in the history. And unless our comforters can come to us and say, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee,' they are only chattering nonsense, and singing songs to a heavy heart which will make an effervescence 'like vinegar on nitre,' when they say to us, 'Be of good cheer.' How can I be glad if there lie coiled in my heart that consciousness of alienation and disorder in my relations to God, which all men carry with them, though they overlay it and try to forget it? There is no basis for a peaceful gladness worthy of a man except that which digs deep down into the very secrets of the heart, and lays the first course of the building in the consciousness of pardoned sin. 'Son, be of good cheer! Lift up thy head. Face smaller evils without discomposure, and with quietly throbbing pulses, for the fountain of possible terrors and calamities is stanchd and stayed with, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee.'

Side by side with this first instance, illustrating the same general thought, though from a somewhat different point of view, I may put another of the instances in which the same phrase was soothingly on our Lord's lips. 'Daughter,' said He to the poor woman with the issue of blood, 'be of good cheer. Thy faith hath saved thee.' The consciousness of a living union with God through Christ by faith, which results in the present possession of a real, though it may be a partial, salvation, is indispensable to the temper of equable cheerfulness of which I have been speaking. Apart from that consciousness, you may have plenty of excitement, but no lasting calm. The contrast between the drugged and effervescent potion which the world gives as a cup of gladness, and the pure tonic which Jesus Christ administers for the same purpose, is infinite. He says to us, 'I forgive thy sins; by thy faith I save thee;

go in peace.' Then the burdened heart is freed from its oppression, and the downcast face is lifted up, and all things around change, as when the sunshine comes out on the wintry landscape, and the very snow sparkles into diamonds. So much, then, for the first of the instances of the use of this phrase.

II. We now take a second. Jesus Christ ministers to us cheerful courage because He manifests Himself to us as a Companion in the storm ([Matt. xiv. 27](#)).

The narrative is very familiar to us, so that I need not enlarge upon it. You remember the scene—our Lord alone on the mountain in prayer, the darkness coming down upon the little boat, the storm rising as the darkness fell, the wind howling down the gorges of the mountains round the landlocked lake, the crew 'toiling in rowing, for the wind was contrary.' And then, all at once, out of the mysterious obscurity beneath the shadow of the hills, Something is seen moving, and it comes nearer; and the waves become solid beneath that light and noiseless foot, as steadily nearer He comes. Jesus Christ uses the billows as the pavement over which He approaches His servants, and the storms which beat on us are His occasion for drawing very near. Then they think Him a spirit, and cry out with voices that were heard amidst the howling of the tempest, and struck upon the ear of whomsoever told the Evangelist the story. They cry out with a shriek of terror—because Jesus Christ is coming to them in so strange a fashion! Have *we* never shrieked and groaned, and passionately wept aloud for the same reason; and mistaken the Lord of love and consolation for some grisly spectre? When He comes it is with the old word on His lips, 'Be of good cheer.'

'Tell us not to be frightened when we see something stalking across the waves in the darkness!' 'It is I'; surely that is enough. The Companion in the storm is the Calmer of the terror. He who recognises Jesus Christ as drawing near to his heart over wild billows may well 'be of good cheer,' since the storm but brings his truest treasure to him.

'Well roars the storm to those who hear
A deeper Voice across the storm.'

And He who, with unwetted foot, can tread on the wave, and with quiet voice heard above the shriek of the blast can say, 'It is I,' has the right to say, 'Be of good cheer,' and never says it in vain to such as take Him into their lives however tempest-tossed, and into their hearts however tremulous.

III. A third instance of the occurrence of this word of cheer presents Jesus as ministering cheerful courage to us by reason of His being victor in the strife with the world ([John xvi. 33](#)).

'In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.'

Of course 'the world' which He overcame is the whole aggregate of things and persons considered as separated from God, and as being the great Antagonist and counter power to

a holy life of obedience and filial devotion. At that last moment when, according to all outward seeming and the estimate of things which sense would make, He was utterly and hopelessly and all but ignominiously beaten, He says, 'I have overcome the world.' What! Thou! within four-and-twenty hours of Thy Cross? Is that victory? Yes! For he conquers the world who uses all its opposition as well as its real good to help him, absolutely and utterly, to do the will of God. And he is conquered by the world who lets it, by its glozing sweetnesses and flatteries, or by its knitted brows and frowning eyes and threatening hand, hinder him from the path of perfect consecration and entire conformity to the Father's will.

Christ has conquered. What does that matter to us? Why, it matters this, that we may have the Spirit of Jesus Christ in our hearts to make us also victorious in the same fight. And whosoever will lay his weakness on that strong arm, and open his emptiness to receive the fulness of that victorious Spirit for the very spirit of his life, will be 'more than conqueror through Him that loved us,' and can front all the evils, dangers, threatenings, temptations of the world, its heaped sweets and its frowning antagonisms, with the calm confidence that none of them are able to daunt him; and that the Victor Lord will cover his head in the day of battle and deliver him from every evil work. 'Be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world, and play your parts like men in the good fight of faith; for I am at your back, and will help you with Mine own strength.'

IV. The last instance that I point to of the use of this phrase is one in which it was spoken by Christ's voice from heaven ([Acts xxiii. 11](#)). It was the voice which was heard by the Apostle Paul after he had been almost torn in pieces by the crowd in the Temple, and had been bestowed for security, by the half-contemptuous protection of the Roman governor, in the castle, and was looking onward into a very doubtful future, not knowing how many hours' purchase his life might be worth. That same night the Lord appeared to him and said, 'Be of good cheer, Paul, for as thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.' That is to say, 'No man can touch you until I let him, and nobody shall touch you until you have done your work and spoken out your testimony. Jerusalem is a little sphere; Rome is a great one. The tools to the hand that can use them. The reward for work is more work, and work in a larger sphere. So cheer up! for I have much for you to do yet.'

And the spirit of that encouragement may go with us all, breeding in us the quiet confidence that no matter who may thwart or hinder, no matter what dangers or evils may seem to ring us round, the Master who bids us 'Be of good cheer' will give us a charmed life, and nothing shall by any means hurt us until He says to us, 'Be of good courage; for you have done your work; and now come and rest.' 'Wait on the Lord. Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord.'

SOUL-HEALING FIRST: BODY-HEALING SECOND

‘That ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins (then saith He to the sick of the palsy), Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.’—[MATT. ix. 6.](#)

The great example of our Lord’s teaching in the Sermon on the Mount is followed, in this and the preceding chapter, by a similar collection of His works of healing. These are divided into three groups, each consisting of three members. This miracle is the last of the second triad, of which the other two members are the miraculous stilling of the tempest and the casting out of the demons from the men in the country of the Gergesenes.

One may discern a certain analogy in these three members of this central group. In all of them our Lord appears as the peace-bringer. But the spheres are different. The calm which was breathed over the stormy lake is peace of a lower kind than that which filled the soul of the demoniacs when the power that made discord within had been cast out. Even that peace was lower in kind than that which brought sweet repose in the assurance of pardon to this poor paralytic. Forgiveness speaks of a loftier blessing than even the casting out of demons. The manifestation of power and love steadily rises to a climax.

The most important part of this story, then, is not the mere healing of the disease, but the forgiveness of sins which accompanies it. And the large teaching which our Lord gives as to the relation between His miracles and His standing work, His ordinary work which He has been doing all through the ages, which He is doing to-day, which He is ready to do for you and me if we will let Him, towers high above the mere miracle, which is honoured by being the signal attestation of that work.

Therefore I would turn to this story now, not for the sake of dealing with the mere miraculous event, but in order to draw the important lessons from it which lie upon its very surface.

I. The first thought that is suggested here is that our deepest need is forgiveness.

How strangely irrelevant and beside the mark, at first sight, seems the answer which Christ gives to the eager zeal and earnestness of the man and his bearers. Christ’s word is ‘Son,’ or as the original might more literally and even more tenderly be rendered, ‘Child—be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.’ That seemed far away from their want. It *was* far from their wish, but yet it was the shortest road to its accomplishment. Christ here goes straight to the heart of the necessity, when, passing by the disease for the moment, He speaks the great word of pardon. The palsy was probably the result of the sufferer’s vice, and probably, too, he felt, whatever may have been his friends’ wishes for him, that he needed forgiveness most. Such a conclusion as to his state of mind seems a fair inference from our Lord’s words to him, for Christ would never have offered forgiveness to an impenitent or indifferent heart.

So we may learn that our chief and prime need is forgiveness. Amid all our clamours and hungry needs, that is our deepest. Is not a man's chief relation in this world his relation to God? Is not that the most important thing about all of us? If that be wrong, will not everything be wrong? If that be right, will not everything come right? And is it not true that for you and me, and for all our fellows, whatever be the surface diversities of character, civilisation, culture, taste and the like, there is one deep experience common to every human spirit, and that is the fact, and in some sense more or less acutely the consciousness of the fact, that 'we have sinned, and come short of the glory of God'?

There is the fontal source of all sorrow, for even to the most superficial observation ninety per cent., at any rate, of man's misery comes either from his own or from others' wrongdoing, and for the rest, it is regarded in the eye of faith as being sorrow that is needful because of sin, in order to discipline and to purify. But here stands the fact, that king and clown, philosopher and fool, men of culture and men of ignorance, all of us, through all the ages, manifest the unity of our nature in this—I was going to say most chiefly—that lapses from the path of rectitude, and indulgence in habits, thoughts, feelings, and actions, which even our consciences tell us are wrong, characterise us all.

Hence the profound wisdom of Christ and of His Gospel in that, when it begins the task of healing, it does not peddle and potter on the surface, but goes straight to the heart, with true instinct flies at the head, like a wise physician pays little heed to secondary and unimportant symptoms, but grapples with the disease, makes the tree good, and leaves the good tree to make, as it will, the fruit good.

The first thing to do to heal men's misery, is to make them pure; and the first step in the great method by which a man can be made pure, is to assure him of a divine forgiveness for the past. So the sneers that we often hear about Christian 'philanthropists taking tracts to people when they want soup,' and the like, are excessively shallow sneers, and indicate nothing more than this, that the critic has superficially diagnosed the disease, and is wofully wrong about the remedy. God forbid that I should say one word that would seem to depreciate the value of other forms of beneficence, or to cast doubt upon the purity of motives, or even to be lacking in admiration for the enthusiasm that fills and guides many an earnest man and woman, working amongst the squalid vice of our great cities and of our complex and barbarous civilisation to-day. I would recognise all their work as good and blessed; but, oh! dear brethren, it deals with the surface, and you will have to go a great deal deeper down than æ³'hetic, or intellectual, or economical, or political reformation and changes reach, before you touch the real reason why men and women are miserable in this world. And you will only effectually cure the misery, but you certainly then will do it, when you begin where the misery begins, and deal first with sin. The true 'saviour of society' is the man that can go to his brother, and as a minister declaratory of the divine heart can say—'Brother, be of

good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.' And then, after that, the palsy will go out of his limbs, and a new nervous energy will come into them, and he will rise, take up his bed, and walk.

II. Now, in the next place, notice, as coming out of this incident before us, the thought that forgiveness is an exclusively divine act.

There was, sitting by, with their jealous and therefore blind eyes, a whole crowd of wise men and religious formalists of the first water, collected together as a kind of ecclesiastical inquisition and board of triers, as one of the other evangelists tells us, out of every corner of the land. They had no care for the dewy pity that was in Christ's looks, or for the nascent hope that began to swim up into the poor, dim eye of the paralytic. But they had keen scent for heresy, and so they fastened with true feline instinct upon the one thing, 'This man speaketh blasphemies. Who can forgive sins but God alone?' Ah! if you want to get people blind as bats to the radiant beauty of some lofty character, and insensible as rocks to the wants of a sad humanity, commend me to your religious formalists, whose religion is mainly a bundle of red tape tied round men's limbs to keep them from getting at things that they would like. These are the people who will be as hard as the nether millstones, and utterly blind to all enthusiasm and to all goodness.

But yet these Pharisees are right; perfectly right. Forgiveness *is* an exclusively divine act. Of course. For sin has to do with God only; vice has to do with the laws of morality; crime has to do with the laws of the land. The same act may be vice, crime, and sin. In the one aspect it has to do with myself, in the other with my fellows, in the last with God. And so evil considered as sin comes under God's control only, and only He against whom it has been committed can forgive.

What is forgiveness? The sweeping aside of penalties? the shutting up of some more or less material hell? By no means: penalties are often left; when sins are crimes they are generally left; when sins are vices they are always left, thank God! But in so far as sin is sin, considered as being the perversion and setting wrong of my relation to Him, its consequences, which are its penalties, are swept away by forgiveness; for forgiveness, in its essence and deepest meaning, is neither more nor less than that the love of the person against whom the wrong has been done shall flow out, notwithstanding the wrong. Pardon is love rising above the ice-dam which we have piled in its course, and pouring into our hearts.

When you fathers and mothers forgive your children, what does it mean? Does it not mean that your love is neither deflected nor embittered any more, by reason of their wrongdoing, but pours upon them as of old? So God's forgiveness is at bottom—'Child! there is nothing in my heart to thee, but pure and perfect love.' We fill the sky with mists, through which the sun itself has to look like a red ball of lurid fire. But it shines on the upper side of the mists all the same, and all the time, and thins them away and scatters them utterly, and shines forth in its own brightness on the rejoicing heart. Pardon is God's love, unchecked

and unembittered, granted to the wrongdoer. And that is a divine act, and a divine act alone. Pharisees and Scribes were perfectly right. No man can forgive sins but God only.

And I might add, though it is somewhat aside from my direct purpose, God *can* forgive sin; which some people nowadays say is impossible. The apparent impossibility arises only from shallow and erroneous notions of what forgiveness is. God does not—it might be too bold to say God cannot, if we believe in miracles—but as a matter of fact, God does not, usually interfere to hinder men from reaping, as regards this life, what they have sown. But as I say, that is not forgiveness; and is there any reason conceivable why it should be impossible for the divine love to pour down upon a sinful man who has forsaken his sin, and is trusting in God's mercy in Christ, just as if his sin was non-existent, in so far as it could condition or interfere with the flow of the divine mercy?

And I may say, further, we need a definite divine assurance of pardon. Ah! if you have ever been down into the cellars of your own hearts, and seen the ugly things that coil there, you will know that a vague trust in a vague God and a vague mercy is not enough to still the conscience that has once been stung into action. My brothers, you want neither priests nor ceremonies on the one hand, nor a mere peradventure of 'Oh! God is merciful!' on the other, in order to deal with that deepest need of your heart. Nothing but the King's own sign-manual on the pardon makes it valid; and unless you and I can, somehow or other, come to close grips with God, and get into actual contact with Him, and hear, somehow, with infallible certitude, as from His own lips, the assurance of forgiveness, there is not enough for our needs.

III. So I come to say, in the next place, that the incident before us teaches us that Jesus Christ claims and exercises this divine prerogative of forgiveness.

Mark His answer to these cavillers. He admits their promises absolutely. They said, 'No man can forgive sins but God only.' If Christ was only a man, like us, standing in the same relation to the divine pardon that other teachers, saints, and prophets have stood, and had nothing more to do with it than simply, as I might do, to say to a troubled heart, 'My brother, be quite sure that God has forgiven you'; if Christ's relation to the divine forgiveness was nothing more than ministerial and declaratory, why, in the name, not of common sense only, but of veracity, did He not turn round to these men and say so? He was bound, by all the obligations of a religious teacher, to disclaim, as you or I would have done under similar circumstances, the misapprehension of His words: 'I use blasphemies? No! I am not speaking blasphemies. I know that God only can forgive sins, and I am doing no more than telling my poor brother here that his sins are forgiven by God.' But that is not His answer at all. What He says in effect is—'Yes; you are quite right. No man can forgive sins, but God only. *I* forgive sins. Whom think ye, then, that I, the Son of Man am? It is easy to say "Thy sins be forgiven thee"—far easier to say that than to say "Take up thy bed and walk," because one can verify and check the accomplishment of the saying in the one case, and one cannot

in the other. The sentences are equally easy to pronounce, the things are equally difficult for a *man* to do, but the difference is that one of them can be verified and the other of them cannot. I will do the visible impossibility, and then I leave you to judge whether I can do the invisible one or not.'

Now, dear brethren, I have only one word to say about that, and it is this. We are here brought sharp up to a fork in the road. I know that it is not always a satisfactory way of arguing to compel a man to take one horn or other of an alternative, but it is quite fair to do go in the present case; and I would press it upon some of you who, I think, urgently need to consider the dilemma. Either the Pharisees were quite right, and Jesus Christ, the meek, the humble, the Pattern of all lowly gentleness, the Teacher whom nineteen centuries confess that they have not exhausted, was an audacious blasphemer, or He was God manifest in the flesh. The whole context forbids us to take these words, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee,' as anything less than the voice of divine love wiping out the man's transgressions; and if Jesus Christ pretended or presumed to do that, there is no hypothesis that I know of which can save His character for the reverence of man, but that which sees in Him God revealed in manhood; the world's Judge, from whom the world may receive divine forgiveness.

IV. Jesus Christ here brings visible facts into the witness-box as the attesters of His invisible powers.

Of course the miracle was such a witness in a special way, inasmuch as it and forgiveness were equally divine prerogatives and acts. I need not dwell now upon what I have already observed in my introductory remarks, that our Lord here teaches us the relative importance of the attesting miracle and the thing attested, and regards the miracle as subordinate to the higher and spiritual work of bringing pardon.

But we may widen out this into the thought that the subsidiary effects of Christian faith in individuals, and of the less complete Christian faith which is diffused over society, do stand as very strong evidences of the reality of Christ's professions and claims to exercise this invisible power of pardon. Or, to put it into a concrete form, and to take an illustration which may need large deductions.—Go into a Salvation Army meeting. Admit the extravagance, the coarseness, and all the rest which we educated and superfine Christians cannot stand. But when you have blown away the froth, is there not something left in the cup which looks uncommonly like the wine of the Kingdom? Are there not visible results of that, as of every earnest effort to carry the message of forgiveness to men, which create an immense presumption in favour of its reality and divine origin? Men reclaimed, passions tamed, homes that were pandemoniums made Bethels, houses of God. Wherever Christ's forgiving power really comes into a heart, life is beautified, is purified, is ennobled; and secondary and material benefits follow in the train.

I claim all the difference between Christendom and Heathendom as attestation of the reality of Christ's divine and atoning work. I say, and I believe it to be a valid and a good

argument as against much of the doubt of this day, 'If you seek His monument, look around.' His own answer to the question, 'Art thou He that should come?' is valid still: 'Go and tell John the things that ye see and hear'; the dead are raised, the deaf ears are opened; faculties that lie dormant are quickened, and in a thousand ways the swift spirit of life flows from Him and vitalises the dead masses of humanity.

Let any system of belief or of no belief do the like if it can. This rod has budded at any rate, let the magicians do the same with their enchantments.

Now, Christian men and women, 'ye are My witnesses,' saith the Lord. The world takes its notions of Christianity, and its belief in the power of Christianity, a great deal more from you than it does from preachers and apologists. *You* are the Bibles that most men read. See to it that your lives represent worthily the redeeming and the ennobling power of your Master.

And as for the rest of you, do not waste your time trying to purify the stream twenty miles down from the fountainhead, but go to the source. Do not believe, brother, that your palsy, or your fever, your paralysis of will towards good, or the unwholesome ardour with which you are impelled to wrong, and the consequent misery and restlessness, can ever be healed until you go to Christ—the forgiving Christ—and let Him lay His hand upon you; and from His own sweet and infallible lips hear the word that shall come as a charm through all your nature: 'Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.' 'Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened; then shall the lame man leap as an hart';—then limitations, sorrows, miseries, will pass away, and forgiveness will bear fruit in joy and power, in holiness, health and peace.

THE CALL OF MATTHEW

‘And as Jesus passed forth from thence, He saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and He saith unto him, Follow Me. And he arose, and followed Him. 10. And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. 11. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto His disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? 12. But when Jesus heard that, He said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. 13. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. 14. Then came to Him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but Thy disciples fast not? 15. And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast. 16. No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse. 17. Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved.’—[MATT. ix. 9-17](#).

All three evangelists connect the call of Matthew immediately with the cure of the paralytic, and follow it with an account of Christ’s answers to sundry cavils from Pharisees and John’s disciples. No doubt, the spectacle of this new Teacher taking a publican into His circle of disciples, and, not content with such an outrage on all proper patriotic feeling, following it up with scandalous companionship with the sort of people that a publican could get to accept his hospitality, sharpened hatred and made suspicion prick its ears. Mark and Luke call the publican Levi, he calls himself Matthew, the former being probably his name before his discipleship, the latter, that by which he was known thereafter. Possibly Jesus gave it him, as in the cases of Simon, and perhaps Bartholomew. But, however acquired, it superseded the old one, as the fact that it appears in the lists of the apostles in both the other evangelists and in Acts, shows. Its use here may be a trace of a touching desire to make sure that readers, who only knew him as Matthew, should understand who this publican was. It is like the little likenesses of themselves, in some corner of a background, that early painters used to slip into a picture of Madonna and angels. There was no vanity in the wish, for he says nothing about his sacrifices, leaving it to Luke to tell that ‘he left all,’ but he *does* crave that his brethren, who read, should know that it was he whom Jesus honoured by His call.

The condensed narrative emphasises three things, (1) his occupation with his ordinary business when that wonderful summons thrilled his soul; (2) the curt authoritative command, and (3) the swift obedience. As to the first, Capernaum was on a great trade route, and the

custom-house officers there would have their hands full. This one was busy at his work, hateful and shameful as it was in Jewish eyes, and into that sordid atmosphere, like a flash of light into a mephitic cavern full of unclean creatures, came the transcendent mercy of Jesus' summons. There is no region of life so foul, so mean, so despicable in men's eyes, but that the quickening Voice will enter there. We do not need to be in temples or about sacred tasks in order to hear it. It summons us in, and sometimes from, our daily work. Well for those who know whose Voice it is, and do not mistake it for some Eli's!

No doubt this was not the first of Matthew's knowledge of Jesus. Living in Capernaum, he would have had many opportunities of hearing Him or of Him, and his heart and conscience may have been stirred. As he sat in his 'tolbooth,' feeling contempt and hatred poured on him, he, no doubt, had had longings to get nearer to the One whose voice was gentle, and His looks, love. So the call would come to him as the fulfilment of a dim hope, and it would be a joyful surprise to know that Jesus wished to have him for a disciple as much as he wished to have Jesus for a Teacher. The ring of fire and hate within which he had been imprisoned was broken, and there was One who cared to have him, and who would not shrink from his touch. In the light of that assurance, the call became, not a summons to give anything up, but an invitation to receive a better possession than all with which he was called to part. And if we saw things as they are, would it not always be so to us? 'Follow Me' does mean, Forsake earth and self, but it means still more: Take what is more than all. It parts from these because it unites to Jesus. Therefore it means gain, not deprivation. And it condenses all rules for life into one, for to follow Him is the sum of all duty, and yields the perfect pattern of conduct and character, while it is also the secret of all blessedness, and the talisman that assures a man of continual progress. They who follow are near, and will reach, Him. Of course, if His servants follow Him, it stands to reason that one day, 'where I am there shall also My servants be.' So in that command lie a sufficient guide for earth, and a sure guarantee for heaven.

'And he arose and followed Him.' That is the only thing that we are told of Matthew. We hear no more of him, except that he made a feast in his house on the occasion. No doubt he did his work as an apostle, but oblivion has swallowed up all that. A happy fate to be known to all the world for all time, only by this one thing, that he unconditionally, immediately and joyfully obeyed Christ's call! He might have said: 'How can I leave my work? I must make up my accounts, hand over my papers, do a hundred things in order to wind up matters, and I must postpone following till then.' But he sprang up at once. He would have abundant opportunities to settle all details afterwards, but if he let this opportunity of taking his place as a disciple pass, he might never have another. There are some things that are best done gradually and slowly, but obedience to Christ's call is not one of them. Prompt obedience is the only safety. The psalmist knew the danger of delay when he said: 'I made haste and delayed not, but made haste to keep Thy commandments.'

Matthew does not tell us that *he* made the feast, but Luke does. It was the natural expression of his thankfulness and joy for the new bond. His knowledge was small, but his love was great. How could he honour Jesus enough? But he was a pariah in Capernaum, and the only guests he could assemble were, like himself, outcasts from 'respectable society.' In popular estimation all publicans were regarded without any more ado as 'sinners,' but probably that designation is here applied to disreputable folks of various kinds and degrees of shadiness, who gravitated to Matthew and his class, because, like him, they were repulsed by every one else. Even outcasts hunger for society, and manage to get a community of their own, in which they find some glow of comradeship, and some defence from hatred and contempt. Even lepers herd together and have their own rules of intercourse.

But what a scandal in the eyes not only of Pharisees, but of all the proper people in Capernaum, Jesus' going to such a gathering of disreputables would be, we may estimate if we remember that they did not know His reason, but thought that He went because He liked the atmosphere and the company. 'Like draws to like' was the conclusion suggested, in the absence of His own explanation. The Pharisee conceived that his duty in regard to publicans and sinners was to keep as far from them as he could, and his strait-laced self-righteousness had never dreamed of going to them with an open heart, and trying to win them to a better life. Many so-called followers of Jesus still take that attitude. They gather up their skirts round them daintily, and never think that it would be liker their Lord to sweep away the mud than to pick their steps through it, caring mainly to keep their own shoes clean.

The feast was probably spread in some courtyard or open space, to which, as is the Eastern custom, uninvited spectators could have access. It is quite in accordance with the usage of the times and land that the Pharisees should have been onlookers, and should have been able to talk to the disciples. No doubt their colloquy became animated, and perhaps loud, so that it could easily attract Christ's attention. He answered for Himself, and the tone of His reply is friendly and explanatory, as if He recognised that the questioners genuinely wished to know 'why' He was sitting in such company.

It discloses His motive, and thereby sweeps away all insinuations that He consorted with sinners because their company was congenial. It was precisely for the opposite reason, because He was so unlike them. He came among these sinners as a physician; and who wonders at *his* being beside the sick? He does not spend his days by their bedsides because he likes the atmosphere, but because it is his business to make them well. Now, in that comparison, Jesus pronounces no opinion on the correctness of the Pharisees' estimate of themselves as 'righteous,' or of publicans as sinners, but simply takes them on their own ground. But He does make a great claim for Himself, and speaks out of His consciousness of power to heal men's worst disease, sin. It is a tremendous assertion to make of oneself, and its greatness is enhanced by the quiet way in which it is stated as a thought familiar to Himself. What right had He to pose as the physician for humanity, and how can such a

claim be reconciled with His being 'meek and lowly in heart'? If He Himself was one of the sick and needed healing, how can He be the healer of the rest? If being a sinful man, as we all are, He made such a claim, what becomes of the reverence which is paid to Him as a great religious Teacher, and where has His 'sweet reasonableness' vanished?

Jesus passes from explanation of His personal relation to the publicans to adduce the broad principle which should shape the Pharisees' relation to them, as it had shaped His. Hosea had said long ago that God delighted more in 'mercy' than in 'sacrifice.' Kindly helpfulness to men is better worship than exact performance of any ritual. Sacrifice propitiates God, but mercy imitates Him, and imitation is the perfection of divine service. Jesus here speaks as all the prophets had spoken, and smites with a deadly stroke the mechanical formalism which in every age stiffens religion into ceremonies and neglects love towards God, expressed in mercy to men. He lays bare the secret of His own life, and He thereby lays on His followers the obligation of making it the moving impulse of theirs.

The great general truth is followed, as it has been preceded, by a plain statement of Jesus' own conception of His mission in the world. 'I came,' says He, hinting at the fact that He was before He was born, and that His Incarnation was His voluntary act. True, He was sent, and we speak of His mission, but also He 'came,' and we speak of His advent. 'To repentance' is omitted by the best editors as being brought over from Luke, where it is genuine. But it is a correct gloss on the simple word 'call,' though 'repentance' is but a small part of that to which He summons. He calls us to repent; He calls us to Himself; He calls us to self-surrender; He calls us to Eternal Life; He calls us to a better feast than Matthew had spread. But we must recognise that we are sinners, or we shall never realise that His invitation is for us, nor ever feel that we need a physician, and have in Him, and in Him alone, the Physician whom we need.

The Pharisees objected to Jesus' feasting, and could scarcely in the same breath find fault with Him for not fasting, but they put forward some of John's disciples to bring that fresh objection. Common hatred is a strong cement, and often holds opposites together for a while. It was bad for John's followers that they should be willing to say, 'We and the Pharisees.' They had travelled far from the days when their master had called the same class a 'generation of vipers'! Their keen desire to uphold the honour of their teacher, whose light they saw paling before the younger Jesus, made them hostile to Him, and, as is usually the case, the followers were more partisan than the leader. Religious antagonism sometimes stoops to very strange alliances. The two questions brought together in this context are noticeably alike, and noticeably different. Both ask for the reason of conduct which they do not go the length of impugning. They seem to be desirous of enlightenment, they are really eager to condemn. Both avoid seeming to call in question the acts of the persons addressed, for the Pharisees interrogate the *disciples* as to the reason for *Jesus'* conduct, while John's

disciples ask from *Jesus* the reason of His disciples' conduct. In both, mock respectfulness covers lively hatred.

Our Lord's first answer is as profound as it is beautiful, and veils, while it reveals, a lofty claim for Himself and a solemn foresight of His death, and lays down a great and fruitful principle as to the relations between spiritual moods and outward acts of religion. His speaking of Himself as 'the Bridegroom' would recall to some of His questioners, and that with a touch of shame, John's nobly humble acceptance of the subordinate place of the bridegroom's friend and elevation of Jesus to that of the bridegroom. But it was not merely a rebuking quotation from John's witness, but the expression of His own unclouded and continual consciousness of what He was to humanity, and of what humanity could find in Him, as well as a sovereign appropriating to Himself of many prophetic strains. What depth of love, what mysterious blending of spirit, what adoring, lowly obedience, what perfection of protecting care, what rapture of possession, what rest of heart in trust, what dower of riches are dimly shadowed in that wonderful emblem, will never be known till the hour of the marriage-supper of the Lamb, when 'His bride hath made herself ready.' But across the light there flits a shadow. It is but for a moment, and it meant little to the hearers, but it meant much to Him. For He could not look forward to winning His bride without seeing the grim Cross, and even athwart the brightness of the days of companionship with His humble friends, came the darkness on His soul, though not on theirs, of the violent end when He 'shall be taken from them.' The hint fell apparently on deaf ears, but it witnesses to the continual presence in the mind of Jesus of His sufferings and death. The certainty that He must die was not forced on Him by the failure of His efforts as His career unfolded itself. It was no disappointment of bright earlier hopes, as is the case with many a disillusionised reformer, who thought at the outset that he had only to speak and all men would listen. It was the clearly discerned goal from the first. 'The Son of Man came . . . to give His life a ransom.'

But our Lord here lays down a broad principle, which, if applied as it was meant to be, would lift a heavy burden of outward observance off the Christian consciousness. Fast when you are sad; feast when you are glad. Let the disposition, the mood, the moment's circumstance, mould your action. There is no virtue or sanctity in observances which do not correspond to the inner self. What a charter of liberty is proclaimed in these quiet words! What mountains of ceremonial unreality, oppressive to the spirit, are cast into the sea by them! How different Christendom would have been and would be to-day, if Christians had learned the lesson of these words!

The two condensed parables or extended metaphors, which follow the vindication of the disciples, carry the matter further, and lay down a principle which is intended to cover not only the question in hand, their non-observance of Jewish regulations as to fasting, but the whole subject of the relations of the new word, which Jesus felt that He brought, to the

old system. The same consciousness of His unique mission which prompted His use of the term 'bridegroom,' shines through the two metaphors of the new cloth and the new wine. He knows that He is about to bring a new garb to men, and to give them new wine to drink, and He knows that what He brings is no mere patch on a worn-out system, but a new fermenting force, which demands fresh vehicles and modes of expression. The two metaphors take up different aspects of one thought. To try to mend an old coat with a bit of unshrunk cloth would only make a worse dissolution of continuity, for as soon as a shower fell on it the patch would shrink, and, in shrinking, pull the thin pieces of the old garment adjoining it to itself. Judaism was already 'rent' and worn too thin to be capable of repair. The only thing to be done was 'as a vesture' to 'fold it up' and shape a new garment out of new cloth. What was true as to the supremely new thing which He brought into the world remains true, in less eminent degree, of the less acute differences between the Old and the New, within Christianity itself. There do come times when its externals become antiquated, worn thin and torn, and when patching is useless. Christian men, like others, constitutionally incline to conservatism or to progress, and the one temperament needs to be warned against obstinately preserving old clothes, and the other against eagerly insisting that they are past mending.

But a patch and a worn garment do not wholly describe the relations of the old and the new. Freshly made wine, still fermenting, and old, stiff wine-skins which have lost their elasticity suggest further thoughts. Now we have to do with containing vessel *versus* contents, with a fermenting force *versus* stiffened forms. To put that into these will destroy both. For example, if the struggle of the Judaisers in the early Church had succeeded, and Christianity had become a Jewish sect, it would have dwindled to nothing, as the Jewish-minded Christians did. The wine must have bottles. Every great spiritual renovating force must embody itself in institutions. Spiritual emotions must express themselves in acts of worship, spiritual convictions must speak in a creed. But the containing vessel must be congruous with, and still more, it must be created by, the contained force, as there are creatures who frame their shells to fit the convolutions of their bodies, and build them up from their own substance. Forms are good, as long as they can stretch if need be; when they are too stiff to expand, they restrict rather than contain the wine, and if short-sighted obstinacy insists on keeping *it in them*, there will be a great spill and loss of much that is precious.

THE TOUCH OF FAITH AND THE TOUCH OF CHRIST

‘While He spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshipped Him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay Thy hand upon her, and she shall live. 19. And Jesus arose, and followed him, and so did His disciples. 20. And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind Him, and touched the hem of His garment: 21. For she said within herself, If I may but touch His garment, I shall be whole. 22. But Jesus turned Him about, and when He saw her, He said, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour. 23. And when Jesus came into the ruler’s house, and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise. 24. He said unto them, Give place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed Him to scorn. 25. But when the people were put forth, He went in, and took her by the hand, and the maid arose. 26. And the fame hereof went abroad into all that land. 27. And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed Him, crying, and saying, Thou Son of David, have mercy on us. 28. And when He was come into the house, the blind men came to Him: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto Him, Yea, Lord. 29. Then touched He their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you. 30. And their eyes were opened; and Jesus straitly charged them, saying, See that no man know it. 31. But they, when they were departed, spread abroad His fame in all that country.’—[MATT. ix. 18-31](#).

The three miracles included in the present section belong to the last group of this series. Those of the second group were all effected by Christ’s word. Those now to be considered are all effected by touch. The first two are intertwined. The narrative of the healing of the woman is embedded in the account of the raising of Jairus’s daughter.

Mark the impression of calm consciousness of power and leisurely dignity produced by Christ’s having time to pause, even on such an errand, in order to heal, by the way, the other sufferer. The father and the disciples would wonder at Him as He stayed His steps, and be apt to feel that priceless moments were being lost; but He knows His own resources, and can afford to let the child die while He heals the woman. The one shall receive no harm by the delay, and the other will be blessed. Our Lord is sitting at the feast which Matthew gave on the occasion of his call, engaged in vindicating His sharing in innocent festivity against the cavils of the Pharisees, when the summons to the death-bed comes to Him from the lips of the father, who breaks in on the banquet with his imploring cry. Matthew gives the story much more summarily than the other evangelists, and does not distinguish, as they do, between Jairus’s first words, ‘at the point of death, and the message of her actual decease, which met them on the way. The call of sorrow always reaches Christ’s ear, and the cry for help is never deemed by Him an interruption. So this ‘man, gluttonous and a wine-bibber,’ as these Pharisees thought Him, willingly and at once leaves the house of feasting

for that of mourning. How near together, in this awful life of ours, the two lie, and how thin the partition walls! Well for those whose feasts do not bar them out from hearing the weeping next door.

As the crowd accompanies Jesus, His hasting love is, for a moment, diverted by another sufferer. We never go on an errand of mercy but we pass a hundred other sorrowing hearts, so close packed lie the griefs of men. This woman is a poor shrinking creature, broken down by long illness (which had lasted for the same length of time as the joyous life of Jairus's child), made more timid by disappointed hopes of cure, and depressed by poverty to which her many doctors had brought her. She does not venture to stop this new Rabbi-physician, as He goes with the church dignitary of the town to heal his daughter, but lets Him pass before she can make up her mind to go near Him; and then she comes creeping up behind the crowd, puts out her wasted, trembling hand to the hem of His garment,—and she is whole.

The other evangelists give us a more extended account, but Matthew throws into prominence, in his condensed narrative, the essential points.

Notice her real but imperfect faith. There was unquestionable confidence in Christ's power, and very genuine desire for healing. But it was a very ignorant faith. She believes that her touch of the garment will heal without Christ's will or knowledge, much more His pitying love, having any part in it. She thinks that she may win her desire furtively, and may carry it away, and He be none the wiser nor the poorer for the stolen blessing. What utter, blank ignorance of His character and way of working! What gross superstition! Yes, and withal what a hunger of desire, what absolute assurance of confidence that one finger-tip on His robe was enough! Therefore she had her desire, and her Healer recognised her faith as true, though blended with much ignorance of Him. Her error was very like that which many Christians entertain with less excuse. To attach importance to external means of grace, rites, ordinances, sacraments, outward connection with Christian organisations, is the very same misconception in a slightly different form. Such error is always near us; it is especially rife in countries where there has long been a visible Church. It has received strange new vigour to-day, partly by reaction from extreme rationalism, partly by the growing cultivation of the aesthetic faculties. It is threatening to corrupt the simplicity and spirituality of Christian worship, and needs to be strenuously resisted. But the more we have to fight against it, the more do we need to remember that, along with this clinging to the hem of the garment instead of to the heart of its Wearer, there may be a very real trust, which might shame some of those who profess to hold a less sensuous form of faith. Many a poor soul clasping a crucifix clings to the Cross. Many a devout heart kneeling at mass sees through the incense-smoke the face of Christ.

This woman's faith was selfish. She wanted health; she did not care much about the Healer. She would have been quite contented to have had no more to do with Him, if she

could only have stolen out of the crowd cured. She would have had little gratitude to the unconscious Giver of a stolen good. So, many a Christian life in its earlier stages is more absorbed with its own deep misery and its desire for deliverance, than with Him. Love comes after, born of the experience of His love. But faith precedes love, and the predominant motive impelling to faith at first is distinctly self-regard. That is all as it should be. The most purely self-absorbed wish to escape from the most rudely pictured hell is often the beginning of a true trust in Christ, which, in due time, will be elevated into perfect consecration. Some of our modern teachers, who are shocked at Christianity because it lays the foundation of the most self-denying morality in such 'selfishness,' would be none the worse for going to school to this story, and learning from it how a desire for nothing more than to get rid of a painful disease, started a process which turned a life into a peaceful, thankful surrender of the cured self to the love and service of the mighty Healer.

Observe, next, how Christ answers the imperfect faith, and, by answering, corrects and confirms it. Matthew omits Christ's question as to who touched Him, the disciples' reply, and His renewed asseveration that He was conscious of power having gone forth from Him. All these belong to the loving method by which our Lord sought to draw forth an open acknowledgment. Womanly diffidence, enfeebled health, her special disease, all made the woman wish to hide herself. She wanted to steal away unnoticed, as she hoped that she had come. But Christ forces her to stand out before all the crowd, and there, with all eyes upon her,—cold, cruel eyes, some of them—to conquer her shame, and tell all the truth. Strange kindness that; strangely contrasted with His ordinary desire to avoid notoriety, and with His ordinary tender consideration for shrinking weakness! He did it for her sake, not for His own. She is changed from timidity to courage. At one moment she stretches out her wasted finger, a tremulous invalid; at the next, she flings herself at His feet, a confessor. He would have us testify for Him, because faith unavowed, like a plant in the dark, is apt to become pale and sickly; but ere He bids us own His name, He pours into our hearts, in answer to our secret appeal, the health of His own life, and the blissful consciousness of that great gift which makes the tongue of the dumb sing.

His words to her are full of tenderness. She receives the name of 'daughter.' Gently He encourages her timidity by that 'Be of good cheer,' and then He sets right her error: 'Thy faith'—not thy finger—'hath made thee whole.' There was no real connection between the touch of the robe and healing; but the woman thought that there was, and so Christ stooped to her childish thought, and allowed her to prescribe the road which His mercy should take. But He would not leave her with her error. The true means of contact between us and Him is not our outward contact with external means of grace, but the touch of our spirits by faith. Faith is nothing in itself, and heals only because it brings us into union with His power, which is the sole cause of our healing. Faith is the hand which receives the blessing. It may be a wasted and tremulous hand, like that which this woman laid lightly on His robe. But

He feels its touch, though a universe presses on Him, and He answers. Not the garment's hem, but Christ's love, is the cause of our salvation. Not an outward contact with it or with Him, but faith, is the condition on which His life, which knows no disease, pours into our souls. The hand of my faith lifted to Him will receive into its empty palm and clasping fingers the special blessing for my special wants.

The other evangelists tell us that, at the moment of His words to the woman, the messengers came bearing tidings of the child's death. How Jairus must have grudged the pause! A word from Christ, like the pressure of His hand, heartened him. Like a river turned from its course for a space, to fill some empty reservoir, His love comes back to its original direction. How abundant the power and mercy, to which such a work as that just done was but a parenthesis! The doleful music and the shrill shrieks of Eastern mourning, which met them as they entered Jairus's house, disturbed the sanctity of the hour, and were in strong contrast with the majestic calmness of Jesus. Not amid venal lamentations and excited cries will He do His work. He bids the noisy crowd forth with curt, almost stern, command, and therein rebukes all such hollow and tumultuous scenes, in the presence of the stillness of death, still more where faith in Him has robbed it of its terror, in robbing it of its perpetuity. It is strange that believing readers should have thought that our Lord meant to say that the little girl was not really dead, but only in a swoon. The scornful laughter of the flute-players and hired mourners understood Him better. They knew that it was real death, as men count death, and, as has often been the case, the laughter of His foes has served to establish the truth. That was not worthy to be called death from which the child was so soon and easily to be awaked. But, besides this special application to the case in hand, that great saying of our Lord's carries the blessed truth that, since He has come, death is softened into sleep for all who love Him. The euphemism is not peculiar to Christianity, but has a deeper meaning on Christian lips than when Greeks or Romans spoke of the eternal sleep. Others speak of death by any name rather than its own, because they fear it so much. The Christian does so, because he fears it so little,—and, as a matter of fact, the use of the word death as meaning merely the separation of soul and body by the physical act is exceptional in the New Testament. This name of sleep, sanctioned thus by Christ, is the sweetest of all. It speaks of the cessation of connection with the world of sense, and 'long disquiet merged in rest.' It does not imply unconsciousness, for we are not unconscious when we sleep, but only unaware of externals. It holds the promise of waking when the sun comes. So it has driven out the ugly old name. Our tears flow less bitterly when we think of our dear ones as 'sleeping in Jesus.' Their bodies, like this little child's, are dead, but *they* are not. They rest, conscious of their own blessedness and of Him 'in whom they live, and have their being,' whether they 'move' or no.

Then comes the great deed. The crowd is shut out. For such a work silence is befitting. The father and mother, with His foremost three disciples, go with Him into the chamber.

There is no effort, repeated and gradually successful, as when Elisha raised the dead boy; no praying, as when Peter raised Dorcas; only the touch of the hand in which life throbbed in fulness, and, as the other narratives record, two words, spoken strangely to, and yet more strangely heard by, the dull, cold ear of death. Their echo lingered long with Peter, and Mark gives us them in the original Aramaic. But Matthew passes them by, as he seems here to have desired to emphasise the power of Christ's touch. But touch or word, the real cause of the miracle was simply His will; and whether He used media to help men's faith, or said only 'I will,' mattered little. He varied His methods as the circumstances of the recipients required, and in order that they and we might learn that He was tied to none. These miracles of raising the dead are three in number. Jairus's daughter is raised from her bed, just having passed away; the widow's son at Nain from his bier, having been for a little longer separated from his body; Lazarus from the grave, having been dead four days. A few minutes, or days, or four thousand years, are one to His power. These three are in some sense the first-fruits of the great harvest; the stars that shone out singly before all the heaven is in a blaze. For, though they died again, and so left to Him the precedence in resurrection, as in all besides, they are still prophetic of His power in the hour when they 'that sleep in the dust' shall awake at His voice. Blessed they who, like this little maiden, are awakened, not only by His voice, but by His touch, and to find, as she did, their hand in His!

The third of these miracles, which Matthew seems to reckon as the second in the group, because he treats the two former as so closely connected as to be but one in numeration, need not detain us long. It is found only in this Gospel. The first point to be observed in it is the cry of these two blind men. There is something pathetic and exquisitely natural in the two being together, as is also the case in the similar miracle, at a later period, on the outskirts of Jericho. Equal sorrows drive men together for such poor help and solace as they can give each other. They have common experiences which isolate them from others, and they creep close for warmth and companionship. All the blind men in the Gospels have certain resemblances. One is that they are all sturdily persevering, as perhaps was easier for them because they could not see the impatience of the listeners, and possibly because, in most cases, persistent begging was their trade, and they were used to refusals. But a more important trait is their recognition of Jesus as 'Son of David.' Blind as they are, they see more than do the seeing. Thrown in upon themselves, they may have been led to ponder the old words, and by their affliction been made more ready to welcome One who, if He were Messiah, was coming with a special blessing for them—'to open the blind eyes.' Men who deeply desire a good are quick to listen to the promise of its accomplishment. So these two followed Him along the road, loudly and perseveringly calling out their profession of faith, and their entreaty for sight.

The next point is our Lord's treatment. He let them cry on, apparently unheeding. Had, then, the two miracles just done exhausted His stock of power or of pity? Certainly His

reason was, as it always was, their good. We do not know why it was better for them to have to wait, and continue their entreaty; but we may be quite sure that the reason for all His delays is the same,—the larger blessing which comes with the answer when it comes, and the large blessings which may be gathered while we wait its coming. Christ's question to them, when at last they have found their way even indoors, holds out more hope than they had yet received. By it, Christ established a close relation with them, and implied to them that He was willing to answer their cry. One can fancy how the poor blind faces would light up with a flush of eager expectation, and how swift would be the answer. The question is not cold or inquisitorial. It is more than half a promise, and a powerful aid to the faith which it requires.

There is something very beautiful and pathetic in the simple brevity of the unhesitating answer, 'Yea, Lord.' Sincerity needs few words. Faith can put an infinite deal of meaning into a monosyllable. Their eagerness to reach the goal made their answer brief. But it was enough. Again the hand which had clasped the maiden's palm is put out and laid gently on the useless eyes, and the great word spoken, 'According to your faith be it unto you.' Their blindness made the touch peculiarly fitting in their case, as bringing evidence of sense to those who could not see the gracious pity of His looks. The word spoken was, like that to the centurion, a declaration of the power of faith, which determines the measure, and often the manner, of His gifts to us. The containing vessel not only settles the quantity of, but the shape assumed by, the water which is taken up in it from the sea. Faith, which keeps inside of Christ's promises (and what goes outside of them is not faith), decides how much of Christ we shall have for our very own. He condescends to run the molten gold of His mercies into the moulds which our faith prepares.

These two men, who had used their tongues so well in their persistent cry for healing, went away to make a worse use of them in telling everywhere of their cure. Jesus desired silence. Possibly He did not wish His reputation as a mere worker of miracles to be spread abroad. In all His earlier ministry He avoided publicity, singularly contrasting therein with the evident desire to make Himself the centre of observation which marks its close. He dreaded the smoky flame of popular excitement. His message was to individuals, not to crowds. It was a natural impulse to tell the benefits these two had received; but truer gratitude and deeper faith would have made them obey His lightest word, and have shut their mouths. We honour Christ most, not by taking our way of honouring Him, but by absolute obedience.

The final miracle of the nine (or ten) marshalled in long procession in [chapters viii.](#) and [ix.](#) is told with singular brevity. There is nothing individual in our Lord's treatment of the sufferer, as there was in the previous healing of the two blind men, and no details are given of either the appeal to His pity or the method of His cure. The dumb demoniac could lift no cry, nor exercise any faith, and all the petitions and hopes of his bearers were expressed in the act of bringing the sufferer thither, and silently setting him there before these eyes of

universal pity. It was enough. With Jesus, to see was to compassionate, and to compassionate was to help. In the other instances of casting out demons, the method is an authoritative command, addressed not to the possessed, but to the alien personality that has seized on him, and we conclude that such was the method here. Jesus undoubtedly believed in demoniacal possession, if we can at all rely on the Gospel narratives; and it may be humbly suggested that there are dark depths in humanity, which had need to be fathomed more completely, before any one is warranted in dogmatically pronouncing that He was wrong in His diagnosis. There are ugly facts which should give pause to those who are inclined to say—“There are no demons, and if there were, they could not dominate a human consciousness.”

But the effects of the miracle are emphasised more than itself. They are two, neither of them what might or should have been. The dumb man is not said to have used his recovered speech to thank his deliverer, nor is there any sign that he clung to Him, either for fear of being captured again or in passionate gratitude. It looks as if he selfishly bore away his blessing and cared nothing for its giver. That is very human, and we all are too often guilty of the same sin. Nor was the effect on the multitudes much better, for they were only struck with vulgar wonder, which had no moral quality in it and led to nothing. They saw ‘the miracle,’ that is, the wonderfulness of the act made some dint even on their minds, but these were either too fluid to retain the impression, or too hard to let it be deep, and so it soon filled up again. We have to think of Christ’s deeds as ‘signs,’ not only as ‘wonders,’ or they will do little to draw us to Him. Wonder is a necessarily evanescent emotion, which may indeed set something better stirring in us, but is quite as likely to die barren.

The Pharisees did not wonder, and did look into the phenomenon with sharp eyes; and in so far, they were in advance of the gaping multitudes. They were much too superior persons to be astonished at anything, and they had already settled on a formula which was delightfully easy of application, and had the further advantage of turning the miracles into evidences that the doer of them was a child of the Devil. It appears to have been a well-worked formula too, for it is found again in [chap. xii. 24](#), and in [Luke xi. 15](#), in the account of another cure of a dumb demoniac. It is possible that the incident now before us may be the same as this, but there is nothing improbable in the occurrence of such a case twice, nor in the repetition of what had become the commonplace of the Pharisaic polemic. But what a piercing example that explanation is of the blinding power of prejudice, determined to hold on to a foregone conclusion, and not to see the sun at noon! Jesus in league with ‘the prince of the devils’! And that was gravely said by religious authorities! They saw the loveliness of His perfect life, His gentle goodness, His self-forgetting love, His swift-springing pity, and they set it all down to His commerce with the Evil One. He was so good that He must be more than humanly bad.

A CHRISTLIKE JUDGMENT OF MEN

‘But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.’ —[MATT. ix. 36](#).

In the course of our Lord’s wandering life of teaching and healing, there had naturally gathered around Him a large number of persons who followed Him from place to place, and we have here cast into a symbol the impression produced upon Him by their outward condition. That is to say, He sees them lying there weary, and footsore, and travel-stained. They have flung themselves down by the wayside. There is no leader or guide, no Joshua or director to order their march; they are a worn-out, tired, unregulated mob, and the sight smites upon His eye, and it smites upon His heart. He says to Himself, if I may venture to put words into His lips, ‘There are a worse weariness, and a worse wandering, and a worse anarchy, and a worse disorder afflicting men than that poor mob of tired pedestrians shows.’ Matthew, who was always fond of showing the links and connections between the Old Testament and the New, casts our Lord’s impression of what He then saw into language borrowed from the prophecy of Ezekiel ([ch. xxxiv.](#)), which tells of a flock that is scattered in a dark and cloudy day, that is broken, and torn, and driven away. I venture to see in the text three points: (1) Christ teaching us how to look at men; (2) Christ teaching us how to feel at such a sight; and (3) Christ teaching us what to do with the feeling. ‘When He saw the multitude, He was moved with compassion, because they fainted and were scattered abroad.’ ‘Then He said unto His disciples, the harvest is plenteous, the labourers are few, pray ye the Lord of the harvest to send forth labourers unto the harvest.’ And then there follows, ‘And when He had called unto Him His twelve disciples, He gave them power against unclean spirits to cast them out.’ There are, then, these three points;—just a word or two about each of them.

I. Here we have our Lord teaching us how to look at men.

The picture of my text is, of course, in its broad outlines, very clear and intelligible, but there may be a little difficulty as to the precise force of the language. The obscurity of it is in some degree reflected in the margin of our Bibles; so, perhaps, you will permit one word of an expository nature. The description of the flock, ‘Because they fainted and were scattered abroad,’ is couched in the original in a couple of words, one of which means properly ‘torn’ or ‘fainting,’ according as one or other of two readings of the text is adopted, and the other means ‘lying down.’ Now, the former of these gives a very pathetic picture if we apply it to the individuals that made up the flock. We have then the image of the poor sheep that has lost its way, struggling through briars and thorns, getting out of them with its fleece all torn and hanging in strips dangling at its heels, or of it as lacerated by the beasts of the field to whom it is a prey. If we take the metaphor, as seems more probably to be intended, as applying not so much to the individuals as to the flock, then it comes to mean ‘torn asunder,’

‘thrown apart,’ and gives us the notion of anarchic confusion into which the flock comes if there be no shepherd to lead it. Then the other word, which our Bible translates ‘were scattered abroad,’ seems to mean more properly ‘lying down,’ and it gives the idea of the poor, wearied creature, after all its struggles and wanderings, utterly beaten and dejected, having lost its way, at its wits’ end and resourceless, flinging itself down there in despair, and panting its timid life out anywhere where it finds itself. So it comes to be a picture of the utter weariness and hopelessness of all men’s efforts apart from that Guide and Shepherd, who alone can lead them in the way. And then both of these miserable states, the laceration if you take the one explanation, the disintegration and casting apart if you take the other, the weariness and exhaustion, are traced to their source, they are ‘as sheep having no shepherd.’ He has gone, and so all this comes. With this explanation we may take the points of view that are thus suggested simply as they lie before us.

First of all, notice how here, as always to Jesus Christ, the outward was nothing, except as a symbol and manifestation of the inward; how the thing that He saw in a man was not the external accidents of circumstance or position, for His true, clear gaze and His loving, wise heart went straight to the essence of the matter, and dealt with the man not according to what he might happen to be in the categories of earth, but to what he was in the categories of heaven. All the same to Him whether it was some poor harlot, or a rabbi; all the same to Him whether it was Pilate on the judgment-seat, or the penitent thief hanging at His side. These gauds and shows were nothing; sheer away He cut them all, and went down to the hidden heart of the man, and He allocated and ranged them according to that. Christian men and women, do you try to do the same thing, and to get rid of all these superficial veils and curtains with which we drape ourselves and attitudinise in the world, and to see men as Christ saw them, both in regard to your judgment of them, and in regard to your judgment of yourselves? ‘I am a scholar and a wise man; a great thinker; a rich merchant; a man of rising importance and influence.’ Very well; what does that matter? ‘I am ignorant or a pauper’; be it so. Let us get below all that. The one question worth asking and worth answering is, ‘How am I affected towards Him?’ There are many temporary and local principles of arrangement and order among men; but they will all vanish some day, and there will be one regulating and arranging principle, and it is this: ‘Do I love God in Jesus Christ, or do I not?’ Oh! for myself, for yourself, and for all our outlook towards others, let us not forget that the inmost, deepest, hidden man of the heart is the man, and that all else is naught, and that its whole character is absolutely determined by its relation to Jesus Christ.

But this is somewhat aside from my main purpose, which is rather briefly to expand the various phases which, as I have already suggested, are included in such an emblem. The first of them is this: Try to think for yourselves of the condition of humanity as apart from Christ—shepherdless. That old metaphor of a shepherd which comes out of the Old Testament is there sometimes used to indicate a prophet, and sometimes to indicate a king. I

suppose we may put both of these uses together, as far as our present purposes are concerned; and this is what I want to insist upon. I dare say some people here will think it is very old-fashioned, very narrow in these broad and liberal days; but what I would say is this, that unless Jesus Christ is both Guide and Teacher, we have neither guide nor teacher but are shepherdless without Him. There are plenty of rulers. There was no lack of other authority in the days of His flesh. There were crowds of rabbis, guides, and directors. The life of the nation was throttled by the authorities that had planted themselves upon its back, and yet Christ saw that there were none of those who were fit for the work, or afforded the adequate guidance. And so it is, now and always. There have been hosts of men who have sought to impose their authority upon an era. Where is there one that has swayed passion, that has ruled hearts, that has impressed his own image on the will, that has made obedience an honour, and absolute, abject devotion to his command a very patent of nobility? Here, and nowhere beside. Besides that Christ there is no ruler amongst men who can come to them and say to his servant, 'Go,' and he goeth, and to this man, 'Do this,' and he doeth it. Obedience to any besides is treason against the dignity of our own nature; disobedience to Him is both treason against our nature and blasphemy against God. 'Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ, Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father.' *There* is the deepest reason for His rule.

And as for 'teacher,' whom are we to put up beside Him? Is it to be these dim figures of religious reformers that are gliding, ghostlike, to their doom, being wrapped round and round about by ever thicker and thicker folds of the inevitable oblivion that swallows all that is human? Brethren, by common consent it is Christ or nobody. Aaron dies upon Hor; Moses dies upon Pisgah; the teachers, the leaders, the guides, the under-shepherds, pass away one by one; and if this Christ be but a Man and a Teacher, He too will pass away. Shall I be thought very blind to the signs of the times if I say that I see no sign of His dominion being exhausted, of His influence being diminished, of His guidance being capable of being dispensed with? You may say, 'Oh, we do not want any teacher or guide; we do not want a shepherd.' I am not going to enter upon that question now at all, except just to say this, that the instincts of humanity rise up in contradiction, as it seems to me, of that cold and cheerless creed, and that we have this fact staring us in the face, that men are made capable of a devotion and submission the most passionate, the most absolute, the most mighty force in their lives, to human guides and ensamples, and that it is all wasted unless there be somewhere a Man, our Brother, who shall come to us and say, 'All that ever went before Me are thieves and robbers; I am the Good Shepherd; follow Me, and ye shall not walk in darkness,' 'He saw the multitudes as sheep having no shepherd.'

Still further, take that other phase of the metaphor which, as I suggested, the text includes, namely, the idea of disintegration, the rending apart of social ties and union, unless there be the centre of unity in the shepherd of the flock. 'I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep

shall be scattered,' says the old prophecy. Of course, for what is there to hold them together unless it be their guide and their director? So we are brought face to face with this plain prosaic rendering of the metaphor—that but for the centre of unity provided for mankind in the person and work of Jesus Christ, there is no satisfaction of the deep hunger for unity and society with which in that case God would have cursed mankind. For whilst there are many other bonds most true, most blessed, God-given, and mighty, such as that of the sacred unity of the family, and that of the nation and many others of which we need not speak, yet all these are constantly being disintegrated by the unresting waves of that gnawing sea of selfishness, if I may so say, which, like the waters upon our eastern coasts, eats and eats for ever at the base of the cliffs, so that society in all its forms, whether it be built upon identity of opinion, which is perhaps the shabbiest bond of all, or whether it be built upon purposes of mutual action, which is a great deal better, or whether it be built upon hatred of other people, which is the modern form of patriotism, or whether it be built upon the domestic affections, which are the purest and highest of all—all the other bonds of society, such as creeds, schools, nations, associations, leagues, families, denominations, all go sooner or later. The base is eaten out of them, because every man that belongs to them has in him that tyrannous, dominant self, which is ever seeking to assert its own supremacy. Here is Babel, with its half-finished tower, built on slime; and there is Pentecost, with its great Spirit; here is the confusion, there is the unifying; here the disintegration, there the power that draws them all together. 'They were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd,' and one looks out over the world and sees great tracts of country and long dismal generations of time, in which the very thought of unity and charity and human bonds knitting men together has faded from the consciousness of the race, and then one turns to blessed, sweet, simple words that say, 'there shall be one flock and one shepherd,' and 'I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me.' Drawing thus, He will draw them into the eternal, mighty bond of union that shall never be broken, and is all the more precious and all the more true because it is not a unity like the vulgar unities that express themselves in external associations. You know, of course or if you do not know it will be a good thing that you should know, that that verse in John's Gospel which I have quoted has been terribly mangled by a little slip of our translators. Christ said, 'Other sheep I must bring which are not of this fold,' the fold being the external unity of the Jewish church—an enclosure made of hurdles that you can stick in the ground. 'I shall bring them,' says He, 'and there shall be one'—(not, as our Bible says, 'fold,'—but something far better)—'there shall be one flock'; which becomes a unity not by wattling round about it on the outside, but by a shepherd standing in the middle. 'There shall be one flock and one shepherd'—a unity which is neither the destruction of the variety of the churches, nor the crushing of men, nationalities, and types of character all down into one dead level beneath the heel of a conqueror, but the unity which subsists in

the many operations of the one Spirit, and is expressed by all the forms of the one inspired grace.

Then passing by altogether the other idea which I said was only doubtfully suggested by the words—namely, that of laceration and wounding—let me say a word about the last of the aspects of humanity when Christless, which is set forth in this text, and that is, the dejected weariness arising from the fruitless wanderings wherewith men are cursed. As a verse in the Book of Proverbs puts it, ‘The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because they know not how to go to the city.’ Putting aside the metaphor, the plain truth which it embodies is just this, that there is in all men’s souls a deep longing after peace and rest, after goodness and beauty and truth, and that all the strenuous efforts to satisfy these longings, either by social reforms or by individual culture and discipline, are pathetically vain and profitless, because there is none to guide them. The sheep go wandering in any direction, and with no goal; and wherever one has jumped, a dozen others will go after him, and so they are wearied out long before the day’s journey is ended, and they never reach the goal. Put that into less vivid, and, therefore, as people generally suppose, more accurate, language, and it is a statement of the universal law of human history that, after any epoch of great aspirations and strong excitement of the noblest parts of human nature, there has always come a reaction of corruption and a collapse from weariness. What did ‘Liberty, Equality, Fraternity’ end in? A guillotine. What do all similar epochs end in, when they do not take the Christ to march ahead of them? An utter disgust and disillusion, and a despair of all progress. That is why wild revolutionists in their youth are always obstinate Conservatives in their old age. The wandering sheep are footsore, and they fling themselves down by the wayside. That is why heathenism presents to us the aspect that it does. There is nothing about it that seems to me more tragical than the weary languor that besets it. Do you ever think of the depth of pathetic, tragic meaning that there is in that verse in one of the Psalms, ‘Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death’? There they sit, because there is no hope in rising and moving. They would have to grope if they arose, and so with folded hands they sit like the Buddha, which one great section of heathenism has taken as being the true emblem and ideal of the noblest life. Absolute passivity lays hold upon them all—torpor, stagnation, no dream of advance or progress. The sheep are dejected, despairing, anarchic, disintegrated, lacerated, guideless, and shepherdless—away from Christ. So He thought them. God give you and me grace, dear brethren, to see, as Christ saw, the condition of humanity and our own apart from Him.

II. And now let me say a word in the next place as to the second movement of His mind and heart here. He teaches us not only how to think of men, but how that sight should touch us.

‘He was moved with compassion on them when He saw the multitude’—with the eye of a god, I was going to say, and the heart of a man. Pity belongs to the idea of divinity;

compassion belongs to the idea of divinity incarnate; and the motion that passed across His heart is the motion that I would seek may pass, with its sweet and healing breath, across yours and mine. The right emotion for a Christian looking on the Christless crowds is pity, not aversion; pity, not anger; pity, not curiosity; pity, not indifference. How many of us walk the streets of the towns in which our lot is cast, and never know one touch of that emotion, when we look at these people here in England torn, and anarchic, and wearied, and shepherdless, within sound of our psalm-singing in our chapels? Why, on any Sunday there are thousands of men and women standing about the streets who, we may be sure, have not seen the inside of a church or a chapel since they were married, and that not one in five hundred of all the good people that are going with their prayer-books and hymn-books to church and chapel ever think anything about them as they pass them by; and some of them, perhaps, if they come to any especially disreputable one, will gather up their skirts and keep on the safe side of the pavement, and there an end of it. But Jesus Christ had no aversions. His white purity was a great deal nearer to the blackness of the woman that was a sinner, than was the leprous whiteness of the whited sepulchre of the self-righteous Pharisee. He had neither aversion, nor anger, nor indifference.

And, if I might venture to touch upon another matter, compassion and not curiosity is an especial lesson for the day to the more thoughtful and cultivated amongst our congregations. I have just said that the appropriate Christian feeling in contemplating the state of the sheep without the Shepherd is compassion, not curiosity. That reminder is particularly needful in view of the prominence to-day of investigations into the new science of Comparative Religion. I speak with most unfeigned respect of it and of its teachers, and gratefully hail the wonderful light that it is casting upon ideas underlying the strange and often savage and obscene rites of heathenism; but it has a side of danger in it against which I would warn you all, especially young, reading men and women. The time has not yet come when we can afford to let such investigations be our principal occupation in the face of heathenism. If idolatry was dead we could afford to do that, but it is alive—the more's the pity; and it is not only a curious instance of the workings of man's intelligence, and a great apocalypse of earlier stages of society, but, besides that, it is a lie that is deceiving and damning our brethren, and we have got to kill it first and dissect it afterwards. So I say, do not only think of heathenism in its various forms as a subject for speculation and analysis; as much as you like of that, only do not let it drive out the other thing, and after you have tried to understand it, then come back to my text, 'He was moved with compassion.' And so pity, and neither anger, nor aversion, nor curiosity, nor indifference is what I urge as the Christian emotion.

III. Let us take this text as teaching us how Christ would have us act, after such emotion built and based upon such a look.

It is perfectly legitimate, although it is by no means the highest motive, to appeal to feeling as a stimulus to action. We have a right to base our urging of Christian men and

women to missionary work either at home or abroad, upon the ground of the condition of the men to whom the Gospel has to be carried. I know that if taken alone it is a very inadequate motive. I believe that any failure that may be manifest in the interest of Christian people in missionary work is largely traceable to the blunder we have made in dwelling on superficial motives more than we ought to have done, in proportion to the degree in which we have dwelt on the deepest. We have been gathering the surface-water instead of going right down to the green sand, to which the artesian well must be sunk if the stream is to come up without pumping or wasting. So I say that a deeper reason than the sorrow and darkness of the heathen is—‘the love of Christ constraineth me’; but yet the first is a legitimate one. Only remember this, that Bishop Butler taught us long ago, that if you excite emotions which are intended to lead to action, and the action does not follow, the excitation of the emotion without its appropriate action makes the heart a great deal harder than it was before. That is why it is playing with edged tools to speak so much to our Christian audiences, as we sometimes hear done, about the condition of the heathen as a stimulus to missionary work. If a man does not respond and do something, some crust of callousness and coldness comes over his own heart. You cannot indulge in the luxury of emotion which you do not use to drive your spindles, without doing yourselves harm. It is never intended to be blown off as waste steam and allowed to vanish into the air. It is meant to be conserved and guided, and to have something done with it. Therefore beware of sentimental contemplation of the sad condition of the shepherdless sheep which does not move you to do anything to help them.

One word more. Take my text as a guide to the form of action into which we are to cast the emotions that should spring from this gaze upon the world. I will only name three points. Christ opened His mouth and spake to them, and taught them many things; Christ said to His disciples, ‘Pray ye the Lord of the harvest’; and Christ sent out His apostles to preach the Kingdom. These three things in their bearing upon us are—personal work, prayer, help to send forth Christ’s messengers. There is nothing like personal work for making a man understand and feel the miseries of his fellows. Christian men and women, it is your first business everywhere to proclaim the name of Jesus Christ, and no prayers and no subscriptions absolve you from that. In this army a man cannot buy himself off and send in a substitute at the cost of an annual guinea. If Christ sent the apostles, do you hold up the hands of the apostles’ successors, and so by God’s grace you and I may help on the coming of that blessed day when there shall be one flock and one Shepherd, and when ‘the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne’—for the Shepherd is Himself a lamb—‘shall feed them and lead them, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.’

THE OBSCURE APOSTLES

‘These twelve Jesus sent forth.’—[MATT. x. 5.](#)

And half of ‘these twelve’ are never heard of as doing any work for Christ. Peter and James and John we know; the other James and Judas have possibly left us short letters; Matthew gives us a Gospel; and of all the rest no trace is left. Some of them are never so much as named again, except in the list at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles; and none of them except the three who ‘seemed to be pillars’ appear to have been of much importance in the early diffusion of the Gospel.

There are many instructive and interesting points in reference to the Apostolate. The number of twelve, in obvious allusion to the tribes of Israel, proclaims the eternal certainty of the divine promises to His people, and the dignity of the New Testament Church as their true heir. The ties of relationship which knit so many of the apostles together, the order of the names varying, but within certain limits, in the different catalogues, the uncultivated provincial rudeness of most of them, would all afford material for important reflections. But, perhaps, not the least important fact about the Apostolate is that one to which we have referred, which like the names of countries on the map, escapes notice because it is ‘writ’ so ‘large’—namely, the small place which the apostles as a body fill in the subsequent narrative, and the entire oblivion into which so many of them pass from the moment of their appointment.

It is to that fact that we wish to turn attention now. It may suggest some considerations worth pondering, and among other things, may help to show the exaggeration of the functions of the office by the opposite extremes of priests and rationalists. The one school makes it the depository of exclusive supernatural powers; the other regards it as a master-stroke of organisation, to which the early rapid growth of Christianity was largely due. The facts seem to show that it was neither.

I. The first thought which this peculiar and unexpected silence suggests is of the True Worker in the Church’s progress.

The way in which the New Testament drops these apostles is of a piece with the whole tone of the Bible. Throughout, men are introduced into its narratives and allowed to slip out with well-marked indifference. Nowhere do we get more vivid, penetrating portraiture, but nowhere do we see such carelessness about following the fortunes or completing the biographies even of those who have filled the largest space in its pages.

Recall, for example, the way in which the New Testament deals with ‘the very chiefest’ apostles, the illustrious triad of Peter, James, and John. The first escapes from prison; we see him hammering at Mary’s door in the grey of the morning, and after brief, eager talk with his friends he vanishes to hide in ‘another place,’ and is no more heard of, except for a moment in the great council, held in Jerusalem, about the admission of Gentiles to the

Church. The second of the three is killed off in a parenthesis. The third is only seen twice in the Book of the Acts, as a silent companion of Peter at a miracle and before the Sanhedrim. Remember how Paul is left in his own hired house, within sight of trial and sentence, and neither the original writer of the book nor any later hand thought it worth while to add three lines to tell the world what became of him. A strange way to write history, and a most imperfect narrative, surely! Yes, unless there be some peculiarity in the purpose of the book, which explains this cold-blooded, inartistic, and tantalising habit of letting men leap upon the stage as if they had dropped from the clouds, and vanish from it as abruptly as if they had fallen through a trap-door.

Such a peculiarity there is. One of the three to whom we have referred has explained it in the words with which he closes his gospel, words which might stand for the motto of the whole book, 'These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Son of God.' The true purpose is not to speak of men except in so far as they 'bore witness to that light' and were illuminated for a moment by contact with Him. From the beginning the true 'Hero' of the Bible is God; its theme is His self-revelation culminating for evermore in the Man Jesus. All other men interest the writers only as they are subsidiary or antagonistic to that revelation. As long as that breath blows through them they are music; else they are but common reeds. Men are nothing except as instruments and organs of God. He is all, and His whole fulness is in Jesus Christ. Christ is the sole worker in the progress of His Church. That is the teaching of all the New Testament. The thought is expressed in the deepest, simplest form in His own unapproachable words, unfathomable as they are in their depth of meaning, and inexhaustible in their power to strengthen and to cheer: 'I am the vine, ye are the branches, without Me ye can do nothing.' It shapes the whole treatment of the history of the so-called 'Acts of the Apostles,' which by its very first sentence proclaims itself to be the Acts of the ascended Jesus, 'the former treatise' being declared to have had for its subject 'all that Jesus *began* to do and teach while on earth, and this treatise being manifestly the continuance of the same theme, and the record of the heavenly activity of the Lord. So the thought runs through all the book: 'The help that is done on earth, He does it all Himself.'

So let us think of Him and of His relation to us as well as to that early Church. His continuous energy is pouring down on us if we will accept it. *In us, for us, by us* He works. 'My Father worketh hitherto, said He when here, 'and I work'; and now, exalted on high, He has passed into that divine repose, which is at the same time the most energetic divine activity. He is all in all to His people. He is all their strength, wisdom, and righteousness. They are but the clouds irradiated by the sun and bathed in its brightness; He is the light which flames in their grey mist and turns it to a glory. They are but the belts and cranks and wheels; He is the power. They are but the channel, muddy and dry; He is the flashing life that fills it and makes it a joy. They are the body; He is the soul dwelling in every part to save it from corruption and give movement and warmth.

‘Thou art the organ, whose full breath is thunder;
I am the keys, beneath thy fingers pressed.’

If this be true, how it should deliver us from all overestimate of men, to which our human affections and our feeble faith tempt us so sorely! There *is* One man, and One man only, whose biography is a ‘Gospel, who owes nothing to circumstances, and who originates the power which He wields; One who is a new beginning, and has changed the whole current of human history, One to whom we are right to bring offerings of the gold, and incense, and myrrh of our hearts, and wills, and minds, which it is blasphemy and degradation to lay at the feet of any others. We may utterly love, trust, and obey Jesus Christ. We dare not do so to any other. The inscription written over the whole book, that it may be transcribed on our whole nature, is, ‘No man any more save Jesus only.’

If this thought be true, what confidence it ought to give us as we think of the tasks and fortunes of the Church! If we think only of the difficulties and of the enormous work before us, so disproportioned to our weak powers, we shall be disposed to agree with our enemies, who talk as if Christianity was on the point of perishing, as they have been doing ever since it began. But the outlook is wonderfully different when we take Christ into the account. We are very apt to leave Him out of the reckoning. But one man with Christ to back him is always in the majority. He flings his sword clashing into one scale, and it weighs down all that is in the other. The walls are very lofty and strong, and the besiegers few and weak, badly armed, and quite unfit for the assault; but if we lift our eyes high enough, we, too, shall see a man with a drawn sword over against us, and our hearts may leap up in assured confidence of victory as we recognise in Him the Captain of the Lord’s Host, who has already overcome, and will make us valiant in fight and more than conquerors.

When conscious of our own weakness, and tempted to think of our task as heavy, or when complacent in our own power, and tempted to regard our task as easy, let us think of His ever-present work in and for His people, till it braces us for all duty, and rebukes our easy-going idleness. Surely from that thought of the active, ascended Christ may come to many of His slothful followers the pleading question, as from His own lips, ‘Dost thou not care that thou hast left me to serve alone?’ Surely to us all it should bring inspiration and strength, courage and confidence, deliverance from man, and elevation above the reverence of blind impersonal forces. Surely we may all lay to heart the grand lesson that union with Him is our only strength, and oblivion of ourselves our highest wisdom. Surely he has best learned his true place and the worth of Jesus Christ, who abides with unmoved humility at His feet, and, like the lonely, lowly forerunner, puts away all temptations to self-assertion while joyfully accepting it as the law of his life to

‘Fade in the light of the planet he loves,
To fade in his light and to die.’

Blessed is he who is glad to say, ‘He must increase, I must decrease!’

II. This same silence of Scripture as to so many of the apostles may be taken as suggesting what the real work of these delegated workers was.

It certainly seems very strange that, if they were the possessors of such extraordinary powers as the theory of Apostolic Succession implies, we should hear so little of these in the narratives. The silence of Scripture about them goes a long way to discredit such ideas, while it is entirely accordant with a more modest view of the apostolic office.

What was an apostle’s function during the life of Christ? One of the evangelists divides it into three portions: to be with Jesus; to preach the kingdom; to cast out devils and to heal. There is nothing in these offices peculiar to them. The seventy had miraculous powers too, and some at least were our Lord’s companions and preachers of His kingdom who were simple disciples. What was an apostle’s function after the resurrection? Peter’s words, on proposing the election of a new apostle, lay down the duty as simply ‘to bear witness’ of that resurrection. They were not supernatural channels of mysterious grace, not lords over God’s heritage, not even leaders of the Church, but bearers of a testimony to the great historical fact, on the acceptance of which all belief in an historical Christ depended then and depends now. Each of the greater of the apostles is penetrated with the same thought. Paul disclaims anything beside in his ‘Not I, but the grace of God in me.’ Peter thrusts the question at the staring crowd, ‘Why look ye on us as though by *our* power or holiness *we* had made this man to walk?’ John, in his calm way, tells his children at Ephesus, ‘Ye need not that any man teach you.’

Such an idea of the apostolic office is far more reasonable and accordant with Scripture than a figment about unexampled powers and authority in the Church. It accounts for the qualifications as stated in the same address of Peter’s, which merely secure the validity of their testimony. The one thing that *must* be found in an apostle was that he should have been in familiar intercourse with Christ during his earthly life, both before and after His resurrection, in order that he might be able to say, ‘I knew Him well; I know that He died; I know that He rose again; I saw Him go up to heaven.’ For such a work there was no need for men of commanding power. Plain, simple, honest men who had the requisite eye-witness were sufficient. The guidance and the missionary work of the Church need not necessarily be in their hands, and, in fact, does not seem to have been. In harmony with this view of the office and its requisites, we find that Paul rests the validity of his apostolate on the fact that ‘He was seen of me also,’ and regards that vision as his true appointment which left him not ‘one whit behind the very chiefest apostles.’ Miraculous gifts indeed they had, and miraculous gifts they imparted; but in both instances others shared these powers with them.

It was no apostle who laid his hands on the blinded Saul in that house in Damascus and said, 'Receive the Holy Ghost.' An apostle stood by passive and wondering when the Holy Ghost fell on Cornelius and his comrades. In reality apostolic succession is absurd, because there is nothing to succeed to, except what cannot be transmitted, personal knowledge of the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. To establish that fact as indubitable history is to lay the foundation of the Christian Church, and the eleven plain men, who did that, need no superstitious mist around them to magnify their greatness.

In so far as any succession to them or any devolution of their office is possible, all Christian men inherit it, for to bear witness of the living power of the risen Lord is still the office and honour of every believing soul. It is still true that the sharpest weapon which any man can wield for Christ is the simple adducing of his own personal experience. 'That which we have seen and handled we declare' is still the best form into which our preaching can be cast. And such a voice every man and woman who has found the sweetness and the power of Christ filling their own souls, is bound—rather let us say, is privileged—to lift up. 'This honour have all the saints.' Christ is the true worker, and all our work is but to proclaim Him, and what He has done and is doing for ourselves and for all men.

III. We may gather, too, the lesson of how often faithful work is unrecorded and forgotten.

No doubt those apostles who have no place in the history toiled honestly and did their Lord's commands, and oblivion has swallowed it all. Bartholomew and 'Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus,' and the rest of them, have no place in the record, and their obscure work is faded, faithful and good as certainly it was.

So it will be sooner or later with us all. For most of us, our service has to be unnoticed and unknown, and the memory of our poor work will live perhaps for a year or two in the hearts of some few who loved us, but will fade wholly when they follow us into the silent land. Well, be it so; we shall sleep none the less sweetly, though none be talking about us over our heads. The world has a short memory, and, as the years go on, the list that it has to remember grows so crowded that it is harder and harder to find room to write a new name on it, or to read the old. The letters on the tombstones are soon erased by the feet that tramp across the churchyard. All that matters very little. The notoriety of our work is of no consequence. The earnestness and accuracy with which we strike our blow is all-important; but it matters nothing how far it echoes. It is not the heaven of heavens to be talked about, nor does a man's life consist in the abundance of newspaper or other paragraphs about him. 'The love of fame' is, no doubt, sometimes found in 'minds' otherwise 'noble,' but in itself is very much the reverse of noble. We shall do our work best, and be saved from much festering anxiety which corrupts our purest service and fevers our serenest thoughts, if we once fairly make up our minds to working unnoticed and unknown, and determine that, whether our post be a conspicuous or an obscure one, we shall fill it to the utmost of our

power—careless of praise or censure, because our judgment is with our God; careless whether we are unknown or well known, because we are known altogether to Him.

The magnitude of our work in men's eyes is as little important as the noise of it. Christ gave all the apostles their tasks—to some of them to found the Gentile churches, to some of them to leave to all generations precious teaching, to some of them none of these things. What then? Were the Peters and the Johns more highly favoured than the others? Was their work greater in His sight? Not so. To Him all service done from the same motive is the same, and His measure of excellence is the quantity of love and spiritual force in our deeds, not the width of the area over which they spread. An estuary that goes wandering over miles of shallows may have less water in it, and may creep more languidly, than the torrent that thunders through some narrow gorge. The deeds that stand highest on the records in heaven are not those which we vulgarly call great. Many 'a cup of cold water only' will be found to have been rated higher there than jewelled golden chalices brimming with rare wines. God's treasures, where He keeps His children's gifts, will be like many a mother's secret store of relics of her children, full of things of no value, what the world calls 'trash,' but precious in His eyes for the love's sake that was in them.

All service which is done from the same motive and with the same spirit is of the same worth in His eyes. It does not matter whether you have the gospel in a penny Testament printed on thin paper with black ink and done up in cloth, or in an illuminated missal glowing in gold and colour, painted with loving care on fair parchment, and bound in jewelled ivory. And so it matters little about the material or the scale on which we express our devotion and our aspirations; all depends on what we copy, not on the size of the canvas on which, or on the material in which, we copy it. 'Small service is true service while it lasts,' and the unnoticed insignificant servants may do work every whit as good and noble as the most widely known, to whom have been intrusted by Christ tasks that mould the ages.

IV. Finally, we may add that forgotten work is remembered, and unrecorded names are recorded above.

The names of these almost anonymous apostles have no place in the records of the advancement of the Church or of the development of Christian doctrine. They drop out of the narrative after the list in the first chapter of the Acts. But we do hear of them once more. In that last vision of the great city which the seer beheld descending from God, we read that in its 'foundations were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.' All were graven there—the inconspicuous names carved on no record of earth, as well as the familiar ones cut deep in the rock to be seen of all men for ever. At the least that grand image may tell us that when the perfect state of the Church is realised, the work which these men did when their testimony laid its foundation, will be for ever associated with their names. Unrecorded on earth, they are written in heaven.

The forgotten work and its workers are remembered by Christ. His faithful heart and all-seeing eye keep them ever in view. The world, and the Church whom these humble men helped, may forget, yet He will not forget. From whatever muster-roll of benefactors and helpers their names may be absent, they will be in His list. The Apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Philippians, has a saying in which his delicate courtesy is beautifully conspicuous, where he half apologises for not sending his greetings 'to others my fellow-workers' by name, and reminds them that, however their names may be unwritten in his letter, they have been inscribed by a mightier hand on a better page, and 'are in the Lamb's book of life.' It matters very little from what record ours may be absent so long as they are found there. Let us rejoice that, though we may live obscure and die forgotten, we may have our names written on the breastplate of our High Priest as He stands in the Holy Place, the breastplate which lies close to His heart of love, and is girded to His arm of power.

The forgotten and unrecorded work lives, too, in the great whole. The fruit of our labour may perhaps not be separable from that of others, any more than the sowers can go into the reaped harvest-field and identify the gathered ears which have sprung from the seed that they sowed, but it is there all the same; and whosoever may be unable to pick out each man's share in the blessed total outcome, the Lord of the harvest knows, and His accurate proportionment of individual reward to individual service will not mar the companionship in the general gladness, when 'he that soweth and he that reapeth shall rejoice together.'

The forgotten work will live, too, in blessed results to the doers. Whatever of recognition and honour we may miss here, we cannot be robbed of the blessing to ourselves, in the perpetual influence on our own character, of every piece of faithful even if imperfect service. Habits are formed, emotions deepened, principles confirmed, capacities enlarged by every deed done for Christ, and these make an over-measure of reward here, and in their perfect form hereafter are heaven. Nothing done for Him is ever wasted. 'Thou shalt find it after many days.' We are all writing our lives' histories here, as if with one of these 'manifold writers'—a black blank page beneath the flimsy sheet on which we write, but presently the black page will be taken away, and the writing will stand out plain on the page behind that we did not see. Life is the filmy, unsubstantial page on which our pen rests; the black page is death; and the page beneath is that indelible transcript of our earthly actions, which we shall find waiting for us to read, with shame and confusion of face, or with humble joy, in another world.

Then let us do our work for Christ, not much careful whether it be greater or smaller, obscure or conspicuous; assured that whoever forgets us and it, He will remember, and however our names may be unrecorded on earth, they will be written in heaven, and confessed by Him before His Father and the holy angels.

CHRIST'S CHARGE TO HIS HERALDS

'These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, do not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: 6. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. 8. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give. 9. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, 10. Nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat. 11. And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, enquire who in it is worthy: and there abide till ye go thence. 12. And when ye come into an house, salute it. 13. And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you. 14. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. 15. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrhah in the day of judgment, than for that city. 16. Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.' —[Matt. x. 5-16](#).

The letter of these instructions to the apostles has been abrogated by Christ, both in reference to the scope of, and the equipment for, their mission ([Matt. xxviii. 19](#); [Luke xxii. 36](#)). The spirit of them remains as the perpetual obligation of all Christian workers, and every Christian should belong to that class. Some direct evangelistic work ought to be done by every believer, and in doing it he will find no better directory than this charge to the apostles.

I. We have, first, the apostles' mission in its sphere and manner ([vs. 5-8](#)). They are told where to go and what to do there. Mark that the negative prohibition precedes the positive injunction, as if the apostles were already so imbued with the spirit of universalism that they would probably have overpassed the bounds which for the present were needful. The restriction was transient. It continued in the line of divine limitation of the sphere of Revelation which confined itself to the Jew, in order that through him it might reach the world. That method could not be abandoned till the Jew himself had destroyed it by rejecting Christ. Jesus still clung to it. Even when the commission was widened to 'all the world,' Paul went 'to the Jew first,' till he too was taught by uniform failure that Israel was fixed in unbelief.

How tenderly our Lord designates the nation as 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel!' He is still influenced by that compassion which the sight of the multitudes had moved in Him ([chap. ix. 36](#)). Lost indeed, wandering with torn fleece, and lying panting, in ignorance of their pasture and their Shepherd, they are yet 'sheep,' and they belong to that chosen seed, sprung from so venerable ancestors, and heirs of so glorious promises. Clear sight of, and infinite pity for, men's miseries, must underlie all apostolic effort.

The work to be done is twofold—a glad truth is to be proclaimed, gracious deeds of power are to be done. How blessed must be the kingdom, the forerunners of which are miracles of healing and life-giving! If the heralds can do these, what will not the King be able to do? If such hues attend the dawn, how radiant will be the noontide! Note ‘as ye go,’ indicating that they were travelling evangelists, and were to speak as they went, and go when they had spoken. The road was to be their pulpit, and each man they met their audience. What a different world it would be if Christians carried their message with them *so!*

‘Freely ye have received’; namely, in the first application of the words, the message of the coming kingdom and the power to work miracles. But the force of the injunction, as applied to us, is even more soul-subduing, as our gift is greater, and the freedom of its bestowal should evoke deeper gratitude. The deepest springs of the heart’s love are set flowing by the undeserved, unpurchased gift of God, which contains in itself both the most tender and mighty motive for self-forgetting labour, and the pattern for Christian service. How can one who has received that gift keep it to himself? How can he sell what he got for nothing? ‘Freely give’—the precept forbids the seeking of personal profit or advantage from preaching the gospel, and so makes a sharp test of our motives; and it also forbids clogging the gift with non-essential conditions, and so makes a sharp test of our methods.

II. The prohibition to make gain out of the message, serves as a transition to the directions as to equipment. The apostles were to go as they stood; for the command is, ‘*Get you no gold,*’ etc. It has been already noted that these prohibitions were abrogated by Jesus in view of His departure, and the world-wide mission of the Church. But the spirit of them is not abrogated. Note that the descending value of the metals named makes an ascending stringency in the prohibition. Not even copper money is to be taken. The ‘wallet’ was a leather satchel or bag, used by shepherds and others to carry a little food; sustenance, then, was also to be left uncared for. Dress, too, was to be limited to that in wear; no change of inner robe nor a spare pair of shoes was to encumber them, nor even a spare staff. If any of them had one in his hand, he was to take it ([Mark vi. 8](#)). The command was meant to lift the apostles above suspicion, to make them manifestly disinterested, to free them from anxiety about earthly things, that their message might absorb their thoughts and efforts, and to give room for the display of Christ’s power to provide. It had a promise wrapped in it. He who forbade them to provide for themselves thereby pledged Himself to take care of them. ‘The labourer is worthy of his food.’ They may be sure of subsistence, and are not to wish for more.

All this has a distinct bearing on modern church arrangements. On the one hand, it vindicates the right of those who preach the gospel to live of the gospel, and sets any payments to them on the right footing, as not being charity or generosity, but the discharge of a debt. On the other hand, it enjoins on preachers and others who are paid for service not to serve for pay, not to be covetous of large remuneration, and to take care that no taint of greed for

money shall mar their work, but that their conduct may confirm their words when they say with Paul, 'We seek not yours, but you.'

III. The conduct required from, and the reception met with by, the messengers come next. Christ first enjoins discretion and discrimination of character, so far as possible. The messenger of the kingdom is not to be mixed up with disreputable people, lest the message should suffer. The principle of his choice of a home is to be, not position, comfort, or the like, but 'worthiness'; that is, predisposition to receive the message. However poor the chamber in the house of such, there is the apostle to settle himself. 'If ye have judged me to be faithful, come into my house,' said Lydia. The less Christ's messengers are at home with Christ's neglecters, the calmer their own hearts, and the more potent their message. They give the lie to it, if they voluntarily choose as their associates those to whom their dearest convictions are idle. Christian charity does not blind to distinctions of character. A little common sense in reading these will save many a scandal, and much weakening of influence.

Christian earnestness does not abolish courtesy. The message is not to be blurted out in defiance of even conventional forms. Zeal for the Lord is no excuse for rude abruptness. But the salutation of the true apostle will deepen the meaning of such forms, and make the conventional the real expression of real goodwill. No man should say 'Peace be unto you' so heartily as Christ's servant. The servant's benediction will bring the Master's ratification; for Jesus says, 'Let your peace come upon it,' as if commanding the good which we can only wish. That will be so, if the requisite condition is fulfilled. There must be soil for the seed to root in.

But no true wish for others' good—still more, no effort for it—is ever void of blessed issue. If the peace does not rest on a house into which jarring and sin forbid its entrance, it will not be homeless, but come back, like the dove to the ark, and fold its wings in the heart of the sender. The reflex influence of Christian effort is precious, whatever its direct results are. How the Church has been benefited by its missionary enterprises!

Jesus encouraged no illusions in His servants as to their success. From the beginning they were led to expect that some would receive and some would reject their words. In this rapid preparatory mission, there was no time for long delay anywhere; but for us, it is not wise to conclude that patient effort will fail because first appeals have not succeeded. Much close communion with Jesus, not a little self-suppression, and abundant practical wisdom, are needed to determine the point at which further efforts are vain. No doubt, there is often great waste of strength in trying to impress unimpressible people, or to revive some moribund enterprise; but it is a pardonable weakness to be reluctant to abandon a field. Still it is a weakness, and there come times when the only right thing to do is to 'shake off the dust' of the messenger's feet in token that all connection is ended, and that he is clear from the blood of the rejecters. The awful doom of such is solemnly introduced by 'Verily, I say unto you.' It rests on the plain principle that the measure of light is the measure of criminality, and

hence the measure of punishment. The rejecters of Christ among us are as much more guilty than 'that city' as its inhabitants were than the men of Sodom.

The first section of this charge properly ends with [verse 15](#)'' , the following verse being a transition to the second part. The Greek puts strong emphasis on 'I.' It is He who sends among wolves, therefore He will protect. A strange thing for a shepherd to do! A strange encouragement for the apostles on the threshold of their work! But the words would often come back to them when beset by the pack with their white teeth gleaming, and their howls filling the night. They are not promised that they will not be torn, but they are assured that, even if they are, the Shepherd wills it, and will not lose one of His flock.

What is the Christian defence? Prudence like the serpent's, but not the serpent's craft or malice; harmlessness like the dove's, but not without the other safeguard of 'wisdom.' The combination is a rare one, and the surest way to possess it is to live so close to Jesus that we shall be progressively changed into His likeness. Then our prudence will never degenerate into cunning, nor our simplicity become blindness to dangers. The Christian armour and arms are meek, unconquerable patience, and Christ-likeness, To resist is to be beaten; to endure unretaliating is to be victorious. 'Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.'

THE WIDENED MISSION, ITS PERILS AND DEFENCES

‘Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves; be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. 17. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; 18. And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for My sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. 19. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. 20. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you. 21. And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death. 22. And ye shall be hated of all men for My name’s sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved. 23. But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of Man be come. 24. The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. 25. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household? 26. Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known. 27. What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops. 28. And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. 29. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. 30. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.’
—[MATT. x. 16-31](#).

We have already had two instances of Matthew’s way of bringing together sayings and incidents of a like kind without regard to their original connection. The Sermon on the Mount and the series of miracles in [chapters viii.](#) and [ix.](#) are groups, the elements of which are for the most part found disconnected in Mark and Luke. This charge to the twelve in [chapter x.](#) seems to present a third instance, and to pass over in [verse 16](#) to a wider mission than that of the twelve during our Lord’s lifetime, for it forebodes persecution, whereas the preceding verses opened no darker prospect than that of indifference or non-reception. The ‘city’ which, in that stage of the gospel message, simply would ‘not receive you nor hear your words,’ in this stage has worsened into one where ‘they persecute you,’ and the persecutors are now ‘kings’ and ‘Gentiles,’ as well as Jewish councils and synagogue-frequenter. The period covered in these verses, too, reaches to the ‘end,’ the final revelation of all hidden things.

Obviously, then, our Lord is looking down a far future, and giving a charge to the dim crowd of His later disciples, whom His prescient eye saw pressing behind the twelve in days

to come. He had no dreams of swift success, but realised the long, hard fight to which He was summoning His disciples. And His frankness in telling them the worst that they had to expect was as suggestive as was His freedom from the rosy, groundless visions of at once capturing a world which enthusiasts are apt to cherish, till hard experience shatters the illusions. He knew the future in store for Himself, for His Gospel, for His disciples. And He knew that dangers and death itself will not appal a soul that is touched into heroic self-forgetfulness by His love. 'Set down my name,' says the man in *Pilgrim's Progress*, though he knew—may we not say, because he knew?—that the enemies were outside waiting to fall on him.

A further difference between this and the preceding section is, that there the stress was laid on the contents of the disciples' message, but that here it is laid on their sufferings. Not so much by what they say, as by how they endure, are they to testify. 'The noble army of martyrs praise Thee,' and the primitive Church preached Jesus most effectually by dying for Him.

The keynote is struck in [verse 16](#), in which are to be noted the 'Behold,' which introduces something important and strange, and calls for close attention; the majestic 'I send you,' which moves to obedience whatever the issues, and pledges Him to defend the poor men who are going on His errands and the pathetic picture of the little flock huddled together, while the gleaming teeth of the wolves gnash all round them. A strange theme to drape in a metaphor! but does not the very metaphor help to lighten the darkness of the picture, as well as speak of His calmness, while He contemplates it? If the Shepherd sends His sheep into the midst of wolves, surely He will come to their help, and surely any peril is more courageously faced when they can say to themselves, 'He put us here.' The sheep has no claws to wound with nor teeth to tear with, but the defenceless Christian has a defence, and in his very weaponlessness wields the sharpest two-edged sword. 'Force from force must ever flow.' Resistance is a mistake. The victorious antagonist of savage enmity is patient meekness. 'Sufferance is the badge of all' true servants of Jesus. Wherever they have been misguided enough to depart from Christ's law of endurance and to give blow for blow, they have lost their cause in the long run, and have hurt their own Christian life more than their enemies' bodies. Guilelessness and harmlessness are their weapons. But 'be ye wise as serpents' is equally imperative with 'guileless as doves.' Mark the fine sanity of that injunction, which not only permits but enjoins prudent self-preservation, so long as it does not stoop to crooked policy, and is saved from that by dove-like guilelessness. A difficult combination, but a possible one, and when realised, a beautiful one!

The following verses ([17-22](#)) expand the preceding, and mingle in a very remarkable way plain predictions of persecution to the death and encouragements to front the worst. Jewish councils and synagogues, Gentile governors and kings, will unite for once in common hatred, than which there is no stronger bond. That is a grim prospect to set before a handful

of Galilean peasants, but two little words turn its terror into joy; it is 'for My sake,' and that is enough. Jesus trusted His humble friends, as He trusts all such always, and believed that 'for My sake' was a talisman which would sweeten the bitterest cup and would make cowards into heroes, and send men and women to their deaths triumphant. And history has proved that He did not trust them too much. 'For His sake'—is that a charm for *us*, which makes the crooked straight and the rough places plain, which nerves for suffering and impels to noble acts, which moulds life and takes the sting and the terror out of death? Nor is that the only encouragement given to the twelve, who might well be appalled at the prospect of standing before Gentile kings. Jesus seems to discern how they shrank as they listened, at the thought of having to bear 'testimony' before exalted personages, and, with beautiful adaptation to their weakness, He interjects a great promise, which, for the first time, presents the divine Spirit as dwelling in the disciples' spirits. The occasion of the dawning of that great Christian thought is very noteworthy, and not less so is the designation of the Spirit as 'of your Father,' with all the implications of paternal care and love which that name carries. Special crises bring special helps, and the martyrologies of all ages and lands, from Stephen outside the city wall to the last Chinese woman, have attested the faithfulness of the Promiser. How often have some calm, simple words from some slave girl in Roman cities, or some ignorant confessor before Inquisitors, been manifestly touched with heavenly light and power, and silenced sophistries and threats!

The solemn foretelling of persecution, broken for a moment, goes on and becomes even more foreboding, for it speaks of dearest ones turned to foes, and the sweet sanctities of family ties dissolved by the solvent of the new Faith. There is no enemy like a brother estranged, and it is tragically significant that it is in connection with the rupture of family bonds that death is first mentioned as the price that Christ's messengers would have to pay for faithfulness to their message. But the prediction springs at a bound, as it were, from the narrow circle of home to the widest range, and does not fear to spread before the eyes of the twelve that they will become the objects of hatred to the whole human race if they are true to Christ's charge. The picture is dark enough, and it has turned out to be a true forecast of facts. It suggests two questions. What right had Jesus to send men out on such an errand, and to bid them gladly die for Him? And what made these men gladly take up the burden which He laid on them? He has the right to dispose of us, because He is the Son of God who has died for us. Otherwise He is not entitled to say to us, Do my bidding, even if it leads you to death. His servants find their inspiration to absolute, unconditional self-surrender in the Love that has died for them. That which gives Him His right to dispose of us in life and death gives us the disposition to yield ourselves wholly to Him, to be His apostles according to our opportunities, and to say, 'Whether I live or die, I am the Lord's.'

That thought of world-wide hatred is soothed by the recurrence of the talisman, 'For My name's sake,' and by a moment's showing of a fair prospect behind the gloom streaked

with lightning in the foreground. 'He that endureth to the end shall be saved.' The same saying occurs in [chapter xxiv. 13](#), in connection with the prediction of the fall of Jerusalem, and in the same connection in [Mark xiii. 13](#), in both of which places several other sayings which appear in this charge to the apostles are found. It is impossible to settle which is the original place for these, or whether they were twice spoken. The latter supposition is very unfashionable at present, but has perhaps more to say for itself than modern critics are willing to allow. But [Luke \(xxi. 19\)](#) has a remarkable variation of the saying, for his version of it is, 'In your patience, ye shall win your souls.' His word 'patience' is a noun cognate with the verb rendered in Matthew and Mark 'endureth,' and to 'win one's soul' is obviously synonymous with being 'saved.' The saying cannot be limited, in any of its forms, to a mere securing of earthly life, for in this context it plainly includes those who have been delivered to death by parents and brethren, but who by death have won their lives, and have been, as Paul expected to be, thereby 'saved into His heavenly kingdom.' To the Christian, death is the usher who introduces him into the presence-chamber of the King, and he that loseth his life 'for My name's sake,' finds it glorified in, and into, life eternal.

But willingness to endure the utmost is to be accompanied with willingness to take all worthy means to escape it. There has been a certain unwholesome craving for martyrdom generated in times of persecution, which may appear noble but is very wasteful. The worst use that you can put a man to is to burn him, and a living witness may do more for Christ than a dead martyr. Christian heroism may be shown in not being afraid to flee quite as much as in courting, or passively awaiting, danger. And Christ's Name will be spread when His lovers are hounded from one city to another, just as it was when 'they that were scattered abroad, went everywhere, preaching the word.' When the brands are kicked apart by the heel of violence, they kindle flames where they fall.

But the reason for this command to flee is perplexing. 'Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of Man be come.' Is Jesus here reverting to the narrower immediate mission of the apostles? What 'coming' is referred to? We have seen that the first mission of the twelve was the theme of [verses 5-15](#), and was there pursued to its ultimate consequences of final judgment on rejecters, whilst the wider horizon of a future mission opens out from [verse 16](#) onwards. A renewed contraction of the horizon is extremely unlikely. It would be as if 'a flower should shut and be a bud again.' The recurrence in [verse 23](#) of 'Verily I say unto you,' which has already occurred in [verse 15](#), closing the first section of the charge, makes it probable that here too a section is completed, and that probability is strengthened if it is observed that the same phrase occurs, for a third time, in the last verse of the chapter, where again the discourse soars to the height of contemplating the final reward. The fact that the apostles met with no persecution on their first mission, puts out of court the explanation of the words that refers them to that mission, and takes the 'coming' to be Jesus' own appearances in the places they had preceded Him as His heralds. The difficult question as

to what is the *terminus ad quem* pointed to here seems best solved by taking the 'coming of the Son of Man' to be His judicial manifestation in the destruction of Jerusalem and the consequent desolation of many of 'the cities of Israel,' whilst at the same time, the nearer and smaller catastrophe is a prophecy and symbol of the remoter and greater 'day of the Son of Man' at the end of the days. The recognition of that aspect of the fall of Jerusalem is forced on us by the eschatological parts of the Gospels, which are a bewildering whirl without it. Here, however, it is the crash of the fall itself which is in view, and the thought conveyed is that there would be cities enough to serve for refuges, and scope enough for evangelistic work, till the end of the Jewish possession of the land.

In [verses 26-31](#), 'fear not' is thrice spoken, and at each occurrence is enforced by a reason. The first of these encouragements is the assurance of the certain ultimate world-wide manifestation of hidden things. That same dictum occurs in other connections, and with other applications, but in the present context can only be taken as an assurance that the Gospel message, little known as it thus far was, was destined to fill all ears. Therefore the disciples were to be fearless in doing their part in making it known, and so working in alliance with the divine purpose. It is the same thing that is meant by the 'covered' that 'shall be revealed,' the 'hidden' that 'shall be known,' 'that which is spoken in darkness,' and 'that which is whispered in the ear'; and all four designations refer to the word which every Christian has it in charge to sound out. We note that Jesus foresees a far wider range of publicity for His servants' ministry than for His own, just as He afterwards declared that they would do 'greater works' than His. He spoke to a handful of men in an obscure corner of the world. His teaching was necessarily largely confidential communication to the fit few. But the spark is going to be a blaze, and the whisper to become a shout that fills the world. Surely, then, we who are working in the line of direction of God's working should let no fear make us dumb, but should ever hear and obey the command: 'Lift up thy voice with strength, lift it up, be not afraid.'

A second reason for fearlessness is the limitation of the enemy's power to hurt, reinforced by the thought that, while the penalties that man can inflict for faithfulness are only corporeal, transitory, and incapable of harming the true self, the consequences of unfaithfulness fling the whole man, body and soul, down to utter ruin. There is a fear that makes cowards and apostates; there is a fear which makes heroes and apostles. He who fears God, with the awe that has no torment and is own sister to love, is afraid of nothing and of no man. That holy and blessed fear drives out all other, as fire draws the heat out of a burn. He that serves Christ is lord of the world; he that fears God fronts the world, and is not afraid.

The last reason for fearlessness touches a tender chord, and discloses a gracious thought of God as Father, which softens the tremendous preceding word: 'Who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.' Take both designations together, and let them work together in producing the awe which makes us brave, and the filial trust which makes us braver. A

bird does not 'fall to the ground' unless wounded, and if it falls it dies. Jesus had looked pityingly on the great mystery, the woes of the creatures, and had stayed Himself on the thought of the all-embracing working of God. The very dying sparrow, with broken wing, had its place in that universal care. God is 'immanent' in nature. The antithesis often drawn between His universal care and His 'special providence' is misleading. Providence is special because it is universal. That which embraces everything must embrace each thing. But the immanent God is 'your Father,' and because of that sonship, 'ye are of more value than many sparrows.' There is an ascending order, and an increasing closeness and tenderness of relation. 'A man is better than a sheep,' and Christians, being God's children, may count on getting closer into the Father's heart than the poor crippled bird can, or than the godless man can. 'Your Father,' on the one hand, can destroy soul and body, therefore fear Him; but, on the other, He determines whether you shall 'fall to the ground' or soar above dangers, therefore fear none but Him.

LIKE TEACHER, LIKE SCHOLAR

‘The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. 26. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord.’ —[MATT. x. 24, 25](#).

These words were often on Christ’s lips. Like other teachers, He too had His favourite sayings, the light of which He was wont to flash into many dark places. Such a saying, for instance, was, ‘To him that hath shall be given.’ Such a saying is this of my text; and probably several other of our Lord’s utterances, which are repeated more than once in different Gospels, and have too hastily been sometimes assumed to have been introduced erroneously by the evangelists, in varying connections.

This half-proverb occurs four times in the Gospels, and in three very different connections, pointing to three different subjects. Here, and once in John’s Gospel, in the fifteenth chapter, it is employed to enforce the lesson of the oneness of Christ and His disciples in their relation to the world; and that His servants cannot expect to be better off than the Master was. ‘If they have called Me Beelzebub they will not call you anything else.’

Then in Luke’s Gospel ([vi. 40](#)) it is employed to illustrate the principle that the scholar cannot expect to be wiser than his master; that a blind teacher will have blind pupils, and that they will both fall into the ditch. Of course, the scholar may get beyond his master, but then he will get up and go away from the school, and will not be his scholar any longer. As long as he is a scholar, the best that can happen to him, and that will not often happen, is to be on the level of his teacher.

Then in another place in John’s Gospel ([xiii. 16](#)) the saying is employed in reference to a different subject, viz. to teach the meaning of the pathetic, symbolical foot-washing, and to enforce the exhortation to imitate Jesus Christ, as generally in conduct, so specially in His wondrous humility. ‘The servant is not greater than his lord.’ ‘I have left you an example that ye should do as I have done to you.’

So if we put these three instances together we get a threefold illustration of the relation between the disciple and the teacher, in respect to wisdom, conduct, and reception by the world. And these three, with their bearing on the relation between Christians and Jesus Christ, open out large fields of duty and of privilege. The very centre of Christianity is discipleship, and the very highest hope, as well as the most imperative command which the Gospel brings to men is, ‘Be like Him whom you profess to have taken as your Master. Be like Him here, and you shall be like Him hereafter.’

I. Likeness to the teacher in wisdom is the disciple’s perfection.

‘If the blind lead the blind both shall fall into the ditch.’ ‘The disciple is not greater than his master.’ ‘It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master.’ If that be a true principle, that the best that can happen to the scholar is to tread in his teacher’s footsteps, to see with his eyes, to absorb his wisdom, to learn his truth, we may apply it in two opposite directions.

First, it teaches us the limitations, and the misery, and the folly of taking men for our masters; and then, on the other hand, it teaches us the large hope, the blessing, freedom, and joy of having Christ for our Master.

Now, first, look at the principle as bearing upon the relation of disciple and human teacher. All such teachers have their limitations. Each man has his little circle of favourite ideas that he is perpetually reiterating. In fact, it seems as if one truth was about as much as one teacher could manage, and as if, whensoever God had any great truth to give to the world, He had to take one man and make him its sole apostle. So that teachers become mere fragments, and to listen to them is to dwarf and narrow oneself.

The chances are that no scholar shall be on his master's level. The eyes that see truth directly and for themselves in this world are very few. Most men have to take truth at second-hand, and few indeed are they who, like a perfect medium, receive even the fragmentary truth that human lips can impart to them, and transmit it as pure as they receive it. Disciples present exaggerations, caricatures, misconceptions, the limitations of the master becoming even more rigid in the pupil. Schools spring up which push the founder's teaching to extremes, and draw conclusions from it which he never dreamed of. Instead of a fresh voice, we have echoes, which, like all echoes, give only a syllable or two out of a sentence. Teachers can tell what they see, but they cannot give their followers eyes, and so the followers can do little more than repeat what their leader said he saw. They are like the little suckers that spring up from the 'stool' of a cut-down tree, or like the kinglets among whose feeble hands the great empire of an Alexander was divided at his death.

It is a dwarfing thing to call any man master upon earth. And yet men will give to a man the credence which they refuse to Christ. The followers of some of the fashionable teachers of to-day—Comte, Spencer, or others—protest, in the name of mental independence, against accepting Christ as the absolute teacher of morals and religion, and then go away and put a man in the very place which they have denied to Him, and swallow down his *dicta* whole.

Such facts show how heart and mind crave a teacher; how discipleship is ingrained in our nature; how we all long for some one who shall come to us authoritatively and say, 'Here is truth—believe it and live on it.' And yet it is fatal to pin one's faith on any, and it is miserable to have to change guides perpetually and to feel that we have outgrown those whom we reverence, and that we can look down on the height which once seemed to touch the stars—and, if we cut ourselves loose from all men's teaching, the isolation is dreary, and few of us are strong enough of arm, or clear enough of eye, to force or find the path through the tangled jungles of error.

So take this thought, that the highest hope of a disciple is to be like the master in wisdom, in its bearing on the relation between us and Christ, and look how it then flashes up into blessedness and beauty.

Such a teacher as we have in Him has no limitations, and it is safe to follow Him absolutely and Him alone. All others have plainly borne the impress of their age, or their nation, or their idiosyncrasy, in some way or another; Christ Jesus is the only teacher that the world has ever heard of, in whose teaching there is no mark of the age or generation or set of circumstances in which it originated. This water does not taste of any soil through which it has passed, it has come straight down from Heaven, and is pure and uncontaminated as the Heaven from which it has come. This teacher is safe to listen to absolutely: there are no limitations there; you never hear Him arguing; there is no sign about His words as if He had ever dug out for Himself the wisdom that He is proclaiming, or had ever seen it less distinctly than He sees it at the moment. The great peculiarity of His teaching is that He does not reason, but declares that His 'Verily! Verily!' is the confirmation of all His message. His teaching is Himself; other men bring lessons about truth; He says, 'I am the Truth.' Other teachers keep their personality in the background; He clashes His down in the foreground. Other men say, 'Listen to what I tell you, never mind about me.' He says, 'This is life eternal, that ye should believe on Me.' This Teacher has His message level to all minds, high and low, wise and foolish, cultivated and rude. This Teacher does not only impart wisdom by words as from without, though He does that too, but He comes into men's spirits, and communicates Himself, and so makes them wise. Other teachers fumble at the outside, but 'in the hidden parts He makes me to know wisdom.' So it is safe to take this Teacher absolutely, and to say, 'Thou art my Master, Thy word is truth, and the opening of Thy lips to me is wisdom.'

In following Christ as our absolute Teacher, there is no sacrifice of independence or freedom of mind, but listening to Him is the way to secure these in their highest degree. We are set free from men, we are growingly delivered from errors and misconceptions, in the measure in which we keep close to Christ as our Master. The Lord is that Teacher, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there, and there only, is liberty; freedom from self, from the dominion of popular opinion, from the coterie-speech of schools, from the imposing authority of individuals, and from all that makes cowardly men say as other people say, and fall in with the majority; and freedom from our own prejudices and our own errors, which are cleared away when we take Christ for our Master and cleave to Him.

His teaching can never cease until it has accomplished its purpose, and not until we have gathered into our consciousness all the truth that He has to give, and have received all the wisdom that He can impart unto us as to God and Himself, does His teaching cease. Here we may grow indefinitely in the knowledge of Christ, and in the future we shall know even as we are known. His merciful teaching will not come to a close till we have drunk in all His wisdom, and till He has declared to us all which He has heard of the Father. He will pass us from one form to another of His school, but in Heaven we shall still be His scholars; 'Every one shall sit at Thy feet, every one shall receive of Thy words.'

So, then, let us turn away from men, from rabbis and Sanhedrins, from authorities and schools, from doctors and churches. Why resort to cisterns when we may draw from the spring? Why listen to men when we may hear Christ? He is, as Dante called the great Greek thinker, 'the Master of those who know.' Why should we look to the planets when we can see the sun? 'Call no man master upon earth, for One is your Master, and all ye are brethren.' And His merciful teaching will never cease until 'everyone that is perfected shall be as his Master.'

II. Now, turn to the second application of this principle. Likeness to the Master in life is the law of a disciple's conduct.

That pathetic and wonderful story about the foot-washing in John's Gospel is meant for a symbol. It is the presenting, in a picturesque form, of the very heart and essence of Christ's Incarnation in its motive and purpose. The solemn prelude with which the evangelist introduces it lays bare our Lord's heart and His reason for His action. 'Having loved His own, which were in the world, He loved them to the end.' His motive, then, was love. Again, the exalted consciousness which accompanied His self-abasement is made prominent in the words, 'Knowing that the Father had given all things into His hand, and that He was come from God and went to God.' And the majestic deliberation and patient continuance in resolved humility with which He goes down the successive steps of the descent, are wonderfully given in the evangelist's record of how He 'riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments and girded Himself, and poured water into the basin.' It is a parable. Thus, in the consciousness of His divine authority and dignity, and moved by His love to the whole world, He laid aside the garments of His glory, and vested Himself with the towel of His humanity, the servant's garb, and took the water of His cleansing power, and came to wash the feet of all who will let Him cleanse them from their soil. And then, having reassumed His garments, He speaks from His throne to those who have been cleansed by His humiliation and His sacrifice, 'Know ye what I have done to you? The servant is not greater than his lord.'

That is to say, dear brethren, in this one incident, which is the condensation, so to speak, of the whole spirit of His life, is the law for our lives as well. We, too, are bound to that same love as the main motive of all our actions; we, too, are bound to that same stripping off of dignity and lowly equalising of ourselves with those below us whom we would help, and we, too, are bound to make it our main object, in our intercourse with men, not merely that we should please nor enlighten them, nor succour their lower temporal needs, but that we should cleanse them and make them pure with the purity that Christ gives.

A Christian life all moved and animated by self-denuding love, and which came amongst men to make them better and purer, and all the influence of which tended in the direction of helping poor foul hearts to get rid of their filth, how different it would be from our lives! What a grim contrast much of our lives is to the Master's example and command! Did you

ever strip yourself of anything, my brother, in order to make some poor, wretched creature a little purer and liker the Saviour? Did you ever drop your dignity and go down to the low levels in order to lift up the people that were there? Do men see anything of that example, as reproduced in your lives, of the Master that lays aside the garments of Heaven for the vesture of earth, and dies upon the Cross in order that He might make our poor hearts purer and liker His own?

But, hard as such imitation is, it is only one case of a general principle. Discipleship is likeness to Jesus Christ in conduct. There is no discipleship worth naming which does not, at least, attempt that likeness. What is the use of a man saying that he is the disciple of Incarnate Love if his whole life is incarnate selfishness? What is the use of your calling yourselves Christians, and saying that you are followers of Jesus Christ, when He came to do God's will and delighted in it, and you come to do your own, and never do God's will at all, or scarcely at all, and then reluctantly and with many a murmur? What kind of a disciple is he, the habitual tenor of whose life contradicts the life of his Master and disobeys His commandments? And I am bound to say that that is the life of an enormously large proportion of the professing disciples in this age of conventional Christianity.

'The disciple shall be as his master.' Do you make it your effort to be like Him? If so, then the saying is not only a law, but a promise, for it assures us that our effort shall not fail but progressively succeed, and lead on at last to our becoming what we behold, and being conformed to Him whom we love, and like the Master to whose wisdom we profess to listen. They whose earthly life is a following of Christ, with faltering steps and afar off, shall have for their heavenly blessedness, that they shall 'follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.'

III. And now, lastly, likeness to the Master in relation to the world is the fate that the disciple must put up with.

'If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?' 'The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord.' Our Lord reiterated the statement in another place in John's Gospel, reminding them that He had said it before.

If we are like Jesus Christ in conduct, and if we have received His Word as the truth upon which we repose, depend upon it, in our measure and in varying fashions, we shall have to bear the same kind of treatment that He received from the world. The days of so-called persecution are over in so-called Christian countries, but if you are a disciple in the sense of believing all that Jesus Christ says, and taking Him for your Teacher, the public opinion of this day will have a great many things to say about you that will not be very pleasant. You will be considered to be 'old-fashioned,' 'narrow,' 'behind the times,' etc. etc. etc. Look at the bitter spirit of antagonism to an earnest and simple Christianity and adoption of Christ as our authoritative Teacher which goes through much of our high-class literature to-day. It is a very small matter as measured with what Christian men used to have to bear;

but it indicates the set of things. We may make up our minds that if we are not contented with the pared-down Christianity which the world allows to pass at present, but insist upon coming to the New Testament for our beliefs and practices, and avow—‘I believe all that Jesus Christ says, and I believe it because He says it, and I take Him as my model’; we shall find out that the disciple has to be ‘as his Master,’ and that the Pharisees and the Scribes of to-day stand in the same relation to the followers as their predecessors did to the Leader. If you are like your Master in conduct, you will be no more popular with the world than He was. As long as Christianity will be quiet, and let the world go its own gait, the world is very well contented to let it alone, or even to say polite things to it. Why should the world take the trouble of persecuting the kind of Christianity that so many of us display? What is the difference between our Christianity and their worldliness? The world is quite willing to come to church on Sundays, and to call itself a Christian world, if only it may live as it likes. And many professing Christians have precisely the same idea. They attend to the externals of Christianity, and call themselves Christians, but they bargain for its having very little power over their lives. Why, then, should two sets of people who have the same ideas and practices dislike each other? No reason at all! But let Christian men live up to their profession, and above all let them become aggressive, and try to attack the world’s evil, as they are bound to do; let them fight drunkenness, let them go against the lust of great cities, let them preach peace in the face of a nation howling for war, let them apply the golden rules of Christianity to commerce and social relationships and the like, and you will very soon hear a pretty shout that will tell you that the disciple who is a disciple has to share the fate of the Master, notwithstanding nineteen centuries of Christian teaching.

If you do not know what it is to find yourselves out of harmony with the world, I am afraid it is because you have less of the Master’s spirit than you have of the world’s. The world loves its own. If you are not ‘of the world, the world will hate you.’ If it does not, it must be because, in spite of your name, you belong to it.

But if we are like Him in our relation to the world, because we are like Him in character, our very share in ‘His reproach,’ and our sense of being ‘aliens’ here, bear the promise that we shall be like Him in all worlds. His fortune is ours. ‘The disciple shall be as his master.’ If we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him. No cross, no crown;—if cross, then crown! The end of discipleship is not reached until the Master’s image and the Master’s lot are repeated in the scholar.

Take Christ for your sacrifice, trust to His blood, listen to His teaching, walk in His footsteps, and you shall share His sovereignty and sit on His throne. ‘It is enough,’—ay! more than enough, and nothing less than that is enough,—‘for the disciple that he be *as*’—and *with*—‘his master.’ ‘I shall be satisfied when I awake in Thy likeness.’

THE KING'S CHARGE TO HIS AMBASSADORS

'Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven. 33. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven. 34. Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. 35. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. 36. And man's foes shall be they of his own household. 37. He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. 38. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me. 39. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it 40. He that receiveth you receiveth Me, and he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me. 41. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. 42. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.' —[MATT. x. 32-42](#).

The first mission of the apostles, important as it was, was but a short flight to try the young birds' wings. The larger portion of this charge to them passes far beyond the immediate occasion, and deals with the permanent relations of Christ's servants to the world in which they live, for the purpose of bringing it into subjection to its true King. These solemn closing words, which make our present subject, contain the duty and blessedness of confessing Him, the vision of the antagonisms which He excites, His demand for all-surrendering following, and the rewards of those who receive Christ's messengers, and therein receive Himself and His Father.

I. The duty and blessedness of confessing Him ([vs. 32, 33](#)). The 'therefore' is significant. It attaches the promise which follows to the immediately preceding thoughts of a watchful, fatherly care, extending like a great invisible hand over the true disciple. Because each is thus guarded, each shall be preserved to receive the honour of being confessed by Christ. No matter what may befall His witnesses, the extremest disaster shall not rob them of their reward. They may be flung down from the house-tops where they lift up their bold voices, but He who does not let a sparrow fall to the ground uncared for, will give His angels charge concerning them who are so much more precious, and they shall be borne up on outstretched wings, lest they be dashed on the pavement below. Thus preserved, they shall all attain at last to their guerdon. Nothing can come between Christ's servant and his crown. The tender providence of the Father, whose mercy is over all His works, makes sure of that. The river of the confessor's life may plunge underground, and be lost amid persecutions, but it will emerge again into the brighter sunshine on the other side of the mountains.

The confession which is to be thus rewarded, like the denial opposed to it, is, of course, not merely a single utterance of the lip. So far Judas Iscariot confessed Christ, and Peter denied Him. But it is the habitual acknowledgment by lip and life, unwithdrawn to the end. The context implies that the confession is maintained in the face of opposition, and that the denial is a cowardly attempt to save one's skin at the cost of treason to Jesus. The temptation does not come in that sharpest form to us. Perhaps some cowards would be made brave if it did. It is perhaps easier to face the gibbet and the fire, and screw oneself up for once to a brief endurance, than to resist the more specious blandishments of the world, especially when it has been christened, and calls itself religious. The light laugh of scorn, the silent pressure of the low average of Christian character, the close associations in trade, literature, public and domestic life which Christians have with non-Christians, make many a man's tongue lie silent, to the sore detriment of his own religious life. 'Ye have not yet resisted unto blood,' and find it hard to fulfil the easier conflict to which you are called. The sun has more power than the tempest to make the pilgrim drop his garment. But the duty remains the same for all ages. Every man is bound to make the deepest springs of his life visible, and to stand to his convictions, whatever they be. If he do not, his convictions will disappear like a piece of ice hid in a hot hand, which will melt and trickle away. This obligation lies with infinitely increased weight on Christ's servants; and the consequences of failing to discharge it are more tragic in their cases, in the exact proportion of the greater preciousness of their faith. Corn hoarded is sure to be spoiled by weevils and rust. The bread of life hidden in our sacks will certainly go mouldy.

The reward and punishment of confession and denial come to them not as separate acts, but as each being the revelation of the spiritual condition of the doers. Christ implies that a true disciple cannot but be a confessor, and that therefore the denier must certainly be one whom He has never known. Because, therefore, each act is symptomatic of the doer, each receives the congruous and correspondent reward. The confessor is confessed; the denier is denied. What calm and assured consciousness of His place as Judge underlies these words! His recognition is God's acceptance; His denial is darkness and misery. The correspondence between the work and the reward is beautifully brought out by the use of the same word to express each. And yet what a difference between our confession of Him and His of us! And what a hope is here for all who have tremblingly, and in the consciousness of much unworthiness, ventured to say that they were Christ's subjects, and He their King, brother, and all! Their poor, feeble confession will be endorsed by His. He will say, 'Yes, this man is mine, and I am his.' That will be glory, honour, blessedness, life, heaven.

II. The vision of the discord which follows the coming of the King of peace. It is not enough to interpret these words as meaning that our Lord's purpose indeed was to bring peace, but that the result of His coming was strife. The ultimate purpose is peace; but an immediate purpose is conflict, as the only road to the peace. He is first King of righteousness,

and after that also King of peace. But, if His kingdom be righteousness, purity, love, then unrighteousness, filthiness, and selfishness will fight against it for their lives. The ultimate purpose of Christ's coming is to transform the world into the likeness of heaven; and all in the world which hates such likeness is embattled against Him. He saw realities, and knew men's hearts, and was under no illusion, such as many an ardent reformer has cherished, that the fair form of truth need only be shown to men, and they will take her to their hearts. Incessant struggle is the law for the individual and for society till Christ's purpose for both is realised.

That conflict ranges the dearest in opposite ranks. The gospel is the great solvent. As when a substance is brought into contact with some chemical compound, which has greater affinity for one of its elements than the other element has, the old combination is dissolved, and a new and more stable one is formed, so Christianity analyses and destroys in order to synthesis and construction. In [verse 21](#) our Lord had foretold that brother should deliver up brother to death. Here the severance is considered from the opposite side. The persons who are 'set at variance' with their kindred are here Christians. Perhaps it is fanciful to observe that they are all junior members of families, as if the young would be more likely to flock to the new light. But however that may be, the separation is mutual, but the hate is all on one side. The 'man's foes' are of his own household; but he is not their foe, though he be parted from them.

III. Earthly love may be a worse foe to a true Christian than even the enmity of the dearest; and that enmity may often be excited by the Christian subordination of earthly to heavenly love. So our Lord passes from the warnings of discord and hate to the danger of the opposite—undue love.

He claims absolute supremacy in our hearts. He goes still farther, and claims the surrender, not only of affections, but of self and life to Him. What a strange claim this is! A Jewish peasant, dead nineteen hundred years since, fronts the whole race of man, and asserts His right to their love, which is strange, and to their supreme love, which is stranger still. Why should we love Him at all, if He were only a man, however pure and benevolent? We may admire, as we do many another fair nature in the past; but is there any possibility of evoking anything as warm as love to an unseen person, who can have had no knowledge of or love to us? And why should we love Him more than our dearest, from whom we have drawn, or to whom we have given, life? What explanation or justification does He give of this unexampled demand? Absolutely none. He seems to think that its reasonableness needs no elucidation. Surely never did teacher professing wisdom, modesty, and, still more, religion, put forward such a claim of right; and surely never besides did any succeed in persuading generations unborn to yield His demand, when they heard it. The strangest thing in the world's history is that to-day there are millions who do love Jesus Christ more than all besides, and whose chief self-accusation is that they do not love Him more. The strange, audacious

claim is most reasonable, if we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, who died for each of us, and that each man and woman to the last of the generations had a separate place in His divine human love when He died. It is meet to love Him, if that be true; it is not, unless it be. The requirement is as stringent as strange. If the two ever seem to conflict, the earthly must give way. If the earthly be withdrawn, there must be found sufficiency for comfort and peace in the heavenly. The lower must not be permitted to hinder the flight of the heavenly to its home. 'More than Me' is a rebuke to most of us. What a contrast between the warmth of our earthly and the tepidity or coldness of our heavenly love! How spontaneously our thoughts, when left free, turn to the one; how hard we find it to keep them fixed on the other! How sweet service is to the dear ones here; how reluctantly it is given to Christ! How we long, when parted, to rejoin them; how little we are drawn to the place where He is! We have all to confess that we are 'not worthy of' Him; that we requite His love with inadequate returns, and live lives which tax His love for its highest exercise, the free forgiveness of sins against itself. Compliance with that stringent law, and subordinating all earthly love to His, is the true elevating and ennobling of the earthly. It is promoted, not degraded, when it is made second, and is infinitely sweeter and deeper than when it was set in the place of supremacy, where it had no right to be.

But Christ's demand is not only for the surrender of the heart, but for the giving up of self, and, in a very profound sense, for the surrender of life. How enigmatical that saying about taking up the cross must have sounded to the disciples! They knew little about the cross, as a punishment; they had not yet associated it in any way with their Lord. This seems to have been the first occasion of His mentioning it, and the allusion is so veiled as to be but partially intelligible. But what was intelligible was bewildering. A strange royal procession that, of the King with a cross on His shoulder, and all His subjects behind Him with similar burdens! Through the ages that procession has marched, and it marches still. Self-denial for Christ's sake is 'the badge of all our tribe.' Observe that word 'take.' The cross must be willingly and by ourselves assumed. No other can lay it on our shoulders. Observe that other word 'his.' Each man has his own special form in which self-denial is needful for him. We require pure eyes, and hearts kept in very close communion with Jesus, to ascertain what our particular cross is. He has them of many patterns, shapes, sizes, and materials. We can always make sure of strength to carry the one which He means us to carry, but not of strength to bear what is not ours.

IV. We have the rewards of those who receive Christ's messengers, and therein receive Him and His Father. Our Lord first identifies these twelve with Himself in a manner which must have sounded strange to them then, but have heartened them for their work by the consciousness of His mysterious oneness with them. The whole doctrine of Christ's unity with His people lay in germ in these words, though much more was needed, both of teaching and of experience, before their depth of blessing and strengthening could be apprehended.

We know that He dwells in His true subjects by His Spirit, and that a most real union subsists between the head and the members, of which the closest unions of earth are but faint shadows, so as that not only those who receive His followers receive Him, but, more wonderful still, His followers are received at the last by God Himself as joined to Him, and portions of His very self, and therefore 'accepted in the Beloved.' Our Lord adds to these words the thought that, in like manner, to receive Him is to receive the Father, and so implies that our relation to Him is in certain real respects parallel with His relation to the Father. We too are sent. He who sends abides with us, as the Son ever abode in God, and God in Him. We are sent to be the brightness of Christ's glory, and to manifest Him to men, as He was sent to reveal the Father.

A LIFE LOST AND FOUND¹

‘He that loseth his life for My sake shall find it.’ —**MATT. x. 39.**

My heart impels me to break this morning my usual rule of avoiding personal references in the pulpit. Death has been busy in our own congregation this last week, and yesterday we laid in the grave all that was mortal of a man to whom Manchester owes more than it knows. Mr. Crossley has been for thirty years my close and dear friend. He was long a member of this church and congregation. I need not speak of his utter unselfishness, of his lifelong consecration, of his lavish generosity, of his unstinted work for God and man; but thinking of him and of it, I have felt as if the words of my text were the secret of his life, and as if he now understood the fulness of the promise they contain: ‘He that loseth his life for My sake shall find it.’ Now, looking at these words in the light of the example so tenderly beloved by some of us, so sharply criticised by many, but now so fully recognised as saintly by all, I ask you to consider—

I. The stringent requirement for the Christian life that is here made.

Now we shall very much impoverish the meaning and narrow the sweep of these great and penetrating words, if we understand by ‘losing one’s life’ only the actual surrender of physical existence. It is not only the martyr on whose bleeding brows the crown of life is gently placed; it is not only the temples that have been torn by the crown of thorns, that are soothed by that unfading wreath; but there is a daily dying, which is continually required from all Christian people, and is, perhaps, as hard as, or harder than, the brief and bloody passage of martyrdom by which some enter into rest. For the true losing of life is the slaying of self, and that has to be done day by day, and not once for all, in some supreme act of surrender at the end, or in some initial act of submission and yielding at the beginning, of the Christian life. We ourselves have to take the knife into our own hands and strike, and that not once, but ever, right on through our whole career. For, by natural disposition, we are all inclined to make our own selves to be our own centres, our own aims, the objects of our trust, our own law; and if we do so, we are dead whilst we live, and the death that brings life is when, day by day, we ‘crucify the old man with his affections and lusts.’ Crucifixion was no sudden death; it was an exquisitely painful one, which made every nerve quiver and the whole frame thrill with anguish; and that slow agony, in all its terribleness and protractedness, is the image that is set before us as the true ideal of every life that would not be a living death. The world is to be crucified to me, and I to the world.

We have our centre in ourselves, and we need the centre to be shifted, or we live in sin. If I might venture upon so violent an image, the comets that career about the heavens need to be caught and tamed, and bound to peaceful revolution round some central sun, or else

¹ Preached after the funeral of Mr. F. W. Crossley.

they are 'wandering stars to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.' So, brethren, the slaying of self by a painful, protracted process, is the requirement of Christ.

But do not let us confine ourselves to generalities. What is meant? This is meant—the absolute submission of the will to commandments and providences, the making of that obstinate part of our nature meek and obedient and plastic as the clay in the potter's hands. The tanner takes a stiff hide, and soaks it in bitter waters, and dresses it with sharp tools, and lubricates it with unguents, and his work is not done till all the stiffness is out of it and it is flexible. And we do not lose our lives in the lofty, noble sense, until we can say—and verify the speech by our actions—'Not my will but Thine be done.' They who thus submit, they who thus welcome into their hearts, and enthrone upon the sovereign seat in their wills, Christ and His will—these are they who have lost their lives. When we can say, 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me,' then, and only then, have we in the deepest sense of the words 'lost our lives.'

The phrase means the suppression, and sometimes the excision, of appetites, passions, desires, inclinations. It means the hallowing of all aims; it means the devotion and the consecration of all activities. It means the surrender and the stewardship of all possessions. And only then, when we have done these things, shall we have come to practical obedience to the initial requirement that Christ makes from us all—to lose our lives for His sake.

I need not diverge here to point to that life from which my thoughts have taken their start in this sermon. Surely if there was any one characteristic in it more distinct and lovely than another, it was that self was dead and that Christ lived. There may be sometimes a call for the actual—which is the lesser—surrender of the bodily life, in obedience to the call of duty. There have been Christian men who have wrought themselves to death in the Master's service. Perhaps he of whom I have been speaking was one of these. It may be that, if he had done like so many of our wealthy men—had flung himself into business and then collapsed into repose—he would have been here to-day. Perhaps it would have been better if there had been a less entire throwing of himself into arduous and clamant duties. I am not going to enter on the ethics of that question. I do not think there are many of this generation of Christians who are likely to work themselves to death in Christ's cause; and perhaps, after all, the old saying is a true one, 'Better to wear out than to rust out.' But only this I will say: we honour the martyrs of Science, of Commerce, of Empire, why should not we honour the martyrs of Faith? And why should they be branded as imprudent enthusiasts, if they make the same sacrifice which, when an explorer or a soldier makes, his memory is honoured as heroic, and his cold brows are crowned with laurels? Surely it is as wise to die for Christ as for England. But be that as it may; the requirement, the stringent requirement, of my text is not addressed to any spiritual aristocracy, but is laid upon the consciences of all professing Christians.

II. Observe the grounds of this requirement.

Did you ever think—or has the fact become so familiar to you that it ceases to attract notice?—did you ever think what an extraordinary position it is for the son of a carpenter in Nazareth to plant Himself before the human race and say, ‘You will be wise if you die for My sake, and you will be doing nothing more than your plain duty’? What business has He to assume such a position as that? What warrants that autocratic and all-demanding tone from His lips? ‘Who art Thou’—we may fancy people saying—‘that Thou shouldst put out a masterful hand and claim to take as Thine the life of my heart?’ Ah! brethren, there is but one answer: ‘Who loved me, and gave Himself for me.’ The foolish, loving, impulsive apostle that blurted out, before his time had come, ‘I will lay down my life for Thy sake,’ was only premature; he was not mistaken. There needed that His Lord should lay down His life for Peter’s sake; and then He had a right to turn to the apostle and say, ‘Thou shalt follow Me afterwards,’ and ‘lay down thy life for My sake.’ The ground of Christ’s unique claim is Christ’s solitary sacrifice. He who has died for men, and He only, has the right to require the unconditional, the absolute surrender of themselves, not only in the sacrifice of a life that is submitted, but, if circumstances demand, in the sacrifice of a death. The ground of the requirement is laid, first in the fact of our Lord’s divine nature, and second, in the fact that He who asks my life has first of all given His.

But that same phrase, ‘for My sake,’ suggests—

III. The all-sufficient motive which makes such a loss of life possible.

I suppose that there is nothing else that will wholly dethrone self but the enthroning of Jesus Christ. That dominion is too deeply rooted to be abolished by any enthusiasms, however noble they may be, except the one that kindles its undying torch at the flame of Christ’s own love. God forbid that I should deny that wonderful and lovely instances of self-oblivion may be found in hearts untouched by the supreme love of Christ! But whilst I recognise all the beauty of such, I, for my part, humbly venture to believe and assert that, for the entire deliverance of a man from self-regard, the one sufficient motive power is the reception into his opening heart of the love of Jesus Christ.

Ah! brethren, you and I know how hard it is to escape from the tyrannous dominion of self, and how the evil spirits that have taken possession of us mock at all lesser charms than the name which ‘devils fear and fly’; ‘the Name that is above every name.’ We have tried other motives. We have sought to reprove our selfishness by other considerations. Human love—which itself is sometimes only the love of self, seeking satisfaction from another—human love does conquer it, but yet conquers it partially. The demons turn round upon all other would-be exorcists, and say, ‘Jesus we know . . . but who are ye?’ It is only when the Ark is carried into the Temple that Dagon falls prone before it. If you would drive self out of your hearts—and if you do not it will slay you—if you would drive self out, let Christ’s love and sacrifice come in. And then, what no brooms and brushes, no spades nor wheelbarrows, will ever do—namely, cleanse out the filth that lodges there—the turning of

the river in will do, and float it all away. The one possibility for complete, conclusive deliverance from the dominion and tyranny of Self is to be found in the words 'For My sake.' Ah! brethren, I suppose there are none of us so poor in earthly love, possessed or remembered, but that we know the omnipotence of these words when whispered by beloved lips, 'For My sake'; and Jesus Christ is saying them to us all.

IV. Lastly, notice the recompense of the stringent requirement.

'Shall find it,' and that finding, like the losing, has a twofold reference and accomplishment: here and now, yonder and then.

Here and now, no man possesses himself till he has given himself to Jesus Christ. Only then, when we put the reins into His hands, can we coerce and guide the fiery steeds of passion and of impulse, And so Scripture, in more than one place, uses a remarkable expression, when it speaks of those that believe to the 'acquiring of their souls.' You are not your own masters until you are Christ's servants; and when you fancy yourselves to be most entirely your own masters, you have promised yourselves liberty and have become the slave of corruption. So if you would own yourselves, give yourselves away. And such an one 'shall find' his life, here and now, in that all earthly things will be sweeter and better. The altar sanctifies the gift. When some pebble is plunged into a sunlit stream, the water brings out the veined colourings of the stone that looked all dull and dim when it was lying upon the bank. Fling your whole being, your wealth, your activities, and everything, into that stream, and they will flash in splendour else unknown. Did not my friend, of whom I have been speaking, enjoy his wealth far more, when he poured it out like water upon good causes, than if he had spent it in luxury and self-indulgence? And shall we not find that everything is sweeter, nobler, better, fuller of capacity to delight, if we give it all to our Master? The stringent requirement of Christ is the perfection of prudence. 'Who pleasure follows pleasure slays,' and who slays pleasure finds a deeper and a holier delight. The keenest epicureanism could devise no better means for sucking the last drop of sweetness out of the clustering grapes of the gladnesses of earth than to obey this stringent requirement, and so realise the blessed promise, 'Whoso loseth his life for My sake shall find it.' The selfish man is a roundabout fool. The self-devoted man, the Christ-enthroning man, is the wise man.

And there will be the further finding hereafter, about which we cannot speak. Only remember, how in a passage parallel with this of my text, spoken when almost within sight of Calvary, our Lord laid down not only the principle of His own life but the principle for all His servants, when He said, 'Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.' The solitary grain dropped into the furrow brings forth a waving harvest. We may not, we need not, particularise, but the life that is found at last is as the fruit an hundredfold of the life that men called 'lost' and God called 'sown.'

‘Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord; they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.’

THE GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM, AND THEIR REWARD

‘He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward. 42. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.’ —[MATT. x. 41, 42.](#)

There is nothing in these words to show whether they refer to the present or to the future. We shall probably not go wrong if we regard them as having reference to both. For all godliness has ‘promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come,’ and ‘*in* keeping God’s commandments,’ as well as *for* keeping them, ‘there is great reward,’ a reward realised in the present, even although Death holds the keys of the treasure-house in which the richest rewards are stored. No act of holy obedience is here left without foretastes of joy, which, though they be but ‘brooks by the way,’ contain the same water of life which hereafter swells to an ocean.

Some people tell us that it is defective morality in Christianity to bribe men to be good by promising them Heaven, and that he who is actuated by such a motive is selfish. Now that fantastic and overstrained objection may be very simply answered by two considerations: self-regard is not selfishness, and Christianity does not propose the future reward as the motive for goodness. The motive for goodness is love to Jesus Christ; and if ever there was a man who did acts of Christian goodness only for the sake of what he would get by them, the acts were not Christian goodness, because the motive was wrong. But it is a piece of fastidiousness to forbid us to reinforce the great Christian motive, which is love to Jesus Christ, by the thought of the recompense of reward. It is a stimulus and an encouragement of, not the motive for, goodness. This text shows us that it is a subordinate motive, for it says that the reception of a prophet, or of a righteous man, or of ‘one of these little ones,’ which is rewardable, is the reception ‘in the name of’ a prophet, a disciple, and so on, or, in other words, is the recognising of the prophet, or the righteous man, or the disciple for what he is, and because he is that, and not because of the reward, receiving him with sympathy and solace and help.

So, with that explanation, let us look at these very remarkable words of our text.

I. The first thing which I wish to observe in them is the three classes of character which are dealt with—‘prophet,’ ‘righteous man,’ ‘these little ones.’

Now the question that I would suggest is this: Is there any meaning in the order in which these are arranged? If so, what is it? Do we begin at the bottom, or at the top? Have we to do with an ascending or with a descending scale? Is the prophet thought to be greater than the righteous man, or less? Is the righteous man thought to be higher than the little one, or to be lower? The question is an important one, and worth considering.

Now, at first sight, it certainly does look as if we had here to do with a descending scale, as if we began at the top and went downwards. A prophet, a man honoured with a distinct commission from God to declare His will, is, in certain very obvious respects, loftier than a man who is not so honoured, however pure and righteous he may be. The dim and venerable figures, for instance, of Isaiah and Jeremiah, tower high above all their contemporaries; and godly men who hung upon their lips, like Baruch on Jeremiah's, felt themselves to be, and were, inferior to them. And, in like manner, the little child who believes in Christ may seem to be insignificant in comparison with the prophet with his God-touched lips, or the righteous man of the old dispensation with his austere purity; as a humble violet may seem by the side of a rose with its heart of fire, or a white lily regal and tall. But one remembers that Jesus Christ Himself declared that 'the least of the little ones' was greater than the greatest who had gone before; and it is not at all likely that He who has just been saying that whosoever received His followers received Himself, should classify these followers beneath the righteous men of old. The Christian type of character is distinctly higher than the Old Testament type; and the humblest believer is blessed above prophets and righteous men because his eyes behold and his heart welcomes the Christ.

Therefore I am inclined to believe that we have here an ascending series—that we begin at the bottom and not at the top; that the prophet is less than the righteous man, and the righteous man less than the little one who believes in Christ. For, suppose there were a prophet who was not righteous, and a righteous man who was not a prophet. Suppose the separation between the two characters were complete, which of them would be the greater? Balaam was a prophet; Balaam was not a righteous man; Balaam was immeasurably inferior to the righteous whose lives he did not emulate, though he could not but envy their deaths. In like manner the humblest believer in Jesus Christ has something that a prophet, if he is not a disciple, does not possess; and that which he has, and the prophet has not, is higher than the endowment that is peculiar to the prophet alone.

May we say the same thing about the difference between the righteous man and the disciple? Can there be a righteous man that is not a disciple? Can there be a disciple that is not a righteous man? Can the separation between these two classes be perfect and complete? No! in the profoundest sense, certainly not. But then at the time when Christ spoke there were some men standing round Him, who, 'as touching the righteousness which is of the law,' were 'blameless.' And there are many men to-day, with much that is noble and admirable in their characters, who stand apart from the faith that is in Jesus Christ; and if the separation be so complete as that, then it is to be emphatically and decisively pronounced that, if we have regard to all that a man ought to be, and if we estimate men in the measure in which they approximate to that ideal in their lives and conduct, 'the Christian is the highest style of man.' The disciple is above the righteous men adorned with many graces of character, who, if they are not Christians, have a worm at the root of all their goodness, because it lacks

the supreme refinement and consecration of faith; and above the fiery-tongued prophet, if he is not a disciple.

Now, brethren, this thought is full of very important practical inferences. Faith is better than genius. Faith is better than brilliant gifts. Faith is better than large acquirements. The poet's imagination, the philosopher's calm reasoning, the orator's tongue of fire, even the inspiration of men that may have their lips touched to proclaim God to their brethren, are all less than the bond of living trust that knits a soul to Jesus Christ, and makes it thereby partaker of that indwelling Saviour. And, in like manner, if there be men, as there are, and no doubt some of them among my hearers, adorned with virtues and graces of character, but who have not rested their souls on Jesus Christ, then high above these, too, stands the lowliest person who has set his faith and love on that Saviour. Neither intellectual endowments nor moral character are the highest, but faith in Jesus Christ. A man may be endowed with all brilliancy of intellect and fair with many beauties of character, and he may be lost; and on the other hand simple faith, rudimentary and germlike as it often is, carries in itself the prophecy of all goodness, and knits a man to the source of all blessedness. 'Whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. Now abideth these three, faith, hope, charity.' 'Rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in Heaven.'

Ah! brethren, if we believed in Christ's classification of men, and in the order of importance and dignity in which He arranges them, it would make a wonderful practical difference to the lives, to the desires, and to the efforts of a great many of us. Some of you students, young men and women that are working at college or your classes, if you believed that it was better to trust in Jesus Christ than to be wise, and gave one-tenth, ay! one-hundredth part of the attention and the effort to secure the one which you do to secure the other, would be different people. 'Not many wise men after the flesh,' but humble trusters in Jesus Christ, are the victors in the world. Believe you that, and order your lives accordingly.

Oh! what a reversal of this world's estimates is coming one day, when the names that stand high in the roll of fame shall pale, like photographs that have been shut up in a portfolio, and when you take them out have faded off the paper. 'The world knows nothing of its greatest men,' but there is a time coming when the spurious mushroom aristocracy that the world has worshipped will be forgotten, like the nobility of some conquered land, who are brushed aside and relegated to private life by the new nobility of the conquerors, and when the true nobles, God's aristocrats, the righteous, who are righteous because they have trusted in Christ, shall shine forth like the sun 'in the Kingdom of My Father.'

Here is the climax: gifts and endowments at the bottom, character and morality in the middle, and at the top faith in Jesus Christ.

II. Now notice briefly in the second place the variety of the reward according to the character.

The prophet has his, the righteous man has his, the little one has his. That is to say, each level of spiritual or moral stature receives its own prize. There is no difficulty in seeing that this is so in regard to the rewards of this life. Every faithful message delivered by a prophet increases that prophet's own blessedness, and has joys in the receiving of it from God, in the speaking of it to men, in the marking of its effects as it spreads through the world, which belong to him alone. In all these, and in many other ways, the 'prophet' has rewards that no stranger can intermeddle with. All courses of obedient conduct have their own appropriate consequences and satisfaction. Every character is adapted to receive, and does receive, in the measure of its goodness, certain blessings and joys, here and now. 'Surely the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth.'

And the same principle, of course, applies if we think of the reward as altogether future. It must be remembered, however, that Christianity does not teach, as I believe, that if there be a prophet or a righteous man who is not a disciple, that prophet or righteous man will get rewards in the future life. It must be remembered, too, that every disciple is righteous in the measure of his faith. Discipleship being presupposed, then the disciple who is a prophet will have one reward, and the disciple who is a righteous man shall have another; and where all three characteristics coincide, there shall be a triple crown of glory upon his head.

That is all plain and obvious enough, if only we get rid of the prejudice that the rewards of a future life are merely bestowed upon men by God's arbitrary good pleasure. What is the reward of Heaven? 'Eternal life,' people say. Yes! 'Blessedness.' Yes! But where does the life come from, and where does the blessedness come from? They are both derived, they come from God in Christ; and in the deepest sense, and in the only true sense, God is Heaven, and God is the reward of Heaven. 'I am thy shield,' so long as dangers need to be guarded against, and then, thereafter, 'I am thine exceeding great Reward.' It is the possession of God that makes all the Heaven of Heaven, the immortal life which His children receive, and the blessedness with which they are enraptured. We are heirs of immortality, we are heirs of life, we are heirs of blessedness, because, and in the measure in which, we become heirs of God.

And if that be so, then there is no difficulty in seeing that in Heaven, as on earth, men will get just as much of God as they can hold; and that in Heaven, as on earth, capacity for receiving God is determined by character. The gift is one, the reward is one, and yet the reward is infinitely various. It is the same light which glows in all the stars, but 'star differeth from star in glory.' It is the same wine, the new wine of the Kingdom, that is poured into all the vessels, but the vessels are of divers magnitudes, though each be full to the brim.

And so in those two sister parables of our Master's, which are so remarkably discriminated and so remarkably alike, we have both these aspects of the Heavenly reward set forth—both that which declares its identity in all cases, and the other which declares its

variety according to the recipient's character. All the servants receive the same welcome, the same prize, the same entrance into the same joy; although one of them had ten talents, and another five, and another two. But the servants who were each sent out to trade with one poor pound in their hands, and by their varying diligence reaped varying profits, were rewarded according to the returns that they had brought; and one received ten, and the other five, and the other two, cities over which to have authority and rule. So the reward is one, and yet infinitely diverse. It is not the same thing whether a man or a woman, being a Christian, is an earnest, and devoted, and growing Christian here on earth, or a selfish, and an idle, and a stagnant one. It is not the same thing whether you content yourselves with simply laying hold on Christ, and keeping a tremulous and feeble hold of Him for the rest of your lives, or whether you grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour. There is such a fate as being saved, yet so as by fire, and going into the brightness with the smell of the fire on your garments. There is such a fate as having just, as it were, squeezed into Heaven, and got there by the skin of your teeth. And there is such a thing as having an abundant entrance ministered, when its portals are thrown wide open. Some imperfect Christians die with but little capacity for possessing God, and therefore their heaven will not be as bright, nor studded with as majestic constellations, as that of others. The starry vault that bends above us so far away, is the same in the number of its stars when gazed on by the savage with his unaided eye, and by the astronomer with the strongest telescope; and the Infinite God, who arches above us, but comes near to us, discloses galaxies of beauty and oceans of abysmal light in Himself, according to the strength and clearness of the eye that looks upon Him. So, brethren, remember that the one glory has infinite degrees; and faith, and conduct, and character here determine the capacity for God which we shall have when we go to receive our reward.

III. The last point that is here is the substantial identity of the reward to all that stand on the same level, however different may be the form of their lives.

'He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward.' And so in the case of the others. The active prophet, righteous man, or disciple, and the passive recogniser of each in that character, who receives each as a prophet, or righteous man, or disciple, stand practically and substantially on the same level, though the one of them may have his lips glowing with the divine inspiration and the other may never have opened his mouth for God.

That is beautiful and deep. The power of sympathising with any character is the partial possession of that character for ourselves. A man who is capable of having his soul bowed by the stormy thunder of Beethoven, or lifted to Heaven by the ethereal melody of Mendelssohn, is a musician, though he never composed a bar. The man who recognises and feels the grandeur of the organ music of 'Paradise Lost' has some fibre of a poet in him, though he be but 'a mute, inglorious Milton.'

All sympathy and recognition of character involve some likeness to that character. The poor woman who brought the sticks and prepared food for the prophet entered into the prophet's mission and shared in the prophet's work and reward, though his task was to beard Ahab, and hers was only to bake Elijah's bread. The old knight that clapped Luther on the back when he went into the Diet of Worms, and said to him, 'Well done, little monk!' shared in Luther's victory and in Luther's crown. He that helps a prophet because he is a prophet, has the making of a prophet in himself.

As all work done from the same motive is the same in God's eyes, whatever be the outward shape of it, so the work that involves the same type of spiritual character will involve the same reward. You find the Egyptian medal on the breasts of the soldiers that kept the base of communication as well as on the breasts of the men that stormed the works at Tel-el-Kebir. It was a law in Israel, and it is a law in Heaven: 'As his part is that goeth down into the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff, they shall part alike.' 'I am going down into the pit, you hold the ropes,' said Carey, the pioneer missionary. They that hold the ropes, and the daring miner that swings away down in the blackness, are one in the work, may be one in the motive, and, if they are, shall be one in the reward. So, brethren, though no coal of fire may be laid upon your lips, if you sympathise with the workers that are trying to serve God, and do what you can to help them, and identify yourself with them, and so hold the ropes, my text will be true about you. 'He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward.' They who by reason of circumstances, by deficiency of power, or by the weight of other tasks and duties, can only give silent sympathy, and prayer, and help, are one with the men whom they help.

Dear brethren! remember that this awful, mystical life of ours is full everywhere of consequences that cannot be escaped. What we sow we reap, and we grind it, and we bake it, and we live upon it. We have to drink as we have brewed; we have to lie on the beds that we have made. 'Be not deceived: God is not mocked.' The doctrine of reward has two sides to it. 'Nothing human ever dies.' All our deeds drag after them inevitable consequences; but if you will put your trust in Jesus Christ, He will not deal with you according to your sins, nor reward you according to your iniquities; and the darkest features of the recompense of your evil will all be taken away by the forgiveness which we have in His blood. If you will trust yourselves to Him you will have that eternal life, which is not wages, but a gift; which is not reward, but a free bestowment of God's love. And then, if we build upon that Foundation on which alone men can build their hopes, their thoughts, their characters, their lives, however feeble may be our efforts, however narrow may be our sphere,—though we be neither prophets nor sons of prophets, and though our righteousness may be all stained and imperfect, yet, to our own amazement and to God's glory, we shall find, when the fire is kindled which reveals and tests our works, that, by the might of humble faith in Christ,

we have built upon that Foundation, gold and silver and precious stones; and shall receive the reward given to every man whose work abides that trial by fire.

JOHN'S DOUBTS OF JESUS, AND JESUS' PRAISE OF JOHN

'Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, 3. And said unto Him, Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another? 4. Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: 5. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. 6. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me. 7. And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? 8. But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. 9. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. 10. For this is he, of whom it is written. Behold, I send My messenger before Thy face, which shall prepare Thy way before Thee. 11. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. 12. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. 13. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John—And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come. 16. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.'—[MATT. xi. 2-15](#).

This text falls into two parts: the first, from [verses 2-6](#) inclusive, giving us the faltering faith of the great witness, and Christ's gentle treatment of the waverer; the second, from [verse 7 to the end](#), giving the witness of Christ to John, exuberant in recognition, notwithstanding his momentary hesitation.

I. We do not believe that this message of John's was sent for the sake of strengthening his disciples' faith in Jesus as Messiah, nor that it was merely meant as a hint to Jesus to declare Himself. The question is John's. The answer is sent to him: it is he who is to ponder the things which the messengers saw, and to answer his own question thereby. The note which the evangelist prefixes to his account gives the key to the incident. John was 'in prison,' in that gloomy fortress of Machaerus which Herod had rebuilt at once for 'a sinful pleasure-house' and for an impregnable refuge, among the savage cliffs of Moab. The halls of luxurious vice and the walls of defence are gone; but the dungeons are there still, with the holes in the masonry into which the bars were fixed to which the prisoners—John, perhaps, one of them—were chained. No wonder that in the foul atmosphere of a dark dungeon the spirit which had been so undaunted in the free air of the desert began to flag; nor that even he who had seen the fluttering dove descend on Christ's head, and had pointed to Him as the Lamb of God, felt that 'all his mind was clouded with a doubt.' It would have been wiser if commentators, instead of trying to save John's credit at the cost of straining the narrative, had recognised the psychological truth of the plain story of his wavering conviction and

had learned its lessons of self-distrust. There is only one Man with whom it was always high-water; all others have ebbs and flows in their religious life, and variations in their grasp of truth.

The narrative further gives the motive for John's embassy, in the report which had reached him of 'the works of Christ.' We need only recall John's earlier testimony to understand how these works would not seem to him to fill up the role which he had anticipated for Messiah. Where is the axe that was to be laid at the root of the trees, or the fan that was to winnow out the chaff? Where is the fiery spirit which he had foretold? This gentle Healer is not the theocratic judge of his warning prophecies. He is tending and nurturing, rather than felling, the barren trees. A nimbus of merciful deeds, not of flashing 'wrath to come,' surrounds His head. So John began to wonder if, after all, he had been premature in his recognition. Perhaps this Jesus was but a precursor, as he himself was, of the Messiah. Evidently he continues firm in the conviction of Christ's being sent from God, and is ready to accept His answer as conclusive; but, as evidently, he is puzzled by the contrariety between Jesus' deeds and his own expectations. He asks, 'Art Thou *He that cometh*'—a well-known name for Messiah—'or are we to expect another?' where it should be noted that the word for 'another' means not merely a second, but a different kind of, person, who should present the aspects of the Messiah as revealed in prophecy, and as embodied in John's own preaching, which Jesus had left unfulfilled.

We may well take to heart the lesson of the fluctuations possible to the firmest faith, and pray to be enabled to hold fast that we have. We may learn, too, the danger to right conceptions of Christ, of separating the two elements of mercy and judgment in His character and work. John was right in believing that the Christ must come to judge. A Christ without the fan in His hand is a maimed Christ. John was wrong in stumbling at the gentleness, just as many to-day, who go to the opposite extreme, are wrong in stumbling at the judicial side of His work. Both halves are needed to make the full-orbed character. We have not to 'look for a different' Christ, but we have to look for Him, coming the second time, the same Jesus, but now with His axe in His pierced hands, to hew down trees which He has patiently tended. Let John's profound sense of the need for a judicial aspect in the Christ who is to meet the prophecies written in men's hearts, as well as in Scripture, teach us how one-sided and superficial are representations of His work which suppress or slur over His future coming to judgment.

Our Lord does not answer 'Yes' or 'No.' To do so might have stilled, but would not have removed, John's misconception. A more thorough cure is needed. So Christ attacks it in its roots by referring him back for answer to the very deeds which had excited his doubt. In doing so, He points to, or indeed, we may say, quotes, two prophetic passages ([Isa. xxxv. 5, 6](#); [lxi. 1](#)) which give the prophetic 'notes' of Messiah. It is as if He had said, 'Have you forgotten that the very prophets whose words have fed your hopes, and now seem to minister

to your doubts, have said this and this about the Messiah?' Further, there is deep wisdom in sending John back again to think over the very deeds at which he was stumbling. It is not Christ's work which is wanting in conformity to the divine idea; it is John's conceptions of that idea that need enlarging. What he wants is not so much to be told that Jesus is the Christ, as to grow up to a truer, because more comprehensive, notion of what the Christ is to be. A wide principle is taught us here. The very points in Christ's work which may occasion difficulty, will, when we stand at the right point of view, become evidences of His claims. What were stumbling-blocks become stepping-stones. Arguments against become proofs of, the truth when we look at them with clearer eyes, and from the proper angle. Further, we are taught here, that what Christ does is the best answer to the question as to who He is. Still He is doing these works among us. Darkened eyes are flooded with light by His touch, and see a new world, because they gaze with faith on Him. Lame limbs are endowed with strength, and can run in the way of His commandments, and walk with unfainting perseverance the thorniest paths of duty and self-sacrifice. Lepers are cleansed from the rotting leprosy of sin, and their flesh comes again, 'as the flesh of a little child.' Deaf ears hear the voice of the Son of God, and the dead who hear live. Good news is preached to all the poor in spirit, and whosoever knows himself to be in need of all things may claim all things as his own in Christ. He who through the ages has been working such works, and works them still, 'needs not to speak anything' to confirm His claims, 'neither is there salvation in any other.' We look for no second Christ; but we look for that same Jesus to come the second time to be the Judge of the world of which He is the Saviour.

The benediction on him who finds none occasion of stumbling in Christ, is at once a beatitude and a warning. It rebukes in the gentlest fashion John's temper, which found difficulty in even the perfect personality of Jesus, and made that which should have been the 'sure foundation' of his spirit a stone of stumbling. Our Lord's consciousness of absolute perfection of moral character, and of absolute perfectness in His office and work, is distinct in the words. He knows that 'there is none occasion of stumbling in Him,' and that whoever finds any, brings it or makes it. He knows and warns us that all blessedness lies for us in recognising Him for what He is—God's sure foundation of our hopes, our peace, our thoughts, our lives. He knows that all woe and loss are involved in stumbling on this stone, against which whosoever falls is broken, and by which, when it begins to move, and falls on a man, he is ground to powder, like the dust of the threshing-floor. What tremendous arrogance of assertion! Who is he who can venture on such words without blasphemy against God, and universal ridicule from men?

II. The witness of Christ to John. Praise from Jesus is praise indeed; and it is poured out here with no stinted hand on the languishing prisoner whose doubts had just been brought to Him. Such an eulogium at such a time is a wonderful instance of loving forbearance with a true-hearted follower's weakness, and of a desire which, in a man, we should call magnan-

imous, to shield John's character from depreciation on account of his message. The world praises a man to his face, and speaks of his faults behind his back. Christ does the opposite. Not till the messengers were departing does He begin to speak 'concerning John.' He lays bare the secret of the Baptist's power, and allocates his place as greatest in one epoch and as less than the least in another, with an authority more than human, and on principles which set Himself high above all comparison with men, whether the greatest or the least. The King places His subjects, and Himself sits enthroned above them all.

First, Christ praises John's great personal character in the dramatic and vivid questions which begin this section. He recalls the scenes of popular enthusiasm when all Israel streamed out to the desert preacher. A small man could not have made such an upheaval. What drew the crowds? Just what will draw them; the qualities without which, either possessed in reality or in popular estimation, no man can be a power religiously. The first essential is heroic firmness. It was not reeds swaying in the wind by Jordan's banks, nor a poor feeble man like these, that the people flocked to listen to. His emblem was not the reed, but 'an iron pillar.' His whole career had been marked by decisiveness, constancy, courage. Nothing can be done worth doing in the world without a wholesome obstinacy and imperturbability, which keep a man true to his convictions and his task, whatever winds blow in his teeth. The multitudes will not flock to listen to a teacher who does not speak with the accent of conviction, nor will truths feebly grasped touch the lips with fire. The first requisite for a religious teacher is that he shall be sure of his message and of himself. Athanasius has to 'stand against the world' before the world accepts his teaching. 'Though there were as many devils in Worms as there are tiles on the house-tops, go I will,' said Luther. That is the temper for God's instruments.

The next requisite, which John also had, is manifest indifference to material ease. Silken courtiers do not haunt the desert. Kings' houses, and not either the wilderness or kings' dungeons, are the sunny spots where they spread their plumage. If the gaunt ascetic, with his girdle of camel's hair and his coarse fare, had been a self-indulgent sybarite, his voice would never have shaken a nation. The least breath of suspicion that a preacher is such a man ends his power, and ought to end it; for self-indulgence and the love of fleshly comforts eat the heart out of goodness, and make the eyes too heavy to see visions. John was the same man then as they had known him to be; therefore it was no impatience of the hardships of his prison that had inspired his doubts.

Our Lord next speaks of John's great office. He was a prophet. The dim recognition that God spoke in His fiery words had drawn the crowds, weary of teachers in whose endless jangle and jargon of casuistry was no inspiration. The voice of a man who gets his message at first-hand from God has a ring in it which even dull ears detect as something genuine. Alas for the bewildering babble of echoes and the paucity of voices to-day!

So far Jesus had been appealing to His hearers' knowledge; He now goes on to add higher truth concerning John. He declares that he is more than a prophet, because he is His messenger before His face; that is, immediately preceding Himself. We cannot stay to comment on the remarkable variation between the original form of the quotation from Malachi and Christ's version of it, which, in its substitution of 'thee' for 'me,' bears so forcibly on the divinity of Christ; but we may mark the principle on which John's superiority to the whole prophetic order is based. It is that nearness to Jesus makes greatness. The closer the relation to Him, the higher the honour. In that long procession the King comes last; and of 'them that go before, crying, Hosanna to Him that cometh,' the order of precedence is that the first are last, and that the highest is he who walks in front of the Sovereign.

Next, we have the limitations of the forerunner and his relative inferiority to the least in the kingdom of heaven. Another standard of greatness is here from that of the world, which smiles at the contrast between the uncultured preacher of repentance and the mighty thinkers, poets, legislators, kingdom-makers, whom it enrols among the great. In Christ's eyes greatness is nearness to Him, and understanding of Him and His work. Neither natural faculty nor worth is in question, but simply relation to the Kingdom and the King. He who had only to preach of Him who should come after him, and had but a partial apprehension of Christ and His work, stood on a lower level than the least who has to look to a Christ who has come, and has opened the gates of the kingdom to the humblest believer. The truths which were hid from ages, and were but visible as in morning twilight to John, are sunlit to us. The scholars in our Sunday-schools know familiarly more than prophets and kings ever knew. We 'hold the grey barbarian lower than the Christian child'; and not merely he, but the wisest of the prophets, and the forerunner himself. The history of the world is parted into two by the coming of Jesus Christ, as every dictionary of dates tells, and the least of the greater is greater than the greatest of the less. What a place, then, does Christ claim! Our relation to Him determines greatness. To recognise Him is to be in the Kingdom of Heaven. Union to Him brings us to fulfil the ideal of human nature; and this is life, to know and trust Him, the King.

Our Lord adds a brief characterisation of the effect of John's ministry. It was of mingled good and evil, and there is a tone of sadness perceptible in the ambiguous words. John had aroused great popular excitement, and had stirred multitudes to seek to enter the Kingdom. So far was good. But had all the crowds understood what sort of kingdom it was? Had they not too often dragged down the lofty conception to their own vulgar level, and, with their dream of an outward sovereignty, thought to gain it for their own by violence instead of meekness, by arms and worldly force rather than by submission? The earnestness was good, but Christ's sad insight saw how much strange fire had mingled in the blaze, as if some earth-born smoky flame should seek to blend with the pure sunlight. Such seems the most natural interpretation of the words, but they are ambiguous, and may possibly mean by 'the

violent' those who had been roused to genuine earnestness by the clarion voice which rang in the ears of that slumbering generation.

Then follows the explanation of this new interest in the kingdom. 'All the prophets and the law prophesied until John.' The whole period till his coming was one of preparation, and it all converged on the epoch of the forerunner. The eagerness to flock into the Kingdom which characterised his time would have been impossible in the earlier days. He closes that order of things, standing, as it were, on the isthmus between prophecy and fulfilment, belonging properly to neither, but having affinities with both, and being the transition from the one to the other. Then our Lord closes His words concerning John with the distinct statement, which He expects His hearers to have difficulty in receiving, probably from the contradiction to it which John's present condition seemed to give, that in him was fulfilled Malachi's prophecy of the sending of 'Elijah the prophet before . . . day of the Lord.' The fiery Tishbite, gaunt and grim, ascetic and solitary, who bearded Ahab, and flamed across a corrupt age with a stern message of repentance or destruction, was repeated in the lonely ascetic who had his Ahab in Herod, and his Jezebel in Herodias, and like his prototype, knew no fear, but flashed out the lightnings of his words on every sin. The two men were brothers, and their voices answer each other across the centuries. Christ crowns His witness to John while thus quoting the last swansong of ancient prophecy, and thereby at once sets John on a pinnacle of greatness, and advances a claim concerning Himself all the more weighty, because He leaves it to be inferred. 'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear'—this eulogium on the forerunner needs to be reflected on ere all its bearings are seen. If John was Elias, the day of the Lord was at hand, and 'the Sun of Righteousness' was already above the horizon. Jesus' witness concerning John ends in witness concerning Himself.

THE FRIEND OF PUBLICANS AND SINNERS

‘The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children,’—[MATT. xi. 19](#).

Jesus very seldom took notice of His enemies’ slanders. ‘When He was reviled He reviled not again.’ If ever He did, it was for the sake of those whom it harmed to distort His beauty. Thus, here He speaks, without the slightest trace of irritation, of the capricious inconsistency of condemning Himself and John on precisely opposite grounds. John will not suit them because he neither eats nor drinks. Well, one would think that Jesus would be hailed since He does both. But He pleases them just as little. What was at the root of this contrary working dislike? It was the dislike for the truths they both preached, the rejection of the wisdom of which they were the messengers. When men do not like the message, nothing that the messengers do, or are, is right. Never mind consistency, but object to this form of Christian teaching that it is too harsh, and to that, that it is too soft; to this man that he is always thundering condemnation, to that, that he is always preaching mercy; to one, that he has too much to say about duty, to another, that he dwells too much on grace; to this presentation of the gospel, that it is too learned and doctrinal, to that, that it is too sentimental and emotional, and so on, and so on. The generation of children who neither like piping nor lamenting, lives still.

But my purpose now is not to dwell on the conduct with which our Lord is dealing, but on this caricature of Him which His own lips repeat without a sign of anger. It is the only calumny of antagonists reported by Himself. We owe our knowledge of its currency to this saying. Like other words of His enemies, this saying is a distorted refraction of His glory. The facts it embodies are facts; the conclusions it draws are false. If Jesus had not come eating and drinking, He could not have been called gluttonous and a wine-bibber. If He had not drawn publicans and sinners to Him in a conspicuous manner and degree, He could not have been called their friend. The charge, like all others, is a tribute. Let us try to see what was the blessed truth that it caricatured. We may take the two points separately, for though closely connected they are distinct, and cover different ground.

I. His enemies’ witness to Christ’s participation in common life.

(a) That participation witnesses to His true manhood.

Significant use of ‘Son of Man’ in context.

Because He is so, He must pass into all human circumstances.

Looked at in the light of incarnation, the simple fact that He shared our common lot in all things assumes proportions of majestic condescension.

Extend to all physical necessities, and to simple material pleasures.

What a witness this hostile criticism is to Christ's genial identification of Himself with homely feasters!

(*b*) It sets forth the highest type of manhood.

John could be ascetic, but the Pattern Man could not.

The true perfecting of humanity is not the extirpation, but the control, of the flesh by the spirit. And in accordance with this thought, we may see in the eating and drinking Christ, the pattern for the religious life. Asceticism is not the noblest form of sanctity. There is nothing more striking in Old Testament than the way in which its heroes and saints mingle in all ordinary duties. They are warriors, statesmen, shepherds, they buy, they sell. Asceticism came later, along with formalisms of other sorts. When devotion cools, it is crusted with superstition and external marks of godliness. Propriety in posturing in worship, casuistry in the interpretation of law, and abstinence from common enjoyments, came in Pharisaic times. And into such a world Jesus came, eating and drinking.

But His bearing in these matters is example for us. They were rigidly kept in subordination. They were all done in communion with God.

So He has hallowed all by taking part in them.

Christ should be present in all our material enjoyments. If you cannot think that He is with you, if you cannot conceive of His being there, that is no place for you. If you cannot feel that He approves, that is no fit enjoyment for you.

The tendency of this day is to take a wider view of the liberty allowed to Christians in regard to partaking in material enjoyment, and I dare say that many of you who have thought that I spoke well in insisting on all things belonging to the Christian, will think that I am dropping back into the old narrow groove in my next remark, that all such thoughts need guarding.

One has heard the example of Christ invoked to justify unchristian laxity and excess. Therefore I wish to say that the liberty permitted to Christians in these matters is to be limited within the limits within which Christ's was confined.

The excessive use of innocent things is not justified by His example, nor is the use of things innocent in themselves, which are mixed up with harmful things.

Christ's example does not warrant the importance attached to luxury, the waste on mere eating and drinking. It is sometimes quoted as against total abstinence. It has no bearing on the question. But if He gave up heaven for His brethren, I think that they who give up an indulgence for the sake of theirs are in the line of His action. I venture to think that if Jesus Christ lived in England to-day, He would be a total abstinence fanatic.

'If thy hand offend thee, cut it off.' Asceticism is not the highest, but it is sometimes necessary. If my indulgence in innocent things hurts me, or if my abstinence from them would help others, or increase my power for good, or if innocent things are intertwined with things not innocent, then it is vain to try to shelter under Christ's example, and the

only right course for His disciple is to abridge his liberty. He came eating and drinking, therefore His followers may use all innocent earthly blessings and bodily pleasures, subject to this one law: 'Whether ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God,' and to this solemn warning: 'He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption.'

II. His enemies' witness to Jesus as the friend of the outcasts.

The fact was that He drew them to Himself and evidently was glad to have them round Him. The inference natural to low natures was *noscitur a sociis* and that the bond between Him and them was common evil tendencies and ways. His censors could not conceive of any one's seeking the outcasts from pity and for their good.

(a) Christ's consorting with these was the revelation of His love to them.

It meant no complicity with, nor minimising of, sinfulness.

His sternness is as conspicuous as His love.

He warned, rebuked, tried to win back.

The highest purity is not repellent to sinners.

So in Jesus is the combination of tenderest love and intense moral earnestness.

How difficult for anything but actual sight of such a life to have painted it! Where did the evangelists get such an embodiment of two attitudes so unlike each other, and which we so seldom see united in fact? I venture to think that the combination in perfect harmony and proportion of these, is a strong presumption in favour of the historical truth of the Christ of the gospels.

But remember that if we take His own statement ('He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father'), we are to see in this kindly consorting with sinners not only the love of a perfectly pure manhood, but a revelation of the heart of God. And that adds wonderfulness and awe to the fact. This man to whom sinners were drawn by strange attraction, in whom they found the highest purity and yet softest tenderness, therein revealed God.

(b) It witnesses to His boundless hope.

No outcasts were hopeless in His view. To man's eyes there are hopeless classes, but He sees deeper. 'Perhaps a spark lies hid.' There are dormant possibilities in all souls.

None are so hard as that they cannot be melted by the high temperature of love, just as there are no metals that cannot be volatilised if exposed to intense heat.

Carry the most thick-ribbed ice into the sun and it will thaw.

So the Christian view of mankind is much more hopeful than that of mere educationists or moralists.

None of them paint human nature so black as it does, but none of them have such boundless confidence in the possibility of making it lustrously white.

Urge, then, that none are beyond the power of Christ's gospel. His divine Spirit can change any man. There are no incurables in the judgment of the great Physician.

(c) It witnesses to the truth that gross sin does not shut out from Him so much as does self-complacent ignorance of our own need.

‘They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.’ Where should the physician be but at the sick man’s bedside?

The one impassable barrier between us and Christ is fancying that we are not sinners and do not need Him.

This boundless hopefulness and seeking after the outcasts is the unique glory of Christianity. What has been the mainspring of all movements for their elevation? What broke the chains of slavery? What has sent men to the ends of the earth for the elevation of savage races? What is the motive power in the benevolent works of this day? Is it philosophical altruism or is it Christian faith? No doubt, there are some sporadic movements among people who do not accept the gospel. At present, I do not ask how far these are due to the underground influence of Christianity filtering to men who stand apart from it. But I gravely doubt whether you will ever get any large, continuous, self-sacrificing efforts for the outcasts, unless they are the direct result of the spirit of Christ moving on men who owe their own deliverance to Him. We have not yet seen agnostic missionary societies or the like.

This spirit must mark all living Christianity. If ever churches forget their obligations to the publicans and sinners, they will cease to grow. It will be a sign that they have lost their hold of Christ. They will soon die, and no mourners will attend their funerals. It is a good sign to-day that all Christian churches are waking up to feel more their obligations to the outcasts. Only, we must take heed that we go to them as Christ did, making no compromise with sin, speaking no false flatteries, and bent on one thing, their emancipation from the evil which is slaying them.

Let us all take the blessed thought for ourselves, that Jesus Christ is our friend because He is the friend of sinners, and we are sinners. Degrees of sinfulness vary, but the fact is invariable. The universality of sinfulness makes the universality of Christ’s love the more wonderful and blessed. If He did not love sinners, there would be none for Him to love. We may be His enemies, or may neglect all His beseechings; but He is still our friend, wishing us well, and desiring to bless us. But He cannot give us His deepest friendship unless we are willing to recognise our sin. We must come to Him on the footing of transgressors if we are to come to Him at all.

He will deliver us from our sins.

Appeal to give hearts to Him.

How has He shown His friendship? ‘Greater love hath no man than this,’ that ‘while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.’

To be friends of Christ is the highest honour and blessing.

‘Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.’

'He was called the friend of God.' Abraham's name in Mohammedan lands is still El Khalil, the companion or friend. That is our highest title. Christ's friends will not continue sinners.

SODOM, CAPERNAUM, MANCHESTER

‘Then began He to upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not.’ —**MATT. xi. 20.**

These words, and the woes which they introduce, are found in another connection in Luke’s Gospel. He attaches them to his report of the mission of the seventy disciples. Matthew here introduces them in an order which seems not to depend upon time, but upon identity of subject. It is his method in his Gospel to group together similar events, as we have it exemplified, for instance, in the Sermon on the Mount, and in the long procession of miracles which immediately follows it, as well as in other parts of the Gospel. In this chapter it is not difficult to discover the common idea which binds its parts into a whole. We have a number of instances strung together, illustrating the different effects of Christ’s appearance and work on different classes of persons. There pass before us, John the Baptist with his doubts, the excitable multitude ready to take the Kingdom of Heaven by storm, the critics who cavilled with impartial inconsistency alike at John’s asceticism and at Christ’s freedom. Then follow the woes pronounced by Him upon the indifference of those who knew Him best, and these are succeeded by His rejoicing in spirit over the babes who accepted Him; and the whole is crowned by great words of invitation which extend equally over those and over all other varieties of disposition, and, since all ‘labour and are heavy laden,’ summon all, be they what they may, to come and find rest in Him. Obviously, then, the order in this chapter is not that of time, but that of subject.

Notice that of all these different classes and types of character that pass in review before us, the one that is singled out for the solemn denunciation of heavy judgment is that of the people who stood in a blaze of light, and simply paid no attention to it. These are the worst sort. I wonder how many of them are in my audience now?

Let me try, then, to bring before you the thoughts naturally suggested by these introductory words, and the solemn, sorrowful forebodings of retribution which follow them. I ask you to look at three things,—the blaze of light; the neglect of the light; the rebuke for the neglected light. ‘Jesus began to upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done.’

I. First, then, consider the blaze of light.

According to the words of my text, the larger number of the miracles of our Lord were wrought in these three places. ‘Cities,’ our Bible calls them; two of them were little fishing villages, the third a somewhat considerable town. Where are these miracles recorded? Not in our gospels. As for Chorazin, we never hear its name except in this verse, and in the parallel in Luke’s Gospel; and all that He did there is swallowed up in oblivion. As for Bethsaida, there are a couple of miracles, probably, recorded as having been wrought there, though there is some obscurity in reference to the locality of at least one of them. As for

Capernaum, there are several miracles recorded as having been performed in that place, and several others referred to as having been done there. But there is nothing in the four gospels that would suggest the statement of the text.

Now the inference (which has nothing to do with my present subject, but which I just note in passing) is,—how extremely fragmentary and incomplete these four gospels avowedly are! They harvest for us a few ears plucked in the great waving cornfield,—and all the others withered and died where they grew. The light falls upon one or two groups in the crowd of miserales whom He helped, the rest lie in dim shadow. You have to think of dozens, I suppose I should not be exaggerating if I were to say hundreds, of miracles unrecorded but known, lying behind the specimens that we have in the gospels. ‘Many other things truly did Jesus, which are not written in this book.’

Our Lord takes these two little fishing villages, and He parallels and contrasts them with the two great maritime cities of Tyre and Sidon, and says that these insignificant places have far more light than those had. Then He isolates Capernaum, a place of more importance, and His own usual settled residence; and, in like manner, He contrasts it with the long-buried Sodom, and proclaims the superiority of the illumination which fell on the more modern three. Why were they so superior? Because they had Moses? because they had the prophets, the law, the temple, the priesthood? By no means. Because they had *Him*. So He sets Himself forth as being the highest and clearest of all the revelations that God has made to the world, and asserts that in Him, in His character, in His deeds, men ought to find motives that should bow them in penitence before God; motives sweeter, tenderer, stronger than any that the world knows besides. There is no such light of the knowledge of the glory of God anywhere else as there is in the face of Jesus Christ. And oh! brother; no thoughts of the nobleness of rectitude, and the imperfection of one’s own life, no thoughts of a divine justice and a divine punishment, will bow a man in penitence like having once caught a glimpse of the perfect sweetness and perfect beauty of the perfect Humanity that is revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

But now, mark;—as Capernaum is to Sodom, so is Manchester to Capernaum! I wonder if Jesus Christ were to come amongst us now, whether He would not repeat in spirit the same lesson that is in my text, and bid us contrast our greater illumination with the morning twilight that dawned upon these men, and yet was light enough to bring condemnation? Think,—these people of whom our Lord is speaking here, and setting them high above Tyre and Sidon and Sodom, knew nothing about His cross, death, resurrection, ascension. They knew Him only as ‘a dubious Name,’ as a possible Divine Messenger and a Miracle-worker; but all the sweetest and the deepest thoughts about Him lay unrevealed. Whilst they stood but in the morning twilight, you and I stand in the noonday blaze. *They* might be pardoned for doubting whether the light that shone from Him was sunshine or candle, but men of this twentieth century, who have the whole story of Christ, which is the gospel for the world,

wrought out through all the tragedy and pathos of His death, and triumph and power of His resurrection, and who have, besides, the history of the world and of the Church for nineteen centuries, are more unpardonable unless they listen to Him with penitence and faith, than were any of His contemporaries.

My brother, we stand in the very focus and fountain, as it were, of the heavenly radiance. A whole Christ, a crucified Christ, a risen Christ, an ascended Christ, a Christ who is the Lord of the Spirit, a Christ who through the centuries is saving and blessing men, a Christ who can point to nineteen hundred years and say, 'That is My work, in so far as it is good and noble,'—this Christ shines with a clearer evidence than the Miracle-worker of Capernaum and Bethsaida. And to you the word comes, 'If the mighty works which have been done in *thee*, had been done in Bethsaida and Chorazin, they would have remained until this day.'

There are many of you here saturated with the knowledge of the gospel, who from childhood have heard it and heard it and heard it. You have lived in the light all your days. Alas! 'If the light that is' round 'thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!'

II. That brings me in the next place to notice the negligent indifference to the Light in all its blaze.

The men of these three little fishing towns were not sinners above all the Galileans of their day. Their crime was that they did nothing. No persecution is recorded as having been raised against Him by them; there were no angry antagonisms, no scornful words, no violent opposition. They simply stolidly stood like some black rock in the sunshine, and let the sunshine pour down upon them, and remained grim and black as ever. That was all.

That is to say, the thing that brings down the severest rebuke is not the angry antagonism of the men who are contending in half-darkness, with a misunderstood and therefore disliked Christ, but the sleek, passive apathy that is never touched deeper than its ears by the message of God's word. It is not a difficult thing to incur this condemnation. You have simply to do what some of you are doing, and have been doing all your lives, as to Christianity, and that is—nothing! You have simply to acquiesce politely and respectfully, as many of you do, and say you are Christians; and there an end. You have simply to take my words (as I fear so many of those that listen to them do) as matters of course, the proper things to be said on a Sunday, and for me to say, which may be very true in some vague, general way, but which have no felt application to *you*. That is all you have to do. It is quite enough. Negative vices will ruin a man, in mind, body, and estate; and the negative sin of simple indifference avails to put a barrier between you and Jesus Christ, through which none of His blessing can filter. If a sailor does *not* lash himself to something fixed, the next sea that comes across the deck will do the rest. If a sick man does *not* take the medicine, by doing nothing he has committed suicide. And simple passivity, that is to say (to translate it out of Latin into good, honest English), doing nothing, is all that is needed in order to part you from Christ and Christ from you. He 'upbraided the cities because they repented *not*.'

One can fancy some well-to-do and thoroughly respectable and clean-living native of Capernaum saying, 'What! those foul beasts in Sodom better off than I? Impossible!' Well, Jesus Christ says so upon very intelligible grounds. The measure of light is the measure of responsibility. That is one ground. And the not preferring Him is the preferring of self and the world, and that is the sin of sins. He will 'convince the world of sin because they believe not on Me.'

Now, one more point, viz. this gelatinous kind of indifference, as of a disposition not stiff enough to take any impression, is found most deeply seated, and hopeless, amongst—shall I venture?—amongst people like *you*, who have been listening, listening, listening, until your systems have become so habituated to this Christian preaching that it does not produce the least effect. It all runs off you like rain off waterproof. You have waterproofed your consciences and your spiritual susceptibilities by long habit of listening and doing nothing.

And some of you have come to this point, that you positively rather like the titillation and excitement, slight though it may be, which is produced by coming in contact now and then with a good, wholesome, rousing Christian appeal. Not that you ever intend to do anything, but it is pleasant to see a man in earnest, and preaching as if he believed what he was saying. And so perhaps some of you are feeling here to-night.

Ah! my dear friends, it is possible for a man to live by the side of Niagara until he cannot hear the cataract; and it is an awful thing for men and women to live under the sound of Christian teaching until it produces no more effect upon their wills and natures than the ringing of the church bells, to which they pay no attention.

You do not know the despair that comes over us preachers time after time, as we look down upon the faces of our congregations, and feel, 'What *shall* I do to put a sharp enough point upon this truth to get it into the heart of some man that has been sitting there as long as I have been standing here, and is never a bit the better for it?' Our most earnest preaching is like putting a red-hot iron into a pond: the cold water puts it out and closes above it, and there is no more heard nor seen of it. Our old Puritan forefathers used to talk about 'gospel-hardened hearers.' I believe that there are people listening to me now who have become so inured to Christian preaching that, like artillery horses, they will not move a muscle or quiver if a whole battery of cannon is fired off under their noses. God knows I despair sometimes, many a time, when I think of the hundreds of people to whom I speak, year after year, and how there seems next to nothing in the world to come of it all.

III. Now lastly, notice here the rebuke of this negligence of the light.

'He began to upbraid the cities.' But oh! we shall misunderstand Him and His purpose if we think that that upbraiding was anything but the sorrowful expression of His own loving heart, which warned of what was coming in order that He might never need to send it. '*Woe*

unto you; *woe* unto you,' and His own lips quivered and His own heart felt the woe, as He laid bare the sin and foreannounced the retribution.

I do not feel that I dare dwell upon, or that it beseems me to say much about, this solemn thought. Only, dear friends, I do desire, if I could, to wake some of you to look realities for once in the face, and to be sure of this, that retribution is proportioned to light, and that the sin of sins is the rejection of Jesus Christ. Beneath the broad folds of that 'more tolerable' there lie infinite degrees of retribution. The same deed done by a group of men may be indefinitely varied in its culpability, according to the motives and the clearness of knowledge which accompany or prompt the doing of it. And so, just because the life beyond is the accurate outcome and issue of the whole character and conduct, estimated according to motive and knowledge, therefore there must be differences infinitely wide between the fate of the servant that knew his Lord's will, and the servant that knew not.

Where do you think we gospel-drenched English men and women will stand in that allocation of culpability? I do not presume to say more, but I beseech you,—let no present controversies about the duration and the possible termination of retribution in another state, or the possible prolongation of a probation into another state, blind you to the fact that however these questions be settled, this is a truth, independent of them, but being forgotten amidst the dust of controversy, that the next life is a life of retribution, and that there you and I will give account of our deeds, and chiefly of our attitude to Jesus.

And now let me say, in one word,—hoisting the danger-signal is the work of kindness, and Jesus Christ was never more loving than when from His lips there came these words, heavy with His own sorrow, and stern with the prophecy of retribution. I know that Christian teachers have often spoken of the solemn things beyond, in tones much to be deplored, and which weaken the force of their message. But surely, surely, if we believe in a judgment to come, and if we believe that some of those that listen to us are in peril of it, surely, surely, the plainest duty is that with tears in our voice and pleading tenderness in our tone, seeing the sword coming, we should give warning, and beseech men to flee for refuge to the hope of the Gospel. The solemn words that we have been looking at now, lead up to, and are intended to make more impressive and gracious, the invitation with which this chapter ends: 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'

Dear friends, we stand in the blaze of the light. Our familiarity with Jesus Christ may be our ruin. We are tempted to pay no heed to His words because we know them so well. Neglect of Christ on your part will bring deeper woes on your head than the people of Capernaum pulled down upon theirs. The brighter the sunshine, the louder the thunder and the fiercer the lightning; the longer the summer day, the longer the winter night; the closer the comet comes to the sun, the further away it plunges, at the other extremity of its orbit, into space and darkness. So I beseech you, listen as if you had never heard it before, and listen as if your lives depended upon it (as indeed they do) to that merciful invitation, 'Come

unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden,' and then you will get rest for your souls here, and at that day when Sodom and Capernaum and Manchester—they and we—shall stand before His throne, you may lift up your eyes, and be glad to see who it is that sits on the tribunal, and that you learned to know and love the face of your Saviour, before you saw Him enthroned as your Judge.

CHRIST'S STRANGE THANKSGIVING

'I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.' —[MATT. xi. 25](#).

When Jesus was about to cure one dumb man, He lifted up His eyes to heaven and sighed. Sorrow filled His soul in the act of working deliverance. The thought of the depth of the miseries He had come to heal, and of the ocean of them which He was then diminishing but by one poor drop, saddened Him. When Jesus thought of the woes that had fallen on the impenitent Sodom, and of the worse that still remained to be revealed at the day of judgment, He rejoiced in spirit. Strange! and yet all in harmony with His depth of love. This once, and this once only, do we read that His heart filled with joy. Did He lift up His solemn thanksgiving to God, for the woes that had fallen on Chorazin? Oh no! For the blinding of the wise and prudent? Oh no! For the revelation to babes? Yes, and not only for that, but for that full and universal offer and possibility of salvation, which forms the reason for both the revelation to babes and the hiding from the wise. If we attend to the connection of this passage we get light on its force. It begins with a clear prophecy of endless woe and sorrow upon the rejecters. Then comes my text, alleviating the terror of that thought of destruction by showing the principles on which the reception and rejection are especially based, the sort of people who receive and who reject. Then follows the reason why the wise are shut out and the babes let in. That reason is not only God's inscrutable decree, but something in the very nature of the Gospel. God is hidden from all human sight. There is one divine Revealer apart from whom all is darkness. 'Neither doth any man know the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him.' That is the characteristic which shuts out the wise and lets in the simple.

Then follows the great call to all to come to Him. The practical issue of all these solemn thoughts is that the Gospel is a Gospel for all the world, and that the one qualification for coming within the terms of its offer is to be 'weary and heavy laden.' Thus all ends in the broad universality of the message, in its adaptation to all, in its offer to all; and thus it is shown that every apparent exclusion of any is but the result of its free offer to all, and that to say 'Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent' is but to say, 'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters.' Well then might joy fill the heart of the Man of Sorrows. Well might He lift up His solemn thanksgiving to God and say, 'I thank Thee, Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth.'

Consider—

I. The Great Characteristics of the Gospel.

We shall only understand the ground of the revealing and of the hiding if we understand what it is which is offered. It is of such a nature as necessarily to involve a twofold effect, caused by a twofold attitude towards it.

1. The Gospel addresses itself to all men—man as man—not to what is sectional or accidental, not to classes, not to schools, not to the *élite*. It is broad and universal. It speaks no dialect of a province, but the universal language. It is addressed to Man as Man. 'We have all of us one human heart.' It appeals to the noble and the peasant, to the beggar on the dunghill and to the prince on his throne, in precisely the same fashion. It is equal as the providence of God, impartial as the light, universal as the air which reddens equally the blood that flows in long-descended veins and that of the foundling on the streets. In its sublime universality there are no distinctions. Death and the Gospel know no ranks. In both, 'the rich and the poor meet together, the Lord is the Maker of them all.' 'In Christ Jesus there is neither circumcision nor uncircumcision.' The blue sky which bends above all alike is like that great word.

2. It treats all as utterly helpless.

3. It offers to all Redemption as their most pressing want. Consequently, in substance it is the gift not of culture, but deliverance, and in form it is not a theory but a fact, not a system of *credenda* but an action, not an *-ology* but a power.

4. It demands from all submission and trust.

These being the characteristics, consider—

II. The qualifications for reception as necessarily resulting from the characteristics.

The persons who receive must be those who consent to take the station which the Gospel assigns. They must be babes, by which is meant not such as are innocent, but such as are reliant on a higher Power, self-distrustful, willing to obey.

These qualifications are all moral. The organ for reception of the Gospel is the heart, not the head. To receive it by faith is a spiritual, not an intellectual process. Ignorance is no qualification nor no disqualification. Ignorance or knowledge is immaterial. The one condition is to be willing to accept.

III. The disqualification of the wise as necessarily resulting from the qualification.

The organ for the reception is not the head but the heart. Therefore, wisdom is a barrier only in this way, that it has nothing to do in the matter. Its presence or its absence is quite indifferent here as in many other spheres of experience. The joys of the affections, the joys of common emotions, the joys of bodily life—all these are utterly independent of the culture of the understanding.

Hence 'wisdom' becomes a barrier, because its possessors are accustomed to think it the master key. Not intellect, but the pride of intellect, trusting in it, glorying in wisdom is the disqualification.

It is not true that there is any discord between religion and cultivated thought. The loftier the soul, the loftier all its attributes, the nobler should be, may be, its religion. It is not true that there is any natural affinity between ignorance and religion, between narrow understandings and deep faith. That is not the Bible truth. The religion of Christ is not like

owls that love the twilight, but like eagles that 'purge their sight at the very fountain itself of heavenly radiance.'

Take history: the great names—an Augustine and a Luther, a Dante and a Milton, a Bacon and a Pascal—are enough to show that there is no antagonism. On the other hand, names enough rise to show that there is no alliance. The inference is that the intellect has little to do with a man's attitude towards the Revelation of God in Christ, but that the moral is all.

Let me close with the repetition of the thought that the apparent exclusion is the result of the universality, and that 'Come unto Me' is Christ's commentary on my text. Well then may we rejoice when we think of a gospel for the world. Whatever you are, it is for you if you are a man. However foolish, though you cannot read a letter and know nothing, it is for you. If you be enriched with all knowledge, you must come on the same terms as that beggar at your side. That is a healthy discipline. You are more than a student, than a scholar, than a thinker; you are a man, you are a sinful man. There is a deeper chamber in your heart than any into which knowledge can penetrate. Christ brings a gospel for all. When we think of it, with its sublime disregard of all peculiarities, we may well rejoice with him who said, 'Ye see your calling, brethren,' and with Him, the loftiest, the incarnate, Wisdom who said, 'I thank Thee, Father.' For if you rightly grasp the bearing of this text, and mark what follows it in our Lord's heart and thoughts, you will see these deep eyes of solemn joy turned from the heaven to you, filmy with compassion, and those hands, then lifted in rapt devotion, stretched out to beckon you and all the world to His breast, and hear the voice that rose in that burst of thanksgiving melting into tenderness as it woos you, be you wise or ignorant, to come to Him and rest.

THE REST GIVER

‘Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.’—[MATT. xi. 28, 29.](#)

One does not know whether tenderness or majesty is predominant in these wonderful words. A divine penetration into man’s true condition, and a divine pity, are expressed in them. Jesus looks with clear-sighted compassion into the inmost history of all hearts, and sees the toil and the sorrow which weigh on every soul. And no less remarkable is the divine consciousness of power, to succour and to help, which speaks in them. Think of a Jewish peasant of thirty years old, opening his arms to embrace the world, and saying to all men, ‘Come and rest on My breast.’ Think of a man supposing himself to be possessed of a charm which could soothe all sorrow and lift the weight from every heart.

A great sculptor has composed a group where there diverge from the central figure on either side, in two long lines, types of all the cruel varieties of human pains and pangs; and in the midst stands, calm, pure, with the consciousness of power and love in His looks, and with outstretched hands, as if beckoning invitation and dropping benediction, Christ the Consoler. The artist has but embodied the claim which the Master makes for Himself here. No less remarkable is His own picture of Himself, as ‘meek and lowly in heart.’ Did ever anybody before say, ‘I am humble,’ without provoking the comment, ‘He that says he is humble proves that he is not’? But Jesus Christ said it, and the world has allowed the claim; and has answered, ‘Though Thou bearest record of Thyself, Thy record is true.’

But my object now is not so much to deal with the revelation of our Lord contained in these marvellous words, as to try, as well as I can, to re-echo, however faintly, the invitation that sounds in them. There is a very striking reduplication running through them which is often passed unnoticed. I shall shape my remarks so as to bring out that feature of the text, asking you to look first with me at the twofold designation of the persons addressed; next at the twofold invitation; and last at the twofold promise of rest.

I. Consider then the twofold designation here of the persons addressed, ‘Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden.’

The one word expresses effort and toil, the other a burden and endurance. The one speaks of the active, the other of the passive, side of human misery and evil. Toil is work which is distasteful in itself, or which is beyond our faculties. Such toil, sometime or other, more or less, sooner or later, is the lot of every man. All work becomes labour, and all labour, sometime or other, becomes toil. The text is, first of all, and in its most simple and surface meaning, an invitation to all the men who know how ceaseless, how wearying, how empty the effort and energy of life is, to come to this Master and rest.

You remember those bitter words of the Book of Ecclesiastes, where the preacher sets forth a circle of labour that only comes back to the point where it began, as being the law for nature and the law for man. And truly much of our work seems to be no better than that. We are like squirrels in a cage, putting forth immense muscular effort, and nothing to show for it after all. 'All is vanity, and striving after wind.'

Toil is a curse; work is a blessing. But all our work darkens into toil; and the invitation, 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour,' reaches to the very utmost verge of the world and includes every soul.

And then, in like manner, the other side of human experience is set forth in that other word. For most men have not only to work, but to bear; not only to toil, but to sorrow. There are efforts that need to be put forth, which task all our energy, and leave the muscles flaccid and feeble. And many of us have, at one and the same moment, to work and to weep, to toil whilst our hearts are beating like a forge-hammer; to labour whilst memories and thoughts that might enfeeble any worker, are busy with us. A burden of sorrow, as well as effort and toil, is, sooner or later, the lot of all men.

But that is only surface. The twofold designation here before us goes a great deal deeper than that. It points to two relationships to God and to God's law of righteousness. Men labour with vague and yet with noble effort, sometimes, to do the thing that is right, and after all efforts there is left a burden of conscious defect. In the purest and the highest lives there come both of these things. And Jesus Christ, in this merciful invitation of His, speaks to all the men that have tried, and tried in vain, to satisfy their consciences and to obey the law of God, and says to them, 'Cease your efforts, and no longer carry that burden of failure and of sin upon your shoulders. Come unto Me, and I will give you rest.'

I should be sorry to think that I was speaking to any man or woman who had not, more or less, tried to do what is right. You have laboured at that effort with more or less of consistency, with more or less of earnestness. Have you not found that you could not achieve it?

I am sure that I am speaking to no man or woman who has not upon his or her conscience a great weight of neglected duties, of actual transgressions, of mean thoughts, of foul words and passions, of deeds that they would be ashamed that any should see; ashamed that their dearest should catch a glimpse of. My friend, universal sinfulness is no mere black dogma of a narrow Calvinism; it is no uncharitable indictment against the race; it is simply putting into definite words the consciousness that is in every one of your hearts. You know that, whether you like to think about it or not, you have broken God's law, and are a sinful man. You carry a burden on your back whether you realise the fact or no, a burden that clogs all your efforts, and that will sink you deeper into the darkness and the mire. 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour,' and with noble, but, at bottom, vain, efforts have striven after right and truth. 'Come unto Me all ye that are burdened,' and bear, sometimes forgetting

it, but often reminded of its pressure by galled shoulders and wearied limbs, the burden of sin on your bent backs.

This invitation includes the whole race. In it, as in a blank form, you may each insert your name. Jesus Christ speaks to thee, John, Thomas, Mary, Peter, whatever thy name may be, as distinctly as if you saw your name written on the pages of your New Testament, when He says to you, 'Come unto Me, *all* ye that labour and are heavy laden.' For the 'all' is but the sum of the units; and I, and thou, and thou, have our place within the word.

II. Now, secondly, look at the twofold invitation that is here.

'Come unto Me . . . Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me.' These two things are not the same. 'Coming unto Me,' as is quite plain to the most superficial observation, is the first step in the approach to a companionship, which companionship is afterwards perfected and kept up by obedience and imitation. The 'coming' is an initial act which makes a man Christ's companion. And the 'Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me,' is the continuous act by which that companionship is manifested and preserved. So that in these words, which come so familiarly to most of our memories that they have almost ceased to present a sharp meaning, there is not only a merciful summons to the initial act, but a description of the continual life of which that act is the introduction.

And now, to put that into simpler words, when Jesus Christ says 'Come unto Me,' He Himself has taught us what is His inmost meaning in that invitation, by another word of His: 'He that cometh unto Me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst'; where the parallelism of the clauses teaches us that to come to Christ is simply to put our trust in Him. There is in faith a true movement of the whole soul towards the Master. I think that this metaphor teaches us a great deal more about that faith that we are always talking about in the pulpit, and which, I am afraid, many of our congregations do not very distinctly understand, than many a book of theology does. To 'come to Him' implies, distinctly, that He, and no mere theological dogma, however precious and clear, is the Object on which faith rests.

And, therefore, if Christ, and not merely a doctrinal truth about Christ, be the Object of our faith, then it is very clear that faith, which grasps a Person, must be something more than the mere act of the understanding which assents to a truth. And what more is it? How is it possible for one person to lay hold of and to come to another? By trust and love, and by these alone. These be the bonds that bind men together. Mere intellectual consent may be sufficient to fasten a man to a dogma, but there must be will and heart at work to bind a man to a person; and if it be Christ and not a theology, to which we come by our faith, then it must be with something more than our brains that we grasp Him and draw near to Him. That is to say, your will is engaged in your confidence. Trust Him as you trust one another, only with the difference befitting a trust directed to an absolute and perfect object of trust, and not to a poor, variable human heart. Trust Him as you trust one another. Then, just as

husband and wife, parent and child, friend and friend, pass through all intervening hindrances and come together when they trust and love, so you come closer to Christ as the very soul of your soul by an inward real union, than you do even to your dear ones, if you grapple Him to your heart with the hoops of steel, which, by simple trust in Him, the Divine Redeemer forges for us. 'Come unto Me,' being translated out of metaphor into fact, is simply 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.'

And still further, we have here, not only the initial act by which companionship and union with Jesus Christ is brought about, but the continual course by which it is kept up, and by which it is manifested. The faith which saves a man's soul is not all which is required for a Christian life. 'Take My yoke upon you, and *learn of Me.*' The yoke is that which, laid on the broad forehead or the thick neck of the ox, has attached to it the cords which are bound to the burden that the animal draws. The burden, then, which Christ gives to His servants to pull, is a metaphor for the specific duties which He enjoins upon them to perform; and the yoke by which they are fastened to their burdens, 'obliged' to their duties, is His authority, So to 'take His yoke' upon us is to submit our wills to His authority. Therefore this further call is addressed to all those who have come to Him, feeling their weakness and their need and their sinfulness, and have found in Him a Saviour who has made them restful and glad; and it bids them live in the deepest submission of will to Him, in joyful obedience, in constant service; and, above all, in the daily imitation of the Master.

You must put both these commandments together before you get Christ's will for His children completely expressed. There are some of you who think that Christianity is only a means by which you may escape the penalty of your sins; and you are ready enough, or fancy yourselves so, to listen when He says, 'Come to Me that you may be pardoned,' but you are not so ready to listen to what He says afterwards, when He calls upon you to take His yoke upon you, to obey Him, to serve Him, and above all to copy Him. And I beseech you to remember that if you go and part these two halves from one another, as many people do, some of them bearing away the one half and some the other, you have got a maimed Gospel; in the one case a foundation without a building, and in the other case a building without a foundation. The people who say that Christ's call to the world is 'Come unto Me,' and whose Christianity and whose Gospel is only a proclamation of indulgence and pardon for past sin, have laid hold of half of the truth. The people who say that Christ's call is 'Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me,' and that Christianity is a proclamation of the duty of pure living after the pattern of Jesus Christ our great Example, have laid hold of the other half of the truth. And both halves bleed themselves away and die, being torn asunder; put them together, and each has power.

That separation is one reason why so many Christian men and women are such poor Christians as they are—having so little real religion, and consequently so little real joy. I could lay my fingers upon many men, professing Christians—I do not say whether in this

church or in other churches—whose whole life shows that they do not understand that Jesus Christ has a twofold summons to His servants; and that it is of no avail once, long ago, to have come, or to think that you have come, to Him to get pardon, unless day by day you are keeping beside Him, doing His commandments, and copying His sweet and blessed example.

III. And now, lastly, look at the twofold promise which is here.

I do not know if there is any importance to be attached to the slight diversity of language in the two verses, so as that in the one case the promise runs, 'I will *give* you rest,' and in the other, 'Ye shall *find* rest.' That sounds as if the rest that was contingent upon the first of the invitations was in a certain and more direct and exclusive fashion Christ's gift than the rest which was contingent upon the second. It may be so, but I attach no importance to that criticism; only I would have you observe that our Lord distinctly separates here between the rest of 'coming,' and the rest of wearing His 'yoke.' These two, howsoever they may be like each other, are still not the same. The one is the perfecting and the prolongation, no doubt, of the other, but has likewise in it some other, I say not more blessed, elements. Dear brethren, here are two precious things held out and offered to us all. There is rest in coming to Christ; the rest of a quiet conscience which gnaws no more; the rest of a conscious friendship and union with God, in whom alone are our soul's home, harbour, and repose; the rest of fears dispelled; the rest of forgiveness received into the heart. Do you want that? Go to Christ, and as soon as you go to Him you will get that rest.

There is rest in faith. The very act of confidence is repose. Look how that little child goes to sleep in its mother's lap, secure from harm because it trusts. And, oh! if there steal over our hearts such a sweet relaxation of the tension of anxiety when there is some dear one on whom we can cast all responsibility, how much more may we be delivered from all disquieting fears by the exercise of quiet confidence in the infinite love and power of our Brother Redeemer, Christ! He will be 'a covert from the storm, and a refuge from the tempest'; as 'rivers of water in a dry place, and the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.' If we come to Him, the very act of coming brings repose.

But, brethren, that is not enough, and, blessed be God! that is not all. There is a further, deeper rest in obedience, and emphatically and most blessedly there is a rest in Christ-likeness. 'Take My yoke upon you.' There is repose in saying 'Thou art my Master, and to Thee I bow.' You are delivered from the unrest of self-will, from the unrest of contending desires, you get rid of the weight of too much liberty. There is peace in submission; peace in abdicating the control of my own being; peace in saying, 'Take Thou the reins, and do Thou rule and guide me.' There is peace in surrender and in taking His yoke upon us.

And most especially the path of rest for men is in treading in Christ's footsteps. 'Learn of Me,' it is the secret of tranquillity. We have done with passionate hot desires,—and it is these that breed all the disquiet in our lives—when we take the meekness and the lowliness

of the Master for our pattern. The river will no longer roll, broken by many a boulder, and chafed into foam over many a fall, but will flow with even foot, and broad, smooth bosom, to the parent sea.

There is quietness in self-sacrifice, there is tranquillity in ceasing from mine own works and growing like the Master.

‘The Cross is strength; the solemn Cross is gain.
The Cross is Jesus’ breast,
Here giveth He the rest,
That to His best beloved doth still remain.’

‘Take up thy cross daily,’ and thou enterest into His rest.

My brother, ‘the wicked is like the troubled sea that cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.’ But you, if you come to Christ, and if you cleave to Christ, may be like that ‘sea of glass, mingled with fire,’ that lies pure, transparent, waveless before the Throne of God, over which no tempests rave, and which, in its deepest depths, mirrors the majesty of ‘Him that sitteth upon the Throne, and of the Lamb.’

THE PHARISEES' SABBATH AND CHRIST'S

'At that time Jesus went on the Sabbath day through the corn; and His disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. 2. But when the Pharisees saw it they said unto Him, Behold, Thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the Sabbath day. 3. But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him; 4. How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests! 5. Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the Sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless! 6. But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple. 7. But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless. 8. For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath day 9. And when he was departed thence, He went into their synagogue: 10. And, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. And they asked Him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath days? that they might accuse Him. 11. And He said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the Sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? 12. How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the Sabbath days. 13. Then saith He to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other. 14. Then the Pharisees went out, and held a counsel against Him, how they might destroy Him.' —[MATT. xii. 1-14.](#)

We have had frequent occasion to point out that this Gospel is constructed, not on chronological, but on logical lines. It groups together incidents related in subject, though separated in time. Thus we have the collection of Christ's sayings in the Sermon on the Mount, followed by the collection of doings in chapters [viii.](#) and [ix.](#), the collected charge to His ambassadors in [chapter x.](#), the collection of instances illustrative of the relations of different classes to the message of the Kingdom and its King in chapter [xi.](#), and now in this chapter a series of incidents setting forth the growing bitterness of antagonism on the part of the guardians of traditional and ceremonial religion. This is followed, in the next chapter, with a series of parables.

The present lesson includes two Sabbath incidents, in the first of which the disciples are the transgressors of the sabbatic tradition; in the second, Christ's own action is brought into question. The scene of the first is in the fields, that of the second is in the synagogue. In the one, Sabbath observance is set aside at the call of personal needs; in the other, at the call of another's calamity. So the two correspond to the old Puritan principle that the Sabbath law allowed of 'works of necessity and of mercy.'

I. The Sabbath and personal needs. This is a strange sort of King who cannot even feed His servants. What a glimpse into the penury of their usual condition the quiet statement

that the disciples were hungry gives us, especially if we remember that it is not likely that the Master had fared better than they! Indeed, His reference to David and his band of hungry heroes suggests that 'He was an hungred' as well as 'they that were with Him.' As they traversed some field path through the tall yellowing corn, they gathered a few ears, as the merciful provision of the law allowed, and hastily began to eat the rubbed-out grains. As soon as they 'began,' the eager Pharisees, who seem to have been at their heels, call Him to 'behold' this dreadful crime, which, they think, requires His immediate remonstrance. If they had had as sharp eyes for men's necessities as for their faults, they might have given them food which it was 'lawful' to eat, and so obviated this frightful iniquity. But that is not the way of Pharisees. Moses had not forbidden such gleaning, but the casuistry which had spun its multitudinous webs over the law, hiding the gold beneath their dirty films, had decided that plucking the ears was of the nature of reaping, and reaping was work, and work was forbidden, which being settled, of course the inferential prohibition became more important than the law from which it was deduced. That is always the case with human conclusions from revelation; and the more questionable these are, the more they are loved by their authors, as the sickly child of a family is the dearest.

Our Lord does not question the authority of the tradition, nor ask where Moses had forbidden what His disciples were doing. Still less does He touch the sanctity of the Jewish Sabbath. He accepts His questioners' position, for the time, and gives them a perfect answer on their own ground. Perhaps there may be just a hint in the double 'Have ye not read?' that they could not produce Scripture for their prohibition, as He would do for the liberty which He allowed. He quotes two instances in which ceremonial obligations gave way before higher law. The first, that of David and his followers eating the shew-bread, which was tabooed to all but priests, is perhaps chosen with some reference to the parallel between Himself, the true King, now unrecognised and hunted with His humble followers, and the fugitive outlaw with his band. It is but a veiled allusion at most; but, if it fell on good soil, it might have led some one to ask, 'If this is David, where is Saul, and where is Doeg, watching him to accuse him?' This example serves our Lord's purpose of showing that even a divine prohibition, if it relates to mere ceremonial matter, melts, like wax, before even bodily necessities. What a thrill of holy horror would meet the enunciation of the doctrine that such a carnal thing as hunger rightfully abrogated a sacred ritual proscription! The law of right is rigid; that of external ceremonies is flexible. Better that a man should die than that the one should be broken; better that the other should be flung to the winds than that a hungry man should go unfed. It may reasonably be doubted whether all Christian communities have learned the sweep of that principle yet, or so judge of the relative importance of keeping up their appointed forms of worship, and of feeding their hungry brother. The brave Ahimelech, 'the son of Ahitub,' was ahead of a good many people of to-day.

The second example comes still closer to the question in hand, and supplies the reference to the Sabbath law, which the former had not. There was much hard work done in the temple on the Sabbath—sacrifices to be slain, fires and lamps to be kindled, and so on. That was not Sabbath desecration. Why? Because it was done in the temple, and as a part of divine service. The sanctity of the place, and the consequent sanctity of the service, exempted it from the operation of the law. The question, no doubt, was springing to the lips of some scowling Pharisee, 'And what has that to do with our charge against your disciples?' when it was answered by the wonderful next words, 'In this place'—here among the growing corn, beneath the free heaven, far away from Jerusalem—'is one greater than the temple.' Profound words, which could only sound as blasphemy or nonsense to the hearers, but which touch the deepest truths concerning His person and His relations to men, and which involve the destruction of all temples and rituals. He is all that the temple symbolised. In Him the Godhead really dwells; He is the meeting-place of God and man, the place of the oracle, the place of sacrifice. Then, where He stands is holy ground, and all work done with reference to Him is worship. These poor followers of His are priests; and if, for His sake, they had broken a hundred Sabbath regulations, they were guiltless.

So far our Lord has been answering His opponents; now He attacks. The quotation from Hosea is often on His lips. Here He uses it to unmask the real motives of His assailants. Their murmuring came not from more religion, but from less love. If they had had a little more milk of human kindness in them, it would have died on their lips; if they had grasped the real meaning of the religion they professed, they would have learned that its soul was 'mercy'—that is, of course, man's gentleness to man—and that sacrifice and ceremony were but the body, the help, and sometimes the hindrance, of that soul. They would have understood the relative importance of disposition and of external worship, as end and means, and not have visited a mere breach of external order with a heat of disapprobation only warranted by a sin against the former. Their judgment would have been liker God's if they had looked at those poor hungry men with merciful eyes and with merciful hearts, rather than with eager scrutiny that delighted to find them tripping in a triviality of outward observance. What mountains of harsh judgment by Christ's own followers on each other would have been removed into the sea if the spirit of these great words had played upon them!

The 'for' at the beginning of [verse 8](#) seems to connect with the last words of the preceding verse, 'I call them guiltless, for,' etc. It states more plainly still the claim already put forward in [verse 6](#). 'The Son of Man,' no doubt, is equivalent to 'Messiah'; but it is more, as revealing at once Christ's true manhood and His unique and complete manhood, in which the very ideal of man is personally realised. It can never be detached from His other name, the 'Son of God.' They are the obverse and reverse of the same golden coin. He asserts His power over the Sabbath, as enjoined upon Israel. His is the authority which imposed it. It is plastic

in His hands. The whole order of which it is part has its highest purpose in witnessing of Him. He brings the true 'rest.'

II. The Sabbath, and works of beneficence. Matthew appears to have brought together here two incidents which, according to Luke, were separated in time. The scene changes to a synagogue, perhaps that of Capernaum. Among the worshippers is a man with 'a withered hand,' who seems to have been brought there by the Pharisees as a bait to try to draw out Christ's compassion. What a curious state of mind that was,—to believe that Christ could work miracles, and to want Him to do one, not for pity's sake, nor for confirmation of faith, but to have material for accusing Him! And how heartlessly careless of the poor sufferer they are, when they use him thus! He for his part stands silent. Desire and faith have no part in evoking this miracle. Deadly hatred and calculating malignity ask for it, and for once they get their wish. Having baited their hook, and set the man with his shrunken hand full in view, they get into their corners and wait the event. Matthew tells us that they ask our Lord the question which Luke represents Him as asking them. Perhaps we may say that He gave voice to the question which they were asking in their hearts. Their motive is distinctly given here. They wanted material for a legal process before a local tribunal. The whole thing was an attempt to get Jesus within the meshes of the law. Again, as in the former case, it is the traditional, not the written, law, which healing would have broken. The question evidently implies that, in the judgment of the askers, healing was unlawful. Talmudical scholars tell us that in later days the rabbis differed on the point, but that the prevalent opinion was, that only sicknesses threatening immediate danger to life could lawfully be treated on the Sabbath. The more rigid doctrine was obviously held by Christ's questioners. It is a significant instance of the absurdity and cruelty which are possible when once religion has been made a matter of outward observance. Nothing more surely and completely ossifies the heart and blinds common sense.

In His former answer Jesus had appealed to Scripture to bear out His teaching that Sabbath observance must bend to personal necessities. Here He appeals to the natural sense of compassion to confirm the principle that it must give way to the duty of relieving others. His question is as confident of an answer as the Pharisees' had been. But though He takes it for granted that His hearers could only answer it in one way, the microscopic and cold-blooded ingenuity of the rabbis, since His day, answers it in another. They say, 'Don't lift the poor brute out, but throw in a handful of fodder, and something for him to lie upon, and let him be till next day.' A remarkable way of making 'thine ox and thine ass' keep the Sabbath! There is a delicacy of expression in the question; the owner of 'one sheep' would be more solicitous about it than if he had a hundred; and our Shepherd looks on all the millions of His flock with a heart as much touched by their sorrow and needs as if each were His only possession. The question waits for no answer; but Christ goes on (as if there could be but one reply) to His conclusion, which He binds to His first question by another, equally

easy to answer. Man's superiority to animals makes his claim for help more imperative. 'You would not do less for one another than for a sheep in a hole, surely.' But the form in which our Lord put His conclusive answer to the Pharisees gives an unexpected turn to the reply. He does not say, 'It is lawful to heal,' but, 'It is lawful to do well,' thus at once showing the true justification of healing, namely, that it was a beneficent act, and widening the scope of His answer to cover a whole class of cases. 'To do well' here means, not to do right, but to do good, to benefit men. The principle is a wide one: the charitable succour of men's needs, of whatever kind, is congruous with the true design of that day of rest. Have the churches laid that lesson to heart? On the whole, it is to be observed that our Lord here distinctly recognises the obligation of the Sabbath, that He claims power over it, that He permits the pressure of one's own necessities and of others' need of help, to modify the manner of its observance, and that He leaves the application of these principles to the spiritual insight of His followers.

The cure which follows is done in a singular fashion. Without a whisper of request from the sufferer or any one else, He heals him by a word. His command has a promise in it, and He gives the power to do what He bids the man do. 'Give what Thou commandest,' says St. Augustine, 'and command what Thou wilt.' We get strength to obey in the act of obedience. But beyond the possible symbolical significance of the mode of cure, and beyond the revelation of Christ's power to heal by a word, the manner of healing had a special reason in the very cavils of the Pharisees. Not even they could accuse Him of breaking any Sabbath law by such a cure. What had He done? Told the man to put out his hand. Surely that was not unlawful. What had the man done? Stretched it forth. Surely that broke no subtle rabbinical precept. So they were foiled at every turn, driven off the field of argument, and baffled in their attempt to find ground for laying an information against Him. But neither His gentle wisdom nor His healing power could reach these hearts, made stony by conceit and pedantic formalism; and all that their contact with Jesus did was to drive them to intenser hostility, and to send them away to plot His death. That is what comes of making religion a round of outward observances. The Pharisee is always blind as an owl to the light of God and true goodness; keen-sighted as a hawk for trivial breaches of his cobweb regulations, and cruel as a vulture to tear with beak and claw. The race is not extinct. We all carry one inside us, and need God's help to cast him out.

AN ATTEMPT TO ACCOUNT FOR JESUS

‘But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This man doth not cast out demons, but by Beelzebub, the prince of the demons.’—*MATT. xii. 24.*

Mark’s Gospel tells us that this astonishing explanation of Christ and His work was due to the ingenious malice of an ecclesiastical deputation, sent down from Jerusalem to prevent the simple folk in Galilee from being led away by this new Teacher. They must have been very hard put to it to explain undeniable but unwelcome facts, when they hazarded such a preposterous theory.

Formal religionists never know what to make of a man who is in manifest touch with the unseen. These scribes, like Christ’s other critics, judged themselves in judging Him, and bore witness to the very truths that they were eager to deny. For this ridiculous explanation admits the miraculous, recognises the impossibility of accounting for Christ on any naturalistic hypothesis, and by its very outrageous absurdity indicates that the only reasonable explanation of the facts is the admission of His divine message and authority. So we may learn, even from such words as these, how the glory of Jesus Christ shines, though distorted and blurred, through the fogs of prejudice and malice.

I. Note, then, first, the unwelcome and undeniable facts that insist upon explanation.

I have said that these hostile critics attest the reality of the miracles. I know that it is not fashionable at present to attach much weight to the fact that none of all the enemies that saw them ever had a doubt about the reality of Christ’s miracles. I know quite well that in an age that believed in the possibility of the supernatural, as this age does not, credence would be more easy, and that such testimony is less valuable than if it had come from a jury of scientific twentieth century sceptics. But I know, on the other hand, that for long generations the expectation of the miraculous had died out before Christ came; that His predecessor, John the Baptist, made no such claims; and that, at first, at all events, there was no expectation of Jesus working miracles, to lead to any initial ease of acceptance of His claims. And I know that there were never sharper and more hostile eyes brought to bear upon any man and his work than the eyes of these ecclesiastical ‘triers.’ It would have been so easy and so triumphant a way of ending the whole business if they could have shown, what they were anxious to be able to show, that the miracle was a trick. And so I venture to think that not without some weight is the attestation from the camp of the enemy, ‘This man casteth out demons.’

But you have to remember that amongst the facts to be explained is not only this one of Christ’s works having passed muster with His enemies, but the other of His own reiterated and solemn claim to have the power of working what we call miracles. Now, I wish to dwell on that for one moment, because it is fashionable to put one’s thumb upon it nowadays. It is not unusual to eliminate from the Gospel narrative all that side of it, and then to run over in eulogiums about the rest. But what we have to deal with is this fact, that the Man whom

the world admits to be the consummate flower of humanity, meek, sane, humble, who has given all generations lessons in self-abnegation and devotion, claimed to be able to raise the dead, to cast out demons, and to do many wonderful works. And though we should be misrepresenting the facts if we said that He did what His followers have too often been inclined to do, *i.e.* rested the stress of evidence upon that side of His work, yet it is an equal exaggeration in the other direction to do, as so many are inclined to do to-day, *i.e.* disparage the miraculous evidence as no evidence at all. 'Go and tell John the things that ye see and hear,'—that is His own answer to the question, 'Art Thou He that should come?' And though I rejoice to believe that there are far loftier and more blessed answers to it than these outward signs and tokens, they *are* signs and tokens; and they are part of the whole facts that have to be accounted for.

I would venture to widen the reference of my text for a moment, and include not only the actual miracles of our Lord's earthly life, but all the beneficent, hallowing, elevating, ennobling, refining results which have followed upon the proclamation of His truth in the world ever since. I believe, as I think Scripture teaches me to believe, that in the world today Christ is working; and that it is a mistake to talk about the results of 'Christianity,' meaning thereby some abstract system divorced from Him. It is the working of Jesus Christ in the world that has brought 'nobler manners, purer laws'; that has given a new impulse and elevation to art and literature; that has lifted the whole tone of society; that has suppressed ancient evils; that has barred the doors of old temples of devildom, of lust, and cruelty, and vice; and that is still working in the world for the elevation and the deifying of humanity. And I claim the whole difference between 'B.C. and A.D.'—the whole difference between Christendom and Heathendom—as being the measure of the continuous power with which Jesus Christ has grappled with and throttled the snakes that have fastened on men. That continuous operation of His in delivering from the powers of evil has, indeed, not yielded such results as might have been expected. But just as on earth He was hindered in the exercise of His supernatural power by men's unbelief, so that 'He could do no mighty works, save that He laid His hands on a few sick folk' here and there, 'and healed them,' so He has been thwarted by His Church, and hindered in the world, from manifesting the fulness of His power. But yet, sorrowfully admitting that, and taking as deserved the scoffs of the men that say, 'Your Christianity does not seem to do so very much after all,' I still venture to allege that its record is unique; and that these are facts which wise men ought to take into account, and have some fairly plausible way of explaining.

II. Secondly, note the preposterous explanation. 'This man doth not cast out demons, but by Beelzebub, the prince of the demons.' That is the last resort of prejudice so deep that it will father an absurdity rather than yield to evidence. And Christ has no difficulty in putting it aside, as you may remember, by a piece of common sense: 'If Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself, and his kingdom cannot stand.' There is an old play which

has for its title, *The Devil as an Ass*. He is not such an ass as that, to build up with one hand and cast down with the other. As the proverb has it, 'Hawks do not pick out hawks' eyes.' But this plainly hopeless attempt to account for Christ and His work may be turned into a witness for both, and yield not unimportant lessons.

This explanation witnesses to the insufficiency of all explanations which omit the supernatural. These men felt that they had to do with a Man who was in touch with a whole world of unseen powers; and that they had here to deal with something to which ordinary measuring lines were palpably inapplicable. And so they fell back upon 'by Beelzebub'; and they thereby admitted that humanity without something more at the back of it never made such a man as that. And I beg you to lay that to heart. It is very easy to solve an insoluble problem if you begin by taking all the insoluble elements out of it. And that is how a great deal of modern thinking does with Christianity. Knock out all the miracles; pooh-pooh all Christ's claims; say nothing about Incarnation; declare Resurrection to be entirely unhistorical, and you will not have much difficulty in accounting for the rest; and it will not be worth the accounting for. But here is the thing to be dealt with, that *whole* life, the Christ of the Gospels. And I venture to say that any explanation professing to account for Him which leaves out His coming from an unseen world, and His possession of powers above this world of sense and nature, is ludicrously inadequate. Suppose you had a chain which for thousands of years had been winding on to a drum, and link after link had been rough iron, and all at once there comes one of pure gold, would it be reasonable to say that it had been dug from the same mine, and forged in the same fires, as its black and ponderous companions? Generation after generation has passed across the earth, each begetting sons after its own likeness; and lo! in the midst of them starts up one sinless Man. Is it reasonable to say that He is the product of the same causes which have produced all the millions, and never another like Him? Surely to account for Jesus without the supernatural is hopeless.

Further, this explanation may be taken as an instance showing the inadequacy of all theories and explanations of Christ and Christianity from an unbelieving point of view. It was the first attempt of unbelievers to explain where Christ's power came from. Like all first attempts, it was crude, and it has been amended and refined since. Earlier generations did not hesitate to call the Apostles liars, and Christ's contemporaries did not hesitate to call Him 'this deceiver.' We have got beyond that; but we still are met by explanations of the power of the Gospel and of Christ, its subject and Author, which trace these to ignoble elements, and do not shrink from asserting that a blunder or a hallucination lies at the foundation.

Now, I am not going to enter upon these matters at any length, but I would just recall to you our Lord's broad, simple principle: 'A corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit, neither doth a good tree bring forth evil fruit.' And I would apply that all round. Christian teachers have often made great mistakes, as it seems to me, by tracing the prevalence of the

power of some heathen religions to their vices and lies. No system has ever had great moral power in this world but by reason of its excellences and truths. Mohammedanism, for instance, swept away, and rightly, a mere formal superstition which called itself Christianity, because it grasped the one truth: 'There is no God but God'; and it had faith of a sort. Monasticism held the field in Europe, with all its faults, for centuries, because it enshrined the great Christian truth of self-sacrifice and absolute obedience. And you may take it as a fixed rule, that howsoever some 'mixture of falsehood doth ever please,' as Bacon says, in his cynical way, the reason for the power of any great movement has been the truth that was in it and not the lie; and the reason why great men have exercised influence has been their greatness and their goodness, and not their smallnesses and their vices.

I apply that all round, and I ask you to apply it to Christianity; and in the light of such plain principles to answer the question: 'Where did this Man, so fair, so radiant, so human and yet so superhuman, so universal and yet so individual—where did He come from? and where did the Gospel, which flows from Him, and which has done such things in the world as it has done—where did it come from? 'Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?' If it is true that Jesus Christ is either mistakenly represented in the Gospels, or that He made enthusiastic claims which cannot be verified; and if it is true that the faith in a Resurrection on which Christianity is suspended, and which has produced such fruits as we know have been produced, is a delusion; then all I can say is that the noblest lives that ever were lived in the world have found their impulse in a falsehood or a dream; and that the richest clusters that ever have yielded wine for the cup have grown upon a thorn. If like produces like, you cannot account for Christ and Christianity by anything short of the belief in His Divine mission. Serpents' eggs do not hatch out into doves. This Man, when He claimed to be God's Son and the world's Saviour, was no brain-sick enthusiast; and the results show that the Gospel which His followers proclaim rests upon no lie.

Again, this explanation is an instance of the credulity of unbelief. Think of the mental condition which could swallow such an explanation of such a Worker and such work. It is more difficult to believe the explanation than the alternative which it is framed to escape. So it is always. The difficulties of faith are small by comparison with those of unbelief, gnats beside camels, and that that is so is plain from the short duration of each unbelieving explanation of Jesus. One can remember in the compass of one's own life more than one assailant taking the field with much trumpeting and flag-waving, whose attack failed and is forgotten. The child's story tells of a giant who determined to slay his enemy, and belaboured an empty bed with his club all night, and found his foe untouched and fresh in the morning. The Gospel is here; what has become of its assailants? They are gone, and the limbo into which the scribes' theory has passed will receive all the others. So we may be quite patient, and sure that the sieve of time, which is slowly and constantly working, will riddle out all the rubbish, and cast it on the dunghill where so many exploded theories rot forgotten.

III. And now, one word about the last point; and that is—the true explanation.

Now, at this stage of my sermon, I must not be tempted to say a word about the light which our Lord throws, in these declarations in the context, into that dim unseen world. His words seem to me to be too solemn and didactic to be taken as accommodations to popular prejudice, and a great deal too grave to be taken as mere metaphor. And I, for my part, am not so sure that, apart from Him, I know all things in heaven and earth, as to venture to put aside these solemn words of His—which lift a corner of the veil which hides the unseen—and to dismiss them as unworthy of notice. Is it not a strange thing that a world which is so ready to believe in spiritual communications when they are vouched for by a newspaper editor, is so unwilling to believe them when they are in the Bible? And is it not a strange thing that scientists, who are always taunting Christians with the importance they attach to man in the plan of the universe, and ask if all these starry orbs were built for him, should be so incredulous of teachings which fill the waste places with loftier beings? But that is by the way.

What does Christ say in the context? He tells the secret of His power. ‘I, by the Spirit of God, cast out demons.’ And then He goes on to speak about a conflict that He wages with a strong man; and about His binding the strong man, and spoiling his house. All which, being turned into modern language, is just this, that the Lord, by His incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and government at the right hand of God, has broken the powers of evil in their central hold. He has crushed the serpent’s head; and though He may still, as Milton puts it, ‘swinge the scaly horror of his folded tail,’ it is but the flurries of the dying brute. The conquering heel is firm on his head. So, brethren, evil is conquered, and Christ is the Conqueror; and by His work in life and death He has delivered them that were held captive of the devil. And you and I may, if we will, pass into ‘the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free.’

That is the only explanation of Him—in His person, in His character, in His work, and in the effects of that work in the world—that covers all the facts, and will hold water. All others fail, and they mostly fail by boldly eliminating the very facts that need to be accounted for. Let us rather look to Him, thankful that our Brother has conquered; and let us put our trust in that Saviour. For, if His explanation is true, then a very solemn personal consideration arises for each of us, ‘If I, by the Spirit of God, cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God is come unto you,’ it stands beside us; it calls for our obedience. Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ alone, can cast the evils out of our natures. It is the Incarnate Christ, the Divine Christ, the crucified Christ, the ascended Christ, the indwelling Christ, who will so fill our hearts that there shall be no aching voids there to invite the return of the expelled tyrants. If any other reformation pass upon us than the thorough one of receiving Him by faith into our hearts, then, though they may be swept and garnished, they will be empty; and the demons will come back. With Jesus inside—they will be outside.

'MAKE THE TREE GOOD'

'... Make the tree good, and his fruit good. ...' —**MATT. xii. 33.**

In this Gospel we find that our Lord twice uses this image of a tree and its fruit. In the Sermon on the Mount He applies it as a test to false teachers, who hide, beneath the wool of the sheep's clothing, the fangs and paws of ravening wolves. He says, 'By their deeds ye shall know them; for as is the tree so is its fruit.' That is a rough and ready test, which applies rather to the teacher than to his doctrine, but it applies, to some extent, to the doctrine too, on the hypothesis that the teacher's life fairly represents it. Of course, it is not the only thing that we have to take into account; but it may prick many a bladder, and unmask many an error, and it is the way by which the masses generally judge of systems and of their apostles. A saintly life has more power than dusty volumes of controversy.

But in our text Christ applies the same thoughts in rather a deeper fashion. Here the lesson that He would have us draw is of the connection between character and conduct; how what we do is determined by what we are, and how, not of course with the same absolute regularity and constancy, but still somewhat in the same fashion as the fruit is true to the tree, so, after all allowance made for ups and downs, for the irregular play of will and conscience, for the strife that is waged within a man, for the temptations of external circumstances, and the like—still, in general, as is the inner man, so is the outward manifestation. The facts of a life are important mainly as registering and making visible the inner condition of the doer. Now, that seems very elementary. Everybody believes that 'out of the heart are the issues of life,' as a wise man said long ago, but it is one of the truths that, if grasped and worked into our consciousness, and out in our lives, would do much to revolutionise them. And so, though it is a very old story, and though we all admit it, I wish now to come face to face with the consequences of this thought, that behind action lies character, and that Doing is the second step, and Being is the first.

I. I would ask you to notice how here we are confronted with the great problem for every man.

'Make the tree good.' It takes a good man to do good things. So how shallow is all that talk, 'do, do, do,' this, that, and the other thing. All right, but *be*; that is the first thing; or, as Christ said, 'Make the tree good, and the fruit' will take care of itself. So do you not see how, if that is true about us, we are each brought full front up to this, 'Am I trying to make my tree good? And what kind of success am I having in the attempt?' The water that rises from some spring will bring up with it, in solution, a trace of a bed of salt through which it has come, and of all the minerals in the soil through which it has passed. And as its sparkling waters come out into the light, if one could analyse them completely, one might register a geological section of the strata through which it has risen. So, our acts bear in them a revelation of all the hidden beds through which they have risen; and sometimes they are bitter

and salt, but they are always true to the self whose apocalypse they are to the world, or at all events to God.

Therefore, brethren, I have to urge this, that we shall not be doing our true work as men and women, if we are simply trying to better our actions, important as these are. By this saying the centre of gravity is shifted, and in one aspect, the deeds are made less important. The condition of the hidden man of the heart is the all-important thing. Christ's word comes to each of us as the briefest statement of all that it is our highest duty and truest wisdom to aim at in life—'Make the tree good.'

If you have ever tried it honestly, and have not been contented with the superficial cleaning up of outsides, which consists in shifting the dirt into another place only, not in getting rid of it, I know what met you almost as soon as you began, like some great black rock that rises in a mountain-pass, and forbids all farther advance—the consciousness that you were *not* good met you. I am not going to talk theological technicalities. Never mind about phrases—they have been the ruin of a great deal of earnest preaching—call it what you like, here is a fact, that whenever a man sets himself, with anything like resolute determination and rigid self-examination, to the task of getting himself right, he finds that he is wrong. That being the case, each of us has to deal with a tremendous problem; and the more earnestly and honestly we try to deal with it, the more we shall feel how grave it is. You can cure a great deal, I know. God forbid that I should say one word that seems to deny a man's power to do much in the direction of self-improvement, but after all that is done, again you are brought short up on this fact, the testimony of conscience. And so I see men labouring at a task as vain as that of those who would twist the sands into ropes, according to the old fable. I see men seeking after higher perfection of purity than they will ever attain. That is the condition of us all, of course, for our ideal must always outrun our realisation, else we may as well lie down and die. But there is a difference between the imperfect approximation, which we feel to be imperfect, and yet feel to be approximation, and the despairing consciousness, that I am sure a great many of my audience have had, more or less, that I have a task set for me that is far beyond my strength. 'Talk about making the tree good! I cannot do it.' So men fold their hands, and the foiled endeavour begets despair. Or, as is the case with some of you, it begets indifference, and you do not care to try any more, because you have tried so often, and have made nothing of it.

There is the problem, how 'make the tree good,' the tree being bad, or, at all events, if you do not like that broad statement, the tree having an element of badness, if I may so say, in and amongst any goodness that it has. I do not care which of the two forms of statement you take, the fact remains the same.

II. Note the universal failure to solve the problem.

'Make the tree good.'

Yes. And there are a whole set of would-be arboriculturists who tell you they will do it if you will trust to them. Let us look at them. First comes one venerable personage. He says, 'I am Law, and I prescribe this, and I forbid that, and I show reward and punishment, and I tell you—be a good man.' Well! what then? It is not for want of telling that men are bad. The worst man in the world knows his duty a great deal more than the best man in the world does it. And whether it is the law of the land, or whether it is the law of society, or the law written in Scripture, or the law written in a man's own heart, they all come under the same fatal disability. They tell us what to do, and they do not put out a finger to help us to do it. A lame man does not get to the city because he sees a guide-post at the turning which tells him which road to take. The people who do not believe in certain modern agitations about the restrictions of the liquor traffic say, 'You cannot make people sober by Act of Parliament,' which is absolutely true, although it does not bear, I think, the inference that they would draw from it, and it just puts into a rough form the fatal weakness of this would-be gardener and improver of the nature of the trees. He tells us our duty, and there an end.

Do you remember how the Apostle put the weakness of law in words, the antique theological terminology of which should not prevent us from seeing the large truth in them? 'If there had been a law given which could have given life, then righteousness should have been by the law,' which being translated into modern English is just this, If Law could impart a power to obey its behests, then it is all that we want to make us right. But until it can do that it fails in two points. It deals with conduct, and we need to have character dealt with; and it does not lift the burden that it lays on me with one of its fingers. So we may rule Law out of court.

And then comes another, and he says, 'I am Culture, and intellectual acquirement; or my name is Education, and I am going to make the tree good in the most scientific fashion, because what makes men bad is that they do not know, and if they only knew they would do the right.' Now, I thoroughly believe that education diminishes crime. I believe it weans from certain forms of evil. I believe that, other things being equal, an educated man, with his larger interests and his cultivated tastes, has a certain fastidiousness developed which keeps him from being so much tempted by the grosser forms of transgression. I believe that very largely you will empty your gaols in proportion as you fill your schools. And let no man say that I am an obscurantist, or that I am indifferent to the value of education and the benefits of intellectual culture, when I declare that all these may be attained, and the nature of the tree remain exactly what it was. You may prune, you may train along the wall, you may get bigger fruit, you will not get better fruit. Did you ever hear the exaggerated line that describes one of the pundits of science as 'the greatest, wisest, meanest of mankind'? The plain fact is that the cultivation of the understanding has little to do with the purifying of the depths of the heart.

And then comes another, and says, 'I am the genius of Beauty and Art. And my recipe is pictures and statues, and all that will refine the mind, and lift the taste.' That is the popular gospel of this day, in a great many quarters. Yes, and have we never heard of a period in European history which was, as they call it, 'the Renaissance' of art and the death of morality? Do we not know that side by side there have been cultivated in all ages, and are being cultivated to-day, the most exclusive devotion to the beauty that can be expressed by art, and the most intense indifference to the beauty of holiness? Ah! brethren, it wants something far deeper-going than pictures to purge the souls of men. And whilst, as before, I thankfully acknowledge the refining influence of this new cult, I would protest against the absurdity of putting it upon a pedestal as the guide and elevator of corrupted humanity.

And then come others, and they say, 'Environment is the thing that is to blame for it all. How can you get decent lives in the slums?' No, I know you cannot; and God bless every effort made to get the people out of the slums, I say. Only do not let us exaggerate. You cannot change a man, as deeply as we need to be changed, by any change of his circumstances. 'Take the bitter tree,' as I remember an old Jewish saying has it, 'take the bitter tree and plant it in Eden, and water it with the rivers there; and let the angel Gabriel be the gardener, and the tree will still bear bitter fruit.' Are all the people who live in good houses good? Will a 'living wage'—eight shillings a day and eight hours' play—will these change a man's character? Will these go deep enough down to touch the springs of evil? You cannot alter the nature of a set of objects by arranging them in different shapes, parallelograms, or squares, or circles, or any others. As long as you have the elements that are in human nature to deal with, you may do as you like about the distribution of wealth, and the relation of Capital to Labour, and the various cognate questions which are all included in the vague word Socialism; and human nature will be too strong for you, and you will have the old mischiefs cropping out again. Brethren, you cannot put out Vesuvius by bringing to bear on it the squirts of all the fire engines in creation. The water will go up in steam, and do little or nothing to extinguish the fire. And whilst I would thankfully help in all these other movements, and look for certain limited results of good from them, I, for my part, believe, and therefore I am bound to declare, that neither singly, nor all of them in combination, will they ever effect the change on human nature which Jesus Christ regarded as the only possible means for securing that human nature should bear good fruit.

For, if there were no other reason, there are two plain ones which I only touch. God is the source of all good, of all creatural purity as well as all creatural blessedness. And if a life has a blank wall turned to Him, and has cut itself off from Him, I do not care how you educate it, fill it full of science, plunge it into an atmosphere of art, make the most perfect arrangements for social and economical and political circumstances, that soul is cut off from the possibility of good, because it is cut off from the fontal source of all good. And there is another reason which is closely connected with this, and that is that the true bitter tang in

us all is self-centring regard. That is the mother-tincture that, variously coloured and compounded, makes in all the poisonous element that we call sin, and until you get something that will cast that evil out of a man's heart, you may teach and refine and raise him and arrange things for him as you like, and you will not master the source of all wrong and corrupt fruit.

III. Lastly, let me say a word about the triumphant solution.

Law says, 'Make the tree good,' and does not try to do it. Christ said, 'Make the tree good,' and proceeds to do it. And how does He do it?

He does it by coming to us; to every soul of man on the earth, and offering, first, forgiveness for all the past. I do not know that amongst all the bonds by which evil holds a poor soul that struggles to get away from it, there is one more adamant and unyielding than the consciousness that the past is irrevocable, and that 'what I have written I have written,' and never can blot out. But Jesus Christ deals with that consciousness. It is true that 'whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap,' and the Christian doctrine of forgiveness does not contradict that solemn truth, but it assures us that God's heart is not turned away from us, notwithstanding the past, and that we can write the future better, and break altogether the fatal bond that decrees, apart from Him, that 'to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant,' and that past sin shall beget a progeny of future sins. That fruitfulness of sin is at an end, if we take Christ for our Saviour.

He makes the tree good in another fashion still; for the very centre, as it seems to me, of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that into our spirits He will breathe a new life kindred with His own, a new nature which is free from the law and bonds of past sin, and of present and future death. The tree is made good because He makes those who believe in Him 'new creatures in Christ Jesus.' Now, do not turn away and say that that is mysticism. Be it mysticism or not, it is God's truth. It is the truth of the Christian Revelation, that faith in Jesus Christ puts a new nature into any man, however sinful he may have been, and however deep the marks of the fetters may have been upon his limbs.

Christ makes the tree good in yet another fashion, because He brings to the reinforcement of the new life which He imparts the mightiest motives, and sways by love, which leads to the imitation of the Beloved, which leads to obedience to the Beloved, which leads to shunning as the worst of evils anything that would break the communion with the Beloved, and which is in itself the decentralising of the sinful soul from its old centre, and the making of Christ the Beloved the centre round which it moves, and from which it draws radiance and light and motion. By all these methods, and many more that I cannot dwell upon now, the problem is triumphantly solved by Christianity. The tree is made good, and 'instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle tree.'

You may say, 'That is all very well in theory. What about the practice? I do not see such a mighty difference between you Christians and us.' Well, for myself and my brethren, I

accept the rebuke. There is not such a difference as there ought to be. But do you know why? Not because our great Gardener cannot change the nature of the plant, but because we do not submit ourselves to His power as we ought to do. Debit us with as many imperfections and inconsistencies as you like, do not lay them to the charge of Christ.

And yet we are willing to accept the test of Christianity which lies in its power to change men. I point to the persecutor on the road to Damascus. I point to the Bedfordshire tinker, to him that wrote *Pilgrim's Progress*. I point to the history of the Christian Church all down through the ages. I point to our mission fields to-day. I point to every mission hall, where earnest, honest men are working, and where, if you go and ask them, they will let you see people lifted from the very depths of degradation and sin, and made honest, sober, respectable, hard-working, though not very intelligent or refined, Christian people. I suppose that there is no man in an official position like mine who cannot look back over his ministry and remember, some of them dozens, some of them scores, some of them hundreds, of cases in which the change was made on the most hopeless people, by the simple acceptance of the simple gospel, 'Christ died for me, and Christ lives in me.' I know that I can recall such, and I am sure that my brethren can.

People who are not Christians talk glibly about the failure of Christianity to transform men. They have never seen the transformations because they have never put themselves in the way of seeing them. They are being worked to-day; they might be worked here and now.

Try the power of the Gospel for yourselves. You cannot make the tree good, but you can let Jesus Christ do it. The Ethiopian cannot change his skin, nor the leopard his spots, but Jesus can do both. 'The lion shall eat straw like the ox.' It is weary work to be tinkering at your acts. Take the comprehensive way, and let Him change your character. I believe that in some processes of dyeing, a piece of cloth, prepared with a certain liquid, is plunged into a vat full of dye-stuffs of one colour, and is taken out tinged of another. The soul, wet with the waters of repentance, and plunged into the 'Fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness,' the crimson fountain of the blood of Christ, emerges 'whiter than snow.' Let Him 'make the tree good and fruit will be good,' for if not we shall be 'hewn down and cast into the fire,' because we cannot bear any fruit unto holiness, nor can the end be everlasting life.

'A GREATER THAN JONAS'

'A greater than Jonas is here.'—[MATT. xii. 41](#).

There never was any man in his right mind, still more of influence on his fellows, who made such claims as to himself in such unmistakable language as Jesus Christ does. To say such things of oneself as come from His lips is a sign of a weak, foolish nature. It is fatal to all influence, to all beauty of character. It is not only that He claims official attributes as a fanatical or dishonest pretender to inspiration may do. He does that, but He does more—He declares Himself possessed of virtues which, if a man said he had them, it would be the best proof that he did not possess them and did not know himself. 'I am the way and the truth and the life.' 'I am the light of the world'—a 'greater than the temple,' a greater than Jonah, a 'greater than Solomon,' and then withal 'I am meek and lowly of heart.' And the world believes Him, and says, Yes! it is true.

These three comparisons of Jesus with Temple, Jonas, and Solomon, carry great claims and great lessons. By the first Jesus asserts that He is in reality all that the Temple was in shadowy symbol, and sets Himself above ritual, sacrifices, and priests. By the second he asserts His superiority not only to one prophet but to them all. By the third He asserts His superiority to Solomon, whom the Jews revered as the bright, consummate flower of kingdom.

Now we may take this comparison as giving us positive thoughts about our Lord. The points of comparison may be taken to be three, with Jonah as one of an order, with Jonah in his personal character as a servant of God, with Jonah as a prophet charged with a special work.

I. The prophets and the Son.

The whole prophetic order may fairly be taken as included here. And over against all these august and venerable names, the teachers of wisdom, the speakers of the oracles of God, this Nazarene peasant stands there before Pharisees and Scribes, and asserts His superiority. It is either the most insane arrogance of self-assertion, or it is a sober truth. If it be true that self-consciousness is ever the disease of the soul, and that the religious teacher who begins to think of himself is lost, how marvellous is this assertion!

Compare it with Paul's, 'Unto me who am less than the least of all saints'—'I am not a whit behind the chief of the Apostles'—'though I be nothing'—'Not I, but Christ in me.' And yet this is meekness, for it is infinite condescension in Him to compare Himself with any son of man.

(a) The contrast is suggested between the prophets and the theme of the prophets.

'The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.' Though undoubtedly the prophet order had other work than prediction to do, yet the soul of their whole work was the announcement of the Messiah.

In testimony whereof, Elijah, who was traditionally the chief of the prophets, stood beside Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, and passed away as lost in His light.

(b) The contrast is suggested between the recipients of the word of God and the Word of God.

The relation of the prophets to their message is contrasted with His who was the Truth, who not merely received, but was, the Word of God.

There is nothing in Christ's teaching to show that He was conscious of standing in a human relation to the truths which He spoke. His own personality is ever present in His teaching instead of being suppressed—as in all the prophets. His own personality is His teaching, for His revelation is by being as much as by saying. Similarly, His miracles are done by His own power.

(c) The contrast is suggested between the partial teacher of God's Name and the complete revealer of it.

The foundation was laid by the prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone ([Hebrews i. 1](#)).

II. The disobedient prophet and the perfect Son.

Jonah stands as the great example of human weakness in the chosen instruments of God's hand.

Take the story—his shrinking from the message given him. We know not why; but perhaps from faint-hearted fear, or from a sense of his unworthiness and unfitness for the task. His own words about God as long-suffering seem to suggest another reason, that he feared to go with a message of judgment which seemed to him so unlikely to be executed by the long-suffering God. If so, then what made him recreant was not so much fear from personal motives as intellectual perplexity and imperfect comprehension of the ways of God. Then we hear of his pitiable flight with its absurdity and its wickedness. Then comes the prayer which shows him to have been right and true at bottom, and teaches us that what makes a good man is not the absence of faults, but the presence of love and longing after God. Then we see the boldness of his mission. Then follows the reaction from that lofty height, the petulance or whatever else it was with which he sees the city spared. Even the mildest interpretation cannot acquit him of much disregard for the poor souls whom he had brought to repentance, and of dreadful carelessness for the life and happiness of his fellows.

Now Jonah's behaviour is but a specimen of the vacillations, the alternations of feeling which beset every man; the loftiest, the truest, the best. Moses, David, Solomon, Elijah, John the Baptist, Peter, Luther, Cranmer. And it is full of instruction for us.

Then we turn to the contrast in Christ's perfect obedience and faithfulness in His prophetic office. In Him is no trace of shrinking even when the grimness of the Cross weighed most on His heart. No confusion of mind as to the Father's will, or as to the union in Him

of perfect righteousness and infinite mercy, ever darkened His clear utterances or cast a shadow over his own soul. He was never weakened by the collapse that follows on great effort or strong emotion. He never failed in his mission through lack of pity.

But there is no need to draw out the comparison. We look on all God's instruments, and see them all full of faults and flaws. Here is one stainless name, one life in which is no blot, one heart in which are no envy, no failings—one obedience which never varied. He says of Himself, 'I do always those things which please Him,' and we, thinking of all the noblest examples of virtue that the world has ever seen, and seeing in them all some speck, turn to this whole and perfect chrysolite and say, Yes! 'a greater than they!'

III. The bearer of a transitory message of repentance to one Gentile people, and the bearer of an eternal message of grace and love to the whole earth.

Jonah is remarkable as having had the sphere of his activity wholly outside Israel.

The nature of his message; a preaching of punishment; a call to repentance.

The sphere of it—one Gentile city. The effect of it—transitory. We know what Nineveh became.

Jesus is greater than Jonah or any prophet in this respect, that His message is to the world, and in this, that what He preaches and brings far transcends even the loftiest and most spiritual words of any of them.

His voice is sweetest, tenderest, clearest and fullest of all that have ever sounded in men's ears. And just because it is so, the hearing of it brings the most solemn responsibility that was ever laid on men, and to us still more gravely and truly may it be said than to those who heard Jesus speak on earth, 'The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation and condemn it.'

'A GREATER THAN SOLOMON'

'A greater than Solomon is here.'—[MATT. xii. 42](#).

It is condescension in Him to compare Himself with any; yet if any might have been selected, it is that great name. To the Jews Solomon is an ideal figure, who appealed so strongly to popular imagination as to become the centre of endless legends; whose dominion was the very apex of national glory, in recounting whose splendours the historical books seem to be scarce able to restrain their triumph and pride.

I. The Man. The story gives us a richly endowed and many-sided character. It begins with lovely, youthful enthusiasm, with a profound sense of his own weakness, with earnest longings after wisdom and guidance. He lived a pure and beautiful youth, and all his earlier and middle life was adorned with various graces. There is a certain splendid largeness about the character. He had a rich variety of gifts: he was statesman, merchant, sage, physicist, builder, one of the many-sided men whom the old world produced. And on this we may build a comparison and contrast.

The completeness of Christ's Humanity transcends all other men, even the most various, and transcends all gathered together. Every type of excellence is in Him. We cannot say that His character is any one thing in special, it falls under no classification. It is a pure white light in which all rays are blended. This all-comprehensiveness and symmetry of character are remarkably shown in four brief records.

But we have to take into account the dark shadows that fell on Solomon's later years. He clearly fell away from his early consecration and noble ideals, and let his sensuous appetites gain power. He countenanced, if he did not himself practise, idolatry. As a king he became an arbitrary tyrant, and his love of building led him to oppress his subjects, and so laid the foundation for the revolt under Jeroboam which rent the kingdom. So his history is another illustration of the possible shipwreck of a great character. It is one more instance of the fall of a 'son of the morning.' We need not elaborate the contrast with Christ's character. In Him is no falling from a high ideal, no fading of morning glory into a cloudy noon or a lurid evening. There is no black streak in that flawless white marble. Jesus draws the perfect circle, like Giotto's O, while all other lives show some faltering of hand, and consequent irregularity of outline. Greater than Solomon, with his over-clouded glories and his character worsened by self-indulgence, is Jesus, 'the Sun of righteousness,' the perfect round of whose lustrous light is broken by no spots on the surface, no indentations in the circumference, nor obscured by any clouds over its face.

II. The Teacher.

Solomon was traditionally regarded as the author of much of the Book of Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes was written as by him. Possibly the attribution to him of some share in the

former book may be correct, but at any rate, his wisdom was said to have drawn the Queen of Sheba to hear him, and that is the point of the comparison of our text.

If we take these two books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes into account, as popularly attributed to him, they suggest points of comparison and contrast with Jesus as a teacher, which we may briefly point out. Now, Proverbs falls into two very distinct portions, the former part being a connected fatherly admonition to the pursuit of wisdom, and the latter a collection of prudential maxims, in which it is rare for any two contiguous verses to have anything to do with each other. In the former part Wisdom is set forth as man's chief good, and the Wisdom which is so set forth is mainly moral wisdom, the right disposition of will and heart, and almost identical with what the Old Testament elsewhere calls righteousness. But it is invested, as the writer proceeds, with more and more august and queenly attributes, and at last stands forth as being, if not a divine person, at least a personification of a divine attribute.

Bring that ancient teaching and set it side by side with Jesus, and what can we say but that He is what the old writer, be he Solomon or another, dimly saw? He is the 'wisdom' which was traditionally called the 'wisdom of Solomon,' and which the Queen came from far to hear. Jesus is greater, as the light is more than the eye, or as the theme is more than the speaker. 'The power of God and the wisdom of God' is greater than the sage or seer who celebrates it. What is true of Solomon or whoever wrote that praise of Wisdom, is true of all teachers and wise men, they are 'not that light,' they are 'sent to bear witness of that light.' Jesus is Wisdom, other men are wise. Jesus is the greatest teacher, for He teaches us Himself. He is lesson as well as teacher. Unless He was a great deal more than Teacher, He could not be the perfect Teacher for whom the world groans.

The second half of Proverbs is, as I have said, mostly a collection of prudential and moral maxims, with very little reference to God or high ideals of duty in them. They may represent to us the impotence of wise saws to get themselves practised. A guide-post is not a guide. It stretches out its gaunt wooden arms towards the city, but it cannot bend them to help a lame man lying at its foot. Men do not go wrong for lack of knowing the road, nearly so often as for lack of inclination to walk in it. We have abundant voices to tell us what we ought to do. But what we want is the swaying of inclination to do it, and the gift of power to do it. And it is precisely because Jesus gives us both these that He is what no collection of the wisest sayings can ever be, the efficient teacher of all righteousness, and of the true wisdom which is 'the principal thing.'

As for Ecclesiastes, though not his, it represents not untruly the tone which we may suppose to have characterised his later days in its dwelling on the vanity of life. The sadness of it may be contrasted with the light thrown by the Gospel on the darkest problems. Solomon cries, 'All is vanity'—Jesus teaches His scholars to sing, 'All things work together for good.'

III. The Temple builder.

In this respect 'a greater than Solomon is here,' inasmuch as Jesus is Himself the true Temple, being for all men, which Solomon's structure only shadowed, the meeting-place of God and man, in whom God dwells and through whom we can draw near to Him, the place where the true Sacrifice is once for all offered, by which Sacrifice sin is truly put away. And, further, Jesus is greater than Solomon in that He is, through the ages, building up the great Temple of His Church of redeemed men, the eternal temple of which not one stone shall ever be taken down.

IV. The peaceful King.

There were no wars in Solomon's reign. But a dark shadow brooded over it in its later years, which were darkened by oppression, luxury, and incipient revolt.

Contrast with that merely external and sadly imperfect peacefulness, the deep, inward peace of spirit which Jesus breathes into every man who trusts and obeys Him, and with the peace among men which the acceptance of His rule brings, and will one day bring perfectly, to a regenerated humanity dwelling on a renewed earth. He is King of righteousness, and after that also King of peace.

Surely from all these contrasts it is plain that 'a greater than Solomon is here.'

FOUR SOWINGS AND ONE RIPENING

‘The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side. 2. And great multitudes were gathered together unto Him, so that He went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. 8. And He spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; 4. And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: 6. Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: 6. And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. 7. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: 8. But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. 9. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.’—[MATT. xiii. 1-9.](#)

The seven parables of the kingdom, in this chapter, are not to be regarded as grouped together by Matthew. They were spoken consecutively, as is obvious from the notes of time in [verses 36 and 53](#). They are a great whole, setting forth the ‘mystery of the kingdom’ in its method of establishment, its corruption, its outward and inward growth, the conditions of entrance into it, and its final purification. The sacred number seven, impressed upon them, is the token of completeness. They fall into two parts: four of them being spoken to the multitudes from the boat, and presenting the more obvious aspects of the development of the kingdom; three being addressed to the disciples in the house, and setting forth truths about it more fitted for them.

The first parable, which concerns us now, has been generally called the Parable of the Sower, but he is not the prominent figure. The subject is much rather the soils; and the intention is, not so much to declare anything about him, as to explain to the people, who were looking for the kingdom to be set up by outward means, irrespective of men’s dispositions, that the way of establishing it was by teaching which needed receptive spirits. The parable is both history and prophecy. It tells Christ’s own experience, and it foretells His servants’. He is the great Sower, who has ‘come forth’ from the Father. His present errand is not to burn up thorns or to punish the husbandmen, but to scatter on all hearts the living seed, which is here interpreted, in accordance with the dominant idea of this Gospel, as being ‘the word of the kingdom’ ([ver. 19](#)). All who follow Him, and make His truth known, are sowers in their turn, and have to look for the same issue of their work. The figure is common to all languages. Truth, whether intellectual, moral, or spiritual, is seminal, and, deposited in the heart, understanding, or conscience, grows. It has a mysterious vitality, and its issue is not a manufacture, but a fruit. If all teachers, especially religious teachers, would remember that, perhaps there would be fewer failures, and a good deal of their work would be modified. We have here four sowings and one ripening—a sad proportion! We are not told that the quantity of seed was in each case the same. Rather we may suppose that much less fell on

the wayside, and on the rocky soil, and among the thorns, than on the good ground. So we cannot say that seventy-five per cent, of it was wasted; but, in any case, the proportion of failure is tragically large. This Sower was under no illusion as to the result of His work.

It is folly to sow on the hard footpath, or the rocky ground, or among thorns; but Christ and His servants have to do that, in endless hope that these unreceptive hearts may become good soil. One lesson of the parable is, Scatter the seed everywhere, on the most unlikely places.

I. Our Lord begins with the case in which the seed remains quite outside the soil, or, without metaphor, in which the word finds absolutely no entrance into the heart or mind. A beaten path runs by the end, or perhaps through the middle, of the cornfield. It is of exactly the same soil as the rest, but many passengers have trodden it hard, and the very foot of the sower, as he comes and goes in his work, has helped. Some of the seed, sown broadcast, of course falls there, and lies where it falls, having no power to penetrate the hard surface. As in our own English cornfields, a flock of bold, hungry birds watch the sower; and, as soon as his back is turned, they are down with a swift-winged swoop, and away goes the exposed grain. So there is an end of it; and the path is as bare as ever, five minutes after it has been strewed with seeds.

The explanation is too plain to be mistaken, but we may briefly touch its main features. Notice, then, that our Lord begins with the case in which there is least contact between His word and the soul, and that, as the contact is least in degree, so it is shortest in duration. A minute or two finishes it. Notice especially that the path has been made hard by external pressure. It is not rock, but soil like the other parts of the field. It represents the case of men whose insensibility to the word is caused by outward things having made a thoroughfare of their natures, and trodden them into incapacity to receive the message of Christ's love. The heavy baggage-wagons of commerce, the light cars of pleasure, merry dancers, and sad funeral processions, have all used that way, and each footfall has beaten the once loose soil a little firmer. We are made insensitive to the gospel by the effect of innocent and necessary things, unless we take care to plough up the path along which they travel, and to keep our spirits susceptible by a distinct effort. How many hearers of every teacher are there, who never take in his words at all, simply because they are so completely preoccupied!

Notice what becomes of the seed that lies thus bare. 'Immediately,' says Mark, 'Satan cometh.' His agents are these light-winged thoughts that flutter round the hearer as soon as the sermon or the lesson is over. Talk of the weather, criticism of the congregation, or of the sower's attitude as he flung the seed, or politics, or business, drive away the remembrance of even the text, before many of our hearers are out of sight of the church. Then the whirl of traffic begins again, and the path is soon beaten a little harder. If the seed had got ever so little way into the ground, the sharp beaks of the thieves would not have carried it off so easily. Impressions so slight as Christ's word makes on busy men are quickly rubbed out.

But if the seed sown vanishes thus swiftly, the fault is not in it, but in ourselves. Satan may seek to snatch it away, but we can hinder him.

Our Lord uses a singular expression, 'This is he that was sown by the way side,' which appears to identify the man with the seed rather than with the soil. It has been suggested by some commentators that this expression is to be regarded as conveying the truth that the seed sown in the heart and growing up there becomes the life-spring of the individual, and that therefore we may speak of him or of it as bearing the fruit. But this explanation will not avail for the case where there is no entrance of the word into the heart, and so no new birth by the word. More probably we are to regard the expression simply as a conversational shorthand form of speech, not strictly accurate, but quite intelligible.

II. The next variety of soil differs from the preceding in having its hindrance deep seated. Many a hillside in Galilee—as in Scotland or New England—would show a thin surface of soil over rock, like skin stretched tightly on a bone. No roots could get through the rock nor find nourishment in it; while the very shallowness of earth and the heat of the underlying stone would accelerate growth. Such premature and feeble shoots perish as quickly as they spring up; the fierce Eastern sun makes a speedy end of them, and a few days sees their springing and withering. It is a case of 'lightly come, lightly go.' Quick-sprouting herbs are soon-dying herbs. A shallow pond is up in waves under a breeze which raises no sea on the Atlantic, and it is calm again in a few minutes. Readily stirred emotion is transient. Brushwood catches fire easily, and burns itself out quickly. Coal takes longer to kindle, and is harder to put out.

The persons meant are those of excitable temperament, whose feelings lie on the surface, and can be got at without first passing through the understanding or the conscience. Such people are easily played on by the epidemic influence of any prevalent enthusiasm or emotion, as every revival of religion shows. Their very 'joy' in hearing the word is suspicious; for a true reception of it seldom begins with joy, but rather with 'the sorrow which worketh repentance not to be repented of.' Their immediate reception of it is suspicious, for it suggests that there has been no time to consult the understanding or to form a deliberate purpose; stable resolutions are slowly formed. It is the sunny side of religion which, has attracted them. They know nothing of its difficulties and depths. Hence, as soon as they find out the realities of the course which they have embraced so lightly, they desert, like John Mark running away as soon as home comforts at Cyprus were left behind. The Christian life means self-denial, toil, hard resistance to many fascinations. It means sweat and blood, or it means nothing. Whether there be 'persecution' or no, there will be affliction, 'because of the word,' and all the joyful emotion will ooze out at the man's finger-ends. The same superficial excitability which determined his swift reception of the word will determine his hasty casting of it aside, and immediately he stumbles. All his acts will be done in a hurry, and none of his moods will last. Feeling is in its place down in the engine-room, but it makes a poor pilot.

Very significant is that phrase, 'No root in himself.' His roots are in the accidents of the moment. His religion has never really struck root in him, but only in the superficial layer of him. His conscience, will, understanding, are unpenetrated by its fibres. So it is easily pulled up, as well as soon withered.

There is another profound truth in this picture. The hard, impenetrable rock lies right under the thin skin of soil. The nature which is over-emotional on its surface is utterly hard at its core. The most heartless people are those whose feelings are always ready to gush; the most unimpressible are those who are most easily brought to a certain degree of emotion by the sound of the word. This class is an advance on the former, in that there has been a real contact with the word, which has lain longer in their hearts, and has had some growth. We may regard it as either better or worse than the former, according as we consider that it is better to accept and feel than not to accept at all, or that it is worse to have in some measure possessed and felt than not to have received the word of the kingdom.

III. In one part of the field was a patch where the soil was neither rammed solid, as on the footpath, nor thin, as where the rock cropped out, but where there had been a tangle of thorns, which grow luxuriantly in Palestine. These had been cut down, but not stubbed up, as is plain from the very fact that the seed reached the ground, as also from the description of them as 'springing up.' The two growths advance together. In this case, the seed has a longer life than in the former. It roots and grows, and even, according to the other evangelist's version, fruits, though it does not mature its fruit. There is no question of 'falling away' here. Only the hardier growth, which had the advantage of previous possession, and which pushes up its shoots above ground all round the more tender plant, gets the start of it, and smothers its green blades, overtopping it, and keeping it from sun and air, as well as drawing to itself the nourishment from the soil. The main point here is simultaneousness of the two growths. This man is, as James calls him, a 'double-minded man.' He is trying to grow both corn and thorn on the same soil. He has some religion, but not enough to make thorough work of it. He is endeavouring to ride on two horses at once. Religion says 'either—or'; he is trying 'both—and.' The human heart has only a limited amount of love and trust to give, and Christ must have it all. It has enough for one—that is, for Him; but not enough for two,—that is, for Him and the world. This man's religion has not been powerful enough to grub up the roots of the thorns. They were cut down when the seed was sown, for a little while, at the beginning of his course; the new life in him seemed to conquer, but the roots of the old lay hid, and, in due time, showed again above ground. 'Ill weeds grow apace'; and these, as is their nature, grow faster than the good seed. So the only thing to do is to get them out of the ground to the last fibre.

Christ specifies what He deems thorns. We can all understand care being so called; but riches? Yes, they too have sharp prickles, as anybody will find who stuffs a pillow with them. But our Lord chooses His words to point the lesson that not outward things, but our attitude

to them, make the barrenness of this soil. It is not 'this world,' but 'the care of this world,' not 'riches,' but 'the deceitfulness of riches,' that choke the word. These two seem opposites, but they are really the same thing on two opposite sides. The man who is burdened with the cares of poverty, and the man who is deceived by the false promises of wealth, are really the same man. The one is the other turned inside out. We make the world our god, whether we worship it by saying, 'I am desolate without thee,' or by fancying that we are secure with it. Note that the issue in this case is—unfruitfulness. The man may, and I suppose usually does, keep up a profession of Christianity all his life. He very likely does not know that the seed is choked, and that he has become unfruitful. But he is a stunted, useless Christian, with all the sap and nourishment of his soul given to his worldly position, and his religion is a poor pining growth, with blanched leaves and abortive fruit. How much of Christ's field is filled with plants of that sort!

IV. The parable tells us nothing about the comparative acreage of the path and the rocky and thorny soils on the one hand, and of the fertile soil on the other. It is not meant to teach the proportion of success to failure, but to exhibit the fact that the reception of the word depends on men's dispositions. The good soil has none of the faults of the rest of the field. It is loose, and thus unlike the path; deep, and thus unlike the rocky bit; clean, and thus unlike the thorn brake. The interpretation given of it by our Lord seems at first sight incomplete. It is all summed up in one word, 'understandeth.' Then, did not the second and third classes, at all events, understand? They received the word, and it had some growth in them. The distinction between them and the good-soil hearer is surely of a moral nature, rather than of so purely intellectual a kind as 'understanding' suggests. Hence, Luke's keep fast 'in an honest and good heart' may seem a more adequate statement. But Biblical usage does not regard 'understanding' as a purely intellectual process, but rather as the action of the whole moral and spiritual nature. It knows nothing of dividing a man up into water-tight compartments, one of which may be full of evil, and the other clean and receptive of good. According to it, we 'understand' religious truth by our hearts and moral nature in conjunction with the dry light of intellect. So the word here is used in a pregnant sense, and includes the grasp of the truth with the whole being, the complete reception of the word of the kingdom not merely into the intellect, but into the central self which is the undivided fountain from which flow the issues of life, whether these be called intellect, or affection, or conscience, or will. Only he who has thus become one with the word, and housed it deep in his inmost soul, 'understands' it, in the sense in which our Lord here uses that expression. 'Thy word have I hid in mine heart' exactly corresponds to the 'understanding' which is here given as the distinctive mark of the good soil.

The result of that reception into the depths of the spirit is that he 'verily beareth fruit.' The man who receives the word is identified with the plant that springs from the seed which he receives. The life of a Christian is the result of the growth in him of a supernatural seed.

He bears fruit, yet the fruit comes not from him, but from the seed sown. 'I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.' Fruitfulness is the aim of the sower, and the test of the reception of the seed. If there is not fruit, manifestly there has been no real understanding of the word. A touchstone, that, which will produce surprising results in detecting spurious Christianity, if it be honestly applied!

There is variety in the degree of fruitfulness, according to the goodness of the soil; that is to say, according to the thoroughness and depth of the reception of the word. The great Husbandman does not demand uniform fertility. He is glad when He gets an hundredfold, but He accepts sixty, and does not refuse thirty, only He arranges them in descending order, as if He would fain have the highest rate from all the plants, and, not without disappointment, gradually stretches His merciful allowance to take in even the lowest. He will accept the scantiest fruitage, and will lovingly 'purge' the branch 'that it may bring forth more fruit.'

No parable teaches everything. Paths, rocks, and thorns cannot change. But men can plough up the trodden ways, and blast away the rock, and root out the thorns, and, with God's help, can open the door of their hearts, that the Sower and His seed may enter in. We are responsible for the nature of the soil, else His warning were vain, 'Take heed, therefore, how ye hear.'

EARS AND NO EARS

‘Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.—*MATT. xiii. 8.*

This saying was frequently on our Lord’s lips, and that in very various connections. He sometimes, as in the instance before us, appended it to teaching which, from its parabolic form, required attention to disentangle the spiritual truth implied. He sometimes used it to commend some strange, new revolutionary teaching to men’s investigation—as, for instance, after that great declaration of the nullity of ceremonial worship, how that nothing could defile a man except what came from his heart. In other connections, which I need not now enumerate, we find it. Like printing a sentence in italics, or underscoring it, this saying calls special attention to the thing uttered. It is interesting to notice that our Lord, like the rest of us, had to use such means of riveting and sharpening the attention of His hearers. There is also a striking reappearance of the expression in the last book of Scripture. The Christ who speaks to the seven churches, from the heavens, repeats His old word spoken on earth, and at the end of each of the letters says once more, as if even the Voice that spoke from heaven might be listened to listlessly, ‘He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.’

I. We all have ears.

Now, it is a very singular instance of the superficial, indolent way in which people are led away by sound rather than by sense, that this saying of my text has often been taken to mean that there is a certain class that can listen, and that it is their business to listen, and there is another class that cannot, and so they are absorbed from all responsibility. The opposite conclusion is the correct one. Everybody has ears, therefore everybody is bound to hear. Which being translated, is that there is not a man or woman among us that has not the capacity of hearing in the sense of understanding, and of hearing in the sense of obeying the word that Jesus Christ speaks to us all. Every one of us, whatever may be our diversities of education, temperament, natural capacity in regard to other subjects of study and apprehension, has the ears that are capable of receiving the message that comes to us all in Jesus Christ.

For what is it that He addresses? Universal human nature, the universal human wants, and mainly and primarily, as I believe, the sense of sin which lies dormant indeed, but capable of being awakened, in all men, because the fact of sin attaches to all men. There is no man but has the needs to which Christ addresses Himself, and no man but has the power of apprehending, of accepting, and of living by, the great Incarnate Word and His message to the world. So that instead of there being a restriction implied in the words before us, there is the broadest implication of the universality of Christ’s message. And just as every man comes into the world with a pair of ears on his head, so every man comes into the world

with the capacity of listening to, and accepting, that gracious Lord. That is the first thing that our Master distinctly declares here, that we all have ears.

II. If we have ears we are bound to use them.

'Let him hear.' In all regions, as I need not remind you, capacity and responsibility go together; and the power that we possess is the measure of the obligation under which we come. All our natural faculties, for instance, are given to us with the implied command, 'See that you make the best use of them.' So that even these bodily organs of ours, much more the higher faculties and capacities of the spirit of which the body is partly the symbol and partly the instrument, are intrusted to us on terms of stewardship. And just as it is criminal for a man to go through life with a pair of ears on his head, and a pair of eyes in his forehead, neither of which he educates and cultivates, so is it criminal for a man having the capacity of grasping the great Revelation of God, who 'at sundry times and in divers manners hath spoken unto the Fathers by the prophets, but in these last days hath spoken unto us by the Son,' to turn away from that Voice, and pay no heed to it.

It is universally true that obligation goes with capacity. It is especially true with regard to our relation to Jesus Christ. We are all bound to 'hear Him,' as the great Voice said on the Mount of Transfiguration. The upshot of all that manifestation of the divine glory welling up from the depths of Christ's nature, and transfiguring His countenance, the upshot of all that solemn and mysterious communion with the mighty dead, Moses and Elias, the end of all that encompassing glory that wrapped Him, was the Voice from Heaven which proclaimed, 'This is My beloved Son; hear ye Him.' Moses with his Law, Elijah with his Prophecy, faded away and were lost. But there stood forth singly the one Figure, relieved against the background of the glory-cloud, the Christ to whom we are all bound to turn with the vision of longing eyes, with the listening of docile ears, with the aspiration of yearning affection, with the submission of absolute obedience.

'Hear ye Him.' For just as truly as light is meant for the eye, so truly are the words of the Incarnate Word, and the life which is speech and revelation, meant to be the supreme objects of our attention, of our contemplative regard, and of our practical submission. We are bound to hear because we have ears; and of all the voices that are candidates for our attention, and of all the music that sounds through the universe, no voice is so sweet and weighty, no words so fundamental and all-powerful, no music so melodious, so deep and thunderous, so thrilling and gracious, as are the words of that Word who was made flesh and dwelt among us. We are bound to hear, and we hear to most profit when it is Him that we hear.

III. We shall not hear without an effort.

Christ says in my text, 'Let him hear,' as if the possession of the ear did not necessarily involve that there should be hearing. And so it is; 'Having ears, they hear not,' is a description verified in a great many other walks of life than in regard to religious matters. But it is

verified there in the most conspicuous and in the most tragic fashion. I wonder how many of us there are who, though we have heard with the hearing of the outward ear, have not heard in the sense of attending, have scarcely heard in the sense of apprehending, and have not heard at all in the sense of obeying? Friend, what is it that keeps you from hearing, if you do not hear? Let me run over two or three of the things that thus are like wax in a man's ears, making him deaf to the message of life in Jesus Christ, in order to bring out how needful it is that these should be counteracted by an effort of will, and the vigorous concentration of thought and heart upon that message.

What is it that keeps men from hearing? Being busy with other things is one hindrance. There is an old story of St. Bernard riding along by a lake on his way to a Council, and being so occupied with thoughts and discussions, that after the day's travel he lifted up his eyes and said, 'Where is the lake?' And so we, many of us, go along all our days on the banks of the great sea of divine love, and we are so busy thinking about other things, or doing other things, that at the end of the journey we do not know that we have been travelling by the side of the flashing waters all the day long. Everybody knows how possible it is to be so engrossed with one's occupations or thoughts as that when the clock strikes in the next steeple, we hear it and do not hear it. We have read of soldiers being so completely absorbed in the fury of the fight that a thunderstorm has rattled over their heads, and no man heard the roll, and no man saw the flash. Many of us are so swallowed up in our trade, in our profession, in our special branch of study, in our occupations and desires, that all the trumpets of Sinai might be blown into our ears, and we should hear them as though we heard them not; and what is worse, that the pleading voice of that great Lord who is ever saying to each of us, 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,' passes us by, and produces no effect, any more than does the idle wind whistling through an archway. Brethren, you have the need, the sin, the weakness, the transiency, to which the Gospel appeals. You have the faculties to which it addresses itself. Jesus Christ is speaking to every one of us. I beseech you to ask yourselves, 'Do I hear Him?' If not, is it not because the clatter of the world's business, or the more refined sounds of some profession or study, have so taken up your attention that you have none to spare for that which requires and repays it most?

Then there is another thing that makes attention, and concentration, and a dead lift of resolution necessary, if you are rightly to hear, and that is the very fact that, superficially, you have heard all your days. You do not know the despair that sometimes comes over men in my position when we face our congregations of people that are familiar to weariness with everything that we have to say, and because they are superficially so familiar with it, fancy that there is no need for them to give heed any more. What can a poor man like me do to get through that crust of familiarity with the mere surface of Christian truth and teaching which is round many of you? You come and listen to me, and say, 'Oh! he has nothing ori-

ginal to say. We have heard it all before.' Yes, your ears have heard it. Have *you* heard? 'Jesus Christ died for me,' you have been told that ever since you were a little child; and so the thousand-and-first, the million-and-first, repetition of it has little power over you. If once, just once, that truth could get through the crust of familiarity, and touch your heart, your bare heart, with its quick naked point of fire-shod love, I think there might be a wound made that would mean healing. But some of you will go away presently, just as you have gone away a thousand times before, and my words will rebound from you like an india-rubber ball from a wall, or run off you like water from the sea-bird's plumes, just because you think you have heard it all before—and you have never heard it all your days. 'He that hath ears to hear, let him *hear*.'

Then there is another hindrance. A man may put his fingers in his ears. And some of you, I am afraid, are not ignorant of what it is to have made distinct and conscious efforts to get rid of the impressions of religion, and of Christ's voice to us.

And then there are some of us who, out of sheer listlessness, do not hear. It is not because we are too busy. It is not because we have any intellectual objection to the message. It is not because we have made any definite effort to get away from it. It is not even because we have been so accustomed to hear it, that it is impossible to make an impression on our listless indifference. Go down into Morecambe Bay when the tide is making; and, as the water is beginning to percolate through the sand, try to make an impression with a stick upon the tremulous jelly. As soon as you take out the point the impression is lost. And there are many of us like that, who, out of sheer stolid listlessness, retain no fragment of the truth that is sounding in our ears. Dear friends, 'If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, how shall we escape if we'—what? Reject? Deny? Fight against? Angrily repel? No;—'if we *neglect* so great salvation?' That is the question for you negligent people, for you people who think you know all about it and there an end, for you people who are so busy with your daily lives that, amidst the hubbub of earth, heaven's silent voice is inaudible to your ears. Neglect stops the ears and ruins the man. But you will not hear, though you have ears, unless you make an effort of will and concentration of attention.

IV. And now the last thing that I have to say is:—If we do not hear, we shall become deaf.

That is what Christ said in the context. The sentence which I have taken as my text was spoken at the close of the Parable of the Sower; and when His disciples came and asked Him why He spake in parables, His answer was in effect that the people to whom He spoke had not profited by what they had heard, 'hearing, they heard not,' and therefore He spoke in parables which veiled as well as revealed the truth. It was not given to them to know the mysteries of the Kingdom, because they had not given heed to what had been made known to them. The great law was taking effect which gives to him that has and takes from him that has not; and that law applied not only to the form of Christ's teaching, but also to the

faculty of receiving it. That diminished capacity is sometimes represented as men's own act, and sometimes as the divinely inflicted penalty of not hearing, but in either case the same fact is in view—namely, the loss of susceptibility by neglect, the dying out of faculties by disuse.

Just as in the bodily life capacities untrained and unexercised become faint and disappear; just as the Indian *fakir*, who holds his arm up above his head for years, never using the muscles, has the muscles atrophied, and at last cannot bring his arm down to his side;—so the people who neglect to use the ears that God has given them by degrees will lose the capacity of hearing at all. Which, being put into plain English, just comes to this: that if we do not listen to Jesus Christ when He calls to us in His love, we shall gradually have the capacity of hearing diminished until—I do not know if it ever reaches that point here—until its ultimate extinction.

Dear friends, this word of the love and pity and pardon and purifying power of God manifest in Jesus Christ for us all, which I am trying to preach to you now, is not without an effect even on the men by whom it is most superficially and perfunctorily heard. It either softens or hardens. As the old mystics used to say, the same heat that melts wax hardens clay into brick. The same light that brings blessing to one eye brings pain to another. You have heard, and hearing you have not heard; and you will cease to be able to hear at all; and then the thunders may rattle over your heads, and be inaudible to you; and that Voice which is as loud as the sound of many waters, and sweet as harpers harping on their harps, and which says to each of us, 'Come to Me, and I will be thy peace and thy rest and thy strength,' will no more be audible in your atrophied ears. Dear friends! I do not know, as I have said, whether that ultimate tragic result is ever wholly reached in this world. I am sure that it is not reached with some of you as yet. And I beseech you to obey that voice which says, 'This is My beloved Son; hear Him,' and to let there not be only outward hearing, but to let there be inward acceptance, attention, apprehension, and obedience. And then we shall be able to say, 'Blessed are our ears, for they hear; blessed are our eyes, for they see.' 'Many prophets and righteous men desired to hear the things that ye hear, and heard them not, take care that, since you are thus advanced in the outward possession of the perfect word of God, there be also the yielding to, and reception of it.

'TO HIM THAT HATH SHALL BE GIVEN'

'Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.'— [MATT. xiii. 12.](#)

There are several instances in the Gospels of our Lord's repetition of sayings which seem to have been, if we may use the expression, favourites with Him; as, for instance, 'There are first which shall be last, and there are last which shall be first'; or, again, 'The servant is not greater than his master, nor the disciple than his lord.' My text is one of these. It is here said as part of the explanation why He chose to speak in parables, in order that the truth, revealed to the diligent and attentive, might be hidden from the careless. Again, we find it in two other Gospels, in a somewhat similar connection, though with a different application, where Jesus enunciates it as the basis of His warning, 'Take heed how'—or, in another version, 'what'—'ye hear.' Again He employs it in this Gospel in the parable of the talents, as explaining the principle on which the retribution to the slothful servant was meted out. And we find it yet once more in the parable of the pounds in Luke's Gospel, which, though entirely different in conception and purpose from that of the talents, is identical in the portion connected with the slothful servant.

So there are two very distinct directions in which this saying looks, as it was used by our Lord—one in reference to the attitude of men towards the Revelation of God, and one in reference to the solemn subject of future retribution. I wish, now, mainly to try and illustrate the great law which is set forth here, and to follow out the various spheres of its operation, and estimate the force of its influence. For I think that large and very needful lessons for us all may be drawn therefrom. The principle of my text shapes all life. It is a paradox, but it is a deep truth. It sounds harsh and unjust, but it contains the very essence of righteous retribution. The paradox is meant to spur attention, curiosity, and inquiry. The key to it lies here—to use is to have. There is a possession which is no possession. That I have rights of property in a thing, as contradistinguished to your rights, does not make it in any deep and real sense mine. What I use I have; and all else is, as one of the other evangelists has it, but 'seeming' to have.

So much, then, by way of explanation of our text. Now, let me ask you to look with me into two or three of the regions where we shall find illustrations of its working.

I. Take the application of this principle to common life.

The lowest instance is in regard to material possessions. It is a complaint that is made against the present social arrangements and distribution of wealth, that money makes money; that wealth has a tendency to clot; the rich man to get richer, and the poor man to get poorer. Just as in a basin of water when the plug is out, and circular motion is set up, the little bits of foreign matter that may be there all tend to get together, so it is in regard to these external possessions. 'To him that hath shall be given'; and people grumble about that and say, 'It

never rains but it pours, and the man that needs more money least gets it most easily.' Of course. Treasure used grows; treasure hoarded rusts and dwindles. The millionaire will double his fortune by a successful speculation. The man with half a dozen large shops drives the poor little tradesman out of the field. So it is all round: 'To him that hath shall be given; but from him that hath not shall be taken even that he hath.'

Next, go a step higher. Look at how this law works in regard to powers of body. That is a threadbare old illustration. The blacksmith's arm we have all heard about; the sailor's eye, the pianist's wrist, the juggler's fingers, the surgeon's deft hand—all these come by use. 'To him that hath shall be given.' And the same man who has cultivated one set of organs to an almost miraculous fineness or delicacy or strength will, by the operation of the other half of the same principle, have all but atrophied another set. So with the blacksmith's arm, which has grown muscular at the expense of his legs. Part of the physical frame has monopolised what might have been distributed throughout the whole. Use is strength; use makes growth. We have what we employ. And even in regard to our bodily frame the organs that we do not use we carry about with us rather as a weight attached to us than as a possession.

Again, come a little higher. This great principle largely goes to determine our position in the world and our work. The man that can do a thing gets it to do. In the long run the tools come to the hand that can use them. So here is one medical man's consulting-room crammed full of patients, and his neighbour next door has scarcely one. The whole world runs to read A's, B's, or C's books. The briefless barrister complains that there is no middle course between having nothing to do and being overwhelmed with briefs. 'To him that hath shall be given'—the man can do a thing, and he gets it to do—'and from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath,' That law largely settles every man's place in the world.

Let us come still higher. The same law has much—not all, but much—to do in making men's characters. For it operates in its most intense fashion, and with results most blessed or most disastrous, in the inner life. The great example that I would adduce is conscience. Use it, obey it, listen for its voice, never thwart it, and it grows and grows and grows, and becomes more and more sensitive, more and more educated, more and more sovereign in its decisions. Neglect it, still more, go in its teeth, and it dwindles and dwindles and dwindles; and I suppose it is possible—though one would fain hope that it is a very exceptional case—for a man, by long-continued indifference to the voice within that says 'Thou shalt' or 'Thou shalt not,' to come at last to never hearing it at all, or to its never speaking at all. It is 'seared as with a hot iron,' says one of the Apostles; and in seared flesh there is no feeling any more. Are any of you, dear friends, bringing about such a state? Are you doing what you know you ought not to do? Then you will be less and less troubled as the days go on; and, by neglecting the voice, you will come at last to be like the profligate woman in the book of Proverbs, who, after her sin, 'wipes her mouth and says, I have done no harm.' Do you think

that is a desirable state—to put out the eyes of your soul, to stifle what is the truest echo of God's voice that you will ever hear? Do you not think that it would be wiser to get the blessed half of this law on your side, instead of the dreadful one? Listen to that voice. Never, as you value yourselves, neglect it. Cultivate the habit of waiting for its monitions, its counsels prohibitory or commendatory, and then you will have done much to secure that your spirit shall be enriched by the operations of this wide-spread law.

Take another illustration. People who, by circumstances, are placed in some position of dependence and subordination, where they have seldom to exercise the initiative of choice, but just to do what they are bid, by degrees all but lose the power of making up their minds about anything. And so a slave set free is proverbially a helpless creature, like a bit of drift-wood; and children who have been too long kept in a position of pupilage and subordination, when they are sent into the world are apt to turn out very feeble men, for want of a good, strong backbone of will in them. So, many a woman that has been accustomed to leave everything in her husband's hands, when the clouds fall on his coffin finds herself utterly helpless and bewildered, just because in the long, happy years she never found it necessary to exercise her own judgment or her own will about practical matters.

So do not get into the habit of letting circumstances settle what you are to do, or you will lose the power of dominating them, before very long. And if a man for years leaves himself, as it were, to be guided by the stream of circumstances, like long green weeds in a river, he will lose the power of determining his own fate, and the Will will die clean out of him. Cultivate it, and it will grow.

Again, this same principle largely settles our knowledge, our convictions, the operations and the furniture of our understandings. If a man holds any truth slackly, or in the case of truths that are meant to influence life and conduct, does not let it influence these, then that is a kind of having truth that is sure to end in losing it. If you want to lose your convictions grasp them loosely—do not act upon them, do not take them for guides of your life—and they will soon relieve you of their unwelcome presence. If you wish mind and knowledge to grow, grip with a grip of iron what you do know, and let it dominate you, as it ought. He that truly *has* his learning will learn more and pile by slow degrees stone upon stone, until the building is complete.

So, dear friends, here, in these illustrations, which might have been indefinitely enlarged, we see the working of a principle which has much to do in making men what they are. What you use you increase, what you leave unused you lose. There are grey heads in my present audience who, when they were young men, had dreams and aspirations that they bitterly smile at now. There are men here who began life with possibilities that have never blossomed or fruited, but have died on the stem. Why? Because they were so much occupied with the vulpine craft of making their position and their 'pile' that generous emotions and noble sympathies and lofty aspirations, intellectual or otherwise, were all neglected, and so they

are dead; and the men are the poorer incalculably, because of what has thus been shed away from them. You make your characters by the parts of yourselves that you choose to cultivate and employ. Do you think that God gave us whatever of an intellectual and emotional and moral kind is in us, in order that it might be all used up in our daily business? A very much scantier outfit would have done for all that is wanted for that. But there are abortive and dormant organs in your spiritual nature, as there are in the corporeal, which tell you what you were meant for, and which it is your sin to leave undeveloped. Brethren, the law of my text shapes us in the two ways, that whatever we cultivate, be it noble or be it bestial, will grow, and whatever we repress or neglect will die. Choose which of the two halves of yourselves you will foster, and on which you will frown.

So much, then, for the first general application of these words. Now let me turn for a moment to another.

II. I would note, secondly, the application of this two-fold law in regard to God's revelation of Himself.

That is the bearing of it in the immediate context from which our text is taken. Our Lord explains that teaching by parable—a transparent veil over a truth—was adopted in order that the veiled truth might be a test as well as a revelation. And although I do not believe that the Christian revelation has been made in any degree less plain and obvious than it could have been made, I cannot but recognise the fact that the necessities of the case demand that, when God speaks to us, He should speak in such a fashion as that it is possible to say, 'Tush! It is not God that is speaking; it is only Eli!' and so to turn about the young Samuel's mistake the other way. I do not believe that God has diminished the evidence of His Revelation in order to try us; but I do maintain that the Revelation which He has made does come to us, and must come to us, in such a form as that, not by mathematical demonstration but by moral affinity, we shall be led to recognise and to bow to it. He that will be ignorant, let him be ignorant, and he that will come asking for truth, it will flood his eyeballs with a blessed illumination. The veil will but make more attractive to some eyes the outlines of the fair form beneath it, whilst others are offended at it and say, 'Unless we see the truth undraped, we will not believe that it is truth at all.'

So, brethren, let me remind you—what is really but a repetition in reference to another subject of what I have already said,—that in regard to God's speech to men, and especially in regard to what I, for my part, believe to be the complete and ultimate and perfect speech of God to men, in Jesus Christ our Saviour, the principle of my text holds good.

'To him that hath shall be given.' If you will make that truth your own by loyal faith and honest obedience, if you will grapple it to your heart, then you will learn more and more. Whatever tiny corner of the great whole you have grasped, hold on by that and draw it into yourselves, and you will by degrees get the entire, glorious, golden web to wrap round you.

'If any man wills to do His will he shall know.' That is Christ's promise; and it will be fulfilled to us all. 'To him that hath shall be given.'

If, on the other hand, you 'have' Christian truth and Christ, who is the Truth, in the fashion in which so many of us have it and Him, as a form, as a mere intellectual possession, so that we can, when we go to church, repeat the creed without feeling that we are telling a lie, but that when we go to market we do not carry the Commandments with us—if that is our Christianity, then it will dribble away into nothing. We shall not be much the poorer for the loss of such a sham possession, but it will go. It drops out of the hands that are not clasped to hold it. It is just that a thing so neglected shall some day be a thing withdrawn. So in regard to Revelation and a man's perception and reception of it, my text holds good in both its halves.

III. Lastly, look at the application of these words in the future.

That is our Lord's own application of them, twice out of the five times in which the saying appears in the three Gospels: in the parable of the talents and in the parallel portion of the parable of the pounds. I do not venture into the regions of speculation about that future, but from the words before us there come clearly enough two aspects of it. The man with the ten talents received more; the man that had hid the talent or the pound in the ground was deprived of that which he had not used.

Now, with regard to the former there is no difficulty in translating the representations of the parables, sustained as they are by distinct statements of other portions of Scripture. They come to this, that, for the life beyond, indefinite progress in all that is noble and blessed and Godlike in heart and character, in intellect and power, are certain; that faith, hope, love, here cultivated but putting forth few blossoms and small fruitage, there, in that higher house where these be planted, will flourish in the courts of the Lord, and will bear fruit abundantly; that here the few things faithfully administered will be succeeded yonder by the many things royally ruled over; that here one small coin, as it were, is put into our palm—namely the present blessedness and peace and strength and purity of a Christian life; and that yonder we possess the inheritance of which what we have here is but the earnest. It used to be the custom when a servant was hired for the next term-day to give him one of the smallest coins of the realm as what was called 'arles'—wages in advance, to seal the bargain. Similarly, in buying an estate a bit of turf was passed over to the purchaser. We get the earnest here of the broad acres of the inheritance above. 'To him that hath shall be given.'

And the other side of the same principle works in some terrible ways that we cannot speak about. 'From him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.' I have spoken of the terrible analogy to this solemn prospect which is presented us by the imperfect experiences of earth. And when we see in others, or discover in ourselves, how it is possible for unused faculties to die entirely out, I think we shall feel that there is a solemn background of very awful truth, in the representation of what befell the unfaithful servant. Hopes un-

nourished are gone; opportunities unimproved are gone, capacities undeveloped are gone; fold after fold, as it were, is peeled off the soul, until there is nothing left but the naked self, pauperised and empty-handed for evermore. 'Take it from him'; he never was the better for it; he never used it; he shall have it no longer.

Brethren, cultivate the highest part of yourselves, and see to it that, by faith and obedience, you truly have the Saviour, whom you have by the hearing of the ear and by outward profession. And then death will come to you, as a nurse might to a child that came in from the fields with its hands full of worthless weeds and grasses, to empty them in order to fill them with the flowers that never fade. You can choose whether Death—and Life too, for that matter—shall be the porter that will open to you the door of the treasure-house of God, or the robber that will strip you of misused opportunities and unused talents.

SEEING AND BLIND

‘They seeing, see not.’—[MATT. xiii. 13.](#)

This is true about all the senses of the word ‘seeing’; there is not one man in ten thousand who sees the things before his eyes. Is not this the distinction, for instance, of the poet or painter, and man of science—just that they do see? How true is this about the eye of the mind, what a small number really understand what they know! But these illustrations are of less moment than the saddest example—religious indifference. I wish to speak about this now, and to ask you to consider— I. The extent to which it prevails. II. The causes from which it springs. III. The fearful contrasts it suggests. IV. The end to which it conducts.

I. The extent to which it prevails.

I have no hesitation in saying that it is the condition of by far the largest proportion of our nation. It is the true enemy of souls. I do not believe that any large proportion of Englishmen are actual disbelievers, who reject Christianity as unworthy of credence, or attach themselves to any of the innumerable varieties of deistical and pantheistical schools. I am not saying at present whether it would be a more or less hopeful state if it were so, but only that it is not so, and that a complacent taking for granted of religious truth, a torpor of soul, an entire carelessness about God and Christ, and the whole mighty scheme of the Gospel, is the characteristic of many in all classes of English society. We have it here in our churches and chapels as the first foe we have to fight with. Disbelief slays its thousands, and dissipation its tens of thousands, but this sleek, well-to-do carelessness, its millions. As some one says, it is as if an opium sky had rained down soporifics.

II. The causes from which it springs.

Of course, the great cause of this condition is man’s evil heart of alienation, the spirit of slumber—but we may find proximate and special causes.

There is the indifference springing from the absorbing interests of the present. A man has only a certain quantity of interest to put forth. If he expends it all on small things, he has none for great. This overmastering, overshadowing present draws us all to itself, and we have no power of attention or interest to spare for anything else, or for reflection upon Christian truth in connection with our own conduct.

Then there is the indifference caused by fear of what the results of attention might be. It is sometimes broken in upon, and men are in danger of having their eyes opened, then with an effort they fling themselves into some distraction, and sleep again. As the text says, ‘Their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes.’

Then there is the indifference fed by an indolent acquiescence in the truth. That is a favourite way of breaking the force of all unwelcome moral truth, and especially of the Gospel. A man says, ‘Oh yes, it is true,’ and because it is, therefore he thinks he has done

enough when he has acknowledged it. Many do not seem to dream that the Word has any personal application to them at all.

Then there is the indifference which comes from long familiarity with the truth. It is this which haunts our congregations and makes it so impossible to get at many who know all our message already. You can tell them nothing they do not know. As with men who live by a forge, the sound of the blow of the hammer only lulls them to sleep. The Gospel is so familiar to them that there is no longer any power about it. The vulgar emotion of wonder is not excited, and the other of love and admiration has not taken its place.

Men who live in mountain scenery do not know its beauties, and as with all other operations of the listless eye so with this, the old is deemed to be uninteresting, and the common is the commonplace. As even in the piece of earth that you have trodden on longest, you would find marvels that you do not dream of if you would look, so here. You have heard too much and reflected too little. Oh, brethren, it oppresses a man who has to speak to you when he reflects how often you have heard it all, how the flow of the river only seems to have worn your souls smooth enough to let it glide past without one stoppage.

III. The contrasts it suggests.

Contrast the indolence here with the earnestness in life. The same men who sit with faces stolid and expressionless over a sermon—meet them on Monday morning! They go to sleep at prayer or over a Bible, but see them in a bargain or over a ledger. Think of what powers of intense love, yea, of almost fearful devotion and energy, lie in us, ay and come out of us, and then think how poor, how cold we are here, and we may well be ashamed. It is as if a burning mountain with its cataract of fire were suddenly quenched and locked in everlasting frost, and all the flaming glory running down its heaving sides turned into a slow glacier. There comes ice instead of fire, frost instead of flame, snow instead of sparks. It is as if some magician waved a wand and stiffened men into a paralysis. Religion seems to numb men instead of inspiring them. It is an awful thought of how they serve themselves and the world, how they can love one another, how they can be stirred to noble enthusiasm, and how little of all this ever comes to God.

Contrast the indifference of the men and the awfulness of the things they are indifferent about. God—Christ—their souls—heaven—hell. The grandest things men can think about, the mightiest realities in the universe, the eternal, the most powerful, these it is which some of you, seeing, see not.

Contrast men's indifference and the earnestness of the rest of the creation. God rose early and sent His prophets. He so loved the world that He gave His Son. Christ died, lives, works, rules, expects, beseeches. Angels desire to look into the wonders that you 'seeing, see not'. What makes heaven fill with rapture, and flash through all her golden glories with light, what makes hell look on with the lurid scowl of baffled malignity, that is what *you* are

careless about. My friend, you and other men like you are the only beings in the universe careless about the salvation of your souls.

IV. The end to which it conducts.

That end is certain ruin. Ah, dear friends, you do not need to do much to ruin your own souls. You have only to continue indifferent and you will do it effectually. Negligence is quite enough. Ruin is what it will certainly end in.

And remember that when the possibility of salvation ends, your indifference will end too. The poor toad that is fascinated by the serpent, and drops powerless into the cruel jaws, wakes from the stupor when it feels the pang. And the lifelong torpor will be dissolved for you when you pass into another world. What an awful awaking that will be when men look back and see by the light of eternity what they were doing here! Oh! friends, would to God that any poor word of mine could rouse you from this drugged and opiate sleep! Believe me, it is merciful violence which would rouse you. Anything rather than that the poison should work on till the heavy slumber darkens into death. Let me implore you, as you value your own souls, as you would not fling away your most precious jewel to 'awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.' Beware of the treacherous indifference which creeps on, till, like men in the Arctic regions, the sleepers die.

MINGLED IN GROWTH, SEPARATED IN MATURITY

‘Another parable put He forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: 25. But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. 26. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. 27. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? 28. He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? 29. But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. 30. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.’ —[MATT. xiii. 24-30.](#)

The first four parables contained in this chapter were spoken to a miscellaneous crowd on the beach, the last three to the disciples in the house. The difference of audience is accompanied with a diversity of subject. The former group deals with the growth of the kingdom, as it might be observed by outsiders, and especially with aspects of the growth on which the multitude needed instruction; the latter, with topics more suited to the inner circle of followers. Of these four, the first three are parables of vegetation; the last, of assimilation. The first two are still more closely connected, inasmuch as the person of the sower is prominent in both, while he is not seen in the others. The general scenery is the same in both, but with a difference. The identification of the seed sown with the persons receiving it, which was hinted at in the first, is predominant in the second. But while the former described the various results of the seed, the latter drops out of sight the three failures, and follows its fortunes in honest and good hearts, showing the growth of the kingdom in the midst of antagonistic surroundings. It may conveniently be considered in three sections: the first teaching how the work of the sower is counter-worked by his enemy; the second, the patience of the sower with the thick-springing tares; and the third, the separation at the harvest.

I. The work of the sower counter-worked by his enemy, and the mingled crops.

The peculiar turn of the first sentence, ‘The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man that sowed,’ etc., suggests that the main purpose of the parable is to teach the conduct of the king in view of the growth of the tares. The kingdom is concentrated in Him, and the ‘likening’ is not effected by the parable, but, as the tenses of both verbs show, by the already accomplished fact of His sowing. Our Lord veils His claims by speaking of the sower in the third person; but the hearing ear cannot fail to catch the implication throughout that He Himself is the sower and the Lord of the harvest. The field is ‘his field,’ and His own interpretation tells us that it means ‘the world.’ Whatever view we take of the bearing of this parable on purity of communion in the visible Church, we should not slur over Christ’s

own explanation of 'the field,' lest we miss the lesson that He claims the whole world as His, and contemplates the sowing of the seed broadcast over it all. The Kingdom of Heaven is to be developed on, and to spread through, the whole earth. The world belongs to Christ not only when it is filled with the kingdom, but before the sowing. The explanation of the good seed takes the same point of view as in the former parable. What is sown is 'the word'; what springs from the seed is the new life of the receiver. Men become children of the kingdom by taking the Gospel into their hearts, and thereby receive a new principle of growth, which in truth becomes themselves.

Side by side with the sower's beneficent work the counter-working of 'his enemy' goes on. As the one, by depositing holy truth in the heart, makes men 'children of the kingdom,' the other, by putting evil principles therein, makes men 'children of evil.' Honest exposition cannot eliminate the teaching of a personal antagonist of Christ, nor of his continuous agency in the corruption of mankind. It is a glimpse into a mysterious region, none the less reliable because so momentary. The sulphurous clouds that hide the fire in the crater are blown aside for an instant, and we see. Who would doubt the truth and worth of the unveiling because it was short and partial? 'The devil is God's ape.' His work is a parody of Christ's. Where the good seed is sown, there the evil is scattered thickest. False Christs and false apostles dog the true like their shadows. Every truth has its counterfeit. Neither institutions, nor principles, nor movements, nor individuals, bear unmingled crops of good. Not merely creatural imperfection, but hostile adulteration, marks them all. The purest metal oxidises, scum gathers on the most limpid water, every ship's bottom gets foul with weeds. The history of every reformation is the same: radiant hopes darkened, progress retarded, a second generation of dwarfs who are careless or unfaithful guardians of their heritage.

There are, then, two classes of men represented in the parable, and these two are distinguishable without doubt by their conduct. Tares are said to be quite like wheat until the heads show, and then there is a plain difference. So our Lord here teaches that the children of the kingdom and those of evil are to be discriminated by their actions. We need not do more than point in a sentence to His distinct separation of men (where the seed of the kingdom has been sown) into two sets. Jesus Christ holds the unfashionable, 'narrow' opinion that, at bottom, a man must either be His friend or His enemy. We are too much inclined to weaken the strong line of demarcation, and to think that most men are neither black nor white, but grey.

The question has been eagerly debated whether the tares are bad men in the Church, and whether, consequently, the mingled crop is a description of the Church only. The following considerations may help to an answer. The parable was spoken, not to the disciples, but to the crowd. An instruction to them as to Church discipline would have been signally out of place; but they needed to be taught that the kingdom was to be 'a rose amidst thorns,' and to grow up among antagonisms which it would slowly conquer, by the methods which

the next two parables set forth. This general conception, and not directions about ecclesiastical order, was suited to them. Again, the designation of the tares as 'the children of evil' seems much too wide, if only a particular class of evil men—namely, those who are within the Church—are meant by it. Surely the expression includes all, both in and outside the Church, who 'do iniquity.' Further, the representation of the children of the kingdom, as growing among tares in the field of the world, does not seem to contemplate them as constituting a distinct society, whether pure or impure; but rather as an indefinite number of individuals, intermingled in a common soil with the other class. 'The kingdom of heaven' is not a synonym for the Church. Is it not an anachronism to find the Church in the parable at all? No doubt, tares are in the Church, and the parable has a bearing on it; but its primary lesson seems to me to be much wider, and to reveal rather the conditions of the growth of the kingdom in human society.

II. We have the patience of the husbandman with the quick-springing tares.

The servants of the householder receive no interpretation from our Lord. Their question is silently passed by in His explanation. Clearly then, for some reason, He did not think it necessary to say any more about them; and the most probable reason is, that they and their words have no corresponding facts, and are only introduced to lead up to the Master's explanation of the mystery of the growth of the tares, and to His patience with it. The servants cannot be supposed to represent officials in the Church, without hopelessly destroying the consistency of the parable; for surely all the children of the kingdom, whatever their office, are represented in the crop. Many guesses have been made,—apostles, angels, and so on. It is better to say 'The Lord hath not showed it me.'

The servant's first question expresses, in vivid form, the sad, strange fact that, where good was sown, evil springs. The deepest of all mysteries is the origin of evil. Explain sin, and you explain everything. The question of the servants is the despair of thinkers in all ages. Heaven sows only good; where do the misery and the wickedness come from? That is a wider and sadder question than, How are churches not free from bad members? Perhaps Christ's answer may go as far towards the bottom of the bottomless as those of non-Christian thinkers, and, if it do not solve the metaphysical puzzles, at any rate gives the historical fact, which is all the explanation of which the question is susceptible.

The second question reminds us of 'Wilt Thou that we command fire. . . from heaven, and consume them?' It is cast in such a form as to put emphasis on the householder's will. His answer forbidding the gathering up of the tares is based, not upon any chance of mistaking wheat for them, nor upon any hope that, by forbearance, tares may change into wheat, but simply on what is best for the good crop. There was a danger of destroying some of it, not because of its likeness to the other, but because the roots of both were so interlaced that one could not be pulled up without dragging the other after it.

Is this prohibition, then, meant to forbid the attempt to keep the Church pure from un-Christian members? The considerations already adduced are valid in answering this question, and others may be added. The crowd of listeners had, no doubt, many of them, been influenced by John the Baptist's fiery prophecies of the King who should come, fan in hand, to 'purge His floor,' and were looking for a kingdom which was to be inaugurated by sharp separation and swift destruction. Was not the teaching needed then, as it is now, that that is not the way in which the kingdom of heaven is to be founded and grow? Is not the parable best understood when set in connection with the expectations of its first hearers, which are ever floating anew before the eyes of each generation of Christians? Is it not Christ's *apologia* for His delay in filling the *r?* which John had drawn out for him? And does that conception of its meaning make it meaningless for us? Observe, too, that the rooting up which is forbidden is, by the proprieties of the emblem, and by the parallel which it must necessarily afford to the final burning, something very solemn and destructive. We may well ask whether excommunication is a sufficiently weighty idea to be taken as its equivalent. Again, how does the interpretation which sees ecclesiastical discipline here comport with the reason given for letting the tares grow on? By the hypothesis in the parable, there is no danger of mistake; but is there any danger of casting out good men from the Church along with the bad, except through mistake? Further, if this parable forbids casting manifestly evil men out of the Church, it contradicts the divinely appointed law of the Church as administered by the apostles. If it is to be applied to Church action at all, it absolutely forbids the separation from the Church of any man, however notoriously un-Christian, and that, as even the strongest advocates of comprehension admit, would destroy the very idea of the Church. Surely an interpretation which lands us in such a conclusion cannot be right. We conclude, then, that the intermingling which the parable means is that of good men and bad in human society, where all are so interwoven that separation is impossible without destroying its whole texture; that the rooting up, which is declared to be inconsistent with the growth of the crop, means removal from the field, namely, the world; that the main point of the second part of the parable is to set forth the patience of the Lord of the harvest, and to emphasise this as the law of the growth of His kingdom, that it advances amidst antagonism; and that its members are interlaced by a thousand rootlets with those who are not subjects of their King. What the interlacing is for, and whether tares may become wheat, are no parts of its teaching. But the lesson of the householder's forbearance is meant to be learned by us. While we believe that the scope of the parable is wider than instruction in Church discipline, we do not forget that a fair inference from it is that, in actual churches, there will ever be a mingling of good and evil; and, though that fact is no reason for giving up the attempt to make a church a congregation of faithful men, and of such only, it is a reason for copying the divine patience of the sower in ecclesiastical dealings with errors of opinion and faults of conduct.

III. The final separation at the harvest.

The period of development is necessarily a time of intermingling, in which, side by side, the antagonistic principles embodied in their representatives work themselves out, and beneficially affect each other. But each grows towards an end, and, when it has been reached, the blending gives place to separation. John's prophecy is plainly quoted in the parable, which verbally repeats his 'gather the wheat into his barn,' and alludes to his words in the other clause about burning the tares. He was right in his anticipations; his error was in expecting the King to wield His fan at the beginning, instead of at the end of the earthly form of His kingdom. At the consummation of the allotted era, the bands of human society are to be dissolved, and a new principle of association is to determine men's place. Their moral and religious affinities will bind them together or separate them, and all other ties will snap. This marshalling according to religious character is the main thought of the solemn closing words of the parable and of its interpretation, in which our Lord presents Himself as directing the whole process of judgment by means of the 'angels' who execute His commands. They are 'His angels,' and whatever may be the unknown activity put forth by them in the parting of men, it is all done in obedience to Him. What stupendous claims Jesus makes here! What becomes of the tares is told first in words awful in their plainness, and still more awful in their obscurity. They speak unmistakably of the absolute separation of evil men from all society but that of evil men; of a close association, compelled, and perhaps unwelcome. The tares are gathered out of 'His kingdom,'—for the field of the world has then all become the kingdom of Christ. There are two classes among the tares: men whose evil has been a snare to others (for the 'things that offend' must, in accordance with the context, be taken to be persons), and the less guilty, who are simply called 'them that do iniquity.'

Perhaps the 'bundles' may imply assortment according to sin, as in Dante's circles. What a bond of fellowship that would be! 'The furnace,' as it is emphatically called by eminence, burns up the bundles. We may freely admit that the fire is part of the parable, but yet let us not forget that it occurs not only in the parable, but in the interpretation; and let us learn that the prose reality of 'everlasting destruction,' which Christ here solemnly announces, is awful and complete. For a moment He passes beyond the limits of that parable, to add that terrible clause about 'weeping and gnashing of teeth,' the tokens of despair and rage. So spoke the most loving and truthful lips. Do we believe His warnings as well as His promises?

The same law of association according to character operates in the other region. The children of the kingdom are gathered together in what is now 'the kingdom of My Father,' the perfect form of the kingdom of Christ, which is still His kingdom, for 'the throne of God and of the Lamb,' the one throne on which both sit to reign, is 'in it.' Freed from association with evil, they are touched with a new splendour, caught from Him, and blaze out like the sun; for so close is their association, that their myriad glories melt as into a single great light. Now, amid gloom and cloud, they gleam like tiny tapers far apart; then, gathered into one,

they flame in the forehead of the morning sky, 'a glorious church, not having spot, nor wrinkle, nor any such thing.'

LEAVEN

‘The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and bid to three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.’—[MATT. xiii. 33](#).

How lovingly and meditatively Jesus looked upon homely life, knowing nothing of the differences, the vulgar differences, between the small and great! A poor woman, with her morsel of barm, kneading it up among three measures of meal, in some coarse earthenware pan, stands to Him as representing the whole process of His work in the world. Matthew brings together in this chapter a series of seven parables of the kingdom, possibly spoken at different times, and gathered here into a sequence and series, just as he has done with the great procession of miracles that follows the Sermon on the Mount, and just as, perhaps, he has done with that sermon itself. The two first of the seven deal with the progress of the Gospel in individual minds and the hindrances thereto. Then there follows a pair, of which my text is the second, which deal with the geographical expansion of the kingdom throughout the world, in the parable of the grain of mustard-seed growing into the great herb, and with the inward, penetrating, diffusive influence of the kingdom, working as an assimilating and transforming force in the midst of society.

I do not purpose to enter now upon the wide and difficult question of the relation of the kingdom to the Church. Suffice it to say that the two terms are by no means synonymous, but that, at the same time, inasmuch as a kingdom implies a community of subjects, the churches, in the proportion in which they have assimilated the leaven, and are holding fast by the powers which Christ has lodged within them, are approximate embodiments of the kingdom. The parable, then, suggests to us, in a very striking and impressive form, the function and the obligations of Christian people in the world.

Let me deal, in a purely expository fashion, with the emblem before us.

‘The kingdom of heaven is like leaven.’ Now of course, leaven is generally in Scripture taken as a symbol of evil or corruption. For example, the preliminary to the Passover Feast was the purging of the houses of the Israelites of every scrap of evil ferment, and the bread which was eaten on that Feast was prescribed to be unleavened. But fermentation works ennobling as well as corruption, and our Lord lays hold upon the other possible use of the metaphor. The parable teaches that the effect of the Gospel, as ministered by, and residing in, the society of men, in whom the will of God is supreme, is to change the heavy lump of dough into light, nutritious bread. There are three or four points suggested by the parable which I could touch upon; and the first of them is that significant disproportion between the apparent magnitude of the dead mass that is to be leavened, and the tiny piece of active energy which is to diffuse itself throughout it.

We get there a glimpse into our Lord’s attitude, measuring Himself against the world and the forces that were in it. He knows that in Him, the sole Representative, at the moment,

of the kingdom of heaven upon earth—because in Him, and in Him alone, the divine will was, absolutely and always, supreme—there lie, for the time confined to Him, but never dormant, powers which are adequate to the transformation of humanity from a dead, lumpish mass into an aggregate all-penetrated by a quickening influence, and, if I might so say, fermented with a new life that He will bring. A tremendous conception, and the strange thing about it is that it looks as if the Nazarene peasant's dream was going to come true! But He was speaking to the men whom He was charging with a delegated task, and to them He says, 'There are but twelve of you, and you are poor, ignorant men, and you have no resources at your back, but you have Me, and that is enough, and you may be sure that the tiny morsel of yeast will penetrate the whole mass.' Small beginnings characterise the causes which are destined to great endings; the things that are ushered into the world large, generally grow very little further, and speedily collapse. 'An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning, but the end shall not be blessed.' The force which is destined to be worldwide, began with the one Man in Nazareth, and although the measures of meal are three, and the ferment is a scrap, it is sure to permeate and transform the mass.

Therefore, brethren, let us take the encouragement that our Lord here offers. If we are adherents of unpopular causes, if we have to 'stand alone with two or three,' do not let us count heads, but measure forces. 'What everybody says must be true,' is a cowardly proverb. It may be a correct statement that an absolutely universal opinion is a true opinion, but what most people say is usually false, and what the few say is most generally true. So if we have to front—and if we are true men we shall sometimes have to front—an embattled mass of antagonism, and we be in a miserable minority, never mind! We can say, 'They that be with us are more than they that be with them.' If we have anything of the leaven in us, we are mightier than the lump of dough.

But there is another point here, and that is the contact that is necessary between the leaven and the dough. We have passed from the old monastic idea of Religion being seclusion from life. But that mistake dies hard, and there are many very Evangelical and very Protestant—and in their own notions superlatively good—people, who hold a modern analogue of the old monastic idea; and who think that Christian men and women should be very tepidly interested in anything except what they call the preaching of the Gospel, and the saving of men's souls. Now nobody that knows me, and the trend of my preaching, will charge me with undervaluing either of these things, but these do not exhaust the function of the Church in the world, nor the duty of the Church to society. We have to learn from the metaphor in the parable. The dough is not kept on one shelf and the leaven on another; the bit of leaven is plunged into the heart of the mass, and then the woman kneads the whole up in her pan, and so the influence is spread. We Christians are not doing our duty, nor are we using our capacities, unless we fling ourselves frankly and energetically into all the currents of the national life, commercial, political, municipal, intellectual, and make our influence

felt in them all. The 'salt of the earth' is to be rubbed into the meat in order to keep it from putrefaction; the leaven is to be kneaded up into the dough in order to raise it. Christian people are to remember that they are here, not for the purpose of isolating themselves, but in order that they may touch life at all points, and at all points bring into contact with earthly life the better life and the principles of Christian morality.

But in this contact with all phases of life and forms of activity, Christian men are to be sure that they take the leaven with them. There are professing Christians that say: 'Oh! I am not strait-laced and pharisaical. I do not keep myself apart from any movements of humanity. I count nothing that belongs to men alien to a Christian.' All right! but when you go into these movements, when you go into Parliament, when you become a city Councillor, when you mingle with other men in commerce, when you meet other students in the walks of intellect, do you take your Christianity there, or do you leave it behind? The two things are equally necessary, that Christians should be in all these various spheres of activity, and that they should be there, distinctly, manifestly, and, when need be, avowedly, as Christian men.

Further, there is another thought here, on which I just say one word, and that is the effect of the leaven on the dough.

It is to assimilate, to set up a ferment. And that is what Christianity did when it came into the world, and

'Cast the kingdoms old
Into another mould.'

And that is what it ought to do to-day, and will do, if Christian men are true to themselves and to their Lord. Do you not think that there would be a ferment if Christian principles were applied, say, for instance, to national politics? Do you not think there would be a ferment if Christian principles were brought to bear upon all the transactions on the Exchange? Is there any region of life into which the introduction of the plain precepts of Christianity as the supreme law would not revolutionise it? We talk about England as a Christian country. Is it? A Christian country is a country of Christians, and Christians are not people that only say 'I have faith in Jesus Christ.' but people that do His will. That is the leaven that is to change, and yet not to change, the whole mass; to change it by lightening it, by putting a new spirit into it, leaving the substance apparently unaffected except in so far as the substance has been corrupted by the evil spirit that rules. Brethren, if we as Christians were doing our duty, it would be true of us as it was of the early preachers of the Cross, that we are men who turn the world upside down.

But there is one more point on which I touch. I have already anticipated some of what I would say upon it, but I must dwell upon it for a little longer; and that is, the manner in which the leaven is to work.

Here is a morsel of barm in the middle of a lump of dough. It works by contact, touches the particles nearest it, and transforms them into vehicles for the further transmission of influence. Each particle touched by the ferment becomes itself a ferment, and so the process goes on, outwards and ever outwards, till it permeates the whole mass. That is to say, the individual is to become the transmitter of the influence to him who is next him. The individuality of the influence, and the track in which it is to work, viz. upon those in immediate contiguity to the transformed particle which is turned from dough into leaven, are taught us here in this wonderful simile.

Now that carries a very serious and solemn lesson for us all. If you have received, you are able, and you are bound, to transmit this quickening, assimilating, transforming, lightening influence, and you need never complain of a want of objects upon which to exercise it, for the man or woman that is next you is the person that you ought to affect.

Now I have already said, in an earlier portion of these remarks, that some good people, taking an erroneous view of the function and obligations of the Church in the world, would fain keep its work to purely evangelistic effort upon individual souls in presenting to them the Gospel of Jesus Christ the Saviour. But whilst I vehemently protest against the notion that that is the whole function of the Christian Church, I would as vehemently protest against the notion that the so-called social work of the Church can ever be efficiently done except upon the foundation laid of this evangelistic work. First and foremost amongst the ways in which this great obligation of leavening humanity is to be discharged, must ever stand, as I believe, the appeal to the individual conscience and heart, and the presentation to single souls of the great Name in which are stored all the regenerative and quickening impulses that can ever alleviate and bless humanity. So that, first and foremost, I put the preaching of the Gospel, the Gospel of our salvation, by the death and in the life of the Incarnate Son of God.

But then, besides that, let me remind you there are other ways, subsidiary but indispensable ways, in which the Church has to discharge its function; and I put foremost amongst these, what I have already touched upon, and therefore need not dilate on now, the duty of Christians as Christians to take their full share in all the various forms of national life. I need not dwell upon the evils rampant amongst us, which have to be dealt with, and, as I believe, may best if not only, be dealt with, upon Christian principles. Think of drink, lust, gambling, to name but three of them, the hydra-headed serpent that is poisoning the English nation. Now it seems to me to be a deplorable, but a certainly true thing, that not only are these evils not attacked by the Churches as they ought to be, but that to a very large extent the task of attacking them has fallen into the hands of people who have little sympathy with the Church and its doctrines. They are fighting the evils on principles drawn from Jesus Christ, but they are not fighting the evils to the extent that they ought to do, with the Churches alongside. I beseech you, in your various spheres, to see to it that, as far as you

can make it so, Christian people take the place that Christ meant them to take in the conflict with the miseries, the sorrows, the sins that honeycomb England to-day, and not to let it be said that the Churches shut themselves up and preach to people, but do not lift a finger to deal with the social evils of the nation.

TREASURE AND PEARL

The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. 45. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman, seeking goodly pearls: 46. Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.'—[MATT. xiii. 44-46](#).

In this couple of parables, which are twins, and must be taken together, our Lord utilises two very familiar facts of old-world life, both of them arising from a similar cause. In the days when there were no banks and no limited liability companies, it was difficult for a man to know what to do with his little savings. In old times government meant oppression, and it was dangerous to seem to have any riches. In old days war stalked over the land, and men's property must be portable or else concealed. So, on the one hand we find the practice of hiding away little hoards in some suitable place, beneath a rock, in the cleft of a tree, or a hole dug in the ground, and then, perhaps, the man died before he came back for his wealth. Or, again, another man might prefer to carry his wealth about with him. So he went and got jewels, easily carried, not easily noticed, easily convertible into what he might require.

And, says our Lord, these two practices, with which all the people to whom He was speaking were very much more familiar than we are, teach us something about the kingdom of God. Now, I am not going to be tempted to discuss what our Lord means by that phrase, so frequent upon His lips, 'the kingdom of God' or 'of heaven.' Suffice it to say that it means, in the most general terms, a state or order of things in which God is King, and His will supreme and sovereign. Christ came, as He tells us, to found and to extend that kingdom upon earth. A man can go into it, and it can come into a man, and the conditions on which he enters into it, and it into him, are laid down in this pair of parables. So I ask you to notice their similarities and their divergences. They begin alike and they run on alike for a little way, and then they diverge. There is a fork in the road, and they reunite at the end again. They agree in their representation of the treasure; they diverge in their explanation of the process of discovering it, and they unite at last in the final issue. So, then, we have to look at these three points.

I. Let me ask you to think that the true treasure for a man lies in the kingdom of God.

It is not exactly said that the treasure is the kingdom, but the treasure is found in the kingdom, and nowhere else. Let us put away the metaphor; it means that the only thing that will make us rich is loving submission to the supreme law of the God whom we love because we know that He loves us. You may put that thought into half a dozen different forms. You may say that the treasure is the blessing that comes from Christianity, or the inward wealth of a submissive heart, or may use various modes of expression, but below them all lies this one great thought, that it is laid on my heart, dear brethren, to try and lay on yours now,

that, when all is said and done, the only possession that makes us rich is—is what? God Himself. For that is the deepest meaning of the treasure. And whatever other forms of expression we may use to designate it, they all come back at last to this, that the wealth of the human soul is to have God for its very own.

Let me run over two or three points that show us that. That treasure is the only one that meets our deepest poverty. We do not all know what that is, but whether you know it or not, dear friend, the thing that you want most is to have your sins dealt with, in the double way of having them forgiven as guilt, and in having them taken away from you as tyrants and dominators over your wills. And it is only God who can do that, ‘God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them,’ and giving them, by a new life which He breathes into dead souls, emancipation from the tyrants that rule over them, and thus bringing them ‘into the liberty of the glory of the sons of God.’ ‘Thou sayest that Thou art rich and increased with goods . . . and knowest not that thou art poor . . . and naked.’ Brother, until you have found out that it is only God who will save you from being bankrupt, and enable you to pay your debts, which are your duties, you do not know where your true riches are. And if you have all that men can acquire of the lower things of life, whether of what is generally called wealth or of other material benefits, and have that great indebtedness standing against you, you are but an insolvent after all. Here is the treasure that will make you rich, because it will pay your debts, and endow you with capacity enough to meet all future expenditure—viz. the possession of the forgiving and cleansing grace of God which is in Jesus Christ. If you have that, you are rich; if you do not possess it, you are poor. Now you believe that, as much as I do, most of you. Well, what do you do in consequence?

Further, the possession of God, who belongs to all those that are the subjects of the kingdom of God, is our true treasure, because that wealth, and that alone, meets at once all the diverse wants of the human soul. There is nothing else of which that can be said. There are a great many other precious things in this world—human loves, earthly ambitions of noble and legitimate kinds. No one but a fool will deny the convenience and the good of having a competency of this world’s possessions. But all these have this miserable defect, or rather limitation, that they each satisfy some little corner of a man’s nature, and leave all the rest, if I may so say, like the beasts in a menagerie whose turn has not yet come to be fed, yelping and growling while the keeper is at the den of another one. There is only one thing that, being applied, as it were, at the very centre, will diffuse itself, like some fragrant perfume, through the whole sphere, and fill the else scentless air with its rich and refreshing fragrance. There is but one wealth which meets the whole of human nature. You, however small you are, however insignificant people may think you, however humbly you may think of yourselves, you are so great that the whole created Universe, if it were yours, would be all too little for you. You cannot fill a bottomless bog with any number of cartloads of earth.

And you know as well as I can tell you that ‘he that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he that loveth abundance with increase,’ and that none of the good things here below, rich and precious as many of them are, are large enough to fill, much less to expand, the limitless desires of one human heart. As the ancient Latin father said, ‘Lord, Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our heart is unquiet till it attains to Thee.’

Closely connected with that thought, but capable of being dealt with for a moment apart, is the other, that this is our true treasure, because we have it all in one.

You remember the beautiful emphasis of one of the parables in our text about the man that dissipated himself in seeking for many goodly pearls? He had secured a whole casket full of little ones. They were pearls, they were many; but then he saw one Orient pearl, and he said, ‘The one is more than the many. Let me have unity, for there is rest; whereas in multiplicity there is restlessness and change.’ The sky to-night may be filled with galaxies of stars. Better one sun than a million twinkling tininesses that fill the heavens, and yet do not scatter the darkness. Oh, brethren, to have one aim, one love, one treasure, one Christ, one God—there is the secret of blessedness. ‘Unite my heart to fear Thy name’; and then all the miseries of multiplicity, and of drawing our supplies from a multitude of separate lakes, will be at an end, when our souls are flooded from the one fountain of life that can never fail or be turbid. Thus, the unity of the treasure is the supreme excellence of the treasure.

Nor need I remind you in more than a word of how this is our true treasure, because it is our permanent one. Nothing that can be taken from me is truly mine. Those of you who have lived in a great commercial community as long as I have done, know that it is not for nothing that sovereigns are made circular, for they roll very rapidly, and ‘riches take to themselves wings and fly away.’ We can all go back to instances of men who set their hearts upon wealth, and flaunted their little hour before us as kings of the Exchange, and were objects of adoration and of envy, and at last were left stranded in poverty. Nothing that can be stripped from you by the accidents of life, or by inevitable death, is worth calling your ‘good.’ You must have something that is intertwined with the very fibres of your being. And I, unworthy as I am, come to you, dear friends, now, with this proffer of the great gift of wealth from which ‘neither life, nor death, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us.’ And I beseech you to ask yourselves, Is there anything worth calling wealth, except that wealth which meets my deepest need, which satisfies my whole nature, which I may have all in one, and which, if I have, I may have for ever? That wealth is the God who may be ‘the strength of your hearts and your heritage for ever.’

II. Now notice, secondly, the concealment of the treasure.

According to the first of our parables, the treasure was hid in a field. That is very largely local colouring, which gives veracity and vraisemblance to the fact of the story. And there has been a great deal of very unnecessary and misplaced ingenuity spent in trying to force

interpretations upon every feature of the parable, which I do not intend to imitate, but I just wish to suggest one thing. Here was this man in the story, who had plodded across that field a thousand times, and knew every clod of it, and had never seen the wealth that was lying six inches below the surface. Now, that is very like some of my present hearers. God's treasure comes to the world in a form which to a great many people veils, if it does not altogether hide, its preciousness. You have heard sermons till you are sick of sermons, and I do not wonder at it, if you have heard them and never thought of acting on them. You know all that I can tell you, most of you, about Jesus Christ, and what He has done for you, and what you should do towards Him, and your familiarity with the Word has blinded you to its spirit and its power. You have gone over the field so often that you have made a path across it, and it seems incredible to you that there should be anything worth your picking up there. Ah! dear friends, Jesus Christ, when He was here, 'in whom were hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,' had to the men that looked upon Him 'neither form nor comeliness that they should desire Him,' and He was to them a stumbling-block and foolishness. And Christ's Gospel comes among busy men, worldly men, men who are under the dominion of their passions and desires, men who are pursuing science and knowledge, and it looks to them very homely, very insignificant; they do not know what treasure is lying in it. You do not know what treasure is lying—may I venture to say it?—in these poor words of mine, in so far as they truly represent the mind and will of God. Dear brethren, the treasure is hid, but that is not because God did not wish you to see it; it is because you have made yourselves blind to its flashing brightness. 'If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them . . . in whom the god of this world hath blinded their eyes.' If your whole desires are passionately set on that which Manchester recognises as the summum bonum, or, if you are living without a thought beyond this present, how can you expect to see the treasure, though it is lying there before your eyes? You have buried it, or, rather, you have made that which is its necessary envelope to be its obscuration. I pray you, look through the forms, look beneath the words of Scripture, and try and clear your eyesight from the hallucinations of the dazzling present, and you will see the treasure that is hid in the field.

III. Again, let me ask you to notice, further, the two ways of finding.

The rustic in the first story, who, as I said, had plodded across the field a hundred times, was doing it for the hundred and first, or perhaps was at work there with his mattock or his homely plough. And, perchance, some stroke of the spade, or push of the coulter, went a little deeper than usual, and there flashed the gold, or some shower of rain came on, and washed away a little of the superincumbent soil, and laid bare the bag. Now, that is what often happens, for you have to remember that though you are not seeking God, God is always seeking you, and so the great saying comes to be true, 'I am found of them that sought Me not.' There have been many cases like the one of the man who, breathing out threatenings and slaughter, with no thought in his mind except to bind the disciples and bring them

captive to Jerusalem, saw suddenly a light from heaven flashing down upon him, and a Voice that pulled him up in the midst of his career. Ah! it would be an awful thing if no one found Christ except those who set out to seek for Him. Like the dew on the grass 'that waiteth not for men, nor tarrieth for the sons of men,' He often comes to hearts that are thinking about nothing less than about Him.

There are men and women listening to me now who did not come here with any expectation of being confronted with this message to their souls; they may have been drawn by curiosity or by a hundred other motives. If there is one such, to whom I am speaking, who has had no desires after the treasure, who has never thought that God was his only Good, who has been swallowed up in worldly things and the common affairs of life, and who now feels as if a sudden flash had laid bare the hidden wealth in the familiar Gospel, I beseech such a one not to turn away from the discovered treasure, but to make it his own. Dear friend, you may not be looking for the wealth, but Christ is looking for His lost coin. And, though it has rolled away into some dusty corner, and is lying there all unaware, I venture to say that He is seeking you by my poor words to-night, and is saying to you: 'I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire.'

But then another class is described in the other parable of the merchantman who was seeking many goodly pearls. I suppose he may stand as a representative of a class of whom I have no doubt there are some other representatives hearing me now, namely, persons who, without yielding themselves to the claims of Christ, have been searching, honestly and earnestly, for 'whatsoever things are lovely and of good report.' Dear brethren, if you have been smitten by the desire to live noble lives, if you have been roused

'To follow knowledge, like a sinking star,
Beyond the furthest bounds of human thought,'

or if in any way you are going through the world with your eyes looking for something else than the world's gross good, and are seeking for the many pearls, I beseech you to lay this truth to heart, that you will never find what you seek, until you understand that the many have not it to give you, and that the One has. And when Christ draws near to you and says, 'Whatsoever things are lovely and of good report, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are venerable, if thou seekest them, take Me, and thou wilt find them all,' I beseech you, accept Him. There are two ways of finding the treasure. It is flashed on unexpectant eyes, and it is disclosed to seeking souls.

III. And now, lastly, let us look at the point where the parables converge.

There are two ways of finding; there is only one way of getting. The one man went and sold all that he had and bought the field. Never mind about the morality of the transaction: that has nothing to do with our Lord's purpose. Perhaps it was not quite honest of this man

to bury the treasure again, and then to go and buy the field for less than it was worth, but the point is that, however a soul is brought to see that God in Christ is all that he needs, there is only one way of getting Him, and that is, 'sell all that thou hast.'

'Then it is barter, is it? Then it is salvation by works after all?' No! To 'sell all that thou hast' is first, to abandon all hope of acquiring the treasure by anything that thou hast. We buy it when we acknowledge that we have nothing of our own to buy it with. Buy it 'without money and without price'; buy it by yielding your hearts; buy it by ceasing to cling to earth and creatures, as if they were your good. That trust in Jesus Christ, which is the condition of salvation is selling 'all that thou hast.' Self is 'all that thou hast.' Abandon self and clutch Him, and the treasure is thine. But the initial act of faith has to be carried on through a life of self-denial and self-sacrifice, and the subjection of self-will, which is the hardest of all, and the submission of one's self altogether to the kingdom of God and to its King. If we do thus we shall have the treasure, and if we do not thus we shall not.

Surely it is reasonable to fling away paste pearls for real ones. Surely it is reasonable to fling away brass counters for gold coins. Surely, in all regions of life, we willingly sacrifice the second best in order to get the very best. Surely if the wealth which is in God is more precious than all besides, you have the best of the bargain, if you part with the world and yourselves and get Him. And if, on the other hand, you stick to the second best and cleave to yourselves and to this poor diurnal sphere and what it contains, then I will tell you what your epitaph will be. It is written in one of the Psalms, 'He shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his latter end shall be a fool.'

And there is a more foolish fool still—the man who, when he has seen the treasure, flings another shovelful of earth upon it, and goes away and does not buy it, nor think anything more about it. Dear brother, do not do that, but if, by God's help, any poor words of mine have stirred anything in your hearts of recognition of what your true wealth is, do not rest until you have done what is needful to possess it, given away yourselves, and in exchange received Christ, and in Him wealth for evermore.

THE MARTYRDOM OF JOHN

‘At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus, 2. And said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead; and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him. 3. For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison for Herodias’ sake, his brother Philip’s wife. 4. For John said unto him, It is not lawful for thee to have her. 5. And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet. 6. But when Herod’s birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod. 7. Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask. 8. And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist’s head in a charger. 9. And the king was sorry: nevertheless for the oath’s sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her. 10. And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison. 11. And his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel: and she brought it to her mother. 12. And his disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus.’—[MATT. xiv. 1-12.](#)

The singular indifference of the Bible to the fate of even its greatest men is exemplified in the fact that the martyrdom of John is only told incidentally, in explanation of Herod’s alarm. But for that he would apparently have dropped out of the narrative, as a man sinks in the sea, without a bubble or a ripple. Christ is the sole theme of the Gospels, and all others are visible only as His light falls on them.

It took a long time for news of Christ to reach the ears of Herod. Peasants hear of Him before princes, whose thick palace walls and crowds of courtiers shut out truth. The first thing to note is the alarm of the conscience-stricken king. We learn from the other evangelists that there was a difference of opinion among the attendants of Herod—not very good judges of a religious teacher—as to who this new miracle-working Rabbi might be, but the tetrarch has no hesitation. There is no proof that Herod was a Sadducee; but he probably thought as little about a resurrection as if he had been, and, in any case, did not expect dead men to be starting up again, one by one, and mingling with the living. His conscience made a coward of him, and his fear made that terrible which would else have been thought impossible. In his terror he makes confidants of his slaves, overleaping the barriers of position, in his need of some ears to pour his fears into. He was right in believing that he had not finished with John, and in expecting to meet him again with mightier power to accuse and condemn. ‘If ‘twere done when ‘tis done,’ says Macbeth; but it is not done. There is a resurrection of deeds as well as of bodies, and all our buried badnesses will front us again, shaking their gory locks at us, and saying that we did them.

Instead of following closely the narrative, we may best gather up its lessons by considering the actors in the tragedy.

I. We see in Herod the depths of evil possible to a weak character. The singular double which he, Herodias and John present to Ahab, Jezebel and Elijah, has been often noticed. In both cases a weak king is drawn in opposite directions by the stronger-willed temptress at his side, and by the stern ascetic from the desert. How John had found his way into 'kings' houses' we do not know; but, as he carried thither his undaunted boldness of plain-spoken preaching of morality and repentance, it was inevitable that he should soon find his way from the palace to the dungeon. There must have been some intercourse between Herod and him before his imprisonment, or he could not have shaken the king's conscience with his blunt denunciations. From the account in Mark, it would appear that, after his imprisonment, he gained great influence over the tetrarch, and led him some steps on the way of goodness. But Herod was 'infirm of purpose,' and a beautiful fiend was at his side, and she had an iron will sharpened to an edge by hatred, and knew her own mind, which was murder. Between them, the weaker nature was much perplexed, and like a badly steered boat, yawed in its course, now yielding to the impulse from John, now to that from Herodias. Matthew attributes his hesitation as to killing John to his fear of the popular voice, which, no doubt, also operated. Thus he 'let I dare not wait upon I would,' and had not strength of mind enough to hold to the one and despise the other of his discordant counsellors. He was evidently a sensual, luxurious, feeble-willed, easily frightened, superstitious and cunning despot; and, as is always the case with such, he was driven farther in evil than he meant or wished. He was entrapped into an oath, and then, instead of saying, 'Promises which should not have been made should not be kept,' he weakly consents, from fantastic fear of what his guests will say of him, and unwillingly, out of pure imbecility, stains his soul for ever with blood. In this wicked world, weak men will always be wicked men; for it is less trouble to consent than to resist, and there are more sirens to whisper 'Come' than prophets to thunder, 'It is not lawful.' Strength of will is needful for all noble life.

We may learn from Herod, also, how far we may go on the road of obedience to God's will, and yet leave it at last. What became of all his eager listening, of his partial obedience, of his care to keep John safe from Herodias's malice? All vanished like early dew. What became of his conscience-stricken alarms on hearing of Christ? Did they lead to any deep convictions? They faded away, and left him harder than before. Convictions not followed out ossify the heart. If he had sent for Christ, and told Him his fears, all might have been well. But he let them pass, and, so far as we know, they never returned. He did meet Jesus at last, when Pilate sent him the Prisoner, as a piece of politeness, and in what mood?—childish pleasure at the chance of seeing a miracle. How did Jesus answer his torrent of frivolous questions? 'He answered him nothing.' That sad silence speaks Christ's knowledge that now even His words would be vain to create one ripple of interest on the Dead Sea of Herod's soul. By frivolity, lust, and neglect he had killed the germ of a better life, and silence was the kindest answer which perfect love could give him.

He shows us, too, the intimate connection of all sins. The common root of every sin is selfishness, and the shapes which it takes are protean and interchangeable. Lust dwells hard by hate. Sensual crimes and cruelty are closely akin. The one vice which Herod would not surrender, dragged after it a whole tangle of other sins. No sin dwells alone. There is 'none barren among them.' They are gregarious, and a solitary sin is more seldom seen than a single swallow. Herod is an illustration, too, of a conscience fantastically sensitive while it is dead to real crimes. He has no twinges for his sin with Herodias, and no effective ones at killing John, but he thinks it would be wrong to break his oath. The two things often go together; and many a brigand in Calabria, who would cut a throat without hesitation, would not miss mass, or rob without a little image of the Virgin in his hat. We often make compensation for easy indulgence in great sins by fussy scrupulosity about little faults, and, like Herod, had rather commit murder than not be polite to visitors.

II. The next actors in the tragedy are Herodias and her daughter. What a miserable destiny to be gibbeted for ever by half a dozen sentences! One deed, after which she no doubt 'wiped her mouth, and said, I have done no harm,' has won for the mother an immortality of ignominy. Her portrait is drawn in few strokes, but they are enough. In strength of will and unscrupulous carelessness of human life, she is the sister of Jezebel, and curiously like Shakespeare's awful creation, Lady Macbeth; but she adds a stain of sensuous passion to their vices, which heightens the horror. Her first marriage was with her full uncle; and her second, if marriage it can be called when her husband and Herod's wife were both living, was with her step-uncle, and thus triply unlawful. John's remonstrance awoke no sense of shame in her, but only malignant and murderous hate. Once resolved, no failures made her swerve from her purpose. Hers was no passing fury, but cold-blooded, deliberate determination. Her iron will and unalterable persistence were accompanied by flexibility of resource. When one weapon failed, she drew another from a full quiver. And the means which were finally successful show not only her thorough knowledge of the weak man she had to deal with, but her readiness to stoop to any degradation for herself and her child to carry her point. 'A thousand claims to' abhorrence 'meet in her, as mother, wife, and queen.' Many a shameless woman would have shrunk from sullyng a daughter's childhood, by sending her to play the part of a shameless dancing-girl before a crew of half-tipsy revellers, and from teaching her young lips to ask for murder. But Herodias sticks at nothing, and is as insensible to the duty of a mother as to that of a wife. If we put together these features in her character, her hot animal passions, her cool inflexible revenge, her cynical disregard of all decency, her deadness to natural affection for her child, her ferocity and her cunning, we have a hideous picture of corrupted womanhood. We cannot but wonder whether, in after days, remorse ever did its merciful work upon Herodias. She urged Herod to his ruin at last by her ambition, which sought for him the title of king, and, with one redeeming touch of faithfulness, went with him into dreary exile in Gaul. Perhaps there, among strangers,

and surrounded by the wreck of her projects, and when the hot fire of passion had died down, she may have remembered and repented her crime.

The criminality of the daughter largely depends upon her age, of which we have no knowledge. Perhaps she was too mere a child to understand the degradation of the dance, or the infamy of the request which her, we hope, innocent and panting lips were tutored to prefer. But, more probably, she was old enough to be her mother's fellow-conspirator, rather than her tool, and had learned only too well her lessons of impurity and cruelty. What chance had a young life in such a sty of filth? When the mother becomes the devil's deputy, what can the daughter grow up to be, but a worse edition of her? This poor girl, so sinning, and so sinned against, followed in Herodias's footsteps, and afterwards married, according to the custom of the Herods, her uncle, Philip the tetrarch. She inherited and was taught evil; that was her misfortune. She made it her own; that was her crime. As she stands there, shameless and flushed, in that hideous banqueting-hall, with her grim gift dripping red blood on the golden platter, and wicked triumph gleaming in her dark eyes, she suggests grave questions as to parents' responsibility for children's sins, and is a living symbol of the degradation of art to the service of vice, and of the power of an evil soul to make hideous all the grace of budding womanhood.

III. There is something dramatically appropriate in the silent death in the dungeon of the lonely forerunner. The faint noise of revelry may have reached his ears, as he brooded there, and wondered if the coming King would never come for his enlargement. Suddenly a gleam of light from the opened door enters his cell, and falls on the blade of the headsman's sword. Little time can be wasted, for Herodias waits. With short preface the blow falls. The King has come, and set His forerunner free, sending him to prepare His way before Him in the dim regions beyond. A world where Herod sits in the festal chamber, and John lies headless in the dungeon, needs some one to set it right. When the need is sorest, the help is nearest. Truth succeeds by the apparent failure of its apostle. Herodias may stab the dead tongue, as the legend tells that she did, but it speaks louder after death than ever. Herod kept his birthday with drunken and bloody mirth; but it was a better birthday for his victim.

IV. It needed some courage for John's disciples to come to that gloomy, blood-stained fortress, and bear away the headless trunk which scornful cruelty had flung out to rot unburied. When reverent love and sorrow had finished their task, what was the little flock without a shepherd to do? The possibility of their continued existence as a company of disciples was at an end. They show by their action that their master had profited from his last message to Jesus. At once they turn to Him, and, no doubt, the bulk of them were absorbed in the body of His followers. Sorrowful and bereaved souls betake themselves naturally to His sweet sympathy for soothing, and to His gentle wisdom for direction. The wisest thing that any of us can do is to 'go and tell Jesus' our loneliness, and let it bind us more closely to Him.

THE GRAVE OF THE DEAD JOHN AND THE GRAVE OF THE LIVING JESUS

‘And John’s disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus.’—[MATT. xiv. 12.](#)

‘And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy.’—[MATT. xxviii. 8.](#)

There is a remarkable parallel and still more remarkable contrast between these two groups of disciples at the graves of their respective masters. John the Baptist’s followers venture into the very jaws of the lion to rescue the headless corpse of their martyred teacher from a prison grave. They bear it away and lay it reverently in its unknown sepulchre, and when they have done these last offices of love they feel that all is over. They have no longer a centre, and they disintegrate. There was nothing to hold them together any more. The shepherd had been smitten, and the flock were scattered. As a ‘school’ or a distinct community they cease to be, and are mostly absorbed into the ranks of Christ’s followers. That sorrowful little company that turned from John’s grave, perhaps amidst the grim rocks of Moab, perhaps in his native city amongst the hills of Judah, parted then, to meet no more, and to bear away only a common sorrow that time would comfort, and a common memory that time would dim.

The other group laid their martyred Master in His grave with as tender hands and as little hope as did John’s disciples. The bond that held them together was gone too, and the disintegrating process began at once. We see them breaking up into little knots, and soon they, too, will be scattered. The women come to the grave to perform the woman’s office of anointing, and they are left to go alone. Other slight hints are given which show how much the ties of companionship had been relaxed, even in a day, and how certainly and quickly they would have fallen asunder. But all at once a new element comes in, all is changed. The earliest visitors to the sepulchre leave it, not with the lingering sorrow of those who have no more that they can do, but with the quick, buoyant step of people charged with great and glad tidings. They come to it wrapped in grief—they leave it with great joy. They come to it, feeling that all was over, and that their union with the rest who had loved Him was little more than a remembrance. They go away, feeling that they are all bound together more closely than ever.

The grave of John was the end of a ‘school.’ The grave of Jesus was the beginning of a Church. Why? The only answer is the message which the women brought back from the empty sepulchre on that Easter day: ‘The Lord is risen.’ The whole history of the Christian Church, and even its very existence, is unintelligible, except on the supposition of the resurrection. But for that, the fate of John’s disciples would have been the fate of Christ’s—they would have melted away into the mass of the nation, and at most there would have been

one more petty Galilean sect that would have lived on for a generation and died out when the last of His companions died. So from these two contrasted groups we may fairly gather some thoughts as to the Resurrection of Christ, as attested by the very existence of a Christian Church, and as to the joy of that resurrection.

I. Now the first point to be considered is, that the conduct of Christ's disciples after His death was exactly the opposite of what might have been expected.

They held together. The natural thing for them to do would have been to disband; for their one bond was gone; and if they had acted according to the ordinary laws of human conduct, they would have said to themselves, Let us go back to our fishing-boats and our tax-gathering, and seek safety in separation, and nurse our sorrow apart. A few lingering days might have been given to weep together at His grave, and to assuage the first bitterness of grief and disappointment; but when these were over, nothing could have prevented Christianity and the Church from being buried in the same sepulchre as Jesus. As certainly as the stopping up of the fountain would empty the river's bed, so surely would Christ's death have scattered His disciples. And that strange fact, that it did not scatter them, needs to be looked well into and fairly accounted for in some plausible manner. The end of John's school gives a parallel which brings the singularity of the fact into stronger relief; and looking at these two groups as they stand before us in these two texts, the question is irresistibly suggested, Why did not the one fall away into its separate elements, as the other did? The keystone of the arch was in both cases withdrawn—why did the one structure topple into ruin while the other stood firm?

Not only did the disciples of Christ keep united, but their conceptions of Jesus underwent a remarkable change, after His death. We might have expected, indeed, that, when memory began to work, and the disturbing influence of daily association was withdrawn, the same idealising process would have begun on their image of Him, which reveals and ennobles the characters of our dear ones who have gone away from us. Most men have to die before their true worth is discerned. But no process of that sort will suffice to account for the change and heightening of the disciples' thoughts about their dead Lord. It was not merely that, when they remembered, they said, Did not our hearts burn within us by the way while He talked with us?—but that His death wrought exactly the opposite effect from what it might have been expected to do. It ought to have ended their hope that He was the Messiah, and we know that within forty-eight hours it was beginning to do so, as we learn from the plaintive words of disappointed and fading hope: 'We trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel.' If, so early, the cold conviction was stealing over their hearts that their dearest expectation was proved by His death to have been a dream, what could have prevented its entire dominion over them, as the days grew into months and years? But somehow or other that process was arrested, and the opposite one set in. The death that should have shattered Messianic dreams confirmed them. The death that should have cast

a deeper shadow of incomprehensibility over His strange and lofty claims poured a new light upon them, which made them all plain and clear. The very parts of His teaching which His death would have made those who loved Him wish to forget, became the centre of His followers' faith. His cross became His throne. Whilst He lived with them they knew not what He said in His deepest words, but, by a strange paradox, His death convinced them that He was the Son of God, and that that which they had seen with their eyes, and their hands had handled, was the Eternal Life. The cross alone could never have done that. Something else there must have been, if the men were sane, to account for this paradox.

Nor is this all. Another equally unlikely sequel of the death of Jesus is the unmistakable moral transformation effected on the disciples. Timorous and tremulous before, something or other touched them into altogether new boldness and self-possession. Dependent on His presence before, and helpless when He was away from them for an hour, they become all at once strong and calm; they stand before the fury of a Jewish mob and the threatenings of the Sanhedrim, unmoved and victorious. And these brave confessors and saintly heroes are the men who, a few weeks before, had been petulant, self-willed, jealous, cowardly. What had lifted them suddenly so far above themselves? Their Master's death? That would more naturally have taken any heart or courage out of them, and left them indeed as sheep in the midst of wolves. Why, then, do they thus strangely blaze up into grandeur and heroism? Can any reasonable account be given of these paradoxes? Surely it is not too much to ask of people who profess to explain Christianity on naturalistic principles, that they shall make the process clear to us by which, Christ being dead and buried, His disciples were kept together, learned to think more loftily of Him, and sprang at once to a new grandeur of character. Why did not they do as John's disciples did, and disappear? Why was not the stream lost in the sand, when the head-waters were cut off?

II. Notice then, next, that the disciples' immediate belief in the Resurrection furnishes a reasonable, and the only reasonable, explanation of the facts.

There is no better historical evidence of a fact than the existence of an institution built upon it, and coeval with it. The Christian Church is such evidence for the fact of the Resurrection; or, to put the conclusion in the most moderate fashion, for the belief in the Resurrection. For, as we have shown, the natural effect of our Lord's death would have been to shatter the whole fabric: and if that effect were not produced, the only reasonable account of the force that hindered it is, that His followers believed that He rose again. Since that was their faith, one can understand how they were banded more closely together than ever. One can understand how their eyes were opened to know Him who was 'declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead.' One can understand how, in the enthusiasm of these new thoughts of their Lord, and in the strength of His victory over death, they put aside their old fears and littlenesses and clothed themselves in armour of light. 'The Lord is risen indeed' was the belief which made the continuous existence of the Church

possible. Any other explanation of that great outstanding fact is lame and hopelessly insufficient.

We know that that belief was the belief of the early Church. Even if one waived all reference to the Gospels, we have the means of demonstrating that in Paul's undisputed epistles. Nobody has questioned that he wrote the First Epistle to the Corinthians. The date most generally assumed to that letter brings it within about five-and-twenty years of the crucifixion. In that letter, in addition to a multitude of incidental references to the Lord as risen, we have the great passage in the fifteenth chapter, where the apostle not only declares that the Resurrection was one of the two facts which made his 'gospel,' but solemnly enumerates the witnesses of the risen Lord, and alleges that this gospel of the Resurrection was common to him and to all the Church. He tells us of Christ's appearance to himself at his conversion, which must have taken place within six or seven years of the crucifixion, and assures us that at that early period he found the whole Church believing and preaching Christ's resurrection. Their belief rested on their alleged intercourse with Him a few days after His death, and it is inconceivable that within so short a period such a belief should have sprung up and been universally received, if it had not begun when and as they said that it did.

But we are not left even to inferences of this kind to show that, from the beginning, the Church witnessed to the Resurrection of Jesus. Its own existence is the great witness to its faith. And it is important to observe that, even if we had not the documentary evidence of the Pauline epistles as the earliest records, of the Gospels, and of the Acts of the Apostles, we should still have sufficient proof that the belief in the Resurrection is as old as the Church. For the continuance of the Church cannot be explained without it. If that faith had not dawned on their slow, sad hearts on that Easter morning, a few weeks would have seen them scattered; and if once they had been scattered, as they inevitably would have been, no power could have reunited them, any more than a diamond once shattered can be pieced together again. There would have been no motive and no actors to frame a story of resurrection, when once the little company had melted away. The existence of the Church depended on their belief that the Lord was risen. In the nature of the case that belief must have followed immediately on His death. It, and it only, reasonably accounts for the facts. And so, over and above Apostles, and Gospels, and Epistles, the Church is the great witness, by its very being, to its own immediate and continuous belief in the Resurrection of our Lord.

III. Again, we may remark that such a belief could not have originated or maintained itself unless it had been true.

Our previous remarks have gone no farther than to establish the belief in the Resurrection of Christ, as the basis of primitive Christianity. It is vehemently alleged, and we may freely admit that the step is a long one from subjective belief to objective reality. But still it is surely perfectly fair to argue that a given belief is of such a nature that it cannot be supposed to rest on anything less solid than a fact; and this is eminently the case in regard to the belief

in Christ's Resurrection. There have been many attempts on the part of those who reject that belief to account for its existence, and each of them in succession has 'had its day, and ceased to be.' Unbelief devours its own children remorselessly, and the succession to the throne of antichristian scepticism is won, as in some barbarous tribes, by slaying the reigning sovereign. The armies of the aliens turn their weapons against one another, and each new assailant of the historical veracity of the Gospels commences operations by showing that all previous assailants have been wrong, and that none of their explanations will hold water.

For instance, we hear nothing now of the coarse old explanation that the story of the Resurrection was a lie, and became current through the conscious imposture of the leaders of the Church. And it was high time that such a solution should be laid aside. Who, with half an eye for character, could study the deeds and the writings of the apostles, and not feel that, whatever else they were, they were profoundly honest, and as convinced as of their own existence, that they had seen Christ 'alive after His passion, by many infallible proofs'? If Paul and Peter and John were conspirators in a trick, then their lives and their words were the most astounding anomaly. Who, either, that had the faintest perception of the forces that sway opinion and frame systems, could believe that the fair fabric of Christian morality was built on the sand of a lie, and cemented by the slime of deceit bubbling up from the very pit of hell? Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? That insolent hypothesis has had its day.

Then when it was discredited, we were told that the mythical tendency would explain everything. It showed us how good men could tell lies without knowing it, and how the religious value of an alleged fact in an alleged historical revelation did not in the least depend on its being a fact. And that great discovery, which first converted solid historical Christianity into a gaseous condition, and then caught the fumes in some kind of retort, and professed to hand us them back again improved by the sublimation, has pretty well gone the way of all hypotheses. Myths are not made in three days, or in three years, and no more time can be allowed for the formation of the myth of the Resurrection. What was the Church to feed on while the myth was growing? It would have been starved to death long before.

Then, the last new explanation which is gravely put forward, and is the prevailing one now, sustains itself by reference to undeniable facts in the history of religious movements, and of such abnormal attitudes of the mind as modern spiritualism. On the strength of which analogy we are invited to see in the faith of the early Christians in the Resurrection of the Lord a gigantic instance of 'hallucination.' No doubt there have been, and still are, extraordinary instances of its power, especially in minds excited by religious ideas. But we have only to consider the details of the facts in hand to feel that they cannot be accounted for on such a ground. Do hallucinations lay hold on five hundred people at once? Does a hallucination last for a long country walk, and give rise to protracted conversation? Does hallucination explain the story of Christ eating and drinking before His disciples? The un-

certain twilight of the garden might have begotten such an airy phantom in the brain of a single sobbing woman; but the appearances to be explained are so numerous, so varied in character, embrace so many details, appeal to so many of the senses—to the ear and hand as well as to the eye—were spread over so long a period, and were simultaneously shared by so large a number, that no theory of such a sort can account for them, unless by impugning the veracity of the records. And then we are back again on the old abandoned ground of deceit and imposture. It sounds plausible to say, Hallucination is a proved cause of many a supposed supernatural event—why not of this? But the plausibility of the solution ceases as soon as you try it on the actual facts in their variety and completeness. It has to be eked out with a length of the fox's skin of deceit before it covers them; and we may confidently assert that such a belief as the belief of the early Church in the Resurrection of the Lord was never the product either of deceit or of illusion, or of any amalgam of the two.

What new solutions the fertility of unbelief may yet bring forth, and the credulity of unbelief may yet accept, we know not; but we may firmly hold by the faith which breathed new hope and strange joy into that sad band on the first Easter morning, and rejoice with them in the glad, wonderful fact that He is risen from the dead.

IV. For that message is a message to us as truly as to the heavy-hearted unbelieving men that first received it. We may think for a moment of the joy with which we ought to return from the empty sepulchre of the risen Saviour.

How little these women knew that, as they went back from the grave in the morning twilight, they were the bearers of 'great joy which should be to all people!' To them and to the first hearers of their message there would be little clear in the rush of glad surprise, beyond the blessed thought, Then He is not gone from us altogether. Sweet visions of the resumption of happy companionship would fill their minds, and it would not be until calmer moments that the stupendous significance of the fact would reveal itself.

Mary's rapturous gesture to clasp Him by the feet, when the certainty that it was in very deed He flooded her soul with dazzling light, reveals her first emotion, which no doubt was also the first with them all, 'Then we shall have Him with us again, and all the old joy of companionship will be ours once more.' Nor were they wrong in thinking so, however little they as yet understood the future manner of their fellowship, or anticipated His leaving them again so soon. Nor are we without a share even in that phase of their joy; for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ gives us a living Lord for our love, an ever present Companion and Brother for our hearts to hold, even if our hands cannot clasp Him by the feet. A dead Christ might have been the object of faint historical admiration, and the fair statue might have stood amidst others in the galleries of history; but the risen, living Christ can love and be loved, and we too may be glad with the joy of those who have found a heart to rest their hearts upon, and a companionship that can never fail.

As the early disciples learned to reflect upon the fact of Christ's Resurrection, its riches unfolded themselves by degrees, and the earliest aspect of its 'power' was the light it shed on His person and work. Taught by it, as we have seen, they recognised Him for the Messiah whom they had long expected, and for something more—the Incarnate Son of God. That phase of their joy belongs to us too. If Christ, who made such avowals of His nature as we know that He did, and hazarded such assertions of His claims, His personality and His office, as fill the Gospels, were really laid in the grave and saw corruption, then the assertions are disproved, the claims unwarranted, the office a figment of His imagination. He may still remain a great teacher, with a tremendous deduction to be made from the worth of His teaching, but all that is deepest in His own words about Himself and His relation to men must be sorrowfully put on one side. But if He, after such assertions and claims, rose from the dead, and rising, dieth no more, then for the last time, and in the mightiest tones, the voice that rent the heavens at His baptism and His transfiguration proclaims: 'This is My beloved Son; hear ye Him.' Our joy in His Resurrection is the joy of those to whom He is therein declared to be the Son of God, and who see in Christ risen their accepted Sacrifice, and their ever-living Redeemer.

Such was the earliest effect of the Resurrection of Jesus, if we trust the records of apostolic preaching. Then by degrees the joyful thought took shape in the Church's consciousness that their Shepherd had gone before them into the dark pen where Death pastured his flocks, and had taken it for His own, for the quiet resting-place where He would make them lie down by still waters, and whence He would lead them out to the lofty mountains where His fold should be. The power of Christ's Resurrection as the pattern and pledge of ours is the final source of the joy which may fill our hearts as we turn away from that empty sepulchre.

The world has guessed and feared, or guessed and hoped, but always guessed and doubted the life beyond. Analogies, poetic adumbrations, probabilities drawn from consciousness and from conscience, from intuition and from anticipation, are but poor foundations on which to build a solid faith. But to those to whom the Resurrection of Christ is a fact their own future life is a fact. Here we have a solid certainty, and here alone. The heart says as we lay our dear ones in the grave, 'Surely we part not for ever.' The conscience says, as it points us to our own evil deeds, 'After death the judgment.' A deep indestructible instinct prophesies in every breast of a future. But all is vague and doubtful. The one proof of a life beyond the grave is the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Therefore let us be glad with the gladness of men plucked from a dark abyss of doubt and planted on the rock of solid certainty; and let us rejoice with joy unspeakable, and laden with a prophetic weight of glory, as we ring out the ancient Easter morning's greeting, 'The Lord is risen indeed!'

THE FOOD OF THE WORLD

‘He gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. 20. And they did all eat, and were filled; and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full.’—*MATT. xiv. 19, 20.*

The miracles of Scripture are not merely wonders, but signs. It is one of their most striking characteristics that they are not, like the pretended portents of false faiths, mere mighty deeds standing in no sort of intellectual relation to the message of which they claim to be the attestation, but that they have themselves a doctrinal significance. Our Lord’s miracles have been called ‘the great bell before the sermon,’ but they are more than that. They are themselves no unimportant part of the sermon. In fact, it would not be difficult to construct from them a revelation of His nature, person, and work, scarcely less full and explicit than that contained in His words, or even than that more systematic and developed one which we receive in the writings of His apostles.

This miracle, for instance, of the feeding of the five thousand with five barley loaves and two small fishes, is one of the few which the Apostle John relates in his Gospel, and his reason for selecting it seems to be the commentary with which our Lord followed it, and which John alone has preserved. That commentary is all the wonderful discourse about Christ as the bread of life, and eating His flesh as our means of receiving His life into ourselves. We are warranted, then, in regarding this miracle as a symbolic revelation of Christ as supplying all the wants of this hungry world. If so, we may perhaps venture to take one more step, and regard the manner in which He dispenses His gifts as also significant. His agents are His disciples, or as would appear probable from the twelve baskets full of fragments, the twelve apostles, the nucleus and representatives of His Church. Thus we come to the point from which we wish to regard this narrative now. There are three stages in the words of our text—the distribution, the meal, and the gathering up of the abundance that was left. These three stages may guide us to some thoughts regarding the work to which Christ calls His Church, the success which attends it, and the results to the distributors themselves.

I. Christ feeds the famishing world by means of His Church.

‘He gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.’ One very striking feature in all our Lord’s miracles is economy of power. The miraculous element being admitted for some good and sufficient reason, it is kept down to the lowest possible point. Precisely so much of it as is needed is permitted, and not one hairsbreadth more. It does not begin to make its appearance at any point in the process where ordinary human agency can be used. It does not produce a result beyond the actual necessity. It does not last one instant longer than is required. It inosculates closely with the natural order of things.

Take an illustration from the beginning of miracles where Jesus manifested forth His glory, at the marriage in Cana of Galilee—that great miracle in which our Lord hallowed the ties of human affection, and consecrated the joy of united hearts. The necessity is felt before He supplies it. The servants fill the waterpots. The water is used as the material on which the miraculous power operates. Only so much as is drawn for present use becomes wine. The servants are used as the agents for the distribution, and all is done so unostentatiously, though it be the manifesting of His glory, that no man knows but they.

Take another illustration from the other great contrasted miracle at the grave of Lazarus, where our Lord hallowed the breaking of earthly bonds by death, and sanctified the sorrows of parted love. He does not work His wonder from the other side Jordan, but comes. He does not avert the death which He will conquer, nor prevent the grief which He shares. He goes to the side of the grave—true human tears are wet upon His cheek. They have to roll away the stone. Then, there is flung into the darkness of the tomb the mighty word, ‘Lazarus! come forth.’ The inconceivable miraculous act is done, and life stirs in the sheeted dead. But there the miraculous ceases. The man with his restored life has himself to come out of the grave, and human hands have tremblingly to lift the napkin from the veiled face (how they must have thrilled as they did it, wondering what nameless horror they might see in the eyes that had looked on the inner chamber of death), and human help has to unfold the grave-clothes from the tightly swathed and stumbling limbs, ‘Loose him, and let him go.’

This marked characteristic of all our Lord’s miracles is full of instruction, which it would lead us too far from our present purpose to indicate at any length. But we may just observe in passing, that it brings these into striking parallel with the divine creative act, where there is ever the same precise adaptation of power employed to result contemplated, the same background of veiled omnipotence, the same emergence of proportioned, adequate, but not superfluous force, so that, in fact, economy of power may be said to be the very signature and broad arrow of divinity stamped on all His works. Again, it presents a broad contrast to the wild, reckless miracle-mongering of false faiths, and is at once a test of the genuineness of all ‘lying signs and wonders,’ and an indication of the self-restraint of the Worker, and of the fine sanity and truthfulness of the narrators, of these Gospel miracles. And yet, again, it is one phase of the disciplinary character of the whole revelation of God in Christ—not obtrusive, though obvious, capable of being overlooked if men will. There was the hiding of His power. ‘If any man wills to be ignorant, let him be ignorant.’

But coming more immediately to the narrative before us, we find this same characteristic in full prominence in it. The people are allowed to hunger. The disciples are permitted to feel themselves at their wits’ end. They are bid to bring their poor resources to Christ. The lad who had come with his little store, perhaps a fisherman’s boy from some of the lake villages who hoped to sell his loaves and fishes in the crowd, supplies the material on which Christ wills to exercise His miraculous power. The disciples’ agency is pressed into the service.

Each man separately receives his portion, and when all are supplied, the fragments are carefully preserved for the use of those who had been fed by miracle, and of Him who had fed them!

Besides the general lessons already referred to, as naturally arising from this feature of the miracle, there is that one which belongs to it especially, namely, that Christ feeds the famishing world by means of His Church.

Precisely as in the miracles in general, so in the work of Christ as a whole, the field of supernatural intervention is rigidly confined, and fits in with the established order of things. The Incarnation and Sacrifice of our Lord are the purely supernatural work of the divine Power and Mercy. He comes, enters into our human conditions, assumes our humanity, dies the death for us all. 'I have trodden the wine-press alone.' There is no question of any human agency co-operating there, any more than there is in the word 'Lazarus, come forth,' or in the multiplication of the loaves. There, by Christ alone, is brought to us and is finished for us an eternal redemption, with which the whole race of man have nothing to do but to receive it, to eat and be filled. But this having been done by the solitary work of Jesus Christ, this new power having been introduced into the world, human agency is henceforth called into operation to diffuse it, just as the servants at Cana had to draw the wine which He had made, just as the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias have to give to the multitude the bread which was blessed and broken by His hands.

The supernaturally given Bread of Life is to be carried over the world in accordance with the ordinary laws by which all other truth is diffused and all other gifts that belong to one man are held by him in stewardship for all his fellows. True, there is ever in and with that word of life a divine Spirit, which is the real cause of its progress, which guards it from destruction though all men were faithless, and keeps it alive though all Israel bowed the knee to Baal. But, however easy it may be for us to confuse ourselves with metaphysical puzzles about the relation between the natural and the supernatural elements—the human agency and the divine energiser—in the successful discharge of the Church's work, practically the matter is very plain.

The truth that it behoves us all to lay to heart is just this—that Christian people are Christ's instruments for effecting the realisation of the purposes of His death. Not without them shall He see of the travail of His soul. Not without them shall the preaching be fully known. Not without the people willing in the day of His power, and clothed in priestly beauty, shall the Priest King set His feet upon His enemies. Not without the armies of heaven following Him, shall the 'Word of God' ride forth to victory. Neither the divine decree, nor the expansive power of the Truth, nor the crowned expectancy of the waiting Lord, nor the mighty working of the Comforter, are the complete means for the accomplishment of the divine promise that all nations shall be blessed in Him. Could all these be conceived of as existing without the service and energies of God's Church proclaiming the name of Christ,

they were not enough. He has willed that to us, less than the least of all saints, should this grace be given, that we should make known the unsearchable riches of Christ. God reveals His truth, that men who believe it may impart it. God gives the word, that, caught up by those who receive it into an honest and good heart, it may be poured forth, in mighty chorus from the lips of the 'great company of them that publish it.' 'He gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.'

Christian men! learn your high vocation, and your solemn responsibilities. 'What! came the word of God out from you, or came it unto you only?' For what did you receive it? For the same reason for which you have received everything else which you possess—that you might share it with your brethren. How did you receive it? As a gift, unmerited, the result of a miracle of divine mercy, that you might feel bound to give as ye have received, and spread the free divine gift by cheerful human work of distribution. From whom did you receive it? From Christ, who in the very act of giving binds you to live for Him and not for yourselves, and to mould your lives after the pattern of His. What a multitude of motives converge on the solemn duty of work for Christ, if we read in the light of this deeper meaning the simple words of our text, 'He gave the loaves to the disciples!' What manner of servant is he who can bear to have no part in the blessed work that follows—'and the disciples to the multitude'?

It is further noticeable how these apostles were prepared for the work which they had to do. The first lesson which they had to learn was the almost ludicrous disproportion between the resources at their command and the necessities of the crowd. 'How many loaves have ye? go and see.' And this is the first lesson that we have to learn in all our work for Christ and for our brethren, that in ourselves we have nothing fit for the task before us. Think of what that task is as measured by the necessities and sorrows of men. Think of all the sighs that go up at every moment from burdened hearts, of the tears that run down so many blanched and anxious cheeks. Think of 'all the misery that is done under the sun!' If it could be made visible, what a dark pall would swathe the world, an atmosphere of sorrow rolling ever with it through space. The sight is too sad to be seen by any but by Him who cures it all, and it wrung from His heart the sigh with which ere He cured one poor sufferer—a drop in the ocean—He looked up to heaven, as in mute appeal against all these heaped miseries of suffering man.

And we, what can we do in ourselves? On what comparison of our resources do we not feel utterly inadequate to the work? If we think of the proportion in numbers, we have to say, like the narrator of the wars in Israel, 'The children of Israel pitched before them like two little flocks of kids, but the Syrians filled the country.' If we think of the strength that we ourselves possess and look at our own tremulous faith, at our own feeble love, at the uncertain hold which we ourselves have on the Gospel that we profess, at the mists and darkness which cover so much of God's revelation from our own understandings, at the

sins and faults of our own lives, must we not cry out, Send whom Thou wilt send, O Lord, but take not me, so sinful, so little influenced by Thy grace, to be the messenger of Thy grace? 'Who is sufficient for these things?' And such contemplations, when they drive home to our hearts the wholesome lesson of our own weakness, are the beginning, and the only possible beginning, of divine strength. The only temper in which we can serve God and bless man is that of lowliest self-abasement. God works with bruised reeds, and out of them makes polished shafts, pillars in His house. Only when we are low on our faces before God, crying out, 'Unclean, unclean,' does the purifying coal touch our lips and the prophet strength flow into our souls.

Be humble and self-distrustful, and then learn the further lesson of this narrative, and carry your poor inadequate resources to Christ. 'Bring them hither to Me.' In His hands they become sufficient. He multiplies them. He gives wisdom, strength, and all that fits for the task to which He calls us. Bring your little faith to Him and He will increase it. Bring your feeble love to Him, and ask Him to kindle it from the pure flame of His own, and He will make your heart burn within you. Bring your partial understanding of His will and way to Him, and He will be to you wisdom. Bring all the poverty of your natures, all the insufficiency of your religious character, all the inadequacy of your poor work, to your Lord. Feel it all. Let the conviction of your nothingness sink into your soul. Then wait before Him in simple faith, in lowly obedience, and power will come to you equal to your desire and to your duties, and He will put His spirit upon you, and will anoint you to proclaim liberty to the captives and to give bread to all the hungry. 'Who is sufficient for these things?' must ever precede, and will ever be followed by, 'our sufficiency is of God.'

Mark again that the disciples seem themselves to have partaken of the bread before they parted it among the multitudes. That is our true preparation for the work of feeding the hungry. The Church which feeds the world is able to do so, only because, and in proportion as, it has found in Christ its own sustenance and life. It is only they who can say 'we have tasted and felt and handled of the word of life' who can declare it to others. Personal participation in the bread of life makes any man able to offer it to some fainting spirit. Nothing else makes him able. Ability involves responsibility. 'Power to its last particle is duty.' You, dear friends, who have 'tasted that the Lord is gracious,' have thereby come under weighty obligations. Your own personal experience of that precious bread has fitted you to do something in offering it to others. The manner in which you do so must be determined by your character and circumstances. Every one has his proper walk; but something you can do. To some lips you can commend the food for all the world. Somewhere your word is a power. See that you do what you can do. Remember that Christ feeds the world by His Church, and that every man who has himself eaten of the bread of life is thereby consecrated to carry it to those who yet are perishing in the far-off hunger-ridden land, and trying to fill their bellies with the husks that the swine eat.

II. The Bread is enough for all the world.

‘They did all eat and were filled.’ One can fancy how doubtingly and grudgingly the apostles doled out the supplies at first, and how the portion of each was increased, as group after group was provided, and no diminution appeared in Christ’s full hands, until, at last, all the five thousand, of all ages, of both sexes, of every sort, were fed, and the fragments lying uncared for proved how sufficient had been the share of each.

May we not see in that scene a picture of the full supply for all the wants of the whole world which there is in that Bread of Life which came down from heaven? The Gospel proclaims a full feast, which is enough for all mankind, which is intended for all mankind, which shall one day satisfy all mankind.

This universal adaptation of the message of the Gospel to the whole world arises from the obvious fact that it addresses itself to universal wants, to the great rudimentary, universally diffused characteristics of human nature, and that it provides for all these, in the grand simplicity of its good tidings, the one sufficing word. It entangles itself with no local or historical peculiarities of the time and place of its earthly origin, which can hinder it in its universal diffusion. It commits itself to no transient human opinions. It addresses itself to no sectional characteristics of classes of men. It brushes aside all the surface distinctions which separate us from one another, and goes right down to the depths of the central identities in which we are all alike. However we may differ from one another, in training, in habits, in cast of thought, in idiosyncrasies of character, in circumstances, in age—all these are but the upper strata which vary locally. Beneath all these there lie everywhere the solid foundations of the primeval rocks, and beneath these, again, the glowing central mass, the flaming heart of the world. Christianity sends its shaft right down through all these upper and local beds, till it reaches the deepest depths which are the same in every man—the obstinate wilfulness of a nature averse from God, and the yet deeper-lying longings of a soul that flames with the consciousness of God, and yearns for rest and peace. To the sense of sin, to the sense of sorrow, to the conscience never wholly stifled, to the desires after good never utterly eradicated and never slaked by aught besides itself, does this mighty word come. Not to this or that sort of man, not to men in this or that phase of progress, age of the world, or stage of civilisation, does it address itself, but to the common humanity which belongs to all, to the wants and sorrows and inward consciousness which belong to man as man, be he philosopher or fool, king or slave, Eastern or Western, ‘pagan suckled in a creed outworn,’ or Englishman with the new lights and material science of this twentieth century.

Hence its universal adaptation to mankind. It alone of all so-called faiths overleaps all geographical limits and lives in all centuries. It alone wins its trophies and bestows its gifts on all sorts and conditions of men. Other plants which the ‘Heavenly Father hath not planted’ have their zones of vegetation and die outside certain degrees of latitude, but the seed of the kingdom is like corn, an exotic nowhere, for wherever man lives it will grow, and yet an

exotic everywhere, for it came down from heaven. Other food requires an educated palate for its appreciation, but any hungry man in any land will relish bread. For every soul on earth this living dying love of the Lord Jesus Christ addresses itself to, and satisfies, his deepest wants. It is the bread which gives life to the world.

And one of the constituents of that company by the Galilean lake was children. It is one great glory of Christianity that its merciful mysteries can find their way to the hearts of the little children. Its mysteries, we say—for the Gospel has its mysteries no less than these old systems of heathenism which fenced round their deepest truths with solemn barriers, only to be passed by the initiated. But the difference lies here—that its mysteries are taught at first to the neophytes, and that the sum of them lies in the words which we learned at our mother's knees so long ago that we have forgotten that they were ever new to us: 'God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but should have eternal life.' The little child who has learned his earliest lessons of what father and son, loving and giving, trust and life mean, by the sweet experiences of his own father's home and his own mother's love, can grasp these blessed words. They carry the deepest mysteries which will still gleam before us unfathomed in all their profundity, unappropriated in all their blessedness, when millenniums have passed since we stood in the inner shrine of heaven. Wonderful is the word which blesses the child, which transcends the angel before the throne!

This is the bread for the world—meant for it, and one day to be partaken of by it. For these ordered fifties at their Christ-provided meal are for us a prophecy of the day that shall surely dawn, when all the hunger of wandering prodigals is over, and the deceived heart of the idol-worshipper no longer drawing him aside to feed on ashes, they shall come from the East and from the West, and from the North and from the South, and sit at the feast which the Lord hath prepared for all nations, and when all the earth shall be satisfied with the goodness of His house, even of His holy temple.

III. The Bread which is given to the famishing is multiplied for the future of the Distributors.

'They took of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full.' More was gathered than they had possessed at first. They preserved over, for their own sustenance and refreshment in days to come, a far larger store than the five loaves and two small fishes with which they had begun. The fact contains a principle which is true about almost all except material possessions, which is often in God's providence made true about them, and which is emphatically true about spiritual blessings, about our religious emotions, our Christian beliefs, the joys and powers which Christ comes to give.

For all these, the condition of increase is diffusion. To impart to others is to gain for oneself. Every honest effort to bring some other human heart into conscious possession of Christ's love deepens one's own sense of its preciousness. Every attempt to lead some other

understanding to the perception of the truth, as it is in Jesus, helps me to understand it better myself. If you would learn, teach. That will clear your mind, will open hidden harmonies, will reveal unsuspected deficiencies and contradictions in your own conceptions, will help you to feel more the truths that come from your lips. It will perhaps shame your cold appreciation of them, when you see how others grasp at them from your teaching, or give you more confidence in the Gospel as the power of God unto salvation, when you behold it, even as ministered through you, mighty to pull down strongholds. At the lowest, it will keep your own mind in healthy contact with what you art but too apt to forget. If you would learn to love Christ more, try to lead some one else to love Him, You will catch new gleams from His gracious heart in the very act of commending Him to others. If you would have your own spiritual life strengthened and deepened, remember that not by solitary meditation or raptures of silent communion alone can that be accomplished, but by these and by honest manful work for God in the world. The Mount of Transfiguration must be left, although there were there Moses and Elias, and the cloud of the divine glory and the words of approval from heaven, because there were a demoniac boy and his weeping, despairing father needing Christ down below. Work for God if you would live with God. Give the bread to the hungry, if you would have it for the food of your own souls.

The refusal to engage in such service is one fruitful cause of the low state of spiritual health in which so many Christians pass their days. They seem to think that they receive the bread from heaven only for their own use, and that they have done all that they have to do with it, when they eat it themselves. And so come all manner of spiritual diseases. A selfish, that is an inactive, religion is always more or less a morbid religion. For health you need exercise. 'In the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat bread'; that law expresses not only the fact that work is needed to get it, but that toil must give the appetite and fit the frame to digest it. There is such a thing as a morbid Christianity brought on by want of healthy exercise.

'There is that scattereth and yet increaseth, and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth to poverty.' Good husbandry does not grind up all the year's wheat for loaves for one's own eating, but keeps some of it for seed to be scattered in the furrows. And if Christian men will deal with the great love of God, the great work of Christ, the great message of the Gospel, as if it were bestowed on them for their own sakes only, they will have only themselves to blame if holy desires die out in their hearts, and the consciousness of Christ's love becomes faint, and all the blessed words of truth come to sound far off and mythical in their ears. The standing water gets green scum on it. The close-shut barn breeds weevils and smut. Let the water run. Fling the seed broadcast. 'Thou shalt find it after many days,' bread for thy own soul—even as these ministering apostles were enriched whilst they gave, and the full-handed liberality 'with which they carried Christ's gifts among the crowd' had something to do in providing the large residue which filled their stores for days to come.

Thus, then, this scene on the sweet springing grass down by the side of blue Gennesaret is an emblem of the whole work of the Church in this starving world. The multitudes famish. Tell Christ of their wants. Count your own small resources till you have completely learned your poverty, then take them to Jesus. He will accept them, and in His hands they will become mighty, being transfigured from human thoughts and forces into divine words, into spiritual powers. On that bread which He gives, do you yourselves live. Then carry it boldly to all the hungry. Rank after rank will eat. All races, all ages, from grey hairs to babbling childhood, will find there the food of their souls. As you part the blessing, it will grow beneath His eye; and the longer you give, the fuller-handed you will become. Nor shall the bread fail, nor the word become weak, till all the world has tasted of its sweetness and been refreshed by its potent life.

This miracle is the lesson for the workers. There is another wondrous meal recorded in Scripture, which is the prophecy for the workers when they rest. The little ship has been tossing all the night on the waters of that Galilean lake. Fruitless has been the fishing. The morning breaks cold and grey, and lo! there stands on the shore One who first blesses the toilers' work, and then bids them to His table. There, mysteriously kindled, burns the fire with the welcome meal already laid upon it. They add to it the contribution of their night of toil, and then, hushed and blessed in His still company, they sup with Him and He with them. So when the weary work is over for the Church on earth, we shall be aware of His merciful presence on the shore, and, coming at the last safe to land, we shall 'rest from our labours,' in that we see the 'fire of coals, and fish laid thereon and bread'; and our 'works shall follow us,' in that we are 'bidden to bring of the fish that we have caught.' Then, putting off the wet fisher's coat, and leaving behind the tossing of the unquiet sea and the toil of the weary fishing, we shall sit down with Him at that meal spread by His hands, who blesseth the works of His servants here below, and giveth to them a full fruition of immortal food at His table at the last.

THE KING'S HIGHWAY

'And straightway Jesus constrained His disciples to get into a ship, and to go before Him unto the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. 23. And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone. 24. But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary. 25. And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. 26. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. 27. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. 28. And Peter answered Him and said, Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water. 29. And He said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. 30. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. 31. And immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt. 32. And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. 33. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped Him, saying, Of a truth Thou art the Son of God. 34. And when they were gone over, they came into the land of Gennesaret. 35. And when the men of that place had knowledge of Him, they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto Him all that were diseased; 36. And besought Him that they might only touch the hem of His garment: and as many as touched were made perfectly whole.' —[MATT. xiv. 22-36.](#)

The haste and urgency with which the disciples were sent away, against their will, after the miracle of feeding the five thousand, is explained in John's account. The crowd had been excited to a dangerous enthusiasm by a miracle so level to their tastes. A prophet who could feed them was something like a prophet. So they determine to make him a king. Our Lord, fearing the outburst, resolves to withdraw into the lonely hills, that the fickle blaze may die down. If the disciples had remained with Him, He could not have so easily stolen away, and they might have caught the popular fervour. To divide would distract the crowd, and make it easier for Him to disperse them, while many of them, as really happened, would be likely to set off by land for Capernaum, when they saw the boat had gone. The main teaching of this miracle, over and above its demonstration of the Messianic power of our Lord, is symbolical. All the miracles are parables, and this eminently so. Thus regarding it, we have—

I. The struggling toilers and the absent Christ.

They had a short row of some five or six miles in prospect, when they started in the early evening. An hour or so might have done it, but, for some unknown reason, they lingered. Perhaps instead of pulling across, they may have kept inshore, by the head of the lake, expecting Jesus to join them at some point. Thus, night finds them but a short way on their voyage. The paschal moon would be shining down on them, and perhaps in their eager

talk about the miracle they had just seen, they did not make much speed. A sudden breeze sprang up, as is common at nightfall on mountain lakes; and soon a gale, against which they could make no headway, was blowing in their teeth. This lasted for eight or nine hours. Wet and weary, they tugged at the oars through the livelong night, the seas breaking over them, and the wind howling down the glens.

They had been caught in a similar storm once before, but then He had been on board, and it was daylight. Now it was dark, 'and Jesus had not yet come to them,' How they would look back at the dim outline of the hills, where they knew He was, and wonder why He had sent them out into the tempest alone! Mark tells us that He saw them distressed, hours before He came to them, and that makes His desertion the stranger. It is but His method of lovingly training them to do without His personal presence, and a symbol of what is to be the life of His people till the end. He is on the mountain in prayer, and He sees the labouring boat and the distressed rowers. The contrast is the same as is given in the last verses of Mark's Gospel, where the serene composure of the Lord, sitting at the right hand of God, is sharply set over against the wandering, toiling lives of His servants, in their evangelistic mission. The commander-in-chief sits apart on the hill, directing the fight, and sending regiment after regiment to their deaths. Does that mean indifference? So it might seem but for the words which follow, 'the Lord working with them.' He shares in all the toil; and the lifting up of His holy hands sways the current of the fight, and inclines the balance. His love appoints effort and persistent struggle as the law of our lives. Nor are we to mourn or wonder; for the purpose of the appointment, so far as we are concerned, is to make character, and to give us 'the wrestling thews that throw the world.' Difficulties make men of us. Summer sailors, yachting in smooth water, have neither the joy of conflict nor the vigour which it gives. Better the darkness, when we cannot see our way, and the wind in our faces, if the good of things is to be estimated by their power to 'strengthen us with strength in our soul!'

II. We have the approaching Christ.

Not till the last watch of the night does He come, when they have long struggled, and the boat is out in the very middle of the lake, and the storm is fiercest. We may learn from this the delays of His love. Because He loved Mary and Martha and Lazarus, He stayed still, in strange inaction, for two days, after their message. Because He loved Peter and the praying band, He let him lie in prison till the last hour of the last watch of the last night before his intended execution, and then delivered him with a leisureliness (making him put on article after article of dress) which tells of conscious omnipotence. Heaven's clock goes at a different rate from our little timepieces. God's day is a thousand years, and the longest tarrying is but 'a little while.' When He has come, we find that it is 'right early,' though before He came He seemed to us to delay. He comes across the waves. Their restless and yielding crests are smoothed and made solid by the touch of His foot. 'He walketh on the sea as on a pavement' (Septuagint version of [Job ix. 8](#)). It is a revelation of divine power. It is one of the very few

miracles affecting Christ's own person, and may perhaps be regarded as being, like the Transfiguration, a casual gleam of latent glory breaking through the body of His humiliation, and so, in some sense, prophetic. But it is also symbolic. He ever uses tumults and unrest as a means of advancing His purposes. The stormy sea is the recognised Old Testament emblem of antagonism to the divine rule; and just as He walked on the billows, so does He reach His end by the very opposition to it, 'girding Himself' with the wrath of men, and making it to praise Him. In this sense, too, His 'paths are in the great waters.' In another aspect, we have here the symbol of Christ's using our difficulties and trials as the means of His loving approach to us. He comes, giving a deeper and more blessed sense of His presence by means of our sorrows, than in calm sunny weather. It is generally over a stormy sea that He comes to us, and golden treasures are thrown on our shores after a tempest.

III. We have the terror and the recognition.

The disciples were as yet little lifted above their fellows; they had no expectation of His coming, and thought just what any rude minds would have thought, that this mysterious Thing stalking towards them across the waters came from the unseen world, and probably that it was the herald of their drowning. Terror froze their blood, and brought out a shriek (as the word might be rendered) which was heard above the dash of waves and the raving wind. They had gallantly fought the tempest, but this unmanned them. We too often mistake Christ, when He comes to us. We do not recognise His working in the storm, nor His presence giving power to battle with it. We are so absorbed in the circumstances that we fail to see Him through them. Our tears weave a veil which hides Him, or the darkness obscures His face, and we see nothing but the threatening crests of the waves, curling high above our little boat. We mistake our best friend, and we are afraid of Him as we dimly see Him; and sometimes we think that the tokens of His presence are only phantasms of our own imagination.

They who were deceived by His appearance knew Him by His voice, as Mary did at the sepulchre. How blessed must have been the moment when that astounding certitude thrilled through their souls! That low voice is audible through all the tumult. He speaks to us by His word, and by the silent speech in our spirits, which makes us conscious that He is there. He does speak to us in the deepest of our sorrows, in the darkest of our nights; and when we hear of His voice, and with wonder and joy cry out, 'It is the Lord,' our sorrow is soothed, and the darkness is light about us.

The consciousness of His presence banishes all fear. 'Be not afraid,' follows 'It is I.' It is of no use to preach courage unless we preach Christ first. If we have not Him with us, we do well to fear: His presence is the only rational foundation for calm fearlessness. Only when the Lord of Hosts is with us, ought we not to fear, 'though the waters roar . . . and be troubled.' 'Through the dear might of Him that walked the waves' can we feeble creatures face all terrors, and feel no terror.

IV. We have the end of the storm and of the voyage.

The storm ceases as soon as Jesus is on board. John does not mention the cessation of the tempest, but tells us that they were immediately at the shore. It does not seem necessary to suppose another miracle, but only that the voyage ended very speedily. It is not always true that His presence is the end of dangers and difficulties, but the consciousness of His presence does hush the storm. The worst of trouble is gone when we know that He shares it; and though the long swell after the gale may last, it no longer threatens. Nor is it always true that His coming, and our consciousness that He has come, bring a speedy close to toils. We have to labour on, but in how different a mood these men would bend to their oars after they had Him on board! With Him beside us toil is sweet, burdens are lighter, and the road is shortened. Even with Him on board, life is a stormy voyage; but without Him, it ends in shipwreck. With Him, it may be long, but it will look all the shorter while it lasts, and when we land the rough weather will be remembered but as a transient squall. These wearied rowers, who had toiled all night, stepped on shore as the morning broke on the eastern bank. So we, if we have had Him for our shipmate, shall land on the eternal shore, and dry our wet garments in the sunshine, and all the stormy years that seemed so long shall be remembered but as a watch in the night.

PETER ON THE WAVES

‘And Peter answered Him and said, Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water.’—[MATT. xiv. 28](#).

We owe this account of an episode in the miracle of Christ’s walking on the waters to Matthew alone. Singularly enough there is no reference to Peter’s venturesomeness and failure in the Gospel which is generally believed to have been written under his special inspection and suggestion. Mark passes by that part of the narrative without a word. That may be because Peter was somewhat ashamed of it, or it may be from a natural disinclination to make himself prominent in the story at all. But, whatever the reason, we may be thankful that in this first Gospel we have the story, for it is not only interesting as illustrating the characteristics of the apostle in a very picturesque fashion, but also as carrying in it very plainly large lessons that are of use for us all.

I. Note, first, Peter’s venturesomeness, half faith, and half presumption.

There is a singular mixture of good and bad in it. Looked at one way, it seems all right; like a bit of shot silk, in one light it is bright, and in another it is black enough. What was good in it? Well, there was the man’s out-and-out confidence in his Master; and there was, further, the unconsidered, instinctive shoot of love in his heart to the mysterious figure standing there upon the water, so that his desire was to be beside Him. It was far more ‘Bid me come to Thee!’ than ‘Bid me come to Thee on the water.’ The incident was a kind of rehearsal, with a noticeable difference, and yet with nearly parallel circumstances, of the other incident when, after the Resurrection, he discovered the Lord standing on the shore, and floundered through the water anyhow; whether on it or in it did not matter to him, so long as he could get near his Master. But though the apostle’s action was blended with a great deal that was childish and sensuous, and was perhaps quite as much the result of mere temperament as of conscious affection, still there was good in that eager longing to be beside his Lord, which it would be well for us if we in some measure shared, and in that indifference to the perils of the strange path so long as it led to Christ’s side, which, if it were ours, would ennoble our lives, and in that perfect confidence that Christ could enable him to tread the unquiet sea, which would make us lords of all storms, if it wrought in us.

What was bad in it? First, the characteristic pushing of himself to the front, and wish to be singled out from his brethren by some special token. ‘Bid me come.’ Why should he be bidden any more than John, who sits quietly and gazes, or the others, who are tugging at the oars? Then the impetuous rashness and signal over-estimate of his own capacity and courage were bad. Perhaps, too, there was a little dash of a boyish kind of wish to do a strange thing, and now that he sees his Master there, walking on the waters, he thinks he would like to try it too. So the request is a rash, self-confident pushing of himself before his brethren into circumstances of wholly unnecessary peril and trial, of which he had not estimated the

severity till he felt the water beginning to yield under his feet and the wind smiting him on the face. So that the incident is a rehearsal and anticipation of the precisely similar thing that he did when, on the morning of Christ's trial, he shouldered himself unnecessarily into the high priest's palace, and got himself close up against the fire there, without a moment's reflection on the possible danger he was running of having his loyalty melted by a fiercer flame, and little dreaming that he was going to fall, and all his courage to ooze out at his finger-ends, before the sharp tongue of a maid-servant. In like manner as he says here, 'Bid me come to Thee,' without the smallest doubt that when he was bade to come he would be able to do it, so he said that night: 'Though all should forsake Thee, yet will not I,'—and yet he denied Him.

Let us take the warning from this venturesomeness of a generous, impulsive, enthusiastic religious nature, and remember that the most genuine faith and religious emotion need to be sobered and steadied by reflection, and by searching into our own motives, before we venture upon the water, howsoever much we may wish to go there. Make very sure that your zeal for the Lord has an element of sober permanence in it, and that it is the result, not of a mere transitory feeling, but of a steady, settled purpose. And do not push yourself voluntarily into places of peril or of difficulty, where the fighting is hard and the fire heavy, unless you have reasonable grounds for believing that you can stand the strain. Bring quiet, sober reason into the loftiest and loveliest enthusiasm of your faith, and then there will be something in it that will live through storm, and walk the water with unwetted and unsinking foot. An impure alloy of selfish itching for pre-eminence and distinction does not seldom mingle with the fine gold of religious enthusiasm and desire to serve and be near our Lord. Therefore we have to test our motives and seek to refine our purest emotions, and the more scrupulously the purer they seem, lest we be yielding to the impulses of self while we fancy that we are being drawn by the magnetism of Christ.

II. We have here the momentary triumph and swift collapse of an impure faith.

One can fancy with what hushed expectation the other apostles looked at Peter as he let himself down over the side of the ship, and his feet touched the surges and did not sink. Christ's grave, single-worded answer 'Come' barely sanctions the apostle's request. It is at most a permission, but scarcely a command, and it is permission to try, in order that Peter may learn his own weakness. He did walk on the water to go to Jesus. What kept him up? Not Christ's hand, nor any power bestowed on the apostle, but simply the exercise of Christ's will. But if he was held up by the operation of that will, why did he begin to sink? The vivid narrative tells us: 'When he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid.' That was why. It had been blowing every bit as hard before he stepped out of the ship. The waves were not running any higher after than when he said, 'Bid me come to Thee.' But he was down amongst them, and that makes a wonderful difference. For a moment he stood, and then the peril into which he had so heedlessly thrust himself began to tell on him. Presumption subsided swiftly

into fright, as it usually does, and fear began to fulfil itself, as it usually does. 'He became afraid,' and that made him heavy and he began to sink. Not because the gale was any more violent, not because the uneven pavement was any more yielding, but because he was frightened, and his faith began to falter at the close sight of the danger.

And why did the ebbing away of faith mean the withdrawal of Christ's will to keep him up? Why? Because it could not but be so. There is only one door through which Christ's upholding power gets into a man, and that is the door of the man's trust in the power; and if he shuts the door, the power stops outside. So Peter went down. The text does not tell us how far down he went. Depend upon it, it was further than over the shoes! But he went down because he began to lose his trust that Christ could hold him up; and when he lost his trust, Christ lost His power over him.

All this is a parable, carrying very plain and important lessons. We are upborne by Christ's power, and that power, working on and in our weakness, invests us with prerogatives in some measure like His own. If He can stand quiet on the heaving wave, so can His servant. 'The works that I do shall ye do also'—and 'the depths of the sea "become" a way for the ransomed to pass over.' That power is exercised on condition of our faith. As soon as faith ceases the influx of His grace is stayed. Peter, though probably he was not thinking of this incident, has put the whole philosophy of it into plain words in his own letter, when he says, 'You who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.' He was held up as long as he believed. His belief was a hand, and that which it grasped was what held him up, and that was Christ's will and power. So we shall be held up everywhere, and in any storm, as long as, and no longer than, we set our confidence upon Him.

Our faith is sure to fail when we turn away our eyes from Christ to look at the tempest and the dangers. If we keep our gaze fixed upon Him, the consciousness and the confidence of His all-sustaining power will hold us up. If once we turn aside to look at the waves as they heave, and prick our ears to listen to the wind as it whistles, then we shall begin to doubt whether He is able to keep us up. 'Looking off' from all these dangers 'unto Jesus' is needful if we are to run the race set before us.

A man walking along a narrow ledge of some Alpine height has only one chance of safety, and that is, not to look at his feet or at the icy rocks beside him, or at the gulf beneath, into which he will be dashed if he gazes down. He must look up and onwards, and then he will walk along a knife-edge, and he shall not fall. So, Peter, never mind the water, never mind the wind; look at Jesus and you will get to Him dry shod. If you turn away your eyes from Him, and take counsel of the difficulties and trials and antagonisms, down you will be sure to go. 'They sank to the bottom like a stone, the depths covered them.' Christ holds us up. He cannot hold us up unless we trust Him. Faith and fear contend for supremacy in our hearts. If we rightly trust, we shall not be afraid. If we are afraid, terror will slay trust. To look away from Christ, and occupy our thoughts with dangers and obstacles, is sure to

lead to the collapse of faith and the strengthening of terror. To look past and above the billows to Him that stands on them is sure to cast out fear and to hearten faith. Peter ignored the danger at the wrong time, before he dropped over the side of the boat, and he was aware of it at the wrong time, while he was actually being held up and delivered from it. Rashness ignores peril in the wrong way, and thereby ensures its falling on the presumptuous head. Faith ignores it in the right way, by letting the eye travel past it, to Christ who shields from it, and thereby faith brings about the security it expects, and annihilates the peril from which it looks away to Jesus.

III. We have here the cry of desperate faith and its immediate answer.

The very thing which had broken Peter's faith mended it again. Fear sunk him by making him falter in his confidence; and, as he was sinking, the very desperation of his terror drove him back to his faith, and he 'cried' with a shrill, loud voice, heard above the roar of the boisterous wind, 'Lord, save me.' So difficulties and dangers, when they begin to tell upon us, often send us back to the trust which the anticipation of them had broken; and out of the very extremity of fear we sometimes can draw its own antidote. Just as with flint and steel you may strike a spark, so danger, striking against our heart, brings out the flash that kindles the tinder.

This brief cry for help singularly blends faith and fear. There is faith in it, else Peter would not have appealed to Christ to save him. There is mortal terror in it, else he would not have felt that he needed to cry. But faith is uppermost now, and the very terror feeds it. So, by swift transition, our fears may pass into their own opposite and become courageous trust. Just as in a coal fire the thick black smoke sometimes gets alight and passes into ruddy flame, so our fears may catch fire and flash up as confidence and prayer.

Note the merciful swiftness of Christ's answer. 'Immediately He caught him,' because another moment would have been too late. There will be time to teach him the lessons of his presumption, but when the water is all but up to the lips that shrieked for help, there is but one thing to do. He must be saved first and talked to afterwards. Our cries for deliverance in temporal matters are not always answered so quickly, for it is often better for us to be left to struggle with the waves and winds. But our appeals for Christ's helping hand in soul-peril are always answered without delay. No appreciable time is consumed in the passage of the telegram or in flashing back the answer. The apostle was not caught by Christ's hand before he knew his danger, for it was good for him that he should go down some way, but he was caught as soon as he called on the Master, and before he had come to any harm. The trial lasted long enough to wash the stiffening of self-confidence out of him, and then it had done its work—and Christ's strong hand held him up.

The manner of the answer is noteworthy. It is determined by, and adapted to, his weak faith. He could not be upheld now as he had been a moment ago, before his fear had weighted him, by the exercise of Christ's will only. Then Christ could hold him up without touching

him, but now the palpable grasp of the hand was needed to assure the tremulous, doubting heart. So we, too, sometimes need and get material and outward signs which make it easier to feel the reality of sustaining grace. But whether we do or no, Christ's swift help always takes the form best suited to our faith, and He has regard to the capacity of our clasping hands in the measure and manner of His gifts.

The time and tone of Christ's gentle remonstrance are remarkable. Deliverance comes first, and rebuke afterwards. Having first shown him, by the fact of safety, that his doubts were irrational, Christ then, and not till then, puts His gentle question. Perhaps there was a smile on His face, as surely there was love in His voice, that softened the rebuke and went to Peter's heart.

What does Christ rebuke him for? Getting out of the boat? No. He does not blame him for venturing too much, but for trusting too little. He does not blame him for attempting something beyond his strength, but for not holding fast the beginning of his confidence firm unto the end. And so the lesson for us is, that we cannot expect too much if we expect it perseveringly. We cannot set our conceptions of Christ's possible help to us too high if only we keep at the height to which we once have set them, and are assured that He will hold us up when we are down amongst the weltering waves, as we fancied ourselves to be when we were sitting in the boat wishing to be with Him. That is the question that He will meet us with when we get up on the shore yonder; and we shall not have any more to say for ourselves, in vindication of our tremulous trust, than Peter, silenced for once, had to say on this occasion.

It will be good for us all if, like this apostle, our trials consolidate our characters, and out of the shifting, fluctuating, impetuous nature that was blown about like sand by every gust of emotion there be made, by the pressure of responsibility and trial, and experience of our own unreliableness, the 'Rock' of a stable character, steadfast and unmovable, with calm resolution and fixed faith, on which the Great Architect can build some portion of His great temple.

CRUMBS AND THE BREAD

‘Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. 22. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto Him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. 23. But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and besought Him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. 24. But He answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 25. Then came she and worshipped Him, saying, Lord, help me. 26. But He answered and said, It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to dogs. 27. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table. 28. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour. 29. And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee; and went up into a mountain, and sat down there. 30. And great multitudes came unto Him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus’ feet; and He healed them: 31. Insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel.’—[MATT. xv. 21-31](#).

The King of Israel has passed beyond the bounds of Israel, driven by the hostility of those who should have been His subjects. The delegates of the priestly party from Jerusalem, who had come down to see into this dangerous enthusiasm which was beginning in Galilee, have made Christ’s withdrawal expedient, and He goes northward, if not actually into the territory of Tyre and Sidon, at any rate to the border land. The incident of the Syro-Phoenician woman becomes more striking if we suppose that it took place on Gentile ground. At all events, after it, we learn from Mark that He made a considerable circuit, first north and then east, and so came round to the eastern side of the sea of Galilee, where the last paragraph of this section finds Him. The key to its meaning lies in the contrast between the single cure of the woman’s demoniac daughter, obtained after so long imploring, and the spontaneous abundance of the cures wrought when Jesus again had Jewish sufferers to do with, even though it were on the half-Gentilised eastern shore of the lake. The contrast is an illustration of His parable of the crumbs that fell from the table and the plentiful feast that was spread upon it for the children.

The story of the Syro-Phoenician woman naturally falls into four parts, each marked by the recurrence of ‘He answered.’

I. There is the piteous cry, and the answer of silence. Mark tells us that Jesus sought concealment in this journey; but distress has quick eyes, and this poor woman found Him. Canaanite as she is, and thus a descendant of the ancient race of Israel’s enemies, she has learned to call Him the Son of David, owning His kingship, which His born subjects dis-

owned. She beseeches for that which He delights to give, identifying herself with her poor child's suffering, and asking as for herself His mercy. As Chrysostom says: 'It was a sight to stir pity to behold a woman calling aloud in such distress, and that woman a mother, and pleading for a daughter, and that daughter in such evil plight.' In her humility she does not bring her child, nor ask Him to go to her. In her agony, she has nothing to say but to spread her grief before Him, as thinking that He, of whose pity she has heard, needs but to know in order to alleviate, and requires no motives urged to induce Him to help. In her faith, she thinks that His power can heal from afar. What more could He have desired? All the more startling, then, is His demeanour. All the conditions which He usually required, were present in her; but He, who was wont to meet these with swift and joyful over-answers, has no word to say to this poor, needy, persevering, humble, and faithful suppliant. The fountain seems frozen, from which such streams of blessing were wont to flow. His mercy seems clean gone, and His compassion to have failed. A Christ silent to a sufferer's cry is a paradox which contradicts the whole gospel story, and which, we may be very sure, no evangelist would have painted, if he had not been painting from the life.

II. There is the disciples' intercession answered by Christ's statement of the limitations of His mission. Their petition evidently meant, 'Dismiss her by granting her request'; they knew in what fashion He was wont to 'send away' such suppliants. They seem, then, more pitiful than He is. But their thoughts are more for themselves than for her. That 'us' shows the cloven foot. They did not like the noise, and they feared it might defeat His purpose of secrecy; and so, by their phrase, 'Send her away,' they unconsciously betray that what they wanted was not granting the prayer, but getting rid of the petitioner. Perhaps, too, they mean, 'Say something to her; either tell her that Thou wilt or that Thou wilt not; break Thy silence somehow.' No doubt, it was intensely disagreeable to have a shrieking woman coming after them; and they were only doing as most of us would have done, and as so many of us do, when we give help without one touch of compassion, in order to stop some imploring mouth.

Their apparently compassionate but really selfish intercession was put aside by the answer, which explains the paradox of His silence. It puts emphasis on two things: His subordination to the divine will of the Father, and the restrictions imposed thereby on the scope of His beneficent working. He was obeying the divine will in confining His ministry to the Jewish people, as we know that He did. Clearly, that restriction was necessary. It was a case of concentration in order to diffusion. The fire must be gathered on the hearth, if it is afterward to warm the chamber. There must be geographical and national limits to His life; and the Messiah, who comes last in the long series of the kings and prophets, can only be authenticated as the world's Messiah, by being first the fulfiller to the children of the promises made to the fathers. The same necessity, which required that revelation should be made through that nation, required that the climax and fulfiller of all revelation should limit His

earthly ministry to it. This limitation must be regarded as applying only to His own personal ministry. It did not limit His sympathies, nor interfere with His consciousness of being the Saviour and King of the whole world. He had already spoken the parables which claimed it all for the area of the development of His kingdom, and in many other ways had given utterance to His consciousness of universal dominion, and His purpose of universal mercy. But He knew that there was an order of development in the kingdom, and that at its then stage the surest way to attain the ultimate universality was rigid limitation of it to the chosen people. This conviction locked His gracious lips against even this poor woman's piteous cry. We may well believe that His sympathy outran His commission, and that it would have been hard for so much love to be silent in the presence of so much sorrow, if He had not felt the solemn pressure of that divine necessity which ruled all His life. He was bound by His instructions, and therefore He answered her not a word. Individual suffering is no reason for transcending the limits of God-appointed functions; and he is absolved from the charge of indifference who refrains from giving help, which he can only give by overleaping the bounds of his activity, which have been set by the Father.

III. We have, next, the persistent suppliant answered by a refusal which sounds harsh and hopeless. Christ's former words were probably not heard by the woman, who seems to have been behind the group. She saw that something was being said to Him, and may have gathered, from gestures or looks, that His reply was unfavourable. Perhaps there was a short pause in their walk, while they spoke, during which she came nearer. Now she falls at His feet, and with 'beautiful shamelessness,' as Chrysostom calls it, repeats her prayer, but this time with pathetic brevity, uttering but the one cry, 'Lord, help me!' The intenser the feeling, the fewer the words. Heart-prayers are short prayers. She does not now invoke Him as the Son of David, nor tell her sorrow over again, but flings herself in desperation on His pity, with the artless and unsupported cry, wrung from her agony, as she sees the hope of help fading away. Like Jacob, in his mysterious struggle, 'she wept, and made supplication unto Him.'

As it would seem, her distress touched no chord of sympathy; and from the lips accustomed to drop oil and wine into every wound, came words like swords, cold, unfeeling, keen-edged, fitted and meant to lacerate. We shall not understand them, or Him, if we content ourselves with the explanation which jealousy for His honour as compassionate and tender has led many to adopt, that He meant all the long delay in granting her request, and the words which He spoke, only as tests of her faith. His refusal was a real refusal, founded on the divine decree, which He was bound to obey. His words to her, harsh as they unquestionably sound, are but another way of putting the limitation on which He had just insisted in His answer to the disciples. The 'bread' is the blessing which He, as the sent of God, brings; the 'children' are the 'lost sheep of the house of Israel'; the 'dogs' are the Gentile world. The meaning of the whole is simply the necessary restriction of His personal activity

to the chosen nation. It is not meant to wound nor to insult, though, no doubt, it is cast in a form which might have been offensive, and would have repelled a less determined or less sorrowful heart. The form may be partly explained by the intention of trying her earnestness, which, though it is not the sole, or even the principal, is a subordinate, reason of our Lord's action. But it is also to be considered in the light of the woman's quick-witted retort, which drew out of it an inference which we cannot suppose that Christ did not intend. He uses a diminutive for 'dogs,' which shows that He is not thinking of the fierce, unclean animals, masterless and starving, that still haunt Eastern cities, and deserve their bad character, but of domestic pets, who live with the household, and are near the table. In fact, the woman seized His intention much better than later critics who find 'national scorn' in the words; and the fair inference from them is just that which she drew, and which constituted the law of the preaching of the Gospel,—'To the Jew first, and also to the Gentile.'

IV. We have the woman's retort, which wrings hope out of apparent discouragement, answered by Christ's joyful granting of her request. Out of His very words she weaves a plea. 'Yes, Lord; I am one of the dogs; then I am not an alien, but belong to the household.' The Revised Version does justice to her words by reading 'for even' instead of 'yet,' She does not enter a caveat against the analogy, but accepts it wholly, and only asks Him to carry out His own metaphor. She takes the sword from His hand, or, as Luther says, 'she catches Him in His own words.' She does not ask a place at the table, nor anything taken from those who have a prior claim to a more abundant share in His mercies. A crumb is enough for her, which they will never miss. In other and colder words, she acquiesces in the divine appointment which limits His mission to Israel; but she recognises that all nations belong to God's household, and that she and her countrymen have a real, though for the time inferior, position in it. She pleads that her gain will not be the children's loss, nor the answer to her prayers an infraction of the spirit of His mission. Perhaps, too, there may be a reference to the fact of His being there on Gentile soil, in her words, 'Which fall from the children's table.' She does not want the bread to be thrown from the table to her. She is not asking Him to transfer His ministry to Gentiles; but here He is. A crumb has fallen, in His brief visit. May she not eat of that? In this answer faith, humility, perseverance, swift perception of His meaning, and hallowed ingenuity and boldness, are equally admirable. By admitting that she was 'a dog,' and pleading her claim on that footing, she shows that she was 'a child.' And therefore, because she has shown herself one of the true household, in the fixedness of her faith, in the meekness of her humility, in the persistence of her prayers, Christ joyfully recognises that here is a case in which He may pass the line of ordinary limitation, and that, in doing so, He does not exceed His commission. Such faith is entitled to the fullest share of His gift. She takes her place beside the Gentile centurion as the two recipients of commendation from Him for the greatness of their faith. It had seemed as if He would give nothing; but He ends with giving all, putting the key of the storehouse into her hand, and

bidding her take, not a crumb, but 'as thou wilt.' Her daughter is healed, by His power working at a distance; but that was not, we may be very sure, the last nor the best of the blessings which she took from that great treasure of which He made her mistress. Nor can we doubt that He rejoiced at the removal of the barrier which dammed back His help, as much as she did at the abundance of the stream which reached her at last.

V. The final verses of our lesson give us a striking contrast to this story. Jesus is again on the shores of the lake, after a tour through the Tyrian and Sidonian territory, and then eastwards and southwards, to its eastern bank. There He, as on several former occasions, seeks seclusion and repose in the hills, which is broken in upon by the crowds. The old excitement and rush of people begin again. And large numbers of sick, 'lame, blind, dumb, maimed and many others,' are brought. They are cast 'down at His feet' in hot haste, with small ceremony, and, as would appear, with little petitioning for His healing power. But the same grace, for which the Canaanitish woman had needed to plead so hard, now seems to flow almost unasked. She had, as it were, wrung a drop out; now it gushes abundantly. She had not got her 'crumb' without much pleading; these get the bread almost without asking. It is this contrast of scant and full supplies which the evangelist would have us observe. And he points his meaning plainly enough by that expression, 'they glorified the God of Israel,' which seems to be Matthew's own, and not his quotation of what the crowd said. This abundance of miracle witnesses to the pre-eminence of Israel over the Gentile nations, and to the special revelation of Himself which God made to them in His Son. The crowd may have found in it only fuel for narrow national pride and contempt; but it was the divine method for the founding of the kingdom none the less; and these two scenes, set thus side by side, teach the same truth, that the King of men is first the King of Israel.

THE DIVINE CHRIST CONFESSED, THE SUFFERING CHRIST DENIED

‘When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Phlippi, He asked His disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am? 14. And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. 15. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? 16. And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. 17. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven. 18. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. 19. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be hound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 20. Then charged He His disciples that they should tell no man that He was Jesus the Christ. 21. From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. 22. Then Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him, saying, Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall not be unto Thee. 23. But He turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind Me, Satan: thou art an offence unto Me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men. 24. Then said Jesus unto His disciples, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 25. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it. 26. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? 27. For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his works. 28. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.’—[MATT. xvi. 13-28](#).

This section is embarrassing from its fulness of material. We can but lightly touch points on which volumes might be, and indeed have been, written.

I. The first section ([vs. 13-20](#)) gives us Peter’s great confession in the name of the disciples, and Christ’s answer to it. The centre of this section is the eager avowal of the impetuous apostle, always foremost for good or evil. We note the preparation for it, its contents, and its results. As to the preparation,—our Lord is entering on a new era in His work, and desires to bring clearly into His followers’ consciousness the sum of His past self-revelation. The excitement, which He had checked after the first miraculous feeding, had died down. The fickle crowd had gone away from Him, and the shadows of the cross were darkening. Amid the seclusion of the woods, fountains, and rocks of Caesarea, far away from distracting influences, He puts these two momentous questions. Following the Revised Version reading,

we have a double contrast between the first and second. 'Men' answers to 'ye,' and 'the Son of Man' to 'I.' The first question is as to the partial and conflicting opinions among the multitudes who had heard His name for Himself from His own lips; the second, in its use of the 'I,' hints at the fuller unveiling of the depths of His gracious personality, which the disciples had experienced, and implies, 'Surely you, who have been beside Me, and known Me so closely, have reached a deeper understanding.' It has a tone of the same wistfulness and wonder as that other question of His, 'Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me?' For their sakes, He seeks to draw out their partly unconscious faith, that had been smouldering, fed by their daily experience of His beauty and tenderness. Half-recognised convictions float in many a heart, which need but a pointed question to crystallise into master-truths, to which, henceforward, the whole being is subject. Great are the dangers of articulate creeds; but great is the power of putting our shadowy beliefs into plain words. 'With the mouth confession is made unto salvation.'

Why should this great question have been preceded by the other? Probably to make the disciples feel more distinctly the chaotic contradictions of the popular judgment, and their own isolation by their possession of the clearer light. He wishes them to see the gulf opening between them and their fellows, and so to bind them more closely to Himself. This is the question the answer to which settles everything for a man. It has an intensely sharp point. We cannot take refuge from it in the general opinion. Nor does any other man's judgment about Him matter one whit to us. This Christ has a strange power, after nineteen hundred years, of coming to each of us, with the same persistent interrogation on His lips. And to-day, as then, all depends on the answer which we give. Many answer by exalted estimates of Him, like these varying replies which ascribed to Him prophetic authority, but they have not understood His own name for Himself, nor drunk in the meaning of His self-revelation, unless they can reply with the full-toned confession of the apostle, which sets Him far above and apart from the highest and holiest.

As to the contents of the confession, it includes both the human and the divine sides of Christ's nature. He is the Messiah, but He is more than what a Jew meant by that name; He is 'the Son of the living God,' by which we cannot indeed suppose that Peter meant all that he afterwards learned it contained, or all that the Church has now been taught of its meaning, but which, nevertheless, is not to be watered down as if it did not declare His unique filial relation to the Father, and so His divine nature. Nathanael had burst into rapturous adoration of Jesus as 'the Son of God' at the very beginning; and the disciples' glad confidence, which cast out the fear of the dim form striding across the sea, had echoed the confession; all had heard His words, 'No man knoweth the Father but the Son.' So we need not hesitate to interpret this confession as in essence and germ containing the whole future doctrine of our Lord's divinity. True, the speaker did not know all which lay in His words. Do we? Do we not see here an illustration of the method of Christian progress in doctrine, which consists

not in the winning of new truths, but in the penetrating further into the meaning of old and initial truths? The conviction which made and makes a Christian, is this of Peter's; and Christian growth is into, not away from, it.

As to the results, they are set forth in our Lord's answer, which breathes of delight, and we may almost say gratitude. His manhood knew the thrill of satisfaction at having some hearts which understood though partially, and loved even better than they knew. The solemn address to the apostle by his ancestral name, gives emphasis to the contrast between his natural weakness and his divine illumination and consequent privilege. The name of Peter is not here bestowed, but interpreted. Christ does not say 'Thou shalt be,' but 'Thou art,' and so presupposes the former conferring of the name. Unquestionably, the apostle is the rock on which the Church is built. The efforts to avoid that conclusion would never have been heard of, but for the Roman Catholic controversy; but they are as unnecessary as unsuccessful. Is it credible that in the course of an address which is wholly occupied with conferring prerogatives on the apostle, a clause should come in, which is concerned about an altogether different subject from the 'thou' of the preceding and the 'thee' of the following clauses, and which yet should take the very name of the apostle, slightly modified, for that other subject? We do not interpret other books in that fashion. But it was not the 'flesh and blood' Peter, but Peter as the recipient and faithful utterer of the divine inspiration in his confession, who received these privileges. Therefore they are not his exclusive property, but belong to his faith, which grasped and confessed the divine-human Lord; and wherever that faith is, there are these gifts, which are its results. They are the 'natural' consequences of the true faith in Christ, in that higher region where the supernatural is the natural. Peter's grasp of Christ's nature wrought upon his character, as pressure does upon sand, and solidified his shifting impetuosity into rock-like firmness. So the same faith will tend to do in any man. It made him the chief instrument in the establishment of the early Church. On souls steadied and made solid by like faith, and only on such, can Christ build His Church. Of course, the metaphor here regards Jesus, not as the foundation, as the Scripture generally does, but as the founder. The names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are on the foundations of the heavenly city; and, in historical fact, the name of this apostle is graven on the deepest and first laid. In like subordinate sense, all who share that heroic faith and proclaim it are used by the Master-builder in the foundations of His Church; and Peter himself is eager to share his name among his brethren, when he says 'Ye also, as living stones.'

Built on men who hold by that confession, the Church is immortal; and the armies who pour out of the gates of the pale kingdoms of the unseen world shall not be able to destroy it. Peter, as confessor of his Lord's human-divine nature, wields the keys of the kingdom of heaven, like a steward of a great house; and that too was fulfilled in his apostolic activity in his admitting Jews at Pentecost, and Gentiles in the house of Cornelius. But the same power attends all who share his faith and avowal, for the preaching of that faith is the opening of

heaven's door to men. He receives the power of binding and loosing, by which is not meant that of forgiving or retaining sins, but that of prohibiting or allowing actions, or, in other words, of laying down the law of Christian conduct. This meaning of the metaphors is made certain by the common Jewish use of them. Despotical legislative power is not here committed to the apostle, but the great principle is taught that the morality of Christianity flows directly from its theology, and that whosoever, like Peter, grasps firmly the cardinal truth of Christ's nature, and all which flows therefrom, will have his insight so cleared that his judgments on what is permitted or forbidden to a Christian man will correspond with the decisions of heaven, in the measure of his hold upon the truth which underlies all religion and all morality, namely, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.' These are gifts to Peter indeed, but only as possessor of that faith, and are much more truly understood as belonging to all who 'possess like precious faith' (as Peter says), than as the prerogative of any individual or class.

II. The second section ([vs. 21-23](#)) contains the startling new revelation of the suffering Messiah, and the disciples' repugnance to it. The Gospel has two parts: Jesus is the Christ, and the Christ must suffer and enter into His glory. Our Lord has made sure that the disciples have learned the first before He leads to the second. The very conviction of His dignity and divine nature made that second truth the more bewildering, but still the only road to it was through the first. [Verse 21](#) covers an indefinite time, during which Jesus gradually taught His sufferings. Ordinarily we exaggerate the suddenness, and therefore the depth, of Peter's fall, by supposing that it took place immediately after his confession; but the narrative discountenances the idea, and merely says that Jesus then 'began' His new teaching. There had been veiled hints of it (such as [John ii. 19](#), and [Matt. ix. 15, xii. 40](#)), but henceforward it assumed prominence, and was taught without veil. It was no new thought to Himself, forced on Him by the growing enmity of the nation. The cross always cast its shadow on His path. He was no enthusiast, beginning with the dream of winning a world to His side, and slowly and heroically making up His mind to die a martyr, but His purpose in being born was to minister and to die, a ransom for the many. We have not here to do with a growing consciousness, but simply with an increasing clearness of utterance. Note the detailed accuracy of His prevision, which points to Jerusalem as the scene, and to the rulers of the nation as the instruments, and to death as the climax, and to resurrection as the issue, of His sufferings; the clear setting forth of the divine necessity which, as it ruled all His life, ruled here also, and is expressed in that solemn 'must'; and the perfectly willing acceptance by Him of that necessity, implied in that 'go,' and certified by many another word of His. The necessity was no external compulsion, driving Him to an unwelcome sacrifice, but one imposed alike by filial obedience and by brotherly love. He must die because He would save.

How vividly the scene of Peter's rash rejection of the teaching is described! The apostle, full of eager love, still, as of old, swift to speak, and driven by unexamined impulse, lays his

hand on Christ, and draws Him a little apart, while he 'begins' to pour out words which show that he has forgotten his confession. 'Rebuke' must not be softened down into anything less vehement or more respectful. He knows better than Jesus what will happen. Perhaps his assurance 'that this shall never be' means 'We will fight first.' But he is not allowed to finish what he began; for the Master, whom he loved unwisely but well, turns His back on him, as in horror, and shows by the terrible severity of His rebuke how deeply moved He is. He repels the hint in almost the same words as He had used to the tempter in the wilderness, of whom that Peter, who had so lately been the recipient and proclaimer of a divine illumination, has become the mouthpiece. So possible is it to fall from sunny heights to doleful depths! So little can any divine inspiration be permanent, if the man turn away from it to think man's thoughts, and set his affections on the things which men desire! So certainly does minding these degrade to becoming an organ of Satan! The words are full of restrained emotion, which reveal how real a temptation Peter had flung in Christ's path. The rock has become a stone of stumbling; the man Jesus shrank from the cross with a natural and innocent shrinking, which never made His will tremulous, but was none the less real; and such words from loving lips did affect him. Let us note, on the whole, that the complete truth about Jesus Christ must include these two parts,—His divine nature and Messiahship, and His death on the cross; and that neither alone is the gospel, nor is he a disciple, such as Christ desires, who does not cleave to both with mind and heart.

III. In [verses 24-28](#), the law, which ruled the Master's life, is extended to the servants. They recoiled from the thought of His having to suffer. They had to learn that they must suffer too if they would be His. First, the condition of discipleship is set before them as being the fellowship of His suffering. 'If any man will' gives them the option of withdrawal. A new epoch is beginning, and they will have to enlist again, and to do so with open eyes. He will have no unwilling soldiers, nor any who have been beguiled into the ranks. No doubt, some went away, and walked no more with Him. The terms of service are clear. Discipleship means imitation, and imitation means self-crucifixion. At that time they would only partially understand what taking up their cross was, but they would apprehend that a martyred master must needs have for followers men ready to be martyrs too. But the requirement goes much deeper than this. There is no discipleship without self-denial, both in the easier form of starving passions and desires, and in the harder of yielding up the will, and letting His will supplant ours. Only so can we ever come after Him, and of such sacrifice of self the cross is the eminent example. We cannot think too much of it as the instrument of our reconciliation and forgiveness, but we may, and too often do, think too little of it as the pattern of our lives. When Jesus began to teach His death, He immediately presented it as His servants' example. Let us not forget that fact.

The ground of the law is next stated in [verse 25](#). The desire to save life is the loss of life in the highest sense. If that desire guide us, then farewell to enthusiasm, courage, the martyr

spirit, and all which makes man's life nobler than a beast's. He who is ruled mainly by the wish to keep a whole skin, loses the best part of what he is so anxious to keep. In a wider application, regard for self as a ruling motive is destruction, and selfishness is suicide. On the other hand, lives hazarded for Christ are therein truly saved, and if they be not only hazarded, but actually lost, such loss is gain; and the same law, by which the Master 'must' die and rise again, will work in the servant. [Verse 26](#) urges the wisdom of such apparent folly, and enforces the requirement by the plain consideration that 'life' is worth more than anything beside, and that on the two grounds, that the world itself would be of no use to a dead man, and that, once lost, 'life' cannot be bought back. Therefore the dictate of the wisest prudence is that seemingly prodigal flinging away of the lower 'life' which puts us in possession of the higher. Note that the appeal is here made to a reasonable regard to personal advantage, and that in the very act of urging to crucify self. So little did Christ think, as some people do, that the desire to save one's soul is selfishness.

[Verse 27](#) confirms all the preceding by the solemn announcement of the coming of the Son of Man as Judge. Mark the dignity of the words. He is to come 'in the glory of the Father.' That ineffable and inaccessible light which rays forth from the Father enwraps the Son. Their glory is one. The waiting angels are 'His.' He renders to every man according to his doing (his actions considered as one whole). Thus He claims for Himself universal sway, and the power of accurately determining the whole moral character of every life, as well as that of awarding precisely graduated retribution. They surely shall then find their lives who have followed Him here.

[Verse 28](#) adds, with His solemn 'verily,' a confirmation of this announcement of His coming to judge. The question of what event is referred to may best be answered by noting that it must be one sufficiently far off from the moment of speaking to allow of the death of the greater number of His hearers, and sufficiently near to allow of the survival of some; that it must also be an event, after which these survivors would go the common road into the grave; that it is apparently distinguished from His coming 'in the glory of the Father,' and yet is of such a nature as to afford convincing proof of the establishment of His kingdom on earth, and to be, in some sort, a sign of that final act of judgment. All these requirements (and they are all the fair inferences from the words) meet only in the destruction of Jerusalem, and of the national life of the chosen people. That was a crash of which we faintly realise the tremendous significance. It swept away the last remnant of the hope that Israel was to be the kingdom of the Messiah; and from out of the dust and chaos of that fall the Christian Church emerged, manifestly destined for world-wide extension. It was a 'great and terrible day of the Lord,' and, as such, was a precursor and a prophecy of the day of the Lord, when He 'shall come in the glory of the Father,' and 'render unto every man according to his deeds.'

CHRIST FORESEEING THE CROSS

‘From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.’—[MATT. xvi. 21](#).

The ‘time’ referred to in the text was probably a little more than six months before the Crucifixion, when Jesus was just on the point of finally leaving Galilee, and travelling towards Jerusalem. It was an epoch in His ministry. The hostility of the priestly party in the capital had become more pronounced, and simultaneously the fickle enthusiasm of the Galilean crowds, which had been cooled by His discouragement, had died down into apathy. He and His followers are about to leave familiar scenes and faces, and to plunge into perilous and intrude paths. He is resolved that, if they will ‘come after Him,’ as He bids them in a subsequent verse, it shall be with their eyes open, and as knowing that to come after Him now means to cut themselves loose from old moorings, and to put out into the storm. They shall be abundantly certified that their journeying to Jerusalem is not a triumphal procession to a crown, but a march to a cross.

So, this new epoch in His life is attended with a new development of His teaching. My text sums up the result of many interviews in which, by slow degrees, He sought to put the disciples in possession of this unwelcome truth. It was prepared for, by the previous conversation in which His question elicited from Peter, as the mouthpiece of the apostles, the great confession of His Messiahship and Divinity. Settled in their belief of these truths, however imperfect their intellectual grasp of them, they might perhaps be able to receive the mournful mystery of His passion.

I. We have here set forth in the first place our Lord’s anticipation of the Cross.

Mark the tone of the language, the minuteness of the detail, the absolute certainty of the prevision. That is not the language of a man who simply is calculating that the course which he is pursuing is likely to end in his martyrdom; but the thing lies there before Him, a definite, fixed certainty; every detail known, the scene, the instruments, the non-participation of these in the final act of His death, His resurrection, and its date,—all manifested and mapped out in His sight, and all absolutely certain.

Now this was by no means the first time that the certainty of the Cross was plain to Christ. It was not even the first time that it had been announced in His teaching. Veiled hints; allusions, brief but pregnant, had been scattered through His earlier ministry—such, for instance, as the enigmatical word at its very beginning, ‘Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up’; or as the profound word to the rabbi that sought Him by night, ‘As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up’; or as the passing hint, dropped to the people, in symbolical language, about the ‘sign of the prophet Jonas’; or as the grief foreshadowed dimly to the apostles, of the withdrawal of the

Bridegroom, and their 'fasting in those days.' These hints, and no doubt others unrecorded, had cropped to the surface before; and what we have to do with here, is neither the dawning of an expectation in Christ, nor the first utterance of the certainty of the Cross, but simply the beginning of a continuous and unenigmatical teaching of it, as an element in His instructions to His disciples.

So then, we have to recognise the fact that our Lord's prevision of the end—shone, I was going to say, perhaps it might be truer to say, darkened,—all the path along which He had to travel.

I think that people dogmatise a great deal too glibly as to what they know very little about, the interaction of the divine and the human elements in Christ, and on the one side are far too certain in their affirmation that His humanity possessed in some reflected fashion the divine gift of omniscience; and on the other hand, that His manhood, passing through the process of human development, and increasing in wisdom, was necessarily in its earlier stages void of the consciousness of His Messianic mission. I dare not affirm either 'yes' or 'no' about that matter; but this I am sure of, that if ever there was a time in the development of the Manhood of Jesus Christ when He began to know Himself as the Messiah, at that same time He began to be certain of the Cross. For His Messianic work required the Cross, and the divine thing that was in Him was born into the world for a double purpose, to minister and to die.

So, dear friends, putting aside mere metaphysics, which are superficial after all, we have to recognise this as the fact, that all through His career there arose before our Lord the certainty of that death, and that it did not assume to Him the aspect which such a prospect might have assumed to others as a possible result of a mission that failed, but it assumed to Him the aspect of the certain result of a work that was accomplished. He began His career with no illusions, such as other teachers, reformers, philanthropists, men that have moved society, have always begun with. Moses might 'suppose his brethren would have understood how that God by His hand would deliver them,' but Christ had no such illusion. He knew from the beginning that He came to be rejected and to die. And so He 'trod life's common way,' with that grim certainty rising ever before Him. I suppose that He did not, as you and I do, forget the death that awaits us, and find the non-remembrance of it the condition of much of our energy, but that it was perpetually in His sight.

Now I do not think that we sufficiently dwell upon that fact as an element in the human experience of our Lord. What beauty it gives to His gentleness, to the leisureliness of heart with which He was ready to make everybody's sorrow His own, and to lay a healing and a loving finger upon every wound! With this certainty before Him, there was yet no strain manifest upon His spirit, no self-absorption, no shutting Himself out from other people's burdens because He had so heavy ones of His own to carry; but He was ready for every joy, ready for all sympathy, ready for every help; and if we cannot say that, 'in cheerful godliness,'

as I think we may, at least we can say that with solemn joy and untroubled readiness, He journeyed towards that Cross. This Isaac was under no illusions as to who the Lamb for the offering was, but knowing it, He patiently carried the wood and climbed the hill, ready for the Father's will.

II. That brings me to notice the second point here, our Lord's recognition of the necessity of His suffering.

Mark that He does not say that He shall suffer. Certainty is not all that He proclaims here, however absolute that certainty might be, but it is 'He must.' He is speaking not only of the historical fact, but of the need, deep in the nature of things, for His sufferings that were to follow.

And though these were wrought out by His own willing submission on the one hand, and by the unfettered play of the evil passions of the worst of men on the other, yet over all that apparent chaos of unbridled devildom there ruled the unalterable purpose of God; and the 'must' was wrought out through the passions of evil-doers and the voluntary submission of the innocent sufferer; thus setting before us, in the central fact of the history of humanity, viz. the Cross and passion of Jesus Christ, the eminent example of that great mystery how the absolute freedom of the human will, and the responsibility of the guilt of human wrongdoers, are congruous with the fixed purpose of an all-determining and all-ruling Providence.

But that is apart from my purpose. Mark then, that our Lord's recognition of this necessity for His suffering is, on the first and plainest aspect of it, His recognition that His suffering was necessary on the ground of filial obedience. All through His life we hear that 'must' echoing, and His whole spirit bowed to it. As He says Himself, 'The Son can do nothing of Himself.' As was said for Him of old: 'Lo, I come. In the volume of the book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will, and Thy law is within My heart.' So the Father's will is the Son's law; and the Father's 'Thou shalt' is answered by the Son's 'I must.'

But yet that necessity grounded on filial obedience was no mere external necessity determined solely by the divine will. God so willed it, because it must be so; that it must be so was not because God so willed it. That is to say, the work to which Christ had set His hand was a work that demanded the Cross, nor could it be accomplished without it. For it was the work of redeeming the world, and required more than a beautiful life, more than a divine gentleness of heart, more than the homely and yet deep wisdom of His teachings, it required the sacrifice that He offered on the Cross.

So, dear friends, Christ's 'must' is but this: 'My work is not accomplished except I die.' And remember that the connection between our Lord's work and our Lord's death is not that which subsists between the works and the deaths of great teachers, or heroic martyrs, or philanthropists and benefactors, who will gladly pay the price of life in order to carry out their loving or their wise designs. It is no mere appendage to His work, nor the price that He paid for having done it, but it is His very work in its vital centre.

I pray you to consider if there is any theory of the meaning and power of the death of Jesus Christ which adequately explains this 'must,' except the one that He died a sacrifice for the sins of the world. On any other hypothesis, as it seems to me, of what His death meant, it is surplusage, over and above His work: not adding much, either to His teaching or to the beauty of His example, and having no absolute stringent necessity impressed upon it. There is one doctrine—that when He died He bare the sins of the whole world—which makes His death a necessity; and I ask you, Is there any other doctrine which does? Take care of a Christianity which would not be much impoverished if the Cross were struck out of it altogether.

There is a deeper question, on which, as I believe, it does not become us to enter, and that is, What is the necessity for the necessity? Why must it be that He, who is the Redeemer of the world, must needs be the Sacrifice for the world? We do not know enough about the depths of the divine nature and the divine government to speak very wisely or reverently upon that subject, and I, for one, abjure the attempt, which seems to me to be presumptuous—the attempt to explain why there was needed a sacrifice for sin in order to the forgiveness of sin. If I knew all about God, I could tell you; and nobody, that does not, can. But we can see, as far as concerns us, that, as the history of all religions tells us, for the forgiveness and acceptance of sinful men a pure sacrifice is needed; and that for teaching us the love of God, the hideousness and wages of sin, for our emancipation from evil, for the quieting of our consciences, for a foothold for faith, for an adequate motive of self-surrender and obedience, his sacrificial death is needful. The life and death of Jesus Christ, regarded as God's sacrifice for the world's sin, does all this. The life and death of Jesus Christ, regarded in any other aspect, does not do this. Historically speaking, mutilated forms of Christianity, which have not known what to do with the Cross of Christ, have lost their constraining, purifying, and aggressive power. For us sinful men, if we are to be delivered from evil and become sons of God, He must suffer many things, and be killed, and rise again the third day.

III. Now note further, how we have here also our Lord's willing acceptance of the necessity.

It is one thing to recognise, and another thing to accept, a needs-be. This 'must' was no unwelcome obligation laid upon Him against His will, but one to which His whole nature responded and which He accepted. No doubt there was in Him the innocent instinctive physical shrinking from death. No doubt the Cross, in so far, was pain and suffering. No doubt we are to trace the reality of a temptation in Peter's rash words which follow, as indicated to us by the severity and almost vehemence of the action with which Christ puts it away. No doubt there is a profound meaning in that answer of His, 'Thou art a stumbling-block to Me.' The 'Rock' is turned into a stone of stumbling, and Peter's suggestion appeals to something in Him which responded to it.

That shrinking might be a shrinking of nature, but it was not a recoil of will. The ship may toss in dreadful billows, but the needle points to the pole. The train may rock upon the line, but it never leaves the rails. Christ felt that the Cross was an evil, but that feeling never made Him falter in His determination to bear it. His willing acceptance of the necessity was owing to His full resolve to save the world. He must die because He would redeem, and He would redeem because He could not but love. 'He saved others,' and therefore 'Himself He cannot save.' So the 'must' was not an iron chain that fastened Him to His Cross. Like some of the heroic martyrs of old, who refused to be bound to the funeral pile, He stood there chained to it by nothing but His own will and loving purpose to save the world.

And, brethren, in that loving purpose, each of us may be sure that we had an individual and a personal share. Whatever the interaction between the divinity and the humanity, this at all events is certain, that every soul of man has his distinct and definite place in Christ's knowledge and in Christ's love. Each of us all may be sure that one strand of the cords of love which fastened Him to the Cross was His love for me; and each of us may say—He must die, because 'He loved me, and gave Himself for me.'

IV. Lastly, notice here our Lord's teaching the necessity of His death.

This announcement was preceded, as I remarked, by that conversation which led to the crystallising of the half-formed convictions of the apostles in a definite creed, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.' But that was not all that they needed to know and believe and trust to. That was the first volume of their lesson-book. The second volume was this, that 'Christ must suffer.' And so let us learn the central place which the Cross holds in Christ's teaching. They tell us that the doctrine of Christ as the Sacrifice for the world is not in the Gospels. Where are the eyes that read the Gospels and do not see it? The theory of it is not there; the announcements of it are. And in this latest section of our Lord's ministry, they are fuller and more frequent than in the earlier, for the plain reason which is implied by the preparation through which He passed these disciples, ere He ventured to communicate the mournful and the bewildering fact. There must be, first, the grasp of His Messiahship, and some recognition that He is the Son of God, ere it is possible to go on to speak of the Cross, the full message concerning which could not be spoken until after the Resurrection and the Ascension.

But note, you do not understand Christ's Cross unless you bring to it the faith in Christ's Messiahship and the belief in some measure that He is the Son of God. Neither the pathos nor the power of His death is intelligible if it be simply like other deaths—the dying of a man who is born subject to the law of mortality, and who yields to it by natural process. Unless you and I take upon our lips, though with far deeper meaning, the words with which the heathen centurion gazed upon the dying Christ, and say, 'Truly this was the Son of God!' His Cross is common and trivial and insignificant; but if we can thus speak, then it stands

before us as the crown of all God's manifestations in the world,' the wisdom of God and the power of God.'

And then note, still further, how, without the Cross, these other truths are not the whole gospel. There were disciples then, as there have been disciples since, and as there are to-day, who were willing to accept, 'Thou art the Christ'; and willing in some sense to say 'Thou art the Son of God,' but stumbled when He said, 'The Son of Man must suffer.' Brethren, I venture to urge that the gospel of the Incarnation, precious as it is, is not the whole gospel, and that the full-orbed truth about Jesus Christ is that He is the Christ, and that He died for our sins, and rose again to live for ever, our Priest and King.

We need a whole Christ. For our soul's salvation, for the quieting of our consciences, the forgiveness of our sins, for new life, for peace, purity, obedience, love, joy, hope, our faith must grasp 'Christ, and Him crucified.' A half Christ is no Christ, and unless we have as sinful men laid hold of the one Sacrifice for sins for ever, which He offered, we do not understand even the preciousness of the half Christ whom we perceive, nor know the full beauty of His example, the depth of His teaching, nor the tenderness of His heart.

I beseech you, ask yourselves, What Christ can do for me the things which I need to have done, except 'the Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us'?

THE KING IN HIS BEAUTY

‘And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, 2. And was transfigured before them: and His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light. 3. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with Him. 4. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus. Lord, it is good for us to be here: if Thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. 5. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him. 6. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. 7. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. 8. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only. 9. And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of Man be risen again from the dead. 10. And His disciples asked Him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come? 11. And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. 12. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of Man suffer of them. 13. Then the disciples understood that He spake unto them of John the Baptist.’—*MATT. xvii. 1-13.*

The early guess at Tabor as the scene of the Transfiguration must be given up as untenable. Some one of the many peaks of Hermon rising right over Caesarea is a far more likely place. But the silence of all the accounts as to the locality surely teaches us the unimportance of knowledge on the point. The dangers of knowing would more than outweigh the advantages. A similar indefiniteness attaches to the when. Are we to think of it as occurring by night, or by day? Perhaps the former is slightly the more probable, from the fact of the descent being made ‘the next day’ (Luke). Our conception of the scene will be very different, as we think of that lustre from His face, and that bright cloud, as outshining the blaze of a Syrian sun, or as filling the night with glory. But we cannot settle which view is correct.

There are three distinct parts in the whole incident: the Transfiguration proper; the appearance of Moses and Elijah; and the cloud with the voice from it.

I. The Transfiguration proper.

The general statement that Jesus ‘was transfigured before them’ is immediately followed out into explanatory details. These are twofold—the radiance of His face, and the gleaming whiteness of His raiment, which shone like the snow on Hermon when it is smitten by the sunshine. Probably we are to think of the whole body as giving forth the same mysterious light, which made itself visible even through the white robe He wore. This would give beautiful accuracy and appropriateness to the distinction drawn in the two metaphors,—that His face was ‘as the sun,’ in which the undiluted glory was seen; and His garments ‘as the

light,' which is sunshine diffused and weakened. There is no hint of any external source of the brightness. It does not seem to have been a reflection from the visible symbol of the divine presence, as was the fading radiance on the face of Moses. That symbol does not come into view till the last stage of the incident. We are then to think of the brightness as rising from within, not cast from without. We cannot tell whether it was voluntary or involuntary. Luke gives a pregnant hint, in connecting it with Christ's praying, as if the calm ecstasy of communion with the Father brought to the surface the hidden glory of the Son. Can it be that such glory always accompanied His prayers, and that its presence may have been one reason for the sedulous privacy of these, except on this one occasion, when He desired that His faithful three should be 'eye-witnesses of His majesty'? However that may be, we have probably to regard the Transfiguration as the transient making visible, in the natural, symbolic form of light, of the indwelling divine glory, which dwelt in Him as in a shrine, and then shone through the veil of His flesh. John explains the event, though His words go far beyond it, when he says, 'We beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father.'

What was the purpose of the Transfiguration? Matthew seems to tell us in that 'before them.' It was for their sakes, not for His, as indeed follows from the belief that it was the irradiation from within of the indwelling light. The new epoch of His life, in which they were to have a share of trial and cross-bearing, needed some great encouragement poured into their tremulous hearts; and so, for once, He deigned to let them look on His face shining as the sun, for a remembrance when they saw it covered with 'shame and spitting' and His brow bleeding from the thorns. But perhaps we may venture a step farther, and see here some prophecy of that body of His glory in which He now reigns. Speculations as to the difference between the earthly body of our Lord and ours are fascinating but unsubstantial. It was a true human body, susceptible of hunger, pain, weariness; but we are not taught that it carried in it the necessity of death. It may have been more pliable to the spirit's behests, and more transparent to its light, than ours. There may have been in that hour of radiance some approximation to the perfect harmony between the perfect spirit and the body, which is its fit organ, which we know is His now, and to which we also know that He will conform the body of our humiliation. Then His face 'shone as the sun'; when one of these three saw Him in His glory, 'His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength'; and His own promise to us is that we too 'shall shine forth as the sun.' Then His garments were white as the light; His promise is that they who are worthy shall 'walk with Him in white.' The Transfiguration was a revelation and a prophecy.

II. The appearance of Moses and Elijah.

While the three are gazing with dazzled eyes, suddenly, as if shaped out of air, there stand by Jesus two mighty forms, evidently men, and yet, according to Luke, encompassed in the white radiance, walking with the Son of Man in a better furnace. What a stound of awe and wonder must have touched the gazers as the conviction who these were filled their

minds, and they recognised, we know not how, the mighty lineaments of the lawgiver and the prophet! Did the three mortals understand the meaning of the words of the heavenly three? We cannot tell. Nor does Matthew tell us what was the theme of that wondrous colloquy. These two might have asked, 'Why hast Thou disquieted us to bring us up?' What is the answer? Wherefore were they there? To tell Jesus that He was to die? No, for that lay plain before Him. To learn from Him the mystery of His passion, that they might be His heralds, the one in Paradise, the other in the pale kingdoms of Hades? Perhaps, but, more probably, they came to minister to Him strength for His conflict, even as women did of their substance, and an angel did in Gethsemane. Perhaps the strength came to Jesus from seeing how they yearned for the fulfilment of the typified redemption; perhaps it came from His being able to speak to them as He could not to any on earth. At all events, surely Moses and Elijah were not brought there for their own sakes alone, nor for the sake of the witnesses, but also for His sake who was prepared by that converse for His cross.

Further, their appearance set forth Christ's death, which was their theme, as the climax of revelation. The Law with its requirement and its sacrifices, and Prophecy with its forward-looking gaze, stand there, in their representatives, and bear witness that their converging lines meet in Jesus. The finger that wrote the law, and the finger that smote and parted Jordan, are each lifted to point to Him. The stern voices that spoke the commandments and that hurled threatenings at the unworthy occupants of David's throne, both proclaim, 'Behold the Lamb of God, the perfect Fulfiller of law, the true King of Israel.' Their presence and their speech were the acknowledgment that this was He whom they had seen from afar; their disappearance proclaims that their work is done when they have pointed to Him.

Their presence also teaches us that Jesus is the life of all the living dead. Of course, care must be exercised in drawing dogmatic conclusions from a manifestly abnormal incident, but some plain truths do result from it. Of these two, one had died, though mystery hung round his death and burial; the other had passed into the heavens by another gate than that of death; and here they both stand with lives undiminished by their mysterious changes, in fulness of power and of consciousness, bathed in glory, which was as their native air now. They are witnesses of an immortal life, and proofs that His yet unpierced hands held the keys of life and death. He opened the gate which moves backwards to no hand but His, and summoned them; and they come, with no napkins about their heads, and no trailing grave-clothes entangling their feet, and own Him as the King of life.

They speak too of the eager onward gaze which the Old Testament believers turned to the coming Deliverer. In silent anticipation, through all these centuries, good men had lain down to die, saying, 'I wait for Thy salvation,' and after death their spirits had lived expectant and crying, like the souls under the altar, 'How long, O Lord, how long?' Now these two are brought from their hopeful repose, perchance to learn how near their deliverance was; and behind them we seem to discern a dim crowd of holy men and women, who had died in

faith, not having received the promises, and who throng the portals of the unseen world, waiting for the near advent of the better Samson to bear away the gates to the city on the hill, and lead thither their ransomed train.

Peter's bewildered words need not long detain us. He is half dazed, but, true to his rash nature, thinks that he must say something, and that to do something will relieve the tension of his spirit. His proposal, so ridiculous as it is, shows that he had not really understood what he saw. It also expresses his feeling that it is much better to be there than to be travelling to a cross—and so may stand as an instance of a very real temptation for us all, that of avoiding unwelcome duties and shrinking from rough work, on the plea of holding sweet communion with Jesus on the mountain. It was not 'good' to stay there, and leave demoniacs uncured in the plain.

III. The cloud and the witnessing voice.

Peter's words receive no answer, for, while he is speaking, another solemn and silencing wonder has place. Suddenly a strange cloud forms in the cloudless sky. It is 'bright' with no reflection caught from the sun; it is borne along by no wind; slowly it settles down upon them, like a roof, and, bright though it is, casts a strange shadow. According to one reading of Luke's account, Christ and the two heavenly witnesses pass within its folds, leaving the disciples without, and that separation seems confirmed by Matthew's saying that the voice 'came out of the cloud.' Our evangelist points to its brightness as singular. It was not merely bright, as if smitten by the sunlight, but its whole substance was luminous. It is almost a contradiction to speak of a cloud of light, and the anomalous expression points to something beyond nature. We cannot but remember the pillar which had a heart of fire, and glowed in the darkness over the sleeping camp, and the cloud which filled the house, and drove the priests from the sanctuary by its brightness. Nor should we forget that at His Ascension Jesus was not lost to sight in the blue; but while He was yet visible in the act of blessing, 'a cloud received Him out of their sight.' It is, in fact, the familiar symbol of the divine presence, which had long been absent from the temple, and now reappears. We may note the beauty and felicity of the emblem. It blends light and darkness, so suggesting how the very same 'attributes' of God are both; and how His revelation of Himself reveals Him as unrevealable. The manifestation of His power is also the 'hiding of His power.' The inaccessible light is also thick darkness. The same characteristics of His nature are light and joy to some, and blackness and woe to others.

We may note, too, Christ's passage into the cloud. Moses and Elijah, being purged from mortal weakness, could pass thither. But Jesus, alone of men, could pass in the flesh into that brightness, and be hid in its fiery heart, unshrinking and unconsumed. 'Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? His entrance into it is but the witness to the purity of His nature, and the absence in Him of all fuel for fire. That bright cloud was 'His own

calm home, His habitation from eternity,' and where no man, compassed with flesh and sin, could live, He enters as the Son into the bosom of the Father.

Then comes the articulate witness to the Son. The solemnity and force of the attestation are increased, if we conceive of the disciples as outside the cloud, and parted from Jesus. This word is meant for them only, and so is distinguished from the similar voice at the baptism, and has added the imperative 'Hear him.' The voice bears witness to the mystery of our Lord's person. It points to the contrast between His two attendants and Him. They are servants, 'this is the Son.' It sets forth His supernaturally born humanity, and, deeper still, His true and proper divinity, which John unfolds, in his Gospel, as the deepest meaning of the name. It testifies to the unbroken union of love between the Father and Him, and therein to the absolute perfection of our Lord's character. He is the adequate object of the eternal, divine love. As He has been from the timeless depths of old, He is, in His human life, the object of the ever-unruffled divine complacency, in whom the Father can glass Himself as in a pure mirror. It enjoins obedient listening. God's voice bids us hear Christ's voice. If He is the beloved Son, listening to Him is listening to God. This is the purpose of the whole, so far as we are concerned. We are to hear Him, when He declares God; when He witnesses of Himself, of His love, His work, His death, His judgship; when He invites us to come to Him, and find rest; when He commands and when He promises. Amid the Babel of this day, let us listen to that voice, low and gentle, pleading and soft, authoritative, majestic, and sovereign. It will one day shake 'not the earth only, but also the heaven.' But, as yet, it calls us with strange sweetness, and the music of love in every tone. Well for us if our hearts answer, 'Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth.'

Matthew tells us that this voice from the cloud completely unmanned the disciples, who fell on their faces, and lay there, we know not how long, till Jesus came and laid a loving hand on them, bidding them arise, and not fear. So when they staggered to their feet, and looked around, they saw nothing but the grey stones of the hillside and the blue sky. 'That dread voice was past,' and the silence was broken only by the hum of insects or the twitter of a far-off bird. The strange guests have gone; the radiance has faded from the Master's face, and all is as it used to be. 'They saw no one, save Jesus only.' It is the summing up of revelation; all others vanish, He abides. It is the summing up of the world's history. Thickening folds of oblivion wrap the past, and all its mighty names become forgotten; but His figure stands out, solitary against the background of the past, as some great mountain, which travellers see long after the lower summits are sunk beneath the horizon. Let us make this the summing up of our lives. We can venture to take Him for our sole helper, pattern, love, and aim, because He, in His singleness, is enough for our hearts. There are many fragmentary precious things, but there is only one pearl of great price. And then this will be a prophecy of our deaths—a brief darkness, a passing dread, and then His touch and His voice saying,

‘Arise, be not afraid.’ So we shall lift up our eyes, and find earth faded, and its voices fallen dim, and see ‘no one any more, save Jesus only.’

THE SECRET OF POWER

‘Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? 20. And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief.’—*MATT. xvii. 19, 20.*

‘And when He had called unto Him His twelve disciples, He gave them power against unclean spirits to cast them out.’ That same power was bestowed, too, on the wider circle of the seventy who returned again with joy, saying, ‘Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through Thy name.’ The ground of it was laid in the solemn words with which Christ met their wonder at their own strength, and told how He ‘beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.’ Therefore had they triumphed, showing the fruits of their Master’s victory; and therefore had He a right to renew the gift, in the still more comprehensive promise, ‘I give unto you power—over all the power of the enemy.’

What a commentary on such words this story affords! What has become of the disciples’ supernatural might? Has it ebbed away as suddenly as it flowed? Is their Lord’s endowment a shadow or His assurances delusion? Has He taken back what He gave? Not so. And yet His servants are ignominiously beaten. One poor devil-ridden boy brings all their resources to nothing. He stands before them writhing in the gripe of his tormentor, but they cannot set him free. The importunity of the father’s prayers is vain, and the tension of expectancy in his eager face relaxes into the old hopeless languor as he slowly droops to the conviction that ‘they could not cast him out.’ The malicious scorn in the eyes of the Scribes, those hostile critics who ‘knew that it would be so,’ helps to produce the failure which they anticipated. The curious crowd buzz about them, and in the midst of it all stand the little knot of baffled disciples, possessors of power which seems to leave them when they need it most, with the unavailing spells dying half spoken on their lips, and their faint hearts longing that their Master would come down from the mount, and cover their weakness with His own great strength.

No wonder that, as soon as Christ and they are alone, they wish to know how their mortifying defeat has come about. And they get an answer which they little expected, for the last place where men look for the explanation of their failures is within; but they will ascend into the heavens, and descend into the deeps for remote and recondite reasons, before they listen to the voice which says, ‘The fault is nigh thee, in thy heart.’ Christ’s reply distinctly implies that the cause of their impotence lay wholly in themselves, not in any defect or withdrawal of power, but solely in that in them which grasped the power. They little expected, too, to be told that they had failed because they had not been sure they would succeed. They had thought that they believed in their ability to cast out the demon. They had tried to do so, with some kind of anticipation that they could. They had been surprised when they found that they could not. They had wonderingly asked why. And now Christ tells them that all along they had had no real faith in Him and in the reality of His gift. So subtly may

unbelief steal into the heart, even while we fancy that we are working in faith. And a further portion of our Lord's reply points them to the great means by which this conquering faith can be maintained—namely, prayer and fasting. If, then, we put all these things together, we get a series of considerations, very simple and commonplace indeed, but all the better and truer therefor, which I venture to submit to you, as having a very important bearing on all our Christian work, and especially on the missionary work of the Church. The principles which the text suggests touch the perpetual possession of the power which conquers; the condition of its victorious exercise by us, as being our faith; the subtle danger of unsuspected unbelief to which we are exposed; and the great means of preserving our faith pure and strong. I ask your attention to a few considerations on these points in their order.

But first, let me say very briefly, that I would not be understood as, by the selection of such a text, desiring to suggest that we have failed in our work. Thank God! we can point to results far, far greater than we have deserved, far greater than we have expected, however they may be beneath our desires, and still further below what the gospel was meant to accomplish. It may suit observers who have never done anything themselves, and have not particularly clear eyes for appreciating spiritual work, to talk of Christian missions as failures; but it would ill become us to assent to the lie. Failures indeed! with half a million of converts, with new forms of Christian life budding in all the wilderness of the peoples, with the consciousness of coming doom creeping about the heart of every system of idolatry! Is the green life in the hedges and in the sweet pastures starred with rather primroses, and in the hidden copses blue with hyacinths, a failure, because the east wind bites shrewdly, and 'the tender ash delays to clothe herself with green'? No! no, we have not failed. Enough has been done to vindicate the enterprise, more than enough to fill our lips with thanksgiving, enough to entitle us to say to all would-be critics—Do you the same with your enchantments. But, on the other hand, we have to confess that the success has been slow and small, chequered and interrupted, that often we have been foiled, that we have confronted many a demon whom we could not cast out, and that at home and abroad the masses of evil seem to close in around us, and we make but little impression on their serried ranks. We have had success enough to assure us that we possess the treasure, and failures enough to make us feel how weak are the earthen vessels which hold it.

And now let us turn to the principles which flow from this text.

I. We have an unvarying power.

No doubt the explanation of their defeat which most naturally suggested itself to these disciples would be that somehow or other—perhaps because of Christ's absence—they had lost the gift which they knew that they once had. And the same way of accounting for later want of success lingers among Christian people still. You will sometimes hear it said: 'God sends forth His Spirit in special fulness at special times, according to His own sovereign will; and till then we can only wait and pray.' Or, 'The miraculous powers which dwelt in

the early Church have been withdrawn, and therefore the progress is slow.' The strong imaginative tendency to make an ideal perfect in the past leads us to think of the primitive age of the Church as golden, in opposition to the plain facts of the case. We fancy that because apostles were its teachers, and the Cross within its memory, the infant society was stronger, wiser, better than any age since, and had gifts which we have lost. What had it which we do not possess? The power of working miracles. What have we which it did not possess? A completed Bible, and the experience of nineteen centuries to teach us to understand it, and to confirm by facts our confidence that Christ's gospel is for all time and every land. What have we in common with it? The same mission to fulfil, the same wants in our brethren to meet, the same gospel, the same spirit, the same immortal Lord. All that any age has possessed to fit it for the task of witnessing for Christ we too possess. The Church has in it a power which is ever adequate to the conquest of the world; and that power is constant through all time, whether we consider it as recorded in an unvarying gospel, or as energised by an abiding spirit, or as flowing from and centred in an unchangeable Lord.

We have a gospel which never can grow old. Its adaptation to the deepest needs of men's souls remains constant with these needs. These vary not from age to age. No matter what may be the superficial differences of dress, the same human heart beats beneath every robe. The great primal wants of men's spirits abide, as the great primal wants of their bodily life abide. Food and shelter for the one,—a loving, pardoning God, to know and love, for the other—else they perish. Wherever men go they carry with them a conscience which needs cleansing, a sense of separation from God joined with a dim knowledge that union with Him is life, a will which is burdened with its own selfhood, an imagination which paints the misty walls of this earthly prison with awful shapes that terrify and faint hopes that mock, a heart that hungers for love, and a reason which pines in atrophy without light. And all these the gospel which is lodged in our hands meets. It addresses itself to nothing in men that is not in man. Surface differences of position, culture, clime, age, and the like, it brushes aside as unimportant, and it goes straight to the universal wants. People tell us it has done its work, and much confident dogmatism proclaims that the world has outgrown it. We have a right to be confident also, with a confidence born of our knowledge, that it has met and satisfied for us the wants which are ours and every man's, and to believe that as long as men live by bread, so long will this word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God be the food of their souls. Areopagus and Piccadilly, Benares and Oxford, need the same message and will find the same response to all their wants in the same word.

Many of the institutions in which Christendom has embodied its conceptions of God's truth will crumble away. Many of the conceptions will have to be modified, neglected truths will grow, to the dislocation of much systematic theology, and the Word better understood will clear away many a portentous error with which the Church has darkened the Word. Be it so. Let us be glad when 'the things which can be shaken are removed,' like mean huts built

against the wall of some cathedral, masking and marring the completeness of its beauty; 'that the things which cannot be shaken may remain,' and all the clustered shafts, and deep-arched recesses, and sweet tracery may stand forth freed from the excrescences which hid them.

'The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away. But the word of the Lord endureth for ever.'

We have an abiding Spirit, the Giver to us of a power without variableness or the shadow of turning, 'I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Paraclete, that He may abide with you for ever.' The manner of His operations may vary, but the reality of His energy abides. The 'works' of wonder which Jesus did on earth may no more be done, but the greater works than these are still the sign of His presence, without whom no spiritual life is possible. Prophecies may fail, tongues may cease, but the more excellent gifts are poured out now as richly as ever. We are apt to look back to Pentecost and think that that marked a height to which the tide has never reached since, and therefore we are stranded amidst the ooze and mud. But the river which proceeds from the throne of God and of the Lamb is not like one of our streams on earth, that leaps to the light and dashes rejoicingly down the hillside, but creeps along sluggish in its level course, and dies away at last in the sands. It pours along the ages the same full volume with which it gushed forth at first. Rather, the source goes with the Church in all ages, and we drink not of water that came forth long ago in the history of the world, and has reached us through the centuries, but of that which wells out fresh every moment from the Rock that follows us. The Giver of all power is with us.

We have a Lord, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. 'Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.' We have not merely to look back to the life and death of Christ in history, and recognise there the work, the efficacy of which shall endure for ever. But whilst we do this, we have also to think of the Christ 'that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.' And the one thought, as the other, should strengthen our confidence in our possession of all the might that we need for bringing the world back to our Lord.

A work in the past which can never be exhausted or lose its power is the theme of our message. The mists of gathering ages wrap in slowly thickening folds of forgetfulness all other men and events in history, and make them ghostlike and shadowy; but no distance has yet dimmed or will ever dim that human form divine. Other names are like those stars that blaze out for a while, and then smoulder down into almost complete invisibility; but He is the very Light itself, that burns and is not consumed. Other landmarks sink below the horizon as the tribes of men pursue their solemn march through the centuries, but the Cross on Calvary 'shall stand for an ensign of the people, and to it shall the Gentiles seek.' To proclaim that accomplished salvation, once for all lodged in the heart of the world's history,

and henceforth for ever valid, is our unalterable duty. The message carries in itself its own immortal strength.

A living Saviour in the present, who works with us, confirming the word with signs following, is the source of our power. Not till He is impotent shall we be weak. The unmeasurable measure of the gift of Christ defines the degree, and the unending duration of His life who continueth for ever sets the period, of our possession of the grace which is given to every one of us. He is ever bestowing. He never withdraws what He once gives. The fountain sinks not a hairs-breadth, though nineteen centuries have drawn from it. Modern astronomy begins to believe that the sun itself by long expense of light will be shorn of its beams and wander darkling in space, circled no more by its daughter planets. But this Sun of our souls rays out for ever the energies of life and light and love, and after all communication possesses the infinite fulness of them all. 'His name shall be continued as long as the sun; all nations shall call Him blessed.'

Here then, brethren, are the perpetual elements of our constant power, an eternal Word, an abiding Spirit, an unchanging Lord.

II. The condition of exercising this power is Faith.

With such a force at our command—a force that could shake the mountains and break the rocks—how come we ever to fail? So the disciples asked, and Christ's answer cuts to the very heart of the matter. Why could you not cast him out? For one reason only, because you had lost your hold of My strength, and therefore had lost your confidence in your own derived power, or had forgotten that it was derived, and essayed to wield it as if it were your own. You did not trust Me, so you did not believe that you could cast him out; or you believed that you could by your own might, therefore you failed. He throws them back decisively on themselves as solely responsible. Nowhere else, in heaven or in earth or hell, but only in us, does the reason lie for our breakdown, if we have broken down. Not in God, who is ever with us, ready to make all grace abound in us, whose will is that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth; not in the gospel which we preach, for 'it is the power of God unto salvation'; not in the demon might which has overcome us, for 'greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world.' We are driven from all other explanations to the bitterest and yet the most hopeful of all, that we only are to blame.

And what in us is to blame? Some of us will answer—Our modes of working; they have not been free enough, or not orderly enough, or in some way or other not wisely adapted to our ends. Some will answer—Our forms of presenting the truth; they have not been flexible enough, or not fixed enough; they have been too much a reproduction of the old; they have been too licentious a departure from the old. Some will answer—Our ecclesiastical arrangements; they have been too democratic; they have been too priestly. Some will answer—Our intellectual culture; it has been too great, obscuring the simplicity that is in Christ; it has been too small, sending poorly furnished men into the field to fight with

ordered systems of idolatry which rest upon a philosophical basis, and can only be overturned by undermining that. It is no part of my present duty to discuss these varying answers. No doubt there is room for improvement in all the fields which they indicate. But does not the spirit of our Lord's words here beckon us away from these purely secondary subjects to fix our self-examination on the depth and strength of our faith, as incomparably the most important element in the conditions which determine our success or our failure? I do not undervalue the worth of wise methods of action, but the history of the Church tells us that pretty nearly any methods of action are fruitful in the right hands, and that without living faith the best of them become like the heavy armour which half-smothered a feeble man. I do not pretend to that sublime indifference to dogma which is the modern form of supreme devotion to truth, but experience has taught us that wherever the name of Christ, as the Saviour of the world, has been lovingly proclaimed, there devils have been cast out, whatever private and sectional doctrines the exerciser has added to it. I do not disparage organisation, but courage is more than drill; and there is such a thing as the very perfection of arrangement without life, like cabinets in a museum, where all the specimens are duly classified, and dead. I believe, with the old preacher, that if God does not need our learning, He needs our ignorance still less, but it is of comparatively little importance whether the draught of living water be brought to thirsty lips in an earthen cup or a golden vase.

‘The main thing is, does it hold good measure?
Heaven soon sets right all other matters.’

And therefore, while leaving full scope for all improvements in these subordinate conditions, let me urge upon you that the main thing which makes us strong for our Christian work is the grasp of living faith, which holds fast the strength of God. There is no need to plunge into the jungle of metaphysical theology here. Is it not a fact that the might with which the power of God has wrought for men's salvation has corresponded with the strength of the Church's desire and the purity of its trust in His power? Is it not a truth plainly spoken in Scripture and confirmed by experience, that we have the awful prerogative of limiting the Holy One of Israel, and quenching the Spirit? Was there not a time in Christ's life on earth when He could do no mighty works because of their unbelief? We receive all spiritual gifts in proportion to our capacity, and the chief factor in settling the measure of our capacity is our faith. Here on the one hand is the boundless ocean of the divine strength, unfathomable in its depth, full after all draughts, tideless and calm, in all its movement never troubled, in all its repose never stagnating; and on the other side is the empty aridity of our poor weak natures. Faith opens these to the influx of that great sea, and ‘according to our faith,’ in the exact measure of our receptivity, does it enter our hearts. In itself the gift is boundless. It has no limit except the infinite fulness of the power which worketh in us. But in reference

to our possession it is bounded by our capacity, and though that capacity enlarges by the very fact of being filled, and so every moment becomes greater through fruition, yet at each moment it is the measure of our possession, and our faith is the measure of our capacity. Our power is God's power in us, and our faith is the power with which we grasp God's power and make it ours. So then, in regard to God, our faith is the condition of our being strengthened with might by His Spirit.

Consider, too, how the same faith has a natural operation on ourselves which tends to fit us for casting out the evil spirits. Given a man full of faith, you will have a man tenacious in purpose, absorbed in one grand object, simple in his motives, in whom selfishness has been driven out by the power of a mightier love, and indolence stirred into unwearied energy. Such a man will be made wise to devise, gentle to attract, bold to rebuke, fertile in expedients, and ready to be anything that may help the aim of his life. Fear will be dead in him, for faith is the true anaesthesia of the soul; and the knife may cut into the quivering flesh, and the spirit be scarce conscious of a pang. Love, ambition, and all the swarm of distracting desires will be driven from the soul in which the lamp of faith burns bright. Ordinary human motives will appeal in vain to the ears which have heard the tones of the heavenly music, and all the pomps of life will show poor and tawdry to the sight that has gazed on the vision of the great white throne and the crystal sea. The most ignorant and erroneous 'religious sentiment'—to use a modern phrase—is mightier than all other forces in the world's history. It is like some of those terrible compounds of modern chemistry, an inert, innocuous-looking drop of liquid. Shake it, and it flames heaven high, shattering the rocks and ploughing up the soil. Put even an adulterated and carnalised faith into the hearts of a mob of wild Arabs, and in a century they will stream from their deserts, and blaze from the mountains of Spain to the plains of Bengal. Put a living faith in Christ and a heroic confidence in the power of His Gospel to reclaim the worst sinners into a man's heart, and he will out of weakness be made strong, and plough his way through obstacles with the compact force and crashing directness of lightning. There have been men of all sorts who have been honoured to do much in this world for Christ. Wise and foolish, learned and ignorant, differing in tone, temper, creed, forms of thought, and manner of working, in every conceivable degree; but one thing, and perhaps one thing only, they have all had—a passion of enthusiastic personal devotion to their Lord, a profound and living faith in Him and in His salvation. All in which they differed is but the gay gilding on the soldier's coat. That in which they were alike is as the strong arm which grasps the sword, and has its muscles braced by the very clutch. Faith is itself a source of strength, as well as the condition of drawing might from heaven.

Consider, too, how faith has power over men who see it. The exhibition of our own personal convictions has more to do in spreading them than all the arguments which we use. There is a magnetism and a contagious energy in the sight of a brother's faith which few men can wholly resist. If you wish me to weep, your own tears must flow; and if you

would have me believe, let me see your soul heaving under the emotion which you desire me to feel. The arrow may be keen and true, the shaft rounded and straight, the bow strong, and the arm sinewy; but unless the steel be winged it will fall to the ground long before it strikes the butt. Your arrows must be winged with faith, else orthodoxy, and wise arrangements, and force and zeal, will avail nothing. No man will believe in, and no demon will obey, spells which the would-be exorcist only half believes himself. Even if he speak the name of Christ, unless he speak it with unfaltering confidence, all the answer he will get will only be the fierce and taunting question, 'Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye?' Brethren, let us give heed to the solemn rebuke which our Master lovingly reads to us in these words, and while we aim at the utmost possible perfection in all subordinate matters, let us remember that they all without faith are weak, as an empty suit of armour with no life beneath the corselet; and that faith without them all is strong, like the knight of old, who rode into the bloody field in simple silken vest, and conquered. That which determines our success or failure in the work of our Lord is our faith.

III. Our faith is ever threatened by subtle unbelief.

It would appear that the disciples were ignorant of the unbelief that had made them weak. They fancied that they had confidence in their Christ-given power, and they certainly had in some dull kind of fashion expected to succeed in their attempt. But He who sees the heart knew that there was no real living confidence in their souls; and His words are a solemn warning to us all, of how possible it is for us to have our faith all honeycombed by gnawing doubt while we suspect it not, like some piece of wood apparently sound, the whole substance of which has been eaten away by hidden worms. We may be going on with Christian work, and may even be looking for spiritual results. We may fancy ourselves faithful stewards of the gospel, and all the while there may be an utter absence of the one thing which makes our words more than so much wind whistling through an archway. The shorn Samson went out 'to shake himself as at other times,' and knew not that the Spirit of the Lord had departed from him. Who among us is not exposed to the assaults of that pestilence that walketh in darkness? and, alas! who among us can say that he has repelled the contagion? Subtly it creeps over us all, the stealthy intangible vapour, unfelt till it has quenched the lamp which alone lights the darkness of the mine, and clogged to suffocation the labouring lungs.

I will not now speak of the general sources of danger to our faith, which are always in operation with a retarding force as constant as friction, as certain as the gravitation which pulls the pendulum to rest at its lowest point. But I may very briefly particularise two of the enemies of that faith, which have a special bearing on our missionary work, and may be illustrated from the narrative before us.

First, all our activity in spreading the Gospel, whether by personal effort or by our gifts, like every form of outward action, tends to become mechanical, and to lose its connection with the motive which originated it. Of course it is also true, on the other side, that all outward

action also tends to strengthen the motive from which it flows. But our Christian work will not do so, unless it be carefully watched, and pains be taken to keep it from slipping off its original foundation, and so altering its whole character. We may very easily become so occupied with the mere external occupation as to be quite unconscious that it has ceased to be faithful work, and has become routine, dull mechanism, or the result of confidence, not in Christ, whose power once flowed through us, but in ourselves the doers. So these disciples may have thought, 'We can cast out this devil, for we have done the like already,' and have forgotten that it was not they, but Christ in them, who had done it.

How widely this foe to our faith operates amid the multiplied activities of this busy age, one trembles to think. We see all around us a Church toiling with unexampled expenditure of wealth, and effort, and time. It is difficult to repress the suspicion that the work is out of proportion to the life. Ah, brethren, how much of all this energy of effort, so admirable in many respects, will He whose fan is in His hand accept as true service—how much of it will be wheat for the garner, how much chaff for the fire? It is not for us to divide between the two, but it is for us to remember that it is not impossible to make of our labours the most dangerous enemy to the depth of our still life hidden with Christ in God, and that every deed of apparent service which is not the real issue of living faith is powerless for good to others, and heavy with hurt to ourselves. Brethren and fathers in the ministry! how many of us know what it is to talk and toil away our early devotion; and all at once to discover that for years perhaps we have been preaching and labouring from mere habit and routine, like corpses galvanised into some ghastly and transient caricature of life. Christian men and women, beware lest this great enterprise of missions, which our fathers began from the holiest motives and in the simplest faith, should in our hand be wrenched away from its only true basis, and be done with languid expectation and more languid desires of success, from no higher motive than that we found it in existence, and have become accustomed to carry it on. If that be our reason, then we harm ourselves, and mask from our own sight our own unbelief. If that be the case the work may go on for a while, like a clock ticking with fainter and fainter beats for a minute after it has run down; but it will soon cease, and neither heaven nor earth will be much the poorer for its ending.

Again, the atmosphere of scornful disbelief which surrounded the disciples made their faith falter. It was too weak to sustain itself in the face of the consciousness that not a man in all that crowd believed in their power; and it melted away before the contempt of the scribes and the incredulous curiosity of the bystanders, without any reason except the subtle influence which the opinions and characters of those around us have on us all.

And, brethren, are not we in danger to-day of losing the firmness of our grasp on Christ, as our Saviour and the world's, from a precisely similar cause? We live in an atmosphere of hesitancy and doubt, of scornful rejection of His claims, of contemptuous disbelief in anything which a scalpel cannot cut. We cannot but be conscious that to hold by Jesus Christ

as the Incarnate God, the supernatural Beginning of a new life, the sole Hope of the world, is to expose ourselves to the contempt of so-called advanced and liberal thinkers, and to be out of harmony with the prevailing set of opinions. The current of educated thought runs strongly against such beliefs, and I suppose that every thoughtful man among us feels that a great danger to our faith to-day comes from the force with which that current swings us round, and threatens to make some of us drag our anchors, and drift, and strike and go to pieces on the sands. For one man who is led by the sheer force of reason to yield to the intellectual grounds on which modern unbelief reposes, there are twenty who simply catch the infection in the atmosphere. They find that their early convictions have evaporated, they know not how; only that once the fleece was wet with dew and now it is dry. For unbelief has a contagious energy wholly independent of reason, no less than has faith, and affects multitudes who know nothing of its grounds, as the iceberg chills the summer air for leagues, and makes the sailors shiver long before they see its barren peaks.

Therefore, brethren, let us all take heed to ourselves, lest we suffer our grasp of our dear Lord's hand to relax for no better reason than because so many have left His side. To us all His pleading love, which knows how much we are moulded by the example of others, is saying, in view of the fashion of unbelief, 'Will ye also go away?' Let us answer, with a clasp that clings the tighter for our danger of being sucked in by the strong current, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.' We cannot help seeing that the creeping paralysis of hesitancy and doubt about even the power of Christ's name is stealing over portions of the Church, and stiffening the arm of its activity. Lips that once spoke with full confidence the words that cast out devils, mutter them now languidly with half-belief. Hearts that were once full of sympathy with the great purpose for which Christ died are growing cold to the work of preaching the Gospel to the heathen, because they are growing to doubt whether, after all, there is any Gospel at all. This icy breath, dear brethren, is blowing over our Churches and over our hearts. And wherever it reaches, there labour for Jesus and for men languishes, and we recoil baffled with unavailing exorcisms dying in our throats, and the rod of our power broken in our hands. 'Why could not we cast him out? Because of your unbelief.'

IV. Our faith can only be maintained by constant devotion and rigid self-denial.

I can touch but very lightly on that solemn thought in which our Lord sets forth the condition of our faith, and therefore of our power. This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting. The discipline then which nurtures faith is mainly moral and spiritual—not as a substitute for, or to the exclusion of, the intellectual discipline, which is presupposed, not neglected, in these words.

The first condition of the freshness and energy of faith is constant devotion. The attrition of the world wears it thin, the distractions of life draw it from its clinging hold on Christ, the very toil for Him is apt to entice our thoughts from out of the secret place of the most

High into the busy arena of our strife. Therefore we have ever need to refresh the drooping flowers of the chaplet by bathing them in the Fountain of Life, to rise above all the fevered toil of earth to the calm heights where God dwells, and in still communion with Him to replenish our emptied vessels and fill our dimly burning lamps with His golden oil. The sister of the cumbered Martha is the contemplative Mary, who sits in silence at the Master's feet and lets His words sink into her soul; the closest friend of Peter the apostle of action is John the apostle of love. If our work is to be worthy, it must ever be freshened anew by our gaze into His face; if our communion with Him is to be deep, it must never be parted from outward service. Our Master has left us the example, in that, when the night fell and every man went to his own home, Jesus went to the Mount of Olives; and thence, after His night of prayer, came very early in the morning to the temple, and taught. The stream that is to flow broad and life-giving through many lands must have its hidden source high among the pure snows that cap the mount of God. The man that would work for God must live with God. It was from the height of transfiguration that He came, before whom the demon that baffled the disciples quailed and slunk away like a whipped hound. This kind goeth not out but by prayer.

The second condition is rigid self-denial. Fasting is the expression of the purpose to control the lower life, and to abstain from its delights in order that the life of the spirit may be strengthened. As to the outward fact, it is nothing—it may be practised or not. If it be, it will be valuable only in so far as it flows from and strengthens that purpose. And such vigorous subordination of all the lower powers, and abstinence from many an inferior good, both material and immaterial, is absolutely necessary if we are to have any wholesome strength of faith in our souls. In the recoil from the false asceticism of Roman Catholicism and Puritanism, has not this generation of the Church gone too far in the opposite direction? and in the true belief that Christianity can sanctify all joys, and ensure the harmonious development of all our powers, have we not been forgetting that hand and foot may cause us to stumble, and that we had better live maimed than die with all our limbs? There is a true asceticism, a discipline—a 'gymnastic unto godliness,' as Paul calls it. And if our faith is to grow high and bear rich clusters on the topmost boughs that look up to the sky, we must keep the wild lower shoots close nipped. Without rigid self-control and self-limitation, no vigorous faith.

And without them no effectual work! It is no holiday task to cast out devils. Self-indulgent men will never do it. Loose-braced, easy souls, that lie open to all the pleasurable influences of ordinary life, are no more fit for God's weapons than a reed for a lance, or a bit of flexible lead for a spear-point. The wood must be tough and compact, the metal hard and close-grained, out of which God makes His shafts. The brand that is to guide men through the darkness to their Father's home must glow with a pallor of consuming flame that purges its whole substance into light. This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.

Dear brethren, what solemn rebuke these words have for us all! How they winnow our works of Christian activity! How they show us the hollowness of our services, the self-indulgence of our lives, the coldness of our devotion, the cowardice of our faith! How marvellous they make the fruits which God's great goodness has permitted us to see even from our doubting service! Let us turn to Him with fresh thankfulness that unto us, who are 'less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that we should preach among the nations the unsearchable riches of Christ.' Let us not be driven from our confidence that we have a gospel to preach for all the world; but strong in the faith which rests on impregnable historical grounds, on our own experience of what Christ has done for us, and on nineteen centuries of growing power and unfolding wisdom, let us thankfully welcome all that modern thought may supply for the correction of errors in belief, in organisation, and in life, that may have gathered round His perfect and eternal gospel—being assured, as we have a right to be, that all will but lift higher the Name which is above every name, and set forth more plainly that Cross which is the true tree of life to all the families of men. Let us cast ourselves before Him with penitent confession, and say,—O Lord, our strength! we have not wrought any deliverance on earth; we have been weak when all Thy power was at our command; we have spoken Thy word as if it were an experiment and a peradventure whether it had might; we have let go Thy hand and lost Thy garment's hem from our slack grasp; we have been prayerless and self-indulgent. Therefore Thou hast put us to shame before our foes, and 'our enemies laugh among themselves. Thou that dwellest between the cherubim, shine forth; stir up Thy strength and come and save us!' Then will the last words that He spoke on earth ring out again from the throne: 'All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations; and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.'

THE COIN IN THE FISH'S MOUTH

‘And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What thinkest them, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers? 26. Peter saith unto Him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free.’—[MATT. xvii. 25, 26.](#)

All our Lord's miracles are ‘signs’ as well as ‘wonders.’ They have a meaning. They not only authenticate His teaching, but they are themselves no inconsiderable portion of the teaching. They are not only ‘the great bell before His sermon,’ but they are also a portion of the sermon.

That doctrinal or dogmatic purpose characterises all the miracles in varying degrees. It is the only purpose of the one before us. This singular miracle of finding the coin in the fish's mouth and giving it for the tribute-money is unlike our Lord's other works in several particulars. It is the only miracle—with the exception of the cursing of the barren fig-tree, and the episode of the unclean spirits entering into the swine—in which there is no message of love or blessing for man's sorrow and pain. It is the only miracle in which our Lord uses His power for His own service or help, and it is like the whole brood of legendary miracles, and unlike all the rest of Christ's in that, at first sight, it seems done for a very trivial end—the providing of some three shillings of our money.

Now, if we put all these things together, the absence of any alleviation of man's sorrow, the presence of a personal end, and the apparent triviality of the result secured, I think we shall see that the only explanation of the miracle is given by regarding it as being what I may call a teaching one, full of instruction with regard to our Lord's character, person, and work. It is a parable as well as a miracle, and it is in that aspect that I wish to look at it now, and try to bring out its lessons.

I. We have here, first, the freedom of the Son.

The whole point of the story depends upon the fact that this tribute-money was not a civil, but an ecclesiastical impost. It had originally been levied in the Wilderness, at the time of the numbering of the people, and was enjoined to be repeated at each census, when every male Israelite was to pay half a shekel for ‘a ransom for his soul,’ an acknowledgment that his life was forfeited by sin. In later years it came to be levied as an annual payment for the support of the temple and its ceremonial. It was never compulsory, there was no power to exact it. The question of the collectors, ‘Doth not your Master pay tribute?’ does not sound like the imperative demand which a ‘publican’ would have made for payment of an impost due to the Roman Government. It was an ‘optional church-rate,’ and the very fact that it was so, would make Jews who were, or wished to be considered, patriotic or religious, the more punctilious in paying it.

The question put to Peter possibly implies a doubt whether this Rabbi, who held lax views on so many points of Pharisaical righteousness, would be likely to recognise the obligation of the tax. Peter's quick answer seems to be prompted by zeal for his Master's honour, on which the question appears to him to cast a slur. It was perhaps too quick, but the apostle has been too much blamed for his answer, which was in fact correct, and for which our Lord does not blame him. When he comes to Christ to tell what has happened, before he can speak, Christ puts to him this little parable which I have taken as part of my text: 'How thinkest thou? Do kings of this world take custom?'—meaning thereby not imports or exports, but taxes of all kinds of things,—'or tribute,'—meaning thereby taxes on persons—'from their own children, or from subjects who are not their children?' The answer, of course, is, 'From the latter.' So the answer comes, 'Then are the children free.'

Christ then here claims in some sense, Sonship to Him to whom the tribute is paid, that is, to God, and therefore freedom from the obligation to pay the tribute. But notice, for this is an important point in the explanation of the words, that the plural in our Lord's words, 'Then are the children free,' is not intended to include Peter and the others in the same category as Himself. The only question in hand is as to His obligation to pay a certain tax; and to include any one else would have been irrelevant, as well as erroneous. The plural belongs to the illustration, not to its application, and corresponds with the plural in the question, 'Of whom do the kings of the earth take custom?' The kings of the earth are contrasted with the one King of the heavens, the supreme and sole Sovereign; and the children of the kings of the earth are contrasted with the only begotten Son of the only King of kings and Lord of lords.

So that here there is no mixing up of Himself with others, or of others with Himself, but the claiming of an unique position, singular and sole, belonging to Him only, in which He stands as the Son of the mighty Monarch to whom the tribute is paid. He claims to have the divine nature, the divine prerogatives, to bear a specific relationship to God Himself, and to be, as other words in Scripture put it, 'the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person.'

If there is anything certain about Jesus Christ's teaching, this is certain about it, that He proclaimed Himself to be the Son of God, in such a sense as no man shared with Him, and in such a sense as vindicated the attitude which He took up, the demands which He made, and the gifts which He offered to men.

What a deduction must be made from the wisdom of His teaching, and from the meekness of His Spirit, if that claim was an illusion! What shall we say of the sanity of a man who poses himself before the whole race, claiming to be the Son of God, and whose continual teaching to them therefore is, not, 'Believe in goodness'; 'Believe in virtue'; 'Believe in truth'; 'Believe in My word'; but 'Believe in Me'? Was there ever anywhere else a religious teacher, all of whose words were gracious and wise and sweet, but who—

‘Make the important stumble,
Of saying that he, the sage and humble,
Was likewise—one with the Creator?’

But now what is the freedom based on sonship which our Lord here claims?

I have said that this tax was levied with a double meaning; first, it was an atonement or ransom for the soul; second, it was devoted to the temple and its worship. And now, mark, that in both these aspects our Lord alleges His true sonship as the reason why He is exempt from it.

That is to say, first, Jesus Christ claims to have no need of a ransom for His soul. Never one word dropped from His lips which indicated the smallest consciousness of flaw or failure, of defect or imperfection, still less of actual transgression. He takes His position outside the circle of sinful men which includes all others. It is a strange characteristic in a religious teacher, very unlike the usual tone of devout men. And stranger still is the fact that the absence of this consciousness of evil has never been felt to be itself evil and a blot. Think of a David's agony of penitence. Think of a Paul's, 'Of whom I am chief!' Think of the long wail of an Augustine's confessions. Think of the stormy self-accusations of a Luther; and then think that He who inspired them all, never, by word or deed, betrayed the slightest consciousness that in Himself there was the smallest deflection from the perfect line of right, the least speck or stain on the perfect gold of His purity. And remember, too, that when He challenges the world with, 'Which of you convinceth Me of sin?' with the exception of half a dozen men, of whom we can scarcely say whether their want of spiritual insight or their arrogance of self-importance is the most flagrant, who, in the course of nineteen centuries, have ventured to fling their little handfuls of mud at Him, the whole world has answered, 'Thou art fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into Thy lips.'

The Son needs no 'ransom for His soul,' which, being translated, is but this: the purity and the innocence of Jesus Christ, which is a manifest fact in His biography, is only explicable when we believe that we have before us the Incarnate God, and therefore the Perfect Man. And the Son needs no temple for His worship. His whole life, as human, was a life of communion and prayer with His Father in heaven. And just because He 'dwelt in' God's 'bosom all the year,' for Him ritual and temple were nought. Sense-bound men needed them; He needed them not. 'In this place,' said He, 'is one greater than the temple.' He was all which the temple symbolised. Was it the dwelling-place of God, the place of sacrifice, the meeting-place of man with God, the place of divine manifestation? 'The temple of His body' was in deepest reality all these. In it dwelt the whole fulness of the Godhead. It was at once sacrifice and place of sacrifice, even as He is the true everlasting Priest. In Him men see God, and meet with God. He is greater than the temple because He is the true temple, and He is the true temple because He is the Son. And because He is the Son, therefore He is free from all

dependence upon, and connection with, the outward worship of ceremony and sacrifice and priest and ritual.

Now, dear brethren, let me pause for one moment to press upon you and upon myself this question: Do I welcome that Christ with the full conviction that He is the Son of God? It seems to me that, in this generation, the question of questions, as far as religion is concerned, is the old one which Christ asked of His disciples by the fountains and woods of Caesarea Philippi: 'Whom say ye that I, the Son of Man, am?' Can you lift up your face to meet His clear and all-searching eye, and say: 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God'? If you can, you are on the way to understanding Him and His work; if you cannot, His life and work are all wrapped in darkness for you, His death robbed of its truest power, and your life deprived of its surest anchor.

II. Now, there is a second lesson that I would gather from this miracle—the voluntary submission of the Son to the bonds from which He is free.

He bids His disciple pay the tribute for Him, for a specific reason: 'Lest we should offend them.' That, of course, is simply a piece of practical wisdom, to prevent any narrow or purblind souls from stumbling at His teaching, by reason of His neglect of this trivial matter. The question of how far religious teachers or any others are at liberty, when they are not actuated by personal motives, to render compliance with ceremonies which are of no value to them, is a wide one, which I have no need to dwell upon here. But, turning from that specific aspect of the incident, I think we may look upon it as being an illustration, in regard to a very small matter, of what is really the essence of our Lord's relation to the whole world and ourselves—His voluntary taking upon Himself of bonds from which He is free.

Is it not a symbol of the very heart of the meaning of His Incarnation? 'For as much as the children are partakers of flesh and blood He also Himself likewise takes part of the same.' 'He is found in fashion as a man.' He chooses to enter within the limits and the obligations of humanity. Round the radiant glories of the divinity, He gathers the folds of the veil of human flesh. He immerses the pillar of fire in a cloud of smoke. He comes amongst us, taking on His own wrists the fetters that bind us, suffering Himself to be 'cribbed, cabined, and confined' within the narrow limits of our manhood, in order that by His voluntary acceptance of it we may be redeemed from our corruption.

Is it not a parable of His life and lowly obedience? He proclaimed the same principle as the guide for all His conduct, when, sinless, He presented Himself to John for the 'baptism of repentance,' and overcame the baptiser's scruples with the words, 'Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.' He comes under the law. Bound to no such service, He binds Himself to all human duties that He may hallow the bonds which He has worn, may set us the pattern of perfect obedience, and may know a servant's heart.

The Prince is free, but King's Son though He be, He goes among His Father's poor subjects, lives their squalid lives, makes experience of their poverty, and hardens His hands by labouring like them. Sympathy He 'learned in huts where poor men lie.'

Is it not the rehearsal in parable of His death? He was free from the bonds of mortality, and He took upon Him our human flesh. He was free from the necessity of death, even after He had taken our flesh upon Him. But, being free from the necessity, He submitted to the actuality, and laid down His life of Himself, because of His loving will, to save and help each of us. Oh, dear friends! we never can understand the meaning and the beauty, either of the life or of the death of our Master, unless we look at each from this point of view, that it is His willing acceptance of the bonds that bind us. His own loving will brought Him here; His own loving will kept Him here; His own loving will impelled Him along the path of life, though at every step of it He trod as with naked feet upon burning iron; His own loving Will brought Him to the Cross; His own loving will, and not the Roman soldiers' nails, fastened Him to it. Let us look, then, to Him with thankfulness, and recognise in that death His thorough identification with all the bonds and miseries of our condition. He 'took part of the same that through death He might deliver them that by fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.'

III. Then there is another lesson which I think we may fairly gather from this miracle, viz. that we have here the supernatural glory which ever accompanies the humiliation of the Son.

The miracle, at first sight, appears to be for a very trivial end. Men have made merry with it by reason of that very triviality. But the miracle is vindicated, peculiar as it is, by a deep divine congruity and decorum. He will submit, Son though He be, to this complete identification of Himself with us. But He will so submit as, even in submitting, to assert His divine dignity. As has been well said, 'In the midst of the act of submission majesty flashes forth.' A multiform miracle—containing many miracles in one—a miracle of omniscience, and a miracle of influence over the lower creatures is wrought. The first fish that rises carries in its mouth the exact sum needed.

Here, therefore, we have another illustration of that remarkable blending of humiliation and glory, which is a characteristic of our Lord's life. These two strands are always twined together, like a twisted line of gold and black. At each moment of special abasement there is some special coruscation of the brightness of His glory. Whensoever He stoops there is something accompanying the stooping, to tell how great and how merciful He is who bows. Out of the deepest darkness there flashes some light. So at His cradle, which seems to be the identifying of Him with humanity in its most helpless and lowest condition, there shall be angels, and the stars in their courses shall bow and move to guide wise men from afar with offerings to His feet. And at His Cross, where He sounds the very bass string and touches

the lowest point of humiliation and defeat, a clearer vision sees in that humiliation the highest glory.

And thus, here, He will not only identify Himself with sinful men who need a ransom, and with sense-bound men who need a sacrifice and a temple, but He will so identify Himself with them as that He shall send His power into the recesses of the lake, where His knowledge sees, as clearly as our eyes see the men that stand beside us, and obedient to an unconscious impulse from Him, the dumb creature that had swallowed, as it sunk, the shining stater that had dropped out of the girdle of some fisherman, shall rise first to the hook; in token that not only in His Father's house does He rule as a Son over His own house, but that He 'doeth as He hath pleased, in all deep places,' and that in Him the ancient hope is fulfilled of a Son of Man who 'hath dominion over the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the sea.' The miracle was for a trivial end in appearance, but it was a demonstration, though to one man only at first, yet through him to all the world, that this Christ, in His lowliness, is the Everlasting Son of the Father.

IV. And so, lastly, we have here also the lesson of the sufficiency for us all of what He provides.

'That take, and give unto them for Me and for thee. He does not say 'For us.' He and Peter do not stand on the same level. He has chosen to submit Himself to the obligations, Peter was necessarily under them. That which is found by miracle in the fish's mouth is precisely the amount required for both the one and the other. It is rendered, as the original has it, 'Instead of thee and Me,' putting emphasis upon the characteristic of the tribute as being ransom, or payment, for a man's soul.

And so, although this thought is not part of the original purpose of the miracle, and, therefore, is different from those which I have already been dwelling on, which are part of that purpose, I think we may fairly see here this great truth,—that that which Christ brings to us by supernatural act, far greater than the miracle here, is enough for all the claims and obligations that God, or man, or law, or conscience have upon any of us. His perfect obedience and stainless life discharged for Himself all the obligations to law and righteousness under which He came as a Man; His perfect life and His mighty death are for us the full discharge of all that can be brought against us.

There are many and solemn claims and claimants upon each of us. Law and duty, that awful 'ought' which should rule our lives and which we have broken thousands of times, come to each of us in many an hour of clear vision, and take us by the throat, and say, 'Pay us what thou owest!' And there is a Judgment Day before all of us; which is no mere bugbear to frighten children, but will be a fact of experience in our case. Friend! how are you going to meet your obligations? You owe God all your love, all your heart, will, strength, service. What an awful score of unpaid debts, with accumulated interest, there stands against each of our names! Think of some bankrupt sitting in his counting-house with a balance-sheet

before him that shows his hopeless insolvency. He sits and broods, and broods, and does not know what in the world he is going to do. The door opens—a messenger enters and gives him an envelope. He tears it open, and there flutters out a cheque that more than pays it all. The illustration is a very low one; it does not cover the whole ground of Christ's work for you. It puts a possibly commercial aspect into it, which we have to take care of lest it become the exclusive one; but it is true for all that. You are the bankrupt. What have you to pay? Oh, behold that precious treasure of gold tried in the fire, which is Christ's righteousness and Christ's death; and by faith in Him, 'that take and give' and all the debt will be discharged, and you will be set free and made a son by that Son who has taken upon Himself all our bonds, and so has broken them; who has taken upon Himself all our debts, and so has cancelled them every one.

EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D., Litt. D.

**ST. MATTHEW
Chaps. XVIII to XXVIII**

CONTENTS

THE LAW OF PRECEDENCE IN THE KINGDOM ([Matt. xviii. 1-14](#))
 SELF-MUTILATION FOR SELF-PRESERVATION ([Matt. xviii. 8, R.V.](#))
 THE LOST SHEEP AND THE SEEKING SHEPHERD ([Matt. xviii. 12](#)).
 THE PERSISTENCE OF THWARTED LOVE ([Matt. xviii. 13](#); [Luke xv. 4](#))
 FORGIVEN AND UNFORGIVING ([Matt. xviii. 22](#))
 THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE KING ([Matt. xix. 16-26](#))
 NEAREST TO CHRIST ([Matt. xx. 23](#))
 THE SERVANT-LORD AND HIS SERVANTS ([Matt. xx. 28](#))
 WHAT THE HISTORIC CHRIST TAUGHT ABOUT HIS DEATH ([Matt. xx. 28](#))
 THE COMING OF THE KING TO HIS PALACE ([Matt. xxi. 1-16](#))
 A NEW KIND OF KING ([Matt. xxi. 4, 5](#))
 THE VINEYARD AND ITS KEEPERS ([Matt. xxi. 33-46](#))
 THE STONE OF STUMBLING ([Matt. xxi. 44](#))
 TWO WAYS OF DESPISING GOD'S FEAST ([Matt. xxii. 1-14](#))
 THE TABLES TURNED: THE QUESTIONERS QUESTIONED ([Matt. xxii. 34-46](#))
 THE KING'S FAREWELL ([Matt. xxiii. 27-39](#))
 TWO FORMS OF ONE SAYING ([Matt. xxiv. 13, R.V.](#); [Luke xxi. 19](#))
 THE CARRION AND THE VULTURES ([Matt. xxiv. 28](#))
 WATCHING FOR THE KING ([Matt. xxiv. 42-51](#))
 THE WAITING MAIDENS ([Matt. xxv. 1-13](#))
 DYING LAMPS ([Matt. xxv. 8](#))
 'THEY THAT WERE READY' ([Matt. xxv. 10](#))
 TRADERS FOR THE MASTER ([Matt. xxv. 14-30](#))
 WHY THE TALENT WAS BURIED ([Matt. xxv. 24, 25](#))
 THE KING ON HIS JUDGMENT THRONE ([Matt. xxv. 31-46](#))
 THE DEFENCE OF UNCALCULATING LOVE ([Matt. xxvi. 6-16](#))
 THE NEW PASSOVER ([Matt. xxvi. 17-30](#))
 'IS IT I?' ([Matt. xxvi. 22, 25](#); [John xiii. 25](#))
 'THIS CUP' ([Matt. xxvi. 27, 28](#))
 'UNTIL THAT DAY' ([Matt. xxvi. 29](#))
 GETHSEMANE, THE OIL-PRESS ([Matt. xxvi. 36-46](#))
 THE LAST PLEADING OF LOVE ([Matt. xxvi. 50](#))
 THE REAL HIGH PRIEST AND HIS COUNTERFEIT ([Matt. xxvi. 57-68](#))
 JESUS CHARGED WITH BLASPHEMY ([Matt. xxvi. 35](#))
 'SEE THOU TO THAT!' ([Matt. xxvii. 4, 24](#))
 THE SENTENCE WHICH CONDEMNED THE JUDGES ([Matt. xxvii. 11-26](#))
 THE CRUCIFIXION ([Matt. xxvii. 33-50](#))
 THE BLIND WATCHERS AT THE CROSS ([Matt. xxvii. 36](#))
 TAUNTS TURNING TO TESTIMONIES ([Matt. xxvii. 41-43](#))
 THE VEIL RENT ([Matt. xxvii. 51](#))

THE PRINCE OF LIFE ([Matt. xxviii. 1-15](#))

THE RISEN LORD'S GREETINGS AND GIFTS ([Matt. xxviii. 9](#); [John xx. 19](#))

ON THE MOUNTAIN ([Matt. xxviii. 16, 17](#); [1 Cor. xv. 6](#))

THE LAW OF PRECEDENCE IN THE KINGDOM

‘At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? 2. And Jesus called a little child unto Him, and set him in the midst of them, 3. And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. 4. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5. And whoso shall receive one such little child in My name receiveth Me. 6. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in Me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. 7. Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! 8. Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee; it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. 9. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire. 10. Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven. 11. For the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost. 12. How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? 13. And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. 14. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.’ —[MATT. xviii. 1-14.](#)

Mark tells us that the disciples, as they journeyed, had been squabbling about pre-eminence in the kingdom, and that this conversation was brought on by our Lord’s question as to the subject of their dispute. It seems at first sight to argue singular insensibility that the first effect of His reiterated announcement of His sufferings should have been their quarrelling for the lead; but their behaviour is intelligible if we suppose that they regarded the half-understood prophecies of His passion as indicating the commencement of the short conflict which was to end in His Messianic reign. So it was time for them to be getting ready and settling precedence. The form of their question, in Matthew, connects it with the miracle of the coin in the fish’s mouth, in which there was a very plain assertion of Christ’s royal dignity, and a distinguishing honour given to Peter. Probably the ‘then’ of the question means, Since Peter is thus selected, are we to look to him as foremost? Their conception of the kingdom and of rank in it is frankly and entirely earthly. There are to be graded dignities, and these are to depend on His mere will. Our Lord not only answers the letter of their question, but cuts at the root of the temper which inspired it.

I. He shows the conditions of entrance into and eminence in His kingdom by a living example. There were always children at hand round Him, when He wanted them. Their quick instinct for pure and loving souls drew them to Him; and this little one was not afraid to be taken by the hand, and to be afterwards caught up in His arms, and pressed to His heart. One does not wonder that the legend that he was Ignatius the martyr should have been current; for surely the remembrance of that tender clasping arm and gentle breast would not fade nor be fruitless. The disciples had made very sure that they were to be in the kingdom, and that the only question concerning them was how high up in it they were each to be. Christ's answer is like a dash of cold water to that confidence. It is, in effect, 'Greatest in the kingdom! Make sure that you go in at all, first; which you will never do, so long as you keep your present ambitious minds.'

Verse 3 lays down the condition of entrance into the kingdom, from which necessarily follows the condition of supremacy in it. What a child is naturally, and without effort or merit, by reason of age and position, we must become, if we are to pass the narrow portal which admits into the large room. That 'becoming' is impossible without a revolution in us. 'Be converted' is corrected, in the Revised Version, into 'turn,' and rightly; for there is in the word a distinct reference to the temper of the disciples as displayed by their question. As long as they cherished it they could not even get inside, to say nothing of winning promotion to dignities in the kingdom. Their very question condemned them as incapable of entrance. So there must be a radical change, not unaccompanied, of course, with repentance, but mainly consisting in the substitution of the child's temper for theirs. What is the temper thus enjoined? We are to see here neither the entirely modern and shallow sentimental way of looking at childhood, in which popular writers indulge, nor the doctrine of its innocence. It is not Christ's teaching, either that children are innocent, or that men enter the kingdom by making themselves so. But the child is, by its very position, lowly and modest, and makes no claims, and lives by instinctive confidence, and does not care about honours, and has these qualities which in us are virtues, and is not puffed up by possessing them. That is the ideal which is realised more generally in the child than analogous ideals are in mature manhood. Such simplicity, modesty, humility, must be ours. We must be made small ere we can enter that door. And as is the requirement for entrance, so is it for eminence. The child does not humble himself, but is humble by nature; but we must humble ourselves if we would be great.

Christ implies that there are degrees in the kingdom. It has a nobility, but of such a kind that there may be many greatest; for the principle of rank there is lowliness. We rise by sinking. The deeper our consciousness of our own unworthiness and weakness, the more capable are we of receiving the divine gifts, and therefore the more fully shall we receive them. Rivers run in the hollows; the mountain-tops are dry. God works with broken reeds, and the princes in His realm are beggars taken from the dunghill. A lowliness which made

itself lowly for the sake of eminence would miss its aim, for it would not be lowliness. The desire to be foremost must be cast out, in order that it may be fulfilled.

II. The question has been answered, and our Lord passes to other thoughts rising out of His answer. [Verses 5 and 6](#) set forth antithetically our duties to His little ones. He is not now speaking of the child who served as a living parable to answer the question, but of men who have made themselves like the child, as is plain from the emphatic ‘one such child,’ and from [verse 6](#) (‘which believe on Me’).

The subject, then, of these verses is the blessedness of recognising and welcoming Christlike lowly believers, and the fatal effect of the opposite conduct. To ‘receive one such little child in My name’ is just to have a sympathetic appreciation of, and to be ready to welcome to heart and home, those who are lowly in their own and in the world’s estimate, but princes of Christ’s court and kingdom. Such welcome and furtherance will only be given by one who himself has the same type of character in some degree. He who honours and admires a certain kind of excellence has the roots of it in himself. A possible artist lies in him who thrills at the sight or hearing of fair things painted or sung. Our admiration is an index of our aspiration, and our aspiration is a prophecy of our attainment. So it will be a little one’s heart which will welcome the little ones, and a lover of Christ who receives them in His name. The reception includes all forms of sympathy and aid. ‘In My name’ is equivalent to ‘for the sake of My revealed character,’ and refers both to the receiver and to the received. The blessedness of such reception, so far as the receiver is concerned, is not merely that he thereby comes into happy relations with Christ’s foremost servants, but that he gets Christ Himself into his heart. If with true appreciation of the beauty of such a childlike disposition, I open my heart or my hand to its possessor, I do thereby enlarge my capacity for my own possession of Christ, who dwells in His child, and who comes with him where He is welcomed. There is no surer way of securing Him for our own than the loving reception of His children. Whoso lodges the King’s favourites will not be left unvisited by the King. To recognise and reverence the greatest in the kingdom is to be oneself a member of their company, and a sharer in their prerogatives.

On the other hand, the antithesis of ‘receiving’ is ‘causing to stumble,’ by which is meant giving occasion for moral fall. That would be done by contests about pre-eminence, by arrogance, by non-recognition. The atmosphere of carnality and selfishness in which the disciples were moving, as their question showed, would stifle the tender life of any lowly believer who found himself in it; and they were not only injuring themselves, but becoming stumbling-blocks to others, by their ambition. How much of the present life of average Christians is condemned on the same ground! It is a good test of our Christian character to ask—would it help or hinder a lowly believer to live beside us? How many professing Christians are really, though unconsciously, doing their utmost to pull down their more Christlike brethren to their own low level! The worldliness and selfish ambitions of the Church are responsible

for the stumbling of many who would else have been of Christ's 'little ones.' But perhaps we are rather to think of deliberate and consciously laid stumbling-blocks. Knowingly to try to make a good man fall, or to stain a more than usually pure Christian character, is surely the very height of malice, and presupposes such a deadly hatred of goodness and of Christ that no fate can be worse than the possession of such a temper. To be flung into the sea, like a dog, with a stone round his neck, would be better for a man than to live to do such a thing. The deed itself, apart from any other future retribution, is its own punishment; yet our Lord's solemn words not only point to such a future retribution, which is infinitely more terrible than the miserable fate described would be for the body, but to the consequences of the act, as so bad in its blind hatred of the highest type of character, and in its conscious preference of evil, as well as so fatal in its consequences, that it were better to die drowned than to live so.

III. [Verses 10-14](#) set forth the honour and dignity of Christ's 'little ones.' Clearly the application of the designation in these closing verses is exclusively to His lowly followers. The warning not to despise them is needed at all times, and, perhaps, seldom more, even by Christians, than now, when so many causes induce a far too high estimate of the world's great ones, and modest, humble godliness looks as dull and sober as some russet-coated little bird among gorgeous cockatoos and birds of paradise. The world's standard is only too current in the Church; and it needs a spirit kept in harmony with Christ's spirit, and some degree of the child-nature in ourselves, to preserve us from overlooking the delicate hidden beauties and unworldly greatness of His truest disciples.

The exhortation is enforced by two considerations,—a glimpse into heaven, and a parable. Fair interpretation can scarcely deny that Christ here teaches that His children are under angel-guardianship. We should neither busy ourselves in curious inferences from His reticent words, nor try to blink their plain meaning, but rather mark their connection and purpose here. He has been teaching that pre-eminence belongs to the childlike spirit. He here opens a door into the court of the heavenly King, and shows us that, as the little ones are foremost in the kingdom of heaven, so the angels who watch over them are nearest the throne in heaven itself. The representation is moulded on the usages of Eastern courts, and similar language in the Old Testament describes the principal courtiers as 'the men who see the King's face continually.' So high is the honour in which the little ones are held, that the highest angels are set to guard them, and whatever may be thought of them on earth, the loftiest of creatures are glad to serve and keep them.

Following the Revised Version we omit [verse 11](#). If it were genuine, the connection would be that such despising contradicted the purpose of Christ's mission; and the 'for' would refer back to the injunction, not to the glimpse into heaven which enforced it.

The exhortation is further confirmed by the parable of the ninety and nine, which is found, slightly modified in form and in another connection, in [Luke xv](#). Its point here is to

show the importance of the little ones as the objects of the seeking love of God, and as so precious to Him that their recovery rejoices His heart. Of course, if [verse 11](#) be genuine, the Shepherd is Christ; but, if we omit it, the application of the parable in [verse 14](#) as illustrating the loving will of God becomes more direct. In that case God is the owner of the sheep. Christ does not emphasise His own love or share in the work, reference to which was not relevant to His purpose, but, leaving that in shadow, casts all the light on the loving divine will, which counts the little ones as so precious that, if even one of them wanders, all heaven's powers are sent forth to find and recover it. The reference does not seem to be so much to the one great act by which, in Christ's incarnation and sacrifice, a sinful world has been sought and redeemed, as to the numberless acts by which God, in His providence and grace, restores the souls of those humble ones if ever they go astray. For the connection requires that the wandering sheep here should, when it wanders, be 'one of these little ones'; and the parable is introduced to illustrate the truth that, because they belong to that number, the least of them is too precious to God to be allowed to wander away and be lost. They have for their keepers the angels of the presence; they have God Himself, in His yearning love and manifold methods of restoration, to look for them, if ever they are lost, and to bring them back to the fold. Therefore, 'see that ye despise not one of these little ones,' each of whom is held by the divine will in the grasp of an individualising love which nothing can loosen.

SELF-MUTILATION FOR SELF-PRESERVATION

‘If thy hand or thy foot causeth thee to stumble, cut it off, and cast it from thee.’—[MATT. xviii. 8, R.V.](#)

No person or thing can do our characters as much harm as we ourselves can do. Indeed, none can do them any harm but ourselves. For men may put stumbling-blocks in our way, but it is we who make them stumbling-blocks. The obstacle in the path would do us no hurt if it were not for the erring foot, nor the attractive prize if it were not for the hand that itched to lay hold of it, nor the glittering bauble if it were not for the eye that kindled at the sight of it. So our Lord here, having been speaking of the men that put stumbling-blocks in the way of His little ones, draws the net closer and bids us look at home. A solemn woe of divine judgment is denounced on those who cause His followers to stumble; let us leave God to execute that, and be sure that we have no share in their guilt, but let us ourselves be the executioners of the judgment upon the things in ourselves which alone give the stumbling-blocks, which others put before us, their fatal power.

There is extraordinary energy in these words. Solemnly they are repeated twice here, verbatim; solemnly they are repeated verbatim three times in Mark’s edition. The urgent stringency of the command, the terrible plainness of the alternative put forth by the lips that could say nothing harsh, and the fact that the very same injunction appears in a wholly different connection in the Sermon on the Mount, show us how profoundly important our Lord felt the principle to be which He was here laying down.

We mark these three points. First, the case supposed, ‘If thy hand or thy foot cause thee to stumble.’ Then the sharp, prompt remedy enjoined, ‘Cut them off and cast them from thee.’ Then the solemn motive by which it is enforced, ‘It is better for thee to enter into life maimed than, being a whole man, to be cast into hell-fire.’

I. First, then, as to the case supposed.

Hand and foot and eye are, of course, regarded as organs of the inward self, and symbols of its tastes and capacities. We may perhaps see in them the familiar distinction between the practical and the theoretical:—hand and foot being instruments of action, and the eye the organ of perception. Our Lord takes an extreme case. If members of the body are to be amputated and plucked out should they cause us to stumble, much more are associations to be abandoned and occupations to be relinquished and pleasures to be forsaken, if these draw us away. But it is to be noticed that the whole stringency of the commandment rests upon that if. ‘If they cause thee to stumble,’ then, and not else, amputate. The powers are natural, the operation of them is perfectly innocent, but a man may be ruined by innocent things. And, says Christ, if that process is begun, then, and only then, does My exhortation come into force.

Now, all that solemn thought of a possible injurious issue of innocent occupations, rests upon the principles that our nature has an ideal order, so as that some parts of it are to be suppressed and some are to rule, and that there are degrees of importance in men's pursuits, and that where the lower interfere and clog the operations of the higher, there they are harmful. And so the only wisdom is to excise and cut them off.

We see illustrations in abundance every day. There are many people who are being ruined in regard to the highest purposes of their lives, simply by an over-indulgence in lower occupations which in themselves may be perfectly right. Here is a young woman that spends so much of her day in reading novels that she has no time to look after the house and help her mother. Here is a young man so given to athletics that his studies are neglected—and so you may go all round the circle, and find instances of the way in which innocent things, and the excessive or unwise exercise of natural faculties, are destroying men. And much more is that the case in regard to religion, which is the highest object of pursuit, and in regard to those capacities and powers by which we lay hold of God. These are to be ministered to by the rest, and if there be in my nature or in the order of my life something which is drawing away to itself the energy that ought to go in that other direction, then, howsoever innocent it may be, per se, it is harming me. It is a wen that is sucking all the vital force into itself, and turning it into poison. And there is only one cure for it, and that is the knife.

Then there is another point to be observed in this case supposed, and that is that the whole matter is left to the determination of personal experience. No one else has the right to decide for you what it is safe and wise for you to do in regard to things which are not in themselves wrong. If they are wrong in themselves, of course the consideration of consequences is out of place altogether; but if they be not wrong in themselves, then it is you that must settle whether they are legitimate for you or not. Do not let your Christian liberty be interfered with by other people's dictation in regard to this matter. How often you hear people say, 'I could not do it'; meaning thereby, 'therefore he ought not to do it!' But that inference is altogether illegitimate. True, there are limitations of our Christian liberty in regard to things indifferent and innocent. Paul lays down the most important of these in three sentences. 'All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient.' 'All things are lawful for me, but all things edify not';—you must think of your brethren as well as of yourself. 'All things are lawful for me, yet will I not be brought under the power of any'; keep master of them, and rather abstain altogether than become their slave. But these three limitations being observed, then, in regard to all such matters, nobody else can prescribe for you or me. 'To his own Master he standeth or falleth.'

But, on the other hand, do not you be led away into things that damage you, because some other man does them, as he supposes, without injury. 'Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.' There are some Christian people who are simply very unscrupulous and think themselves very strong; and whose consciences are not more

enlightened, but less sensitive, than those of the 'narrow-minded brethren' upon whom they look askance.

And so, dear friend, you ought to take the world—to inhale it, if I may so say, as patients do chloroform; only you must be your own doctor and keep your own fingers on your pulse, and watch the first sign of failure there, and take no more. When the safety lamps begin to burn blue you may be quite sure there is choke-damp about; and when Christian men and women begin to find prayer wearisome, and religious thoughts dull, and the remembrance of God an effort or a pain, then, whatever anybody else may do, it is time for them to pull up. 'If thy hand offend thee,' never mind though your brother's hand is not offending him, do the necessary thing for your health, 'cut it off and cast it from you.'

But of course there must be caution and common-sense in the application of such a principle. It does not mean that we are to abandon all things that are susceptible of abuse, for everything is so; and if we are to regulate our conduct by such a rule, it is not the amputation of a hand that will be sufficient. We may as well cut off our heads at once, and go out of the world altogether; for everything is capable of being thus abused.

Nor does the injunction mean that unconditionally we are to abandon all occupations in which there is danger. It can never be a duty to shirk a duty because it is dangerous. And sometimes it is as much a Christian man's duty to go into, and to stand in, positions that are full of temptation and danger, as it is a fireman's business to go into a burning house at the risk of suffocation. There were saints in Caesar's household, flowers that grew on a dunghill, and they were not bidden to abandon their place because it was full of possible danger to their souls. Sometimes Christ sets His sentinels in places where the bullets fly very thick; and if we are posted in such a place—and we all are so some time or other in our lives—the only course for us is to stand our ground until the relieving guard comes, and to trust that He said a truth that was always to be true, when He sent out His servants to their dangerous work, with the assurance that if they drank any deadly thing it should not hurt them.

II. So much, then, for the first of the points here. Now a word, in the second place, as to the sharp remedy enjoined.

'Cut it off and cast it from thee.' Entire excision is the only safety. I myself am to be the operator in that surgery. I am to lay my hand upon the block, and with the other hand to grasp the axe and strike. That is to say, we are to suppress capacities, to abandon pursuits, to break with associates, when we find that they are damaging our spiritual life and hindering our likeness to Jesus Christ.

That is plain common-sense. In regard to physical intoxication, it is a great deal easier to abstain altogether than to take a very little and then stop. The very fumes of alcohol will sometimes drive a reclaimed drunkard into a bout of dissipation that will last for weeks; therefore, the only safety is in entire abstinence. The rule holds in regard to everyday life.

Every man has to give up a great many things if he means to succeed in one, and has to be a man of one pursuit if anything worth doing is to be done. Christian men especially have to adopt that principle, and shear off a great deal that is perfectly legitimate, in order that they may keep a reserve of strength for the highest things.

True, all forms of life are capable of being made Christian service and Christian discipline, but in practice we shall find that if we are earnestly seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness, not only shall we lose our taste for a great deal that is innocent, but we shall have, whether we lose our taste for them or not—and more imperatively if we have not lost our taste for them than if we have—to give up allowable things in order that with all our heart, and soul, and strength, and mind, we may love and serve our Master. There are no half-measures to be kept; the only thing to do with the viper is to shake it off into the fire and let it burn there. We have to empty our hands of earth's trivialities if we would grasp Christ with them. We have to turn away our eyes from earth if we would behold the Master, and rigidly to apply this principle of excision in order that we may advance in the divine life. It is the only way to ensure progress. There is no such certain method of securing an adequate flow of sap up the trunk as to cut off all the suckers. If you wish to have a current going down the main bed of the stream, sufficient to keep it clear, you must dam up all the side channels.

But it is not to be forgotten that this commandment, stringent and necessary as it is, is second best. The man is maimed, although it was for Christ's sake that he cut off his hand, or put out his eye. His hand was given him that with it he might serve God, and the highest thing would have been that in hand and foot and eye he should have been anointed, like the priests of old, for the service of his Master. But until he is strong enough to use the faculty for God, the wisest thing is not to use it at all. Abandon the outworks to keep the citadel. And just as men pull down the pretty houses on the outskirts of a fortified city when a siege is impending, in order that they may afford no cover to the enemy, so we have to sweep away a great deal in our lives that is innocent and fair, in order that the foes of our spirit may find no lodgment there. It is second best, but for all that it is absolutely needful. We must lay 'aside every weight,' as well as 'the sin which so easily besets us.' We must run lightly if we would run well. We must cast aside all burdens, even though they be burdens of treasure and delights, if we would 'run with patience the race that is set before us.' 'If thy foot offend thee,' do not hesitate, do not adopt half-measures, do not try moderation, do not seek to sanctify the use of the peccant member; all these may be possible and right in time, but for the present there is only one thing to do—down with it on the block, and off with it! 'Cut it off and cast it from thee.'

III. And now, lastly, a word as to the solemn exhortation by which this injunction is enforced.

Christ rests His command of self-denial and self-mutilation upon the highest ground of self-interest. 'It is better for thee.' We are told nowadays that this is a very low motive to appeal to, that Christianity is a religion of selfishness, because it says to men, 'Your life or your death depends upon your faith and your conduct.' Well, I think it will be time for us to listen to fantastic objections of this sort when the men that urge them refuse to turn down another street, if they are warned that in the road on which they are going they will meet their death. As long as they admit that it is a wise and a kind thing to say to a man, 'Do not go that way or your life will be endangered,' I think we may listen to our Master saying to us, 'Do not do that lest thou perish; do this, that thou may'st enter into life.'

And then, notice that a maimed man may enter into life, and a complete man may perish. The first may be a very poor creature, very ignorant, with a limited nature, undeveloped capacities, intellect and the like all but dormant in him, artistic sensibilities quite atrophied, and yet he may have got hold of Jesus Christ and His love, and be trying to love Him back again and serve Him, and so be entering into life even here, and be sure of a life more perfect yonder. And the complete man, cultured all round, with all his faculties polished and exercised to the full, may have one side of his nature undeveloped—that which connects him with God in Christ. And so he may be like some fair tree that stands out there in the open, on all sides extending its equal beauty, with its stem symmetrical, cylindrical, perfect in its green cloud of foliage, yet there may be a worm at the root of it, and it may be given up to rottenness and destruction. Cultivated men may perish, and uncultured men may have the life. The maimed man may touch Christ with his stump, and so receive life, and the complete man may lay hold of the world and the flesh and the devil with his hands, and so share in their destruction.

Ay! and in that case the maimed man has the best of it. It is a very plain axiom of the rudest common-sense, this of my text: 'It is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than to go into hell-fire with both thy hands.' That is to say, it is better to live maimed than to die whole. A man comes into a hospital with gangrene in his leg; the doctor says it must come off; the man says, 'It shall not,' and he is dead to-morrow. Who is the fool—the man that says, 'Here, then, cut away; better life than limb,' or the man that says, 'I will keep it and I will die'?

'Better to enter into life maimed,' because you will not always be maimed. The life will overcome the maiming. There is a wonderful restoration of capacities and powers that have been sacrificed for Christ's sake, a restoration even here. As crustaceans will develop a new claw in place of one that they have thrown off in their peril to save their lives, so we, if we have for Christ's sake maimed ourselves, will find that in a large measure the suppression will be recompensed even here on earth.

And hereafter, as the Rabbis used to say, 'No man will rise from the grave a cripple.' All the limitations which we have imposed upon ourselves, for Christ's sake, will be removed

then. 'Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf be unstopped; then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing.' 'Verily I say unto thee, there is no man that hath left any' of his possessions, affections, tastes, capacities, 'for My sake but he shall receive a hundredfold more in this life, and in the world to come, life everlasting.' No man is a loser by giving up anything for Jesus Christ.

And, on the other hand, the complete man, complete in everything except his spiritual nature, is a fragment in all his completeness; and yonder, there will for him be a solemn process of stripping. 'Take it from him, and give it to him that hath ten talents.' Ah! how much of that for which some of you are flinging away Jesus Christ will fade from you when you go yonder. 'His glory shall not descend after him'; 'as he came, so shall he go.' 'Tongues, they shall cease; knowledge, it shall vanish away'; gifts will fail, capacities will disappear when the opportunities for the exercise of them in a material world are at an end, and there will be little left to the man who would carry hands and feet and eyes all into the fire and forgot the 'one thing needful,' but a thin thread, if I may so say, of personality quivering with the sense of responsibility, and preyed upon by the gnawing worm of a too-late remorse.

My brother, the lips of Incarnate Love spoke those solemn words of my text, which it becomes not me to repeat to you as if they were mine; but I ask you to weigh this, His urgent commandment, and to listen to His solemn assurance, by which He enforces the wisdom of the self-suppression: 'It is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands, to be cast into hell-fire.'

Give your hearts to Jesus Christ, and set the following in His footsteps and the keeping of His commandments high above all other aims. You will have to suppress much and give up much, but such suppression is the shortest road to becoming perfect men, complete in Him, and such surrender is the surest way to possess all things. 'He that loseth his life'—which is more than hand or eye—for Christ's sake,' the same shall find it.'

THE LOST SHEEP AND THE SEEKING SHEPHERD

If a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray!—[MATT. xviii. 12.](#)

We find this simple parable, or germ of a parable, in a somewhat more expanded form, as the first of the incomparable three in the fifteenth chapter of Luke's Gospel. Perhaps our Lord repeated the parable more than once. It is an unveiling of His inmost heart, and therein a revelation of the very heart of God. It touches the deepest things in His relation to men, and sets forth thoughts of Him, such as man never dared to dream. It does all this by the homeliest image and by an appeal to the simplest instincts. The most prosaic shepherd looks for lost sheep, and everybody has peculiar joy over lost things found. They may not be nearly so valuable as things that were not lost. The unstrayed may be many, and the strayed be but one. Still there is a keener joy in the recovery of the one than in the unbroken possession of the ninety-and-nine. That feeling in a man may be only selfishness, but homely as it is—when the loser is God, and the lost are men, it becomes the means of uttering and illustrating that truth concerning God which no religion but that of the Cross has ever been bold enough to proclaim, that He cares most for the wanderers, and rejoices over the return of the one that went astray more than over the ninety-and-nine who never wandered.

There are some significant differences between this edition of the parable and the form which it assumes in the Gospel according to Luke. There it is spoken in vindication of Christ's consorting with publicans and sinners; here it is spoken in order to point the lesson of not despising the least and most insignificant of the sons of men. There the seeking Shepherd is obviously Christ; here the seeking Shepherd is rather the Divine Father; as appears by the words of the next verse: 'For it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.' There the sheep is lost; here the sheep goes astray. There the Shepherd seeks till He find, here the Shepherd, perhaps, fails to find; for our Lord says, 'If so be that he find it.'

But I am not about to venture on all the thoughts which this parable suggests, nor even to deal with the main lesson which it teaches. I wish merely to look at the two figures—the wanderer and the seeker.

I. First, then, let us look at that figure of the one wanderer.

Of course I need scarcely remind you that in the immediate application of the parable in Luke's Gospel, the ninety-and-nine were the respectable people who thought the publicans and harlots altogether too dirty to touch, and regarded it as very doubtful conduct on the part of this young Rabbi from Nazareth to be mixed up with persons whom no one with a proper regard for whited sepulchres would have anything to do with. To them He answers, in effect—I am a shepherd; that is my vindication. Of course a shepherd goes after and cares

for the lost sheep. He does not ask about its worth, or anything else. He simply follows the lost because it is lost. It may be a poor little creature after all, but it is lost, and that is enough. And so He vindicates Himself to the ninety-and-nine: 'You do not need Me, you are found. I take you on your own estimation of yourselves, and tell you that My mission is to the wanderers.'

I do not suppose, however, that any of us have need to be reminded that upon a closer and deeper examination of the facts of the case, every hoof of the ninety-and-nine belonged to a stray sheep too; and that in the wider application of the parable all men are wanderers. Remembering, then, this universal application, I would point out two or three things about the condition of these strayed sheep, which include the whole race. The ninety-and-nine may shadow for us a number of beings, in unfallen worlds, immensely greater than even the multitudes of wandering souls that have lived here through weary ages of sin and tears, but that does not concern us now.

The first thought I gather from the parable is that all men are Christ's sheep. That sounds a strange thing to say. What? all these men and women who, having run away from Him, are plunged in sin, like sheep mired in a black bog, the scoundrels and the profligates, the scum and the outcasts of great cities; people with narrow foreheads, and blighted, blasted lives, the despair of our modern civilisation—are they all His? And in those great wide-lying heathen lands where men know nothing of His name and of His love, are they all His too? Let Him answer, 'Other sheep I have'—though they look like goats to-day—'which are not of this fold, them also must I bring, and they shall hear My voice.' All men are Christ's, because He has been the Agent of divine creation, and the grand words of the hundredth Psalm are true about Him. 'It is He that hath made us, and we are His. We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.' They are His, because His sacrifice has bought them for His. Erring, straying, lost, they still belong to the Shepherd.

Notice next, the picture of the sheep as wandering. The word is, literally, 'which goeth astray,' not 'which is gone astray.' It pictures the process of wandering, not the result as accomplished. We see the sheep, poor, silly creature, not going anywhere in particular, only there is a sweet tuft of grass here, and it crops that; and here is a bit of ground where there is soft walking, and it goes there; and so, step by step, not meaning anything, not knowing where it is going, or that it is going anywhere; it goes, and goes, and goes, and at last it finds out that it is away from its beat on the hillside—for sheep keep to one bit of hillside generally, as any shepherd will tell you—and then it begins to bleat, and most helpless of creatures, fluttering and excited, rushes about amongst the thorns and brambles, or gets mired in some quag or other, and it will never find its way back of itself until some one comes for it.

'So,' says Christ to us, 'there are a great many of you who do not mean to go wrong; you are not going anywhere in particular, you do not start on your course with any intentions either way, of doing right or wrong, of keeping near God, or going away from Him, but you

simply go where the grass is sweetest, or the walking easiest. But look at the end of it; where you have got to. You have got away from Him.'

Now, if you take that series of parables in [Luke xv.](#), and note the metaphors there, you will see three different sides given of the process by which men's hearts stray away from God. There is the sheep that wanders. That is partly conscious, and voluntary, but in a large measure simply yielding to inclination and temptation. Then there is the coin that trundles away under some piece of furniture, and is lost—that is a picture of the manner in which a man, without volition, almost mechanically sometimes, slides into sins and disappears as it were, and gets covered over with the dust of evil. And then there is the worst of all, the lad that had full knowledge of what he was doing. 'I am going into a far-off country; I cannot stand this any longer—all restraint and no liberty, and no power of doing what I like with my own; and always obliged to obey and be dependent on my father for my pocket-money! Give me what belongs to me, for good and all, and let me go!' That is the picture of the worst kind of wandering, when a man knows what he is about, and looks at the merciful restraint of the law of God, and says: 'No! I had rather be far away; and my own master, and not always be "cribbed, cabined, and confined" with these limitations.'

The straying of the half-conscious sheep may seem more innocent, but it carries the poor creature away from the shepherd as completely as if it had been wholly intelligent and voluntary. Let us learn the lesson. In a world like this, if a man does not know very clearly where he is going, he is sure to go wrong. If you do not exercise a distinct determination to do God's will, and to follow in His footsteps who has set us an example; and if your main purpose is to get succulent grass to eat and soft places to walk in, you are certain before long to wander tragically from all that is right and noble and pure. It is no excuse for you to say: 'I never meant it'; 'I did not intend any harm, I only followed my own inclinations.' 'More mischief is wrought'—to the man himself, as well as to other people—'from want of thought than is wrought by' an evil will. And the sheep has strayed as effectually, though, when it set out on its journey, it never thought of straying. Young men and women beginning life, remember! and take this lesson.

But then there is another point that I must touch for a moment. In the Revised Version you will find a very tiny alteration in the words of my text, which, yet, makes a large difference in the sense. The last clause of my text, as it stands in our Bible, is, 'And seeketh that which is gone astray'; the Revised Version more correctly reads, 'And seeketh that which is going astray.' Now, look at the difference in these two renderings. In the former the process is represented as finished, in the correct rendering it is represented as going on. And that is what I would press on you, the awful, solemn, necessarily progressive character of our wanderings from God. A man never gets to the end of the distance that separates between him and the Father, if his face is turned away from God. Every moment the separation is increasing. Two lines start from each other at the acutest angle and diverge more the further

they are produced, until at last the one may be away up by the side of God's throne, and the other away down in the deepest depths of hell. So accordingly my text carries with solemn pathos, in a syllable, the tremendous lesson: 'The sheep is not gone, but going astray.' Ah! there are some of my hearers who are daily and hourly increasing the distance between themselves and their merciful Father.

Now the last thing here in this picture is the contrast between the description given of the wandering sheep in our text, and that in St. Luke. Here it is represented as wandering, there it is represented as lost. That is very beautiful and has a meaning often not noticed by hasty readers. Who is it that has lost it? We talk about the lost soul and the lost man, as if it were the man that had lost himself, and that is true, and a dreadful truth it is. But that is not the truth that is taught in this parable, and meant by us to be gathered from it. Who is it that has lost it? He to whom it belonged.

That is to say, wherever a heart gets ensnared and entangled with the love of the treasures and pleasures of this life, and so departs in allegiance and confidence and friendship from the living God, there God the Father regards Himself as the poorer by the loss of one of His children, by the loss of one of His sheep. He does not care to possess you by the hold of mere creation and supremacy and rule. He desires you to love Him, and then He deems that He has you. And if you do not love Him, He deems that He has lost you. There is something in the divine heart that goes out after His lost property. We touch here upon deep things that we cannot speak of intelligently; only remember this, that what looks like self-regard in man is the purest love in God, and that there is nothing in the whole revelation which Christianity makes of the character of God more wonderful than this, that He judges that He has lost His child when His child has forgotten to love Him.

II. So much, then, for one of the great pictures in this text. I can spare but a sentence or two for the other—the picture of the Seeker.

I said that in the one form of the parable it was more distinctly the Father, and in the other more distinctly the Son, who is represented as seeking the sheep. But these two do still coincide in substance, inasmuch as God's chief way of seeking us poor wandering sheep is through the work of His dear Son Jesus, and the coming of Christ is the Father's searching for His sheep in the 'cloudy and dark day.'

According to my text God leaves the ninety-and-nine and goes into the mountains where the wanderer is, and seeks him. And this, couched in veiled form, is the great mystery of the divine love, the incarnation and sacrifice of Jesus Christ our Lord. Here is the answer by anticipation to the sarcasm that is often levelled at evangelical Christianity: 'You must think a good deal of human nature, and must have a very arrogant notion of the inhabitant of this little speck that floats in the great sea of the heavens, if you suppose that with all these millions of orbs he is so important that the divine Nature came down upon this little tiny molehill, and took his nature and died.'

‘Yes!’ says Christ, ‘not because man was so great, not because man was so valuable in comparison with the rest of creation—he was but one amongst ninety-nine unfallen and un sinful—but because he was so wretched, because he was so small, because he had gone so far away from God; therefore, the seeking love came after him, and would draw him to itself.’ That, I think, is answer enough to the cavil.

And then, there is a difference between these two versions of the Parable in respect to their representation of the end of the seeking. The one says ‘seeks until He finds.’ Oh! the patient, incredible inexhaustibleness of the divine love. God’s long-suffering, if I may take such a metaphor, like a sleuth-hound, will follow the object of its search through all its windings and doublings, until it comes up to it. So that great seeking Shepherd follows us through all the devious courses of our wayward, wandering footsteps doubling back upon themselves, until He finds us. Though the sheep may increase its distance, the Shepherd follows. The further away we get the more tender His appeal; the more we stop our ears the louder the voice with which He calls. You cannot wear out Jesus Christ, you cannot exhaust the resources of His bounteousness, of His tenderness. However we may have been going wrong, however far we may have been wandering, however vehemently we may be increasing, at every moment, our distance from Him, He is coming after us, serene, loving, long-suffering, and will not be put away.

Dear friend! would you only believe that a loving, living Person is really seeking you, seeking you by my poor words now, seeking you by many a providence, seeking you by His Gospel, by His Spirit; and will never be satisfied till He has found you in your finding Him and turning your soul to Him!

But, I beseech you, do not forget the solemn lesson drawn from the other form of the parable which is given in my text: If so be that He find it. There is a possibility of failure. What an awful power you have of burying yourself in the sepulchre, as it were, of your own self-will, and hiding yourself in the darkness of your own unbelief! You can frustrate the seeking love of God. Some of you have done so—some of you have done so all your lives. Some of you, perhaps at this moment, are trying to do so, and consciously endeavouring to steel your hearts against some softening that may have been creeping over them whilst I have been speaking. Are you yielding to His seeking love, or wandering further and further from Him? He has come to find you. Let Him not seek in vain, but let the Good Shepherd draw you to Himself, where, lifted on the Cross, He ‘giveth His life for the sheep.’ He will restore your soul and carry you back on His strong shoulder, or in His bosom near His loving heart, to the green pastures and the safe fold. There will be joy in His heart, more than over those who have never wandered; and there will be joy in the heart of the returning wanderer, such as they who had not strayed and learned the misery could never know, for, as the profound Jewish saying has it, ‘In the place where the penitents stand, the perfectly righteous cannot stand.’

PERSISTENCE OF THWARTED LOVE

‘If so be that he find it.’—*MATT. xviii. 13.*

‘Until he find it.’—*LUKE xv. 4.*

Like other teachers, Jesus seems to have had favourite points of view and utterances which came naturally to His lips. There are several instances in the gospels of His repeating the same sayings in entirely different connections and with different applications. One of these habitual points of view seems to have been the thought of men as wandering sheep, and of Himself as the Shepherd. The metaphor has become so familiar that we need a moment’s reflection to grasp the mingled tenderness, sadness, and majesty of it. He thought habitually of all humanity as a flock of lost sheep, and of Himself as high above them, unparticipant of their evil, and having one errand—to bring them back.

And not only does He frequently refer to this symbol, but we have the two editions, from which my texts are respectively taken, of the Parable of the Lost Sheep. I say two editions, because it seems to me a great deal more probable that Jesus should have repeated Himself than that either of the Evangelists should have ventured to take this gem and set it in an alien setting. The two versions differ slightly in some unimportant expressions, and Matthew’s is the more condensed of the two. But the most important variation is the one which is brought to light by the two fragments which I have ventured to isolate as texts. ‘If He find’ implies the possible failure of the Shepherd’s search; ‘till He find’ implies His unwearyed persistence in the teeth of all failure. And, taken in conjunction, they suggest some very blessed and solemn considerations, which I pray for strength to lay upon your minds and hearts now.

I. But first let me say a word or two upon the more general thought brought out in both these clauses—of the Shepherd’s search.

Now, beautiful and heart-touching as that picture is, of the Shepherd away amongst the barren mountains searching minutely in every ravine and thicket, it wants a little explanation in order to be brought into correspondence with the fact which it expresses. For His search for His lost property is not in ignorance of where it is, and His finding of it is not His discovery of His sheep, but its discovery of its Shepherd. We have to remember wherein consists the loss before we can understand wherein consists the search.

Now, if we ask ourselves that question first, we get a flood of light on the whole matter. The great hundredth Psalm, according to its true rendering, says, ‘It is He that hath made us, and we are His; . . . we are . . . the sheep of His pasture.’ But God’s true possession of man is not simply the possession inherent in the act of creation. For there is only one way in which spirit can own spirit, or heart can possess heart, and that is through the voluntary yielding and love of the one to the other. So Jesus Christ, who, in all His seeking after us men, is the voice and hand of Almighty Love, does not count that He has found a man until

the man has learned to love Him. For He loses us when we are alienated from Him, when we cease to trust Him, when we refuse to obey Him, when we will not yield to Him, but put Him far away from us. Therefore the search which, as being Christ's is God's in Christ, is for our love, our trust, our obedience; and in reality it consists of all the energies by which Jesus Christ, as God's embodiment and representative, seeks to woo and win you and me back to Himself, that He may truly possess us.

If the Shepherd's seeking is but a tender metaphor for the whole aggregate of the ways by which the love that is divine and human in Jesus Christ moves round about our closed hearts, as water may feel round some hermetically sealed vessel, seeking for an entrance, then surely the first and chiefest of them, which makes its appeal to each of us as directly as to any man that ever lived, is that great mystery that Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God, left the ninety-and-nine that were safe on the high pastures of the mountains of God, and came down among us, out into the wilderness, 'to seek and to save that which was lost.'

And, brother, that method of winning—I was going to say, of earning—our love comes straight in its appeal to every single soul on the face of the earth. Do not say that thou wert not in Christ's heart and mind when He willed to be born and willed to die. Thou, and thou, and thou, and every single unit of humanity were there clear before Him in their individuality; and He died for thee, and for me, and for every man. And, in one aspect, that is more than to say that He died for all men. There was a specific intention in regard to each of us in the mission of Jesus Christ; and when He went to the Cross the Shepherd was not giving His life for a confused flock of which He knew not the units, but for sheep the face of each of whom He knows, and each of whom He loves. There was His first seeking; there is His chief seeking. There is the seeking which ought to appeal to every soul of man, and which, ever since you were children, has been making its appeal to you. Has it done so in vain? Dear friend, let not your heart still be hard.

He seeks us by every record of that mighty love that died for us, even when it is being spoken as poorly, and with as many limitations and imperfections, as I am speaking it now. 'As though God did beseech you by us, pray you in Christ's stead.' It is not arrogance, God forbid! it is simple truth when I say, Never mind about me; but my word, in so far as it is true and tender, is Christ's word to you. And here, in our midst, that unseen Form is passing along these pews and speaking to these hearts, and the Shepherd is seeking His sheep.

He seeks each of us by the inner voices and emotions in our hearts and minds, by those strange whisperings which sometimes we hear, by the suddenly upstarting convictions of duty and truth which sometimes, without manifest occasion, flash across our hearts. These voices are Christ's voice, for, in a far deeper sense than most men superficially believe, 'He is the true Light that lighteth every man coming into the world.'

He is seeking us by our unrest, by our yearnings after we know not what, by our dim dissatisfaction which insists upon making itself felt in the midst of joys and delights, and

which the world fails to satisfy as much as it fails to interpret. There is a cry in every heart, little as the bearer of the heart translates it into its true meaning—a cry after God, even the living God. And by all your unrests, your disappointments, your hopes unfulfilled, your hopes fulfilled and blasted in the fulfilment, your desires that perish unfruited; by all the mystic movements of the spirit that yearns for something beyond the material and the visible, Jesus Christ is seeking His sheep.

He seeks us by the discipline of life, for I believe that Christ is the active Providence of God, and that the hands that were pierced on the Cross do move the wheels of the history of the world, and mould the destinies of individual spirits.

The deepest meaning of all life is that we should be won to seek Him who in it all is seeking us, and led to venture our hopes, and fling the anchor of our faith beyond the bounds of the visible, that it may fasten in the Eternal, even in Christ Himself, 'the same yesterday and to-day and for ever' when earth and its training are done with. Brethren, it is a blessed thing to live, when we interpret life's smallnesses aright as the voice of the Master, who, by them all—our sadness and our gladness, the unrest of our hearts and the yearnings and longings of our spirits, by the ministry of His word, by the record of His sufferings—is echoing the invitation of the Cross itself, 'Come unto Me, all ye . . . and I will give you rest!' So much for the Shepherd's search.

II. And now, in the second place, a word as to the possible thwarting of the search.

'If so be that He find.' That is an awful if, when we think of what lies below it. The thing seems an absurdity when it is spoken, and yet it is a grim fact in many a life—viz. that Christ's effort can fail and be thwarted. Not that His search is perfunctory or careless, but that we shroud ourselves in darkness through which that love can find no way. It is we, not He, that are at fault when He fails to find that which He seeks. There is nothing more certain than that God, and Christ the image of God, desire the rescue of every man, woman, and child of the human race. Let no teaching blur that sunlight fact. There is nothing more certain than that Jesus Christ has done, and is doing, all that He can do to secure that purpose. If He could make every man love Him, and so find every man, be sure that He would do it. But He cannot. For here is the central mystery of creation, which if we could solve there would be few knots that would resist our fingers, that a finite will like yours or mine can lift itself up against God, and that, having the capacity, it has the desire. He says, 'Come!' We say, 'I will not.' That door of the heart opens from within, and He never breaks it open. He stands at the door and knocks. And then the same solemn if comes—'If any man opens, I will come in'; if any man keeps it shut, and holds on to prevent its being opened, I will stop out.

Brethren, I seek to press upon you now the one plain truth, that if you are not saved men and women, there is no person in heaven or earth or hell that has any blame in the matter but yourself alone. God appeals to us, and says, 'What more could have been done

to My vineyard that I have not done unto it?' His hands are clean, and the infinite love of Christ is free from all blame, and all the blame lies at our own doors.

I must not dwell upon the various reasons which lead so many men among us—as, alas! the utmost charity cannot but see that there are—to turn away from Christ's appeals, and to be unwilling to 'have this Man' either 'to reign over' them or to save them. There are many such, I am sure, in my audience now; and I would fain, if I could, draw them to that Lord in whom alone they have life, and rest, and holiness, and heaven.

One great reason is because you do not believe that you need Him. There is an awful inadequacy in most men's conceptions—and still more in their feelings—as to their sin. Oh dear friends, if you would only submit your consciences for one meditative half-hour to the light of God's highest law, I think you would find out something more than many of you know, as to what you are and what your sin is. Many of us do not much believe that we are in any danger. I have seen a sheep comfortably cropping the short grass on a down over the sea, with one foot out in the air, and a precipice of five hundred feet below it, and at the bottom the crawling water. It did not know that there was any danger of going over. That is like some of us. If you believed what is true—that 'sin when it is finished, bringeth forth death,' and understood what 'death' meant, you would feel the mercy of the Shepherd seeking you. Some of us think we are in the flock when we are not. Some of us do not like submission. Some of us have no inclination for the sweet pastures that He provides, and would rather stay where we are, and have the fare that is going there.

We do not need to do anything to put Him away. I have no doubt that some of us, as soon as my voice ceases, will plunge again into worldly talk and thoughts before they are down the chapel steps, and so blot out, as well as they can, any vagrant and superficial impression that may have been made. Dear brethren, it is a very easy matter to turn away from the Shepherd's voice. 'I called, and ye refused. I stretched out My hands, and no man regarded.' That is all! That is what you do, and that is enough.

III. So, lastly, the thwarted search prolonged.

'Till He find'—that is a wonderful and a merciful word. It indicates the infinitude of Christ's patient forgiveness and perseverance. We tire of searching. 'Can a mother forget' or abandon her seeking after a lost child? Yes! if it has gone on for so long as to show that further search is hopeless, she will go home and nurse her sorrow in her heart. Or, perhaps, like some poor mothers and wives, it will turn her brain, and one sign of her madness will be that, long years after grief should have been calm because hope was dead, she will still be looking for the little one so long lost. But Jesus Christ stands at the closed door, as a great modern picture shows, though it has been so long undisturbedly closed that the hinges are brown with rust, and weeds grow high against it. He stands there in the night, with the dew on His hair, unheeded or repelled, like some stranger in a hostile village seeking for a night's shelter. He will not be put away; but, after all refusals, still with gracious finger, knocks upon

the door, and speaks into the heart. Some of you have refused Him all your lives, and perhaps you have grey hairs upon you now. And He is speaking to you still. He 'suffereth long, is not easily provoked, is not soon angry; hopeth all things,' even of the obstinate rejecters.

For that is another truth that this word 'till' preaches to us—viz. the possibility of bringing back those that have gone furthest away and have been longest away. The world has a great deal to say about incurable cases of moral obliquity and deformity. Christ knows nothing about 'incurable cases.' If there is a worst man in the world—and perhaps there is—there is nothing but his own disinclination to prevent his being brought back, and made as pure as an angel.

But do not let us deal with generalities; let us bring the truths to ourselves. Dear brethren, I know nothing about the most of you. I should not know you again if I met you five minutes after we part now. I have never spoken to many of you, and probably never shall, except in this public way; but I know that you need Christ, and that Christ wants you. And I know that, however far you have gone, you have not gone so far but that His love feels out through the remoteness to grasp you, and would fain draw you to itself.

I dare say you have seen upon some dreary moor, or at the foot of some 'scaur' on the hillside, the bleached bones of a sheep, lying white and grim among the purple heather. It strayed, unthinking of danger, tempted by the sweet herbage; it fell; it vainly bleated; it died. But what if it had heard the shepherd's call, and had preferred to lie where it fell, and to die where it lay? We talk about 'silly sheep.' Are there any of them so foolish as men and women listening to me now, who will not answer the Shepherd's voice when they hear it, with, 'Lord, here am I, come and help me out of this miry clay, and bring me back.' He is saying to each of you, 'Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?' May He not have to say at last of any of us, 'Ye would not come to Me, that ye might have life!'

FORGIVEN AND UNFORGIVING

‘Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven.’ —[MATT. xviii. 22.](#)

The disciples had been squabbling about pre-eminence in the kingdom which they thought was presently to appear. They had ventured to refer their selfish and ambitious dispute to Christ’s arbitrament. He answered by telling them the qualifications of ‘the greatest in the kingdom’—that they are to be humble like little children; that they are to be placable; that they are to use all means to reclaim offenders; and that, even if the offence is against themselves, they are to ignore the personal element, and to regard the offender, not so much as having done them harm, as having harmed himself by his evil-doing.

Peter evidently feels that that is a very hard commandment for a man of his temperament, and so he goes to Jesus Christ for a little further direction, and proposes a question as to the limits of this disposition: ‘How often shall my brother sin?’ The very question betrays that he does not understand what forgiveness means; for it is not real, if the ‘forgiven’ sin is stowed away safely in the memory. ‘I can forgive, but I cannot forget,’ generally means, ‘I do not quite forgive.’ We are not to take the pardoned offence, and carry it to a kind of ‘suspense account,’ to be revived if another is committed, but we are to blot it out altogether. Peter thought that he had given a very wide allowance when he said ‘seven times.’ Christ’s answer lifts the whole subject out of the realm of hard and fast lines and limits, for He takes the two perfect numbers ‘ten’ and ‘seven,’ and multiplies them together, and then He multiplies that by ‘seven’ once more; and the product is not four hundred and ninety, but is innumerableness. He does not mean that the four hundred and ninety-first offence is outside the pale, but He suggests indefiniteness, endlessness. So, as I say, He lifts the question out of the region in which Peter was keeping it, thereby betraying that he did not understand what he was talking about, and tells us that there are no limits to the obligation.

The parable which follows, and follows with a ‘therefore,’ does not deal so much with Peter’s question as to the limits of the disposition, but sets forth its grounds and the nature of its manifestations. If we understand why we ought to forgive, and what forgiveness is, we shall not say, ‘How often?’ The question will have answered itself.

I turn to the parable rather than the words which I have read as our starting-point, to seek to bring out the lessons which it contains in regard to our relations to God, and to one another. There are three sections in it: the king and his debtor; the forgiven debtor and his debtor; and the forgiven debtor unforgiven because unforgiving. And if we look at these three points I think we shall get the lessons intended.

I. The king and his debtor.

A certain king has servants, whom he gathers together to give in their reckoning. And one of them is brought that owes him ten thousand talents. Now, it is to be noticed at the

very outset that the analogy between debt and sin, though real, is extremely imperfect. No metaphor of that sort goes on all fours, and there has been a great deal of harm done to theology and to evangelical religion by carrying out too completely the analogy between money debts and our sins against God. But although the analogy is imperfect, it is very real. The first point that is to be brought out in this first part of the parable is the immense magnitude of every man's transgressions against God. Numismatists and arithmeticians may jangle about the precise amount represented by the thousand talents. It differs according to the talent which is taken as the basis of the calculation. There were several talents in use in the currency of ancient days. But the very point of the expression is not the specification of an exact amount, but the use of a round number which is to suggest an undefined magnitude. 'Ten thousand talents,' according to one estimate, is some two millions and a quarter of pounds sterling.

But I would point out that the amount is stated in terms of talents, and any talent is a large sum; and there are ten thousand of these; and the reason why the account is made out in terms of talents, the largest denomination in the currency of the period, is because every sin against God is a great sin. He being what He is, and we being what we are, and sin being what it is, every sin is large, although the deed which embodies it may be, when measured by the world's foot-rule, very small. For the essence of sin is rebellion against God and the enthroning of self as His victorious rival; and all rebellion is rebellion, whether it is found in arms in the field, or whether it is simply sulkily refusing obedience and cherishing thoughts of treason. We are always apt to go wrong in our estimate of the great and small in human actions, and, although the terms of magnitude do not apply properly to moral questions at all, there is no more conspicuous misuse of language than when we speak of anything which has in it the virus of rebellion against God, and the breach of His law, as being a small sin. It may be a small act; it is a great sin. Little rattlesnakes are snakes; they have rattles and poison fangs as really as the most monstrous of the brood that coils and hisses in some cave. So the account is made out in terms of talents, because every sin is a great one. I need not dwell upon the numerousness that is suggested. 'Ten thousand' is the natural current expression for a number that is not innumerable, but is only known to be very great. The psalmist says: 'They are more than the hairs of my head.' How many hairs had you in your head, David? Do you know? 'No!' And how many sins have you committed? Do you know? 'No!' The number is beyond count by us, though it may be counted by Him against whom they are done. Do you believe that about yourself, my friend, that the debit side of your account has filled all the page and has to be carried forward on to another? Do we any of us realise, as we all of us ought to do, the infinite number, and the transcendent greatness, of our transgressions against the Father?

But the next point to be noticed is the stern legal right of the creditor. It sounds harsh, cruel, almost brutal, that the man and his wife and his children should be sold into slavery,

and all that he had should be taken from him, in order to go some little way towards the reduction of the enormous debt that he owed. Christ puts in that harsh and apparently cruel conduct in the story, not to suggest that it was harsh and cruel, but because it was according to the law of the time. A recognised legal right was exercised by the creditor when he said, 'Take him; sell him for a slave, and bring me what he fetches in the open markets.' So that we have here suggested the solemn thought of the right that divine justice, acting according to strict retributive law, has over each of us. Our own consciences attest it as perfectly within the scope of the divine retributive justice that our enormous sin should bring down a tremendous punishment.

I said that the analogy between sin and debt was a very imperfect one. It is imperfect in regard to one point—viz. the implication of other people in the consequences of the man's evil; for although it is quite true that 'the evil that men do lives after them, and spreads far beyond their sight, and involves many people, no other is amenable to divine justice for the sinner's debt. It is quite true that, when we do an evil action, we never can tell how far its wind-borne seeds may be carried, or where they may alight, or what sort of unwholesome fruit they may bear, or who may be poisoned by them; but, on the other hand, we, and we only, are responsible for our individual transgressions against God. 'If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself; and if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.'

The same imperfection in the analogy applies to the next point in the parable—viz. the bankrupt debtor's prayer, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.' Easy to promise! I wonder how long it would have taken a penniless bankrupt to scrape together two and a quarter millions of pounds? He said a great deal more than he could make good. But the language of his prayer is by no means the language that becomes a penitent at God's throne. We have not to offer to make future satisfaction. No! that is impossible. 'What I have written I have written,' and the page, with all its smudges and blots and misshapen letters, cannot be made other than it is by any future pages fairly written. No future righteousness has any power to affect the guilt of past sin. There is one thing that does discharge the writing from the page. Do you remember Paul's words, 'blotting out the handwriting that was against us—nailing it to His Cross'? You sometimes dip your pens into red ink, and run a couple of lines across the page of an account that is done with. Jesus Christ does the same across our account, and the debt is non-existent, because He has died.

But the prayer is the expression, if not of penitence yet of petition, and all the stern rigour of the law's requirement at once melts away, and the king who, in the former words, seemed so harsh, now is almost incredibly merciful. For he not only cancels the debt, but sets the man free. 'Thy ways are not as our ways; . . . as the heavens are higher than the earth, so great is His mercy toward' the sinful soul.

II. So much, then, for the first part of this parable. Now a word as to the second, the forgiven debtor and his debt.

Our Lord uses in the [27th and 28th verses](#) of our text the same expression very significantly and emphatically. 'The lord of that servant was moved with compassion.' And then again, in the [28th verse](#), 'But that servant went out and found one of his fellow-servants.' The repetition of the same phrase hooks the two halves together, emphasises the identity of the man, and the difference of his demeanour, on the two occasions.

The conduct described is almost impossibly disgusting and truculent. 'He found his fellow-servant, who owed him a hundred pence'—some three pounds, ten shillings—and with the hands that a minute before had been wrung in agony, and extended in entreaty, he throttled him; and with the voice that had been plaintively pleading for mercy a minute before, he gruffly growled, 'Pay me that thou owest.' He had just come through an agony of experience that might have made him tender. He had just received a blessing that might have made his heart glow. But even the repetition of his own petition does not touch him, and when the poor fellow-servant, with his paltry debt, says, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all,' it avails nothing. He durst not sell his fellow-servant. God's rights over a man are more than any man's over another. But he does what he can. He will not do much towards recouping himself of his loan by flinging the poor debtor into prison, but if he cannot get his ducats he will gloat over his 'pound of flesh.' So he hurries him off to gaol.

Could a man have done like that? Ah! brethren, the things that would be monstrous in our relations to one another are common in our relations to God. Every day we see, and, alas! do, the very same thing, in our measure and degree. Do you never treasure up somebody's slights? Do you never put away in a pigeon-hole for safe-keeping, endorsed with the doer's name on the back of it, the record of some trivial offence against you? It is but as a penny against a talent, for the worst that any of us can do to another is nothing as compared with what many of us have been doing all our lives toward God. I dare say that some of us will go out from this place, and the next man that we meet that 'rubs us the wrong way,' or does us any harm, we shall score down his act against him with as implacable and unmerciful an unforgiveness as that of this servant in the parable. Do not believe that he was a monster of iniquity. He was just like us. We all of us have one human heart, and this man's crime is but too natural to us all. The essence of it was that having been forgiven, he did not forgive.

So, then, our Lord here implies the principle that God's mercy to us is to set the example to which our dealings with others is to be conformed. 'Even as I had mercy on thee' plainly proposes that miracle of divine forgiveness as our pattern as well as our hope. The world's morality recognises the duty of forgiveness. Christ shows us God's forgiveness as at once the model which is the perfect realisation of the idea in its completeness and inexhaustibility, and also the motive which, brought into our experience, inclines and enables us to forgive.

III. And now I come to the last point of the text—the debtor who had been forgiven falling back into the ranks of the unforgiven, because he does not forgive.

The fellow-servants were very much disgusted, no doubt. Our consciences work a great deal more rapidly, and rigidly, about other people's faults than they do about our own. And nine out of ten of these fellow-servants that were very sorry, and ran and told the king, would have done exactly the same thing themselves. The king, for the first time, is wroth. We do not read that he was so before, when the debt only was in question; but such unforgiving harshness, after the experience of such merciful forgiveness, rouses his righteous indignation. The unmercifulness of Christian people is a worse sin than many a deed that goes by very ugly names amongst men. And so the judgment that falls upon this evil-doer, who, by his truculence to his fellow-servant, had betrayed the baseness of his nature and the ingratitude of his heart, is, 'Put him back where he was! Tie the two and a quarter millions round his neck again! Let us see what he will do by way of discharging it now!' Now, do not let any theological systems prevent you from recognising the solemn truth that underlies that representation, that there may be things in the hearts and conduct of forgiven Christians which may cancel the cancelling of their debt, and bring it all back again. No man can cherish the malicious disposition that treasures up offences against himself, and at the same moment feel that the divine love is wrapping him round in its warm folds. If we are to retain our consciousness of having been forgiven by God, and received into the amplitude of His heart, we must, in our measure and degree, imitate that on which we trust, and be mirrors of the divine mercy which we say has saved us.

Our parable lays equal stress on two things. First, that the foundation of all real mercifulness in men is the reception of forgiving mercy from God. We must have experienced it before we can exercise it. And, second, we must exercise it, if we desire to continue to experience it. 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.' That applies to Christian people. But behind that there lies the other truth, that in order to be merciful we must first of all have received the initial mercy of cancelled transgression.

So, dear friends, here are the two lessons for every one of us. First, to recognise our debt, and go to Him in whom God is well pleased, for its abolishment and forgiveness; and then to go out into the world, and live like Him, and show to others love kindled by and kindred to that to which we trust for our own salvation. 'Be ye therefore imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love, as God also hath loved us.'

THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE KING

‘And, behold, one came and said unto Him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? 17. And He said unto him, Why callest thou Me good? there is none good but One, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. 18. He saith unto Him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, 19. Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 20. The young man saith unto Him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? 21. Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow Me. 22. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. 23. Then said Jesus unto His disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. 24. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. 25. When His disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? 26. But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.’—[MATT. xix. 16-26](#).

We have here one of the saddest stories in the gospels. It is a true soul’s tragedy. The young man is in earnest, but his earnestness has not volume and force enough to float him over the bar. He wishes to have some great thing bidden him to do, but he recoils from the sharp test which Christ imposes. He truly wants the prize, but the cost is too great; and yet he wishes it so much that he goes away without it in deep sorrow, which perhaps, at another day, ripened into the resolve which then was too high for him. There is a certain severity in our Lord’s tone, an absence of recognition of the much good in the young man, and a naked stringency in His demand from him, which sound almost harsh, but which are set in their true light by Mark’s note, that Jesus ‘loved him,’ and therefore treated him thus. The truest way to draw ingenuous souls is not to flatter, nor to make entrance easy by dropping the standard or hiding the requirements, but to call out all their energy by setting before them the lofty ideal. Easy-going disciples are easily made—and lost. Thorough-going ones are most surely won by calling for entire surrender.

I. We may gather together the earlier part of the conversation, as introductory to the Lord’s requirement (vs. 16-20), in which we have the picture of a real though imperfect moral earnestness, and may note how Christ deals with it. Matthew tells us that the questioner was young and rich. Luke adds that he was a ‘ruler’—a synagogue official, that is—which was unusual for a young man, and indicates that his legal blamelessness was recognised. Mark adds one of his touches, which are not only picturesque, but character-revealing, by the information that he came ‘running’ to Jesus in the way, so eager was he, and

fell at His feet, so reverential was he. His first question is singularly compacted of good and error. The fact that he came to Christ for a purely religious purpose, not seeking personal advantage for himself or for others, like the crowds who followed for loaves and cures, nor laying traps for Him with puzzles which might entangle Him with the authorities, nor asking theological questions for curiosity, but honestly and earnestly desiring to be helped to lay hold of eternal life, is to be put down to his credit. He is right in counting it the highest blessing.

Where had he got hold of the thought of 'eternal life'? It was miles above the dusty speculations and casuistries of the rabbis. Probably from Christ Himself. He was right in recognising that the conditions of possessing it were moral, but his conception of 'good' was superficial, and he thought more of doing good than of being good, and of the desired life as payment for meritorious actions. In a word, he stood at the point of view of the old dispensation. 'This do, and thou shalt live,' was his belief; and what he wished was further instruction as to what 'this' was. He was to be praised in that he docilely brought his question to Jesus, even though, as Christ's answer shows, there was error mingling in his docility. Such is the character—a young man, rich, influential, touched with real longings for the highest life, ready, so far as he knows himself, to do whatever he is bidden, in order to secure it.

We might have expected Christ, who opened His arms wide for publicans and harlots, to have welcomed this fair, ingenuous seeker with some kindly word. But He has none for him. We adopt the reading of the Revised Version, in which our Lord's first word is repellent. It is in effect—'There is no need for your question, which answers itself. There is one good Being, the source and type of every good thing, and therefore the good, which you ask about, can only be conformity to His will. You need not come to Me to know what you are to do.' He relegates the questioner, not to his own conscience, but to the authoritative revealed will of God in the law. Modern views of Christ's work, which put all its stress on the perfection of His moral character, and His office as a pattern of righteousness, may well be rebuked by the fact that He expressly disclaimed this character, and declared that, if He was only to be regarded as republishing the law of human conduct, His work was needless. Men have enough knowledge of what they must do to enter into life, without Jesus Christ. No doubt, Christ's moral teaching transcends that given of old; but His special work was not to tell men what to do, but to make it possible for them to do it; to give, not the law, but the power, both the motive and the impulse, which will fulfil the law. On another occasion He answered a similar question in a different manner. When the Jews asked Him, 'What must we do, that we may work the works of God?' He replied by the plain evangelical statement: 'This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent.' Why did He not answer the young ruler thus? Only because He knew that he needed to be led to that thought by having his own self-complacency shattered, and the clinging of his soul to earth laid bare. The whole

treatment of him here is meant to bring him to the apprehension of faith as preceding all truly good work.

The young man's second question says a great deal in its one word. It indicates astonishment at being remanded to these old, well-worn precepts, and might be rendered, 'What sort of commandments?' as if taking it for granted that they must be new and peculiar. It is the same spirit as that which in all ages has led men who with partial insight longed after eternal life, to seek it by fantastic and unusual roads of extraordinary sacrifices or services—the spirit which filled monasteries, and invented hair shirts, and fastings, and swinging with hooks in your back at Hindoo festivals. The craving for more than ordinary 'good works' shows a profound mistake in the estimate of the ordinary, and a fatal blunder as to the relation between 'goodness' and 'eternal life.'

So Christ answers the question by quoting the second half of the Decalogue, which deals with the homeliest duties, and appending to it the summary of the law, which requires love to our neighbour as to ourselves. Why does He omit the earlier half? Probably because He would meet the error of the question, by presenting only the plainest, most familiar commandments, and because He desired to excite the consciousness of deficiency, which could be most easily done in connection with these.

There is a touch of impatience in the rejoinder, 'All these have I kept,' and more than a touch of self-satisfaction. The law has failed to accomplish one of its chief purposes in the young man, in that it has not taught him his sinfulness. No doubt he had a right to say that his outward life had been free from breaches of such very elementary morality which any old woman could have taught him. He had never gone below the surface of the commandments, nor below the surface of his acts, or he would not have answered so jauntily. He had yet to learn that the height of 'goodness' is reached, not by adding some strange new performances to the threadbare precepts of everyday duty, but by digging deep into these, and bottoming the fabric of our lives on their inmost spirit. He had yet to learn that whoever says, 'All these have I kept,' thereby convicts himself of understanding neither them nor himself.

Still he was not at rest, although he had, as he fancied, kept them all. His last question is a plaintive, honest acknowledgment of the hungry void within, which no round of outward obediences can ever fill. He knows that he has not the inner fountain springing up into eternal life. He is dimly aware of something wanting, whether in his obedience or no, at all events in his peace; and he is right in believing that the reason for that conscious void is something wanting in his conduct. But he will not learn what Christ has been trying to teach him, that he needs no new commandment, but a deeper understanding and keeping of the old. Hence his question, half a wail of a hungry heart, half petulant impatience with Christ's reiteration of obvious duties. There are multitudes of this kind in all ages, honestly wishing

to lay hold of eternal life, able to point to virtuous conduct, anxious to know and do anything lacking, and yet painfully certain that something is wanting somewhere.

II. Now comes the sharp-pointed test, which pricks the brilliant bubble. Mark tells us that Jesus accompanied His word with one of those looks which searched a soul, and bore His love into it. 'If thou wouldest be perfect,' takes up the confession of something 'lacking,' and shows what that is. It is unnecessary to remark that this commandment to sell all and give to the poor is intended only for the individual case. No other would-be disciple was called upon to do so. It cannot be meant for others; for, if all were sellers, where would the buyers be? Nor need we do more than point out that the command of renunciation is only half of Christ's answer, the other being, 'Come, follow Me.' But we are not to slide easily over the precept with the comfortable thought that it was special treatment for a special case. The principle involved in it is medicine for all, and the only way of healing for any. This man was tied to earth by the cords of his wealth. They did not hinder him from keeping the commandments, for he had no temptations to murder, or adultery, or theft, or neglect of parents. But they did hinder him from giving his whole self up, and from regarding eternal life as the most precious of all things. Therefore for him there was no safety short of entire outward denuding himself of them; and, if he was in earnest out and out in his questions, here was a new thing for him to do. Others are hindered by other things, and they are called to abandon these. The one thing needful for entrance into life is at bottom self-surrender, and the casting away of all else for its sovereign sake. 'I do count them but dung' must be the language of every one who will win Christ. The hands must be emptied of treasures, and the heart swept clear of lesser loves, if He is to be grasped by our hands, and to dwell in our hearts. More of us than we are willing to believe are kept from entire surrender to Jesus Christ, by money and worldly possessions; and many professing Christians are kept shrivelled and weak and joyless because they love their wealth more than their Lord, and would think it madness to do as this man was bidden to do. When ballast is thrown out, the balloon shoots up. A general unlading of the 'thick clay' which weighs down the Christian life of England, would let thousands soar to heights which they will never reach as long as they love money and what it buys as much as they do. The letter of this commandment may be only applicable in a special case (though, perhaps, this one young man was not the only human being that ever needed this treatment), but the spirit is of universal application. No man enters into life who does not count all things but loss, and does not die to them all, that he may follow Christ.

III. Then comes the collapse of all the enthusiasm. The questioner's earnestness chills at the touch of the test. What has become of the eagerness which brought him running to Jesus, and of the willingness to do any hard task to which he was set? It was real, but shallow. It deceived himself. But Christ's words cut down to the inner man, and laid bare for his own inspection the hard core of selfish worldliness which lay beneath. How many radiant enthu-

siasms, which cheat their subjects quite as much as their beholders, disappear like tinted mist when the hard facts of self-sacrifice strike against them! How much sheer worldliness disguises itself from itself and from others in glistening garments of noble sentiments, which fall at a touch when real giving up is called for, and show the ugly thing below! How much 'religion' goes about the world, and gets made 'a ruler' of the synagogue in recognition of its excellence, which needs but this Ithuriel's spear to start up in its own shape! The completeness and immediateness of the collapse are noticeable. The young man seems to speak no word, and to take no time for reflection. He stands for a moment as if stunned, and then silently turns away. What a moment! his fate hung on it. Once more we see the awful mystery enacted before our eyes, of a soul gathering up its power to put away life. Who will say that the decision of a moment, which is the outcome of all the past, may not fix the whole future? This man had never before been consciously brought to the fork in the road; but now the two ways are before him, and, knowingly, he chooses the worse. Christ did not desire him to do so; but He did desire that he should choose, and should know that he did. It was the truest kindness to tear away the veil of surface goodness which hid him from himself, and to force him to a conscious decision.

One sign of grace he does give, in that he went away 'sorrowful.' He is not angry nor careless. He cannot see the fair prospect of the eternal life, which he had in some real fashion desired, fade away, without a pang. If he goes back to the world, he goes back feeling more acutely than ever that it cannot satisfy him. He loves it too well to give it up, but not enough to feel that it is enough. Surely, in coming days, that godly sorrow would work a change of the foolish choice, and we may hope that he found no rest till he cast away all else to make Christ his own. A soul which has travelled as far on the road to life eternal as this man had done, can scarcely thereafter walk the broad road of selfishness and death with entire satisfaction.

IV. The section closes with Christ's comment on the sad incident. He speaks no word of condemnation, but passes at once from the individual to the general lesson of the difficulty which rich men (or, as He explains it in Mark, men who 'trust in riches') have in entering the kingdom. The reflection breathes a tone of pity, and is not so much blame as a merciful recognition of special temptations which affect His judgment, and should modify ours. A camel with its great body, long neck, and hump, struggling to get through a needle's eye, is their emblem. It is a new thing to pity rich men, or to think of their wealth as disqualifying them for anything. The disciples, with childish naïvté wonder. We may wonder that they wondered. They could not understand what sort of a kingdom it was into which capitalists would find entrance difficult. All doors fly open for them to-day, as then. They do not find much difficulty in getting into the church, however hard it may be to get into the kingdom. But it still remains true that the man who has wealth has a hindrance to his religious character, which, like all hindrances, may be made a help by the use he makes of it; and that the

man who trusts in riches, which he who possesses them is woefully likely to do, has made the hindrance into a barrier which he cannot pass.

That is a lesson which commercial nations, like England, have need to lay to heart, not as a worn-out saying of the Bible, which means very little for us, but as heavy with significance, and pointing to the special dangers which beset Christian perfection.

So real is the peril of riches, that Christ would have His disciples regard the victory over it as beyond our human power, and beckons us away from the effort to overcome the love of the world in our strength, pointing us to God, in whose mighty grace, breathed into our feeble wills and treacherous hearts, is the only force which can overcome the attraction of perishable riches, and make any of us willing or able to renounce them all that we may win Christ. The young ruler had just shown that 'with men this is impossible.' Perhaps he still lingered near enough to catch the assurance that the surrender, which had been too much for him to achieve, might yet be joyfully made, since 'with God all things are possible.'

NEAREST TO CHRIST

‘To sit on My right hand, and on My left, is not Mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of My Father.’—*MATT. xx. 23.*

You will observe that an unusually long supplement is inserted by our translators in this verse. That supplement is quite unnecessary, and, as is sometimes the case, is even worse than unnecessary. It positively obscures the true meaning of the words before us.

As they stand in our Bibles, the impression that they leave upon one’s mind is that Christ in them abjures the power of giving to His disciples their places in the kingdom of heaven, and declares that it belongs not to His function, but relegates it, to His own exclusion, to the Father; whereas what He says is the very opposite of this. He does not put aside the granting of places at His right hand or His left as not being within His province, but He states the principles and conditions on which He does make such a grant, and so is really claiming it as in His province. All that would have been a great deal clearer if our translators had been contented to render the words that they found before them in the Book, without addition, and to read, ‘To sit on My right hand, and on My left, is not Mine to give, but to them for whom it is prepared of My Father.’

Another introductory remark may be made, to the effect that our Lord does not put aside this prayer of His apostles as if they were seeking an impossible thing. It is never safe, I know, to argue from the silence of Scripture. There may be many reasons for that silence beyond our ken in any given case; but still it does strike one as noteworthy that, when this fond mother and her ambitious sons came with their prayer for pre-eminence in His kingdom, our Lord did not answer what would have been so obvious to answer if it had been true, ‘You are asking a thing which cannot be granted to anybody, for they are all upon one level in that kingdom of the heavens.’ He says by implication the very opposite. Not only does His silence confirm their belief that when He came in His glory, some would be closer to His side than others; but the plain statement of the text is that, in the depth of the eternal counsels, and by the preparation of divine grace, there were thrones nearest to His own which some men should fill. He does not say, ‘You are asking what cannot be.’ He does say, ‘There are men for whom it is prepared of My Father.’

And then, still further, Jesus does not condemn the prayer as indicating a wrong state of mind on the part of James and John, though good and bad were strangely mingled in it. We are told nowadays that it is a very selfish thing, far below the lofty height to which our transcendental teachers have attained, to be heartened and encouraged, strengthened and quickened, by the prospect of the crown and the rest that remain for the people of God. If so, Christ ought to have turned round to these men, and have rebuked the passion for reward, which, according to this new light, is so unworthy and so low. But, instead of that, He confines Himself to explaining the conditions on which the fulfilment of the desire is possible, and

by implication permits and approves the desire. 'You want to sit on My right hand and on My left, do you? Then be it so. You may do so if you like. Are you ready to accept the conditions? It is well that you should want it,—not for the sake of being above your brethren, but for the sake of being nearest to Me. Hearken! Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of?' They say unto Him (and I do not know that there are anywhere grander words than the calm, swift, unhesitating, modest, and yet confident answer of these two men), 'We are able.' 'You shall have your desire if you fulfil the conditions. It is given to them for whom it is prepared of My Father.'

I. So, then, if we rightly understand these words, and take them without the unfortunate comment which our translators have inserted, they contain, first, the principle that some will be nearer Christ than others in that heavenly kingdom.

As I have said, the words of our Lord do not merely imply, by the absence of all hint that these disciples' petition was impossible, the existence of degrees among the subjects of His heavenly kingdom, but articulately affirm that such variety is provided for by the preparation of the Father. Probably the two brothers thought that they were only asking for preeminence in an earthly kingdom, and had no idea that their prayer pointed beyond the grave; but that confusion of thought could not be cured in their then stage of growth, and our Lord therefore leaves it untouched. But the other error, if it were an error, was of a different kind, and might, for aught that one sees, have been set right in a moment. Instead of which the answer adopts it, and seems to set Christ's own confirmation on it, as being no Jewish dream, but a truth.

They were asking for earth. He answers—for heaven. He leaves them to learn in after days—when the one was slain with the sword, first martyr among the apostles, and the other lived to see them all pass to their thrones, while he remained the 'companion in tribulation' of the second generation of the Church—how far off was the fulfilment which they fancied so near.

We need not be surprised that so large a truth should be spoken by Christ so quietly, and as it were incidentally. For that is in keeping with His whole tone when speaking of the unseen world. One knows not whether to wonder more at the decisive authority with which He tells us of that mysterious region, or at the small space which such revelations occupy in His words. There is an air of simplicity and unconsciousness, and withal of authority, and withal of divine reticence about them all, which are in full harmony with the belief that Christ speaking of heaven speaks of that He knows, and testifies that He hath seen.

That truth to which, as we think, our Lord's words here inevitably lead, is distinctly taught in many other places of Scripture. We should have had less difficulty about it, and should have felt more what a solemn and stimulating thought it is, if we had tried a little more than most of us do to keep clear before us what really is the essential of that future life, what is the lustre of its light, the heaven of heaven, the glory of the glory. Men talk about

physical theories of another life. I suppose they are possible. They seem to me infinitely unimportant. Warm imaginations, working by sense, write books about a future state which wonderfully succeed in making it real by making it earthly. Some of them read more like a book of travels in this world than forecastings of the next. They may be true or not. It does not matter one whit. I believe that heaven is a place. I believe that the corporeity of our future life is essential to the perfection of it. I believe that Christ wears, and will wear for ever, a glorified human body. I believe that that involves locality, circumstance, external occupations; and I say, all that being so, and in its own place very important, yet if we stop there, we have no vision of the real light that makes the lustre, no true idea of the glory that makes the blessedness.

For what is heaven? Likeness to God, love, purity, fellowship with Him; the condition of the spirit and the relation of the soul to Him. The noblest truth about the future world flows from the words of our Master—‘This is life eternal, to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.’ Not ‘this brings’; not ‘this will lead up to’; not ‘this will draw after it’; but ‘this is’; and whosoever possesses that eternal life hath already in him the germ of all the glories that are round the throne, and the blessedness that fills the hearts of perfected spirits.

If so, if already eternal life in the bud standeth in the knowledge of God in Christ, what makes its fruitage and completeness? Surely, not physical changes or the circumstances of heaven, at least not these primarily, however much such changes and circumstances may subserve our blessedness there, and the anticipation of them may help our sense-bound hopes here. But the completeness of heaven is the completion of our knowledge of God and Christ, with all the perfecting of spirit which that implies and produces. The faith, and love, and happy obedience, and consecration which is calm, that partially occupied and ruled the soul here, are to be thought of as enlarged, perfected, delivered from the interruption of opposing thoughts, of sensuous desires, of selfish purposes, of earthly and sinful occupations. And that perfect knowledge and perfect union and perfect likeness are perfect bliss. And that bliss is heaven. And if, whilst heaven is a place, the heaven of heaven be a state, then no more words are needed to show that, then, heaven can be no dead level, nor can all stand at the same stage of attainments, though all be perfect; but that in that solemn company of the blessed, ‘the spirits of just men made perfect,’ there are indefinitely numerous degrees of approximation to the unattainable Perfection, which stretches above them all, and draws them all to itself. We have not to think of that future life as oppressed, if I may so say, with the unbroken monotony of perfect identity in character and attainments. All indeed are like one another, because all are like Jesus, but that basis of similarity does not exclude infinite variety. The same glory belongs to each, but it is reflected at differing angles and received in divers measures. Perfect blessedness will belong to each, but the capacity to receive it will differ. There will be the same crown on each head, the same song on each lip, the same fulness

of joy filling each heart; but star differeth from star, and the great condition of happy intercourse on earth will not be wanting in heaven—a deep-seated similarity and a superficial diversity.

Does not the very idea of an endless progress in that kingdom involve such variety? We do not think of men passing into the heavens, and being perfected by a bound so as that there shall be no growth. We think of them indeed as being perfected up to the height of their then capacity, from the beginning of that celestial life, so as that there shall be no sin, nor any conscious incompleteness, but not so as that there shall be no progress. And, if they each grow through all the ages, and are ever coming nearer and nearer to Christ, that seems necessarily to lead to the thought that this endless progress, carried on in every spirit, will place them at different points of approximation to the one centre. As in the heavens there are planets that roll nearer the central sun, and others that circle farther out from its rays, yet each keeps its course, and makes music as it moves, as well as planets whose broader disc can receive and reflect more of the light than smaller sister spheres, and yet each blazes over its whole surface and is full to its very rim with white light; so round that throne the spirits of the just made perfect shall move in order and peace—every one blessed, every one perfect, every one like Christ at first, and becoming liker through every moment of the eternities. Each perfected soul looking on his brother shall see there another phase of the one perfectness that blesses and adorns him too, and all taken together shall make up, in so far as finite creatures can make up, the reflection and manifestation of the fulness of Christ. 'Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us' is the law for the incompleteness of earth. 'Having then gifts differing according to the glory that is given to us' will be the law for the perfection of the heavens. There are those for whom it is prepared of His Father, that they shall sit in special nearness to Him.

II. Still further, these words rightly understood assert that truth which, at first sight, our Authorised Version's rendering seems to make them contradict, viz. that Christ is the giver to each of these various degrees of glory and blessedness. 'It is not Mine to give, save to them for whom it is prepared.' Then it is Thine to give it to them. To deny or to doubt that Christ is the giver of the blessedness, whatsoever the blessedness may be, that fills the hearts and souls of the redeemed, is to destroy His whole work, to destroy all the relations upon which our hopes rest, and to introduce confusion and contradiction into the whole matter.

For Scripture teaches us that He is God's unspeakable gift; that in Him is given to us everything; that He is the bestower of all which we need; that 'out of His fulness,' as one of those two disciples long afterwards said, 'all we have received, and grace for grace.' There is nothing within the compass of God's love to bestow of which Christ is not the giver. There is nothing divine that is done in the heavens and the earth, as I believe, of which Christ is not the doer. The representation of Scripture is uniformly that He is the medium of the activity of the divine nature; that he is the energy of the divine will; that He is, to use the

metaphor of the Old Testament, 'the arm of the Lord'—the forthputting of God's power; that He is, to use the profound expression of the New Testament, the Word of the Lord, cognate with, and the utterance of, the eternal nature, the light that streams from the central brightness, the river that flows from the else sealed fountain. As the arm is to the body, and as is the word to the soul, so is Christ to God—the eternal divine utterance and manifestation of the divine nature. And, therefore, to speak of anything that a man can need and anything that God can give as not being given by Christ, is to strike at the very foundation, not only of our hopes, but at the whole scheme of revealed truth. He is the giver of heaven and everything else which the soul requires.

And then, again, let me remind you that on this matter we are not left to such general considerations as those that I have been suggesting, but that the plain statements of Scripture do confirm the assertion that Christ is the determiner and the bestower of all the differing grades of glory and blessedness yonder. For do we not read of Him that He is the Judge of the whole earth? Do we not read of Him that His word is acquittal and His frown condemnation—that to 'be accepted of Him' is the highest aim and end of the Christian life? Do we not read that it is He who says, 'Come, ye blessed of My Father, enter into the kingdom prepared for you'? Do we not read that the apostle, dying, solaced himself with the thought that 'there was laid up for him a crown of glory, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, would give him at that day'? And do we not read in the very last book of Scripture, written by one of those two brothers, and containing almost verbal reference to the words of my text, the promise seven times spoken from the immortal lips of the glorified Son of Man, walking in the midst of the candlesticks, 'To him that overcometh will I give'? The fruit of the tree of life is plucked by His hands for the wearied conquerors. The crown of life is set by Him on the faithful witnesses' brows. The hidden manna and the new name are bestowed by Him on those who hold fast His name. It is He who gives the victors kingly power over the nations. He clothes in white garments those who have not defiled their robes. His hand writes upon the triumphant foreheads the name of God. And highest of all, beyond which there is no bliss conceivable, 'To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne.'

Christ is the bestower of the royalties of the heavens as of the redemptions of earth, and it is His to give that which we crave at His hands, when we ask pardon here and glory hereafter. 'To him that is athirst will He give of the water of life freely,' and to him that overcometh will He give the crown of glory.

III. These words lead us, in the third place, to the further thought, that these glorious places are not given to mere wishing, nor by mere arbitrary will.

'You would sit on My right hand and on My left? You think of that pre-eminence as conferred because you chose to ask it—as given by a piece of favouritism. Not so. I cannot make a man foremost in my kingdom in that fashion. There are conditions which must precede such an elevation.'

And there are people who think thus still, as if the mere desire, without anything more, were enough—or as if the felicities of the heavenly world were dependent solely on Christ's arbitrary will, and could be bestowed by an exercise of mere power, as an Eastern prince may make this man his vizier and that other one his water-carrier. The same principles which we have already applied to the elucidation of the idea of varieties and stages of nearness to Christ in His heavenly kingdom have a bearing on this matter. If we rightly understand that the essential blessedness of heaven is likeness to Christ, we shall feel that mere wishing carries no man thither, and that mere sovereign will and power do not avail to set us there. There are conditions indispensable, from the very nature of the case, and unless they are realised it is as impossible for us to receive, as for Him to give, a place at His side. If, indeed, the future blessedness consisted in mere external circumstances and happier conditions of life, it might be so bestowed. But if place and surroundings, and a more exquisite and ethereal frame, are but subordinate sources of it, and its real fountain is union with Jesus and assimilation to Him, then something else than idle desires must wing the soul that soars thither, and His transforming grace, not His arbitrary will, must set us at His own right hand 'in the heavenly places.'

Of all the profitless occupations with which men waste their lives, none are more utterly useless than wishing without acting. Our wishes are meant to impel us to the appropriate forms of energy by which they can be realised. When a pauper becomes a millionaire by sitting and vehemently wishing that he were rich, when ignorance becomes learning by standing in a library and wishing that the contents of all these books were in its head, there will be some hope that the gates of heaven will fly open to your desire. But till then, 'many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in and not be able.' Many shall seek; you must strive. For wishing is one thing, and willing is another, and doing is yet another. And in regard to entrance into Christ's kingdom, our 'doing' is trusting in Him who has done all for us. 'This is the work of God, that ye should believe on Him whom He hath sent.' Does our wish lead us to the acceptance of the condition? Then it will be fulfilled. If not, it will remain fruitless, will die into apathy, or will live as a pang and a curse.

You wish, or fancy you wish, to pass into heaven when you die, I suppose. Some of its characteristics attract you. You believe in punishment for sin, and you would willingly escape that. You believe in a place of rest after toil, of happiness after sorrow, where nipping frosts of disappointment, and wild blasts of calamity, and slow, gnawing decay no more harm and kill your joys—and you would like that. But do you wish to be pure and stainless, to have your hearts fixed on God alone, to have your whole being filled with Him, and emptied of self and sense and sin? The peace of heaven attracts you—but its praise repels, does it not? Its happiness draws your wishes—does its holiness seem inviting? It would be joyful to be far away from punishment—would it be as joyful to be near Christ? Ah! no; the wishes lead to no resolve, and therefore to no result, for this among other reasons, because they are only

kindled by a part of the whole, and are exchanged for positive aversion when the real heaven of heaven is presented to your thoughts. Many a man who, by the set of his whole life, is drifting daily nearer and nearer to that region of outer darkness, is conscious of an idle wish for peace and joy beyond the grave. In common matters a man may be devoured by vain desires all his lifetime, because he will not pass beyond wishing to acting accordingly. 'The desire of the slothful killeth him; because his hands refused to labour, he coveteth greedily all the day long.' And with like but infinitely more tragical issues do these vain wishes for a place in that calm world, where nothing but holiness enters, gnaw at many a soul. 'Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his,' was the aspiration of that Gentile prophet, whose love of the world obscured even the prophetic illumination which he possessed—and his epitaph is a stern comment on the uselessness of such empty wishes, 'Balaam, the son of Beor, they slew with the sword.' It needs more than a wish to set us at Christ's right hand in His kingdom.

Nor can such a place be given by mere arbitrary will. Christ could not, if He would, set a man at His right hand whose heart was not the home of simple trust and thankful love, whose nature and desires were unprepared for that blessed world. It would be like taking one of those creatures—if there be such—that live on the planet whose orbit is farthest from the sun, accustomed to cold, organised for darkness, and carrying it to that great central blaze, with all its fierce flames and tongues of fiery gas that shoot up a thousand miles in a moment. It would crumble and disappear before its blackness could be seen against the blaze.

His loving will embraces us all, and is the foundation of all our hopes. But it had to reach its purpose by a bitter road which He did not shrink from travelling. He desires to save us, and to realise the desire He had to die. 'It became Him for whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through suffering.' What He had to do, we have to accept. Unless we accept the mercy of God in Christ, no wish on our parts, nor any exercise of power on His, will carry us to the heaven which He has died to open, and of which He is at once the giver and the gift.

IV. These glorious places are given as the result of a divine preparation.

'To them for whom it is prepared of My Father.' We have seen that Christ is not to be regarded as abjuring the office, with which His disciples' confidence led them to invest Him—that of allotting to His servants their place in His kingdom. He neither refers it to the Father without Himself, nor claims it for Himself without the Father. The living unity of will and work which subsists between the Father and the Son forbids such a separation and distribution of office. And that unity is set forth on both its sides in His own deep words, 'The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do: for whatsoever things He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.'

So, then, while the gift of thrones at His side is His act and the Father's, in like manner the preparation of the royal seats for their occupants, and of the kings for their thrones, is the Father's act and His.

Our text does not tell us directly what that preparation is, any more than it tells us directly what the principles are on which entrance into and pre-eminence in the kingdom are granted. But we know enough in regard to both, for our practical guidance, for the vigour of our hope, and the grasp of our faith.

There is a twofold divine preparation of the heavens for men. One is from of old. The kingdom is 'prepared for you before the foundation of the world.' That preparation is in the eternal counsel of the divine love, which calleth the things that are not as though they were, and before which all that is evolved in the generations of men and the epochs of time, lies on one plane, equally near to dim from whose throne diverge far beneath the triple streams of past, present, and future.

And beside that preparation, the counsel of pardoning mercy and redeeming grace, there is the other preparation—the realisation of that eternal purpose in time through the work of Jesus Christ our Lord. His consolation to His disciples in the parting hour was, 'I go to prepare a place for you.' How much was included in these words we shall never know till we, like Him, see of the travail of His soul, and like Him are satisfied. But we can dimly see that on the one hand His death, and on the other hand His entrance into that holiest of all, make ready for us the many mansions of the Father's house. He was crucified for our offences, He was raised again for our justification, He is passed through the heavens to stand our Forerunner in the presence of God—and by all these mighty acts He prepares the heavenly places for us. As the sun behind a cloud, which hides it from us, is still pouring out its rays on far-off lands, so He, veiled in dark, sunset clouds of Calvary, sent the energy of His passion and cross into the unseen world and made it possible that we should enter there. 'When Thou didst overcome the sharpness of death, Thou didst open the gates of the kingdom of heaven to all believers.' As one who precedes a mighty host provides and prepares rest for their weariness, and food for their hunger, in some city on their line of march, and having made all things ready, is at the gates to welcome their travel-stained ranks when they arrive, and guide them to their repose; so He has gone before, our Forerunner, to order all things for us there. It may be that unless Christ were in heaven, our brother as well as our Lord, it were no place for mortals. It may be that we need to have His glorified bodily presence in order that it should be possible for human spirits to bear the light, and be at home with God. Be that as it may, this we know, that the Father prepares a place for us by the eternal counsel of His love, and by the all-sufficient work of Christ, by whom we have access to the Father.

And as His work is the Father's preparation of the place for us by the Son, the issue of His work is the Father's preparation of us for the place, through the Son, by the Spirit. 'He that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God.'

If so, then what follows? This, among other things, that wishes are vain, for heaven is no gift of arbitrary favouritism, but that faith in Christ, and faith alone, leads us to His right hand—and the measure of our faith and growing Christlikeness here, will be the measure of our glory hereafter, and of our nearness to Him. It is possible to be 'saved, yet so as by fire.' It is possible to have 'an entrance ministered unto us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' If we would be near Him then, we must be near Him now. If we would share His throne, we must bear His cross. If we would be found in the likeness of His resurrection, we must be 'conformable unto His death.' Then such desires as these true-hearted, and yet mistaken, disciples expressed will not be the voice of selfish ambition, but of dependent love. They will not be vain wishes, but be fulfilled by Him, who, stooping from amid the royalties of heaven, with love upon His face and pity in His heart, will give more than we ask. 'Seekest thou a place at My right hand? Nay, I give thee a more wondrous dignity. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne.'

THE SERVANT-LORD AND HIS SERVANTS

‘Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.’—[MATT. xx. 28.](#)

It seems at first sight strangely unsympathetic and irrelevant that the ambitious request of James and John and their foolish mother, that they should sit at Christ’s right hand and His left in His kingdom, should have been occasioned by, and have followed immediately upon, our Lord’s solemn and pathetic announcement of His sufferings. But the connection is not difficult to trace. The disciples believed that, in some inexplicable way, the sufferings which our Lord was shadowing forth were to be the immediate precursors of His assuming His regal dignity. And so they took time by the forelock, as they thought, and made haste to ensure their places in the kingdom, which they believed was now ready to burst upon them. Other occasions in the Gospels in which we find similar quarrelling among the disciples as to pre-eminence are similarly associated with references made by our Lord to His approaching crucifixion. On a former occasion He cured these misplaced ambitions by setting a child in the midst of them. On this He cures them by a still more pathetic and wonderful example, His own; and He says, ‘I, in My lowliness and service, am to be your Pattern. In Me see the basis of all true greatness, and the right use of all influence and authority. The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.’

I. So, then, let us look first at the perfect life of service of the Servant-Lord.

Now, in order to appreciate the significance of that life of service, we must take into account the introductory words, ‘The Son of Man came.’ They declare His pre-existence, His voluntary entrance into the conditions of humanity, and His denuding Himself of ‘the glory which He had with the Father before the world was.’ We shall never understand the Servant-Christ until we understand that He is the Eternal Son of the Father. His service began long before any of His acts of sympathetic and self-forgetting lowliness rendered help to the miserable here upon earth. His service began when He laid aside, not the garments of earth, but the vesture of the heavens, and girded Himself, not with the cincture woven in man’s looms, but with the flesh of our humanity, ‘and being found in fashion as a man,’ bowed Himself to enter into the conditions of earth. This was the first, the chiefest of all His acts of service, and the sanctity and awfulness of it run through the list of all His deeds and make them unspeakably great. It was much that His hands should heal, that His lips should comfort, that His heart should bleed with sympathy for sorrow. But, oh! it was more that He had hands to touch, lips to speak to human hearts, and the heart of a man and a brother to feel with as well as for us. ‘The Son of Man came’—there is the transcendent example of the true use of greatness; there is the conspicuous instance of the true basis of authority and rule. For it was because He was ‘found in fashion as a Man’ that He has won a

‘name that is above every name,’ and that there have accrued to Him the ‘many crowns’ which He wears at the Father’s side.

But then, passing beyond this, we may dwell, though all imperfectly, upon the features, familiar as they are, of that wonderful life of self-oblivious and self-sacrificing ministration to others. Think of the purity of the source from all which these wonders and blessednesses of service for man flowed. The life of Jesus Christ is self-forgetting love made visible. Scientists tell us that, by the arrangement of particles of sand upon plates of glass, there can be made, as it were, perceptible to the eye, the sweetness of musical sounds; and each note when struck will fling the particles into varying forms of beauty. The life of Jesus Christ presents in shapes of loveliness and symmetry the else invisible music of a divine love. He lets us see the rhythm of the Father’s heart. The source from which His ministrations have flowed is the pure source of a perfect love. Ancient legends consolidated the sunbeams into the bright figure of the far-darting god of light. And so the sunbeams of the divine love have, as it were, drawn themselves together and shaped themselves into the human form of the Son of Man who ‘came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.’

No taint of bye-ends was in that service; no sidelong glances at possible advantages of influence or reputation or the like, which so often deform men’s philanthropies and services to one another. No more than the sunbeam shines for the sake of collateral issues which may benefit itself, did Jesus Christ seek His own advantage in ministering to men. There was no speck of black in that lustrous white robe, but all was perfectly unselfish love. Like the clear sea, weedless and stainless, that laves the marble steps of the palaces of Venice, the deep ocean of Christ’s service to man was pure to the depths throughout.

That perfect ministry of the Servant-Lord was rendered with strange spontaneity and cheerfulness. One of the evangelists says, in a very striking and beautiful phrase, that ‘He healed them that had need of healing,’ as if the presence of the necessity evoked the supply, by the instinctive action of a perfect love. There was never in Him one trace of reluctance to have leisure broken in upon, repose disturbed, or even communion with God abbreviated. All men could come always; they never came inopportunistly. We often cheerfully take up a burden of service, but find it very hard to continue bearing it. But He was willing to come down from the mountain of Transfiguration because there was a demoniac boy in the plain; and therefore He put aside the temptation—‘Let us build here three tabernacles.’ He was willing to abandon His desert seclusion because the multitude sought Him. Interrupted in His communion with the Father by His disciples, He had no impatient word to say, but ‘Let us go into other cities also, for therefore am I sent.’ When He stepped from the fishing-boat on the other side of the lake to which He had fled for a moment of repose, He was glad when He saw the multitude who had pertinaciously outrun Him, and were waiting for Him on the beach. On His Cross He had leisure to turn from His own physical sufferings and the weight of a world’s sin, which lay upon Him, to look at that penitent by His side, and He

ended His life in the ministry of mercy to a brigand. And thus cheerfully, and always without a thought of self, 'He came to minister.'

Think, too, of the sweep of His ministrations. They took in all men; they were equally open to enemies and to friends, to mockers and to sympathisers. Think of the variety of the gifts which He brought in His ministry—caring for body and for soul; alleviating sorrow, binding up wounds, purifying hearts; dealing with sin, the fountain, and with miseries, its waters, with equal helpfulness and equal love.

And think of how that ministering was always ministration by 'the LORD.' For there is nothing to me more remarkable in the Gospel narrative than the way in which, side by side, there lie in Christ's life the two elements, so difficult to harmonise in fact, and so impossible to have been harmonised in a legend, the consciousness of authority and the humility of a servant. The paradox with which John introduces his sweet pathetic story of our Lord's washing the disciples' feet is true of, and is illustrated by, every instance of more than ordinary lowliness and self-oblivion which the Gospel contains. 'Jesus, knowing that He had come from God, and went to God, and that the Father had given all things into His hand'—did what? 'Laid aside His garments and took a towel and girded Himself.' The two things ever go together. And thus, in His lowliest abasement, as in a star entangled in a cloud, there shine out, all the more broad and conspicuous for the environment which wraps them, the beams of His uncreated lustre.

That ministration was a service that never shrank from stern rebuke. His service was no mere soft and pliant, sympathetic helpfulness, but it could smite and stab, and be severe, and knit its brow, and speak stern words, as all true service must. For it is not service but cruelty to sympathise with the sinner, and say nothing in condemnation of his sin. And yet no sternness is blessed which is not plainly prompted by desire to help.

Now, I know far better than you do how wretchedly inadequate all these poor words of mine have been to the great theme that I have been trying to speak of, but they may at least—like a little water poured into a pump—have set your minds working upon the theme, and, I hope, to better purpose. 'The Son of Man came . . . to minister.'

II. Now, secondly, note the service that should be modelled on His.

Oh! brethren, if we, however imperfectly, have taken into mind and heart that picture of Him who was and is amongst us as 'One that serveth,' how sharp a test, and how stringent, and, as it seems to us sometimes, impossible, a commandment are involved in the 'even as' of my text. When we think of our grudging services; when we think of how much more apt we are to insist upon what men owe to us than of what we owe to them; how ready we are to demand, how slow we are to give; how we flame up in what we think is warranted indignation if we do not get the observance, or the sympathy, or the attention that we require, and yet how little we give of these, we may well say, 'Thou hast set a pattern that can only drive us to despair.' If we would read our Gospels more than we do with the feeling, as we

trace that Master through each of His phases of sympathy and self-oblivion and self-sacrifice and service, 'that is what I should be,' what a different book the New Testament would be to us, and what different people you and I would be!

There is no ground on which we can rest greatness or superiority in Christ's kingdom except this ground of service. And there is no use that we can make either of money or of talents, of acquirements or opportunities, except the use of helping our fellows with them, which will stand the test of this model and example. 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' The servant who serves for love is highest in the hierarchy of Heaven. God, who is supreme, has stooped lower than any that are beneath Him, and His true rule follows, not because He is infinite, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, or any of those other pompous Latin words which describe what men call His attributes, but because He loves best, and does most for the most. And that is what you and I ought to be. We may well take the lesson to ourselves. I have no space, and, I hope, no need to enlarge upon it; but be sure of this, that if we are ever to be near the right and the left of the Master in His kingdom, there is one way, and only one way, to come thither, and that is to make self abdicate its authority as the centre of our lives, and to enthrone there Christ, and for His sake all our brethren. Be ambitious to be first, but remember, Noblesse oblige. He that is first must become last. He that is Servant of all is Master of all. That is the only mastery that is worth anything, the devotion of hearts that circle round the source from which they draw light and warmth. What is it that makes a mother the queen of her children? Simply that all her life she has been their servant, and never thought about herself, but always about them.

Now much might be said as to the application of these threadbare principles in the Church and in society, but I do not enlarge on that; only let me say in a word—that here is the one law on which preeminence in the Church is to be allocated.

What becomes of sacerdotal hierarchies, what becomes of the 'lords over God's heritage,' if the one ground of pre-eminence is service? I know, of course, that there may be different forms embodying one principle, but it seems to me that that form of Church polity is nearest the mind of Christ in which the only dignity is dignity of service, and the only use of place is the privilege of stooping and helping.

This fruitful principle will one day shape civil as well as ecclesiastical societies. For the present, our Lord draws a contrast between the worldly and the Christian notions of rank and dignity. 'It shall not be so among you,' says He. And the nobler conception of eminence and service set forth in His disciples, if they are true to their Lord and their duty, will leaven, and we may hope finally transform society, sweeping away all vulgar notions of greatness as depending on birth, or wealth, or ruder forms of powers, and marshalling men according to Christ's order of precedence, in which helpfulness is preeminence and service is supremacy, while conversely pre-eminence is used to help and superiority stoops to serve.

One remark will close my sermon. You have to take the last words of this verse if you are ever going to put in practice its first words. 'Even as the Son of Man came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister,'—if Jesus Christ had stopped there He would only have been one more of the long roll of ineffectual preachers and prophets who show men the better way, and leave them struggling in the mire. But He did not stop there: 'Even as the Son of Man came . . . to give His life a ransom for many.'

Ah! the Cross, with its burden of the sacrifice for the world's sin, is the only power which will supply us with a sufficient motive for the loftiness of Christlike service. I know that there is plenty of entirely irreligious and Christless beneficence in the world. And God forbid that I should say a word to seem to depreciate that. But sure I am that for the noblest, purest, most widely diffused and blessedly operative kinds of service of man, there is no motive and spring anywhere except 'He loved me, and gave Himself for me.' And, bought by that service and that blood, it will be possible, and it is obligatory upon all of us, to 'do unto others,' as He Himself said, 'as I have done to you.' 'The servant is not greater than his Lord.'

WHAT THE HISTORIC CHRIST TAUGHT ABOUT HIS DEATH

‘The Son of Man came. . . to give His life a ransom for many.’—[MATT. xx. 28.](#)

We hear a great deal at present about going back to ‘the Christ of the Gospels.’ In so far as that phrase and the movement of thought which it describes are a protest against the substitution of doctrines for the Person whom the doctrines represent, I, for one, rejoice in it. But I believe that the antithesis suggested by the phrase, and by some of its advocates avowed, between the Christ of the Gospels and the Christ of the Epistles, is false. The Christ of the Gospels is the Christ of the Epistles, as I humbly venture to believe. And I cannot but see that there is a possibility of a movement which, carried out legitimately, should command the fullest sympathy of every Christian heart, degenerating into the rejection of all the supernatural elements in the nature and work of our Lord, and leaving us with a meagre human Christ, shrunken and impotent. The Christ of the Gospels, by all means; but let it be the whole Christ of all the Gospels, the Christ over whose cradle angels sang, by whose empty grave angels watched, whose ascending form angels beheld and proclaimed that He should come again to be our Judge. Go back to that Christ, and all will be well.

Now it seems to me that one direction in which there is a possibility of such movement as I have referred to being one-sided and harmful is in reference to the conception which we form of the death of Jesus Christ. And therefore I ask you to listen for a few moments to me at this time whilst I try to bring out what is plain in the words before us; and is, as I humbly believe, interwoven in the whole texture of all the Gospels—viz., the conception which Jesus Christ Himself formed of the meaning of His death.

I. The first thing that I notice is that the Christ of the Gospels thought and taught that His death was to be His own act.

I do not think that it is an undue or pedantic pressing of the significance of the words before us, if I ask you to notice two of the significant expressions in this text. ‘The Son of Man came,’ and came ‘to give His life.’ The one word refers to the act of entrance into, the other to the act of departure from, this earthly life. They correspond in so far as that both bring into prominence Christ’s own consent, volition, and action in the very two things about which men are least consulted, their being born and their dying.

‘The Son of Man came.’ Now if that expression occurred but once it might be minimised as being only a synonym for birth, having no special force. But if you will notice that it is our Lord’s habitual word about Himself, only varied occasionally by another one equally significant when he says that He ‘was sent’; and if you will further notice that all through the Gospels He never but once speaks of Himself as being ‘born,’ I think you will admit that I am not making too much of a word when I say that when Christ, out of the depths of His consciousness, said ‘the Son of Man came,’ He was teaching us that He lived before He was born, and that behind the natural fact of birth there lay the supernatural fact of His choosing

to be incarnated for man's redemption. The one instance in which He does speak of Himself as 'being born' is most instructive in this connection. For it was before the Roman governor; and He accompanied the clause in which He said, 'To this end was I born'—which was adapted to Pilate's level of intelligence—with another one which seemed to be inserted to satisfy His own sense of fitness, rather than for any light that it would give to its first hearer, 'And for this cause came I into the world.' The two things were not synonymous; but before the birth there was the coming, and Jesus was born because the Eternal Word willed to come. So says the Christ of the Gospels; and the Christ of the Epistles is represented as 'taking upon Him the form of a servant, and being found in fashion as a man.' Do you accept that as true of 'the historic Christ'?

With precise correspondence, if we turn to the other end of His life, we find the equally significant expression in my text which asserts for it, too, that the other necessity to which men necessarily and without their own volition bow was to Christ a matter of choice. 'The Son of Man came to give.' 'No man taketh it from Me,' as He said on another occasion. 'I lay it down of Myself.' 'The Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep.' 'My flesh . . . I give for the world's life.' Now, brethren, we are not to regard these words as mere vague expressions for a willing surrender to the necessity of death, but as expressing what I believe is taught us all through Scripture, and is fundamental to any real grasp of the real Christ, that He died because He chose, and chose because He loved. What meant that 'loud voice' with which He said 'It is finished,' but that there was no physical exhaustion, such as was usually the immediate occasion of death by crucifixion? What meant that surprising rapidity with which the last moment came in His case, to the astonishment of the stolid bystanders? They meant the same thing as I believe that the Evangelists meant when they, with one consent, employed expressions to describe Christ's death, which may indeed be only euphemisms, but are apparently declarations of its voluntary character. 'He gave up the ghost.' 'He yielded His Spirit.' He breathed forth His life, and so He died.

As one of the old fathers said, 'Who is this that thus falls asleep when He wills? To die is weakness, but thus to die is power.' 'The weakness of God is stronger than man.' The desperate king of Israel bade his slave kill him, and when the menial shrunk from such sacrilege he fell upon his own sword. Christ bade His servant Death, 'Do this,' and he did it; and dying, our Lord and Master declared Himself the Lord and Master of Death. This is a part of the history of the historic Christ. Do you believe it?

II. Then, secondly, the Christ of the Gospels thought and taught that His death was one chief aim of His coming.

I have omitted words from my text which intervene between its first and its last ones; not because I regard them as unimportant, but because they would lead us into too wide a field to cover in one sermon. But I would pray you to observe how the re-insertion of them throws immense light upon the significance of the words which I have chosen. 'The Son of

Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.' That covers the whole ground of His gracious and gentle dealings here on earth, His tenderness, self-abnegation, sympathy, healing, and helpfulness. Then, side by side with that, and as the crowning manifestation of His work of service, without which His life—gracious, radiant, sweet as it is—would still want something of its power, He sets His death.

Surely that is an altogether unexampled phenomenon; altogether a unique and unparalleled thing, that a man should regard that which for all workers, thinkers, speakers, poets, philanthropists, is the sad term of their activity, as being a part of His work; and not only a part, but so conspicuous a part that it was a purpose which He had in view from the very beginning, and before the beginning, of His earthly life. So Calvary was to Jesus Christ no interruption, tragic and premature, of His life's activities. His death was no mere alternative set before Him, which He chose rather than be unfaithful or dumb. He did not die because He was hounded by hostile priests, but He came on purpose that He might so end His career.

I need not remind you of, and space would not permit me to dwell upon, other instances in the Gospels in which our Lord speaks the same language. At the very beginning of His public ministry He told the inquiring rabbi, who came to Him with the notion that He would be somewhat flattered by His recognition by one of the authoritative and wise pundits of the nation, that 'the Son of Man must be lifted up.' The necessity was before Him, but it was no unwelcome necessity, for it sprung from His own love. It was the very aim of His coming, to live a Servant and to die a Ransom.

Dear brethren, let me press upon you this plain truth, that no conception of Christ's death which looks upon it merely as the close, by pathetic sufferings, of a life to the activities of which it adds nothing but pathos, approaches the signification of it which inheres in the thought that this was the aim and purpose with which Jesus Christ was incarnate, that He should live indeed the pure and sweet life which He lived, but equally that He should die the painful and bitter death which He died. He was not merely a martyr, though the first of them, but something far more, as we shall see presently. If to you the death of Jesus Christ is the same in kind, however superior in degree, as those of patriots and reformers and witnesses for the truth and martyrs for righteousness, then I humbly venture to represent that, instead of going back to, you have gone away from, the Christ of the Gospels, who said, 'The Son of Man came . . . to give His life'; and that such a Christ is not a historic but an imaginary one.

III. So, thirdly, notice that the Christ of the Gospels thought and taught that His death was a ransom.

A ransom is a price paid in exchange for captives that they may be liberated; or for culprits that they may be set free. And that was Christ's thought of what He had to die for. There lay the 'must.'

I do not dwell upon the conception of our condition involved in that word. We are all bound and held by the chain of our sins. We all stand guilty before God, and, as I believe, there is a necessity in that loving divine nature whereby it is impossible that without a ransom there can be, in the interests of mankind and in the interests of righteousness, forgiveness of sins. I do not mean that in the words before us there is a developed theory of atonement, but I do mean that no man, dealing with them fairly, can strike out of them the notion of vicarious suffering in exchange for, or instead of, 'the many.' This is no occasion for theological discussion, nor am I careful now to set forth a fully developed doctrine; but I am declaring, as God helps me, what is to me, and I pray may be to you, the central thought about that Cross of Calvary, that on it there is made the sacrifice for the world's sins.

And, dear brethren, I beseech you to consider, how can we save the character of Jesus Christ, accepting these Gospels, which on the hypothesis about which I am now speaking are valid sources of knowledge, without recognising that He deliberately led His disciples to believe that He died for—that is, instead of—them that put their trust in Him? For remember that not only such words as these of my text are to be taken into account. Remember that it was the Christ of the Gospels who established that last rite of the Lord's Supper, in which the broken bread, and the separation between the bread and the wine, both indicated a violent death, and who said about both the one and the other of the double symbols, 'For you.' I do not understand how any body of professing believers, rejecting Christ's death as the sacrifice for sin, can find a place in their beliefs or in their practice for that institution of the Lord's Supper, or can rightly interpret the sacred words then spoken. This is why the Cross was Christ's aim. This is why He said, with His dying breath, 'It is finished.' This truth is the explanation of His words, 'The Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep.'

And this truth of a ransom-price lies at the basis of all vigorous Christianity. A Christianity without a dying Christ is a dying Christianity. And history shows us that the expansiveness and elevating power of the Gospel depend on the prominence given to the sacrifice on the Cross. An old fable says that the only thing that melts adamant is the blood of a lamb. The Gospel reveals the precious blood of Jesus Christ, His death for us as a ransom, as the one power which subdues hostility and binds hearts to Him. The Christ of the Gospels is the Christ who taught that He died for us.

IV. Lastly, the Christ of the Gospels thought and taught that His death had world-wide power.

He says here, 'A ransom for many.' Now that word is not used in this instance in contradistinction to 'all,' nor in contradistinction to 'few.' It is distinctly employed as emphasising the contrast between the single death and the wide extent of its benefits; and in terms which, rigidly taken, simply express indefiniteness, it expresses universality. That that is so seems to me to be plain enough, if we notice other places of Scripture to which, at this stage of my sermon, I can but allude. For instance, in [Romans v.](#) the two expressions, 'the many' and

the 'all,' alternate in reference to the extent of the power of Christ's sacrifice for men. And the Apostle in another place, where probably there may be an allusion to the words of the text, so varies them as that he declares that Jesus Christ in His death was the ransom 'instead of all.' But I do not need to dwell upon these. 'Many' is a vague word, and in it we see dim crowds stretching away beyond our vision, for whom that death was to be the means of salvation. I take it that the words of our text have an allusion to those in the great prophecy in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, in which we read, 'By His knowledge shall My righteous Servant' (mark the allusion in our text, 'Who came to minister') 'justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.'

So, brethren, I believe that I am not guilty of unduly widening out our Lord's thought when I say that the indefinite 'many' is practically 'all.' And, brother, if 'all,' then you; if all, then me; if all, then each. Think of a man, nineteen centuries ago, away in a little insignificant corner of the world, standing up and saying, 'My death is the price paid in exchange for the world!' That is meekness and lowliness of heart, is it? That is humility, so beautiful in a teacher, is it? How any man can accept the veracity of these narratives, believe that Jesus Christ said anything the least like this, not believe that He was the Divine Son of the Father, the Sacrifice for the world's sin, and yet profess—and honestly profess, I doubt not, in many cases—to retain reverence and admiration, all but adoration, for Him, I confess that I, for my poor part, cannot understand.

But I ask you, what you are going to do with these thoughts and teachings of the Christ of the Gospels. Are you going to take them for true? Are you going to trust your salvation to Him? Are you going to accept the ransom and say, 'O Lord, truly I am Thy servant; Thou hast loosed my bonds'? Brethren, the Christ of the Gospels, by all means; but the Christ that said, 'The Son of Man came to . . . give His life a ransom for many.' My Christ, and your Christ, and the world's Christ is 'the Christ that died; yea, rather, that is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.'

THE COMING OF THE KING TO HIS PALACE

‘And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, 2. Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto Me. 3. And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them. 4. All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, 5. Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass. 6. And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, 7. And brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set Him thereon. 8. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way. 9. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. 10. And when He was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? 11. And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee. 12. And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, 13. And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves. 14. And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple; and He healed them. 15. And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David, they were sore displeased, 16. And said unto Him, Hearest Thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise?’ —[MATT. xxi. 1-16](#).

Jesus spent His last Sabbath in the quiet home at Bethany with Lazarus and his sisters. Some sense of His approaching death tinged the modest festivities of that evening with sadness, and spoke in Mary’s ‘anointing of His body for the burying.’ The pause was brief, and, with the dawn of Sunday, He set Himself again to tread the road to the cross. Who can doubt that He felt the relief of that momentary relaxation of the strain on His spirit, and the corresponding pressure of its renewed tightening? This passage shows Him putting out from the quiet haven and facing the storm again. It is in two main sections, dealing respectively with the royal procession, and the acts of the King in the temple.

I. The procession of the King. The first noteworthy point is that our Lord initiates the whole incident, and deliberately sets Himself to evoke the popular enthusiasm, by a distinct voluntary fulfilment of a Messianic prophecy. The allusion to the prophecy, in His sending for the colt and mounting it, may have escaped the disciples and the crowds of pilgrims; but they rightly caught His intention to make a solemn triumphal entry into the city, and respon-

ded with a burst of enthusiasm, which He expected and wished. The poor garments flung hastily on the animals, the travel-stained cloaks cast on the rocky path, the branches of olive and palm waved in the hands, and the tumult of acclaim, which shrilly echoed the words of the psalm, and proclaimed Him to be the Son of David, are all tokens that the crowds hailed Him as their King, and were all permitted and welcomed by Him. All this is in absolute opposition to His usual action, which had been one long effort to damp down inflammable and unspiritual Messianic hopes, and to avoid the very enthusiasm which now surges round Him unchecked. Certainly that calm figure, sitting on the slow-pacing ass, with the noisy multitude pressing round Him, is strangely unlike Him, who hid Himself among the hills when they sought to make Him a King. His action is the more remarkable, if it be remembered that the roads were alive with pilgrims, most of whom passing through Bethany would be Galileans; that they had seen Lazarus walking about the village, and knew who had raised him; that the Passover festival was the time in all the year when popular tumults were to be expected; and that the crowds going to Jerusalem were met by a crowd coming from it, bent on seeing the doer and the subject of the great miracle. Into this heap of combustibles our Lord puts a light. He must have meant that it should blaze as it did.

What is the reason for this contrast? The need for the former reticence no longer existed. There was no fear now of His teaching and ministry being interrupted by popular outburst. He knew that it was finished, and that His hour had come. Therefore, the same motive of filial obedience which had led Him to avoid what would prevent His discharging His Father's commission, now impelled Him to draw the attention of the nation and its rulers to the full extent of His claims, and to put the plain issue of their acceptance or rejection in the most unmistakable manner. A certain divine decorum, if we may so call it, required that once He should enter the city as its King. Some among the shouting crowds might have their enthusiasm purified and spiritualised, if once it were directed to Him. It was for us, no less than for them, that this one interruption of His ordinary method was adopted by Him, that we too might ponder the fact that He laid His hand on that magnificent prophecy, and said, 'It is mine. I am the King.'

The royal procession is also a revelation of the character of the King and the nature of His kingdom. A strange King this, indeed, who has not even an ass of His own, and for followers, peasants with palm branches instead of swords! What would a Roman soldier or one of Herod's men have thought of that rustic procession of a pauper prince on an ass, and a hundred or two of weaponless, penniless men? Christ's one moment of royal pomp is as eloquent of His humiliation as the long stretch of His lowly life is. And yet, as is always the case, side by side with the lowliness there gleams the veiled splendour. He had to borrow the colt, and the message in which He asks for it is a strange paradox. 'The Lord hath need of him'—so great was the poverty of so great a King. But it spoke, too, of a more than human knowledge, and of an authority which had only to require in order to receive. Some farming

villager, no doubt, who was a disciple but secretly, gladly yielded his beasts. The prophecy which Matthew quotes, with the omission of some words, from Zechariah, and the addition of the first clause from Isaiah, is symbolic, and would have been amply fulfilled in the mission and character of Christ, though this event had never taken place. But just as it is symbolic, so this external fulfilment, which is intended to point to the real fulfilment, is also symbolic. The chariot and the horse are the emblems of conquerors. It is fitting that the Prince of Peace should make His state entry on a colt, unriden before, and saddled only with a garment. Zechariah meant that Zion's King should not reign by the right of the strongest, and that all His triumphs should be won by lowly meekness. Christ meant the same by His remarkable act. And has not the picture of Him, throned thus, stamped for ever on the imagination of the world a profounder sense of the inmost nature of His kingdom than many words would have done? Have we learned the lesson of the gentleness which belongs to His kingdom, and of the unchristian character of war and violence? Do we understand what the Psalmist meant when he sang, 'In thy majesty ride on prosperously, because of . . . meekness'? Let us not forget the other picture, 'Behold, a white horse, and He that sat thereon, called Faithful and True; and in righteousness He doth judge and make war.'

The entry may remind us also of the worthlessness of mere enthusiastic feeling in reference to Jesus Christ. The day was the Sunday. How many of that crowd were shouting as loudly, 'Crucify Him!' and 'Not this man, but Barabbas!' on the Friday? The palm-branches had not faded, where they had been tossed, before the fickle crowd had swung round to the opposite mood. Perhaps the very exuberance of feeling at the beginning, had something to do with the bitterness of the execrations at the end, of the week. He had not answered their expectations, but, instead of heading a revolt, had simply taught in the temple, and meekly let Himself be laid hold of. Nothing succeeds like success, and no idol is so quickly forsaken as the idol of a popular rising. All were eager to disclaim connection with Him, and to efface the remembrance of their Sunday's hosannas by their groans round His gibbet. But there is a wider lesson here. No enthusiasm can be too intense which is based upon a true sense of our need of Christ, and of His work for us; but it is easy to excite apparently religious emotion by partial presentations of Him, and such excitement foams itself away by its very violence, like some Eastern river that in winter time dashes down the wady with irresistible force, and in summer is bone dry. Unless we know Christ to be the Saviour of our souls and the Lamb of God, we shall soon tire of singing hosannas in His train, and want a king with more pretensions; but if we have learned who and what He is to us, then let us open our mouths wide, and not be afraid of letting the world hear our shout of praise.

II. The coming of the King in the temple. The discussion of the accuracy of Matthew's arrangement of events here is unnecessary. He has evidently grouped, as usual, incidents which have a common bearing, and wishes to put these three, of the cleansing, the healing, and the pleasure in the children's praise, as the characteristic acts of the King in the temple.

We can scarcely avoid seeing in the first of the three a reference to Malachi's prophecy, 'The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple . . . And He shall purify the sons of Levi.' His first act, when in manhood He visited the temple, had been to cleanse. His first act when He enters it as its Lord is the same. The abuse had grown again apace. Much could be said in its vindication, as convenient and harmless, and it was too profitable to be lightly abandoned. But the altar of Mammon so near the altar of God was sacrilege in His eyes, and though He had passed the traders unmolested many times since that first driving out, now that He solemnly comes to claim His rights, He cannot but repeat it. It is perhaps significant that His words now have both a more sovereign and a more severe tone than before. Then He had spoken of 'My Father's house,' now it is 'My house,' which are a part of His quotation indeed, but not therefore necessarily void of reference to Himself. He is exercising the authority of a son over His own house, and bears Himself as Lord of the temple. Before, He charged them with making it a 'house of merchandise'; now, with turning it into a robber's cave. Evil rebuked and done again is worse than before. Trafficking in things pertaining to the altar is even more likely than other trading to cross the not always very well defined line which separates trade from trickery and commerce from theft. That lesson needs to be laid to heart in many quarters now. There is always a fringe of moneyed interests round Christ's Church, seeking gain out of religious institutions; and their stands have a wonderful tendency to creep inwards from the court of the Gentiles to holier places. The parasite grows very quickly, and Christ had to deal with it more than once to keep down its growth. The sellers of doves and changers of money into the sacred shekel were venial offenders compared with many in the Church, and the race is not extinct. If Christ were to come to His house to-day, in bodily form, who doubts that He would begin, as He did before, by driving the traders out of His temple? How many 'most respectable' usages and people would have to go, if He did!

The second characteristic, or we might say symbolical, act is the healing of the blind and lame. Royal state and cleansing severity are wonderfully blended with tender pity and the gentle hand of sovereign virtue to heal. The very manifestation of the former drew the needy to Him; and the blind, though they could not see, and the lame, though they could not walk, managed to grope and hobble their way to Him, not afraid of His severity, nor daunted by His royalty. No doubt they haunted the temple precincts as beggars, with perhaps as little sense of its sacredness as the money-changers; but their misery kindled a flicker of confidence and desire, to which He who tends the dimmest wick till it breaks into clear flame could not but respond. Though in His house He casts out the traders, He will heal the cripples and the blind, who know their need, and faintly trust His heart and power. Such a trait could not be wanting in this typical representation of the acts of the King.

Finally, He encourages and casts the shield of His approval round the children's praises. How natural it is that the children, pleased with the stir and not yet drilled into convention-

alism, should have kept up their glad shouts, even inside the temple enclosure! How their fresh treble voices ring yet through all these centuries! The priests had, no doubt, been nursing their wrath at all that had been going on, but they had not dared to interfere with the cleansing, nor, for very shame, with the healings; but now they see their opportunity. This is a clear breach of all propriety, and that is the crime of crimes in the eyes of such people. They had kept quite cool and serenely contemptuous, amid the stir of the glad procession, and they did not much care though He healed some beggars; but to have this unseemly noise, though it was praise, was more than they could stand. Ecclesiastical martinets, and men whose religion is mostly ceremony, are, of course, more 'moved with indignation' at any breach of ceremonial regulations than at holes made in graver laws. Nothing makes men more insensitive to the ring of real worship than being accustomed to the dull decorum of formal worship. Christ answers their 'hearest thou?' with a 'did ye never read?' and shuts their mouths with words so apposite in their plainest meaning that even they are silenced. To Him these young ringing hosannas are 'perfect praise,' and worth any quantity of rabbis' preachments. In their deeper sense, His words declare that the ears of God and of His Son, the Lord of the temple, are more gladly filled with the praises of the 'little ones,' who know their weakness, and hymn His goodness with simple tongue, than with heartless eloquence of words or pomp of worship. The psalm from which the words are taken declares man's superiority over the highest works of God's hands, and the perfecting of the divine praise from his lips. We are but as the little children of creation, but because we know sin and redemption, we lead the chorus of heaven. As St. Bernard says, 'Something is wanting to the praise of heaven, if those be wanting who can say, "We went through fire and through water; and Thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place."' In like manner, those praise Him most acceptably among men who know their feebleness, and with stammering lips humbly try to breathe their love, their need, and their trust.

A NEW KIND OF KING

‘All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass.’—*MATT. xxi. 4, 5.*

Our Lord’s entrance into Jerusalem is one of the comparatively few events which are recorded in all the four Gospels. Its singular unlikeness to the rest of His life, and its powerful influence in bringing about the Crucifixion, may account for its prominence in the narratives. It took place probably on the Sunday of Passion Week. Before the palm branches were withered the enthusiasm had died away, and the shouting crowd had found out that this was not the sort of king that they wanted. They might have found that out, even by the very circumstances of the entrance, for they were profoundly significant; though their meaning, like so much of the rest of Christ’s life, was less clear to the partakers and spectators than it is to us. ‘These things understood not the disciples at the first,’ says John in closing his narrative of the entrance, ‘but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that they had done these things unto Him.’

My object in this sermon is not at all to attempt a pictorial treatment of this narrative, for these Gospels tell us a great deal better than any of us can tell it after them; but to seek to bring out, if it may be, two or three aspects of its significance.

I. First, then, I ask you to consider its significance as an altogether exceptional fact in Christ’s life.

Throughout the whole of the preceding period, He had had two aims distinctly in view. One was to shun publicity; and the other was to damp down the heated, vulgar anticipations of the multitude, who expected a temporal king. And now here He deliberately, and of set purpose, takes a step which is like flinging a spark into a powder barrel. The nation was assembled in crowds, full of the unwholesome excitement which attended their meeting for the annual feast. All were in a quiver of expectation; and knowing that, Jesus Christ originates this scene by His act of sending the two disciples into the village over against them, to ‘bring the ass, and the colt the foal of an ass.’ The reasons for a course so entirely opposed to all the preceding must have been strong. Let us try to see what they were.

First, He did it in order to precipitate the conflict which was to end in His death. Now, had He any right to do that? Knowing as He did the ferment of expectation into which He was thrusting this new element of disturbance, and foreseeing, as He must have done, that it would sharpen the hostility of the rulers of the people to a murderous degree, how can He be acquitted of one of two things—either singular shortsightedness or rash foolhardiness in taking such a step? Was He justified, or was He not?

If we are to look at His conduct from ordinary points of view, the answer must certainly be that He was not. And we can only understand this, and all the rest of His actions during

the fateful three or four days that followed it, if we recognise in them the fixed resolve of One who knew that His mission was not only to live and to teach by word and life, but to die, and by death to deliver the world. I take it that it is very hard to save the character of Jesus Christ for our reverence if we refuse to regard His death as for our redemption. But if He came, and knew that He came, not only 'to minister' but 'to give His life a ransom for many,' then we can understand how He hastened to the Cross, and deliberately set a light to the train which was to end in that great explosion. On any other hypothesis it seems to me immensely hard to account for His act here.

Then, still further, looking at this distinctly exceptional fact in our Lord's life, we see in it a very emphatic claim to very singular prerogative and position. He not only thereby presented Himself before the nation in their collective capacity as being the King of Israel, but He also did a very strange thing. He dressed Himself, so to speak, in order to fulfil a prophecy. He posed before the world as being the Person who was meant by sacred old words. And His Entrance upon the slow-pacing colt was His voluntary and solemn assertion that He was the Person of whom the whole stream and current of divinely sent premonitions and forecasts had been witnessing from the beginning. He claimed thereby to be the King of Israel and the Fulfiller of the divine promises that were of old.

Now again, I have to ask the question, Was He right, or was He wrong? If He was right, then He is a great deal more than a wise Teacher, and a perfect Example of excellence. If He was wrong, He is a great deal less. There is no escape from that alternative, as it seems to me, but by the desperate expedient of denying that He ever did this thing which this narrative tells us that He did. At all events I beseech you all, dear friends, to take fairly into your account of the character of Jesus Christ, this fact, that He, the meek, the gentle, said that He was meek, and everybody has believed Him; and that once, in the very crisis of His life, and in circumstances which make the act most conspicuous, He who always shunned publicity, nor 'caused His voice to be heard in the streets,' and steadfastly put away from Himself the vulgar homage that would have degraded Him into a mere temporal monarch, did assert that He was the King of Israel and the Fulfiller of prophecy. Ask yourselves, What does that fact mean?

And then, still further, looking at the act as exceptional in our Lord's life, note that it was done in order to make one final, solemn appeal and offer to the men who beheld Him. It was the last bolt in His quiver. All else had failed, perhaps this might succeed. We know not the depths of the mysteries of that divine foreknowledge which, even though it foresees failure, ceases not to plead and to woo obstinate hearts. But this we may thankfully learn, that, just as with despairing hope, but with unremitting energy, Jesus Christ, often rejected, offered Himself once more if perchance He might win men to repentance, so the loving patience and long-suffering of our God cease not to plead ever with us. 'Last of all He sent unto them His Son, saying, They will reverence My Son when they see Him'; and yet the

expectation was disappointed, and the Son was slain. We touch deep mysteries, but the persistence of the pleading and rejected love and pity of our God shine through this strange fact.

II. And now, secondly, let me ask you to note its significance as a symbol.

The prophecy which two out of the four evangelists—viz., Matthew and John—regard as having been, in some sense, fulfilled by the Entrance into Jerusalem, would have been fulfilled quite as truly if there had been no Entrance. For the mere detail of the prophecy is but a picturesque way of setting forth its central and essential point—viz., the meekness of the King. So our Lord's fulfilment is only an external, altogether subsidiary, accomplishment of the prophecy; and in fact, like some other of the external correspondences between His life and the outward details of Old Testament prophecy, is intended for little more than a picture or a signpost which may direct our thoughts to the inward correspondence, which is the true fulfilment.

So then, the deed, like the prophecy after which it is moulded, is wholly and entirely of importance in its symbolical aspect.

The symbolism is clear enough. This is a new kind of King. He comes, not mounted on a warhorse, or thundering across the battlefield in a scythe-armed chariot, like the Pharaohs and the Assyrian monarchs, who have left us their vainglorious monuments, but mounted on the emblem of meekness, patience, gentleness, and peace. And He is a pauper King, for He has to borrow the beast on which He rides, and His throne is draped with the poor, perhaps ragged, robes of a handful of fishermen. And His attendants are not warriors bearing spears, but peasants with palm branches. And the salutation of His royalty is not the blare of trumpets, but the 'Hosanna!' from a thousand throats. That is not the sort of King that the world calls a King. The Roman soldiers might well have thought they were perpetrating an exquisite jest when they thrust the reed into His unresisting hand, and crushed down the crown of thorns on His bleeding brows.

But the symbol discloses the very secret of His Kingdom, the innermost mysteries of His own character and of the forces to which He intrusts the further progress of His word. Gentleness is royal and omnipotent; force and violence are feeble. The Lord is in the still, small voice, not in the earthquake, nor the fire, nor the mighty wind. The dove's light pinion will fly further than the wings of Rome's eagles, with their strong talons and blood-dyed beaks. And the kingdom that is established in meekness, and rules by gentleness and for gentleness, and has for its only weapons the power of love and the omnipotence of patience, that is the kingdom which shall be eternal and universal.

Now all that is a great deal more than pretty sentiment; it has the closest practical bearing upon our lives. How slow God's Church has been to believe that the strength of Christ's kingdom is meekness! Professing Christian men have sought to win the world to their side, and by wealth or force or persecution, or this, that, or the other of the weapons

out of the world's armoury, to promote the kingdom of Christ. But it has all been in vain. There is only one power that conquers hate, and that is meek love. There is only one way by which Christ's kingdom can stand firm, and that is its unworldly contrast to all the manner of human dominion. Wheresoever God's Church has allied itself with secular sovereignties, and trusted in the arm of flesh, there has the fine gold become dimmed. Endurance wears out persecution, patient submission paralyses hostile violence, for you cannot keep on striking down unresisting crowds with the sword. The Church of Christ is an anvil that has been beaten upon by many hammers, and it has worn them all out. Meekness is victorious, and the kingdom of Christ can only be advanced by the faithful proclamation of His gentle love, from lips that are moved by hearts which themselves are conformed to His patient image.

Then, still further, let me remind you that this symbol carries in it, as it seems to me, the lesson of the radical incompatibility of war with Christ's kingdom and dominion. It has taken the world all these centuries to begin to learn that lesson. But slowly men are coming to it, and the day will dawn when all the pomp of warfare, and the hell of evil passions from which it comes, and which it stimulates, will be felt to be as utterly incompatible with the spirit of Christianity as slavery is felt to-day. The prophecy which underlies our symbol is very significant in this respect. Immediately upon that vision of the meek King throned on the colt the foal of an ass, follows this: 'And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horses from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and He shall speak peace unto the heathen.'

Let me beseech you, Christian men and women, to lay to heart the duty of Christ's followers in reference to the influence and leavening of public opinion upon this matter, and to see to it that, in so far as we can help, we set ourselves steadfastly against that devilish spirit which still oppresses with an incubus almost intolerable, the nations of so-called Christendom. Lift up your voices be not afraid, but cry, 'We are the followers of the Prince of Peace, and we war against the war that is blasphemy against His dominion.'

And so, still further, note the practical force of this symbol as influencing our own conduct. We are the followers of the meek Christ. It becomes us to walk in all meekness and gentleness. 'Spirited conduct' is the world's euphemism for unchristian conduct, in ninety-nine cases out of the hundred. The perspective of virtue has altered since Jesus Christ taught us how to love. The old heathen virtues of magnanimity, fortitude, and the like have 'with shame to take a lower room.' There is something better than these. The saint has all the virtues of the old heathen hero, and some more besides, which are higher than these, and those which he has in common, he has in different proportion. The flaunting tulips and peonies of the garden of the world seem to outshine the white snowdrops and the glowing, modest little violets below their leaves, but the former are vulgar, and they drop very soon, and the latter, if paler and more delicate, are refined in their celestial beauty. The slow-pacing

steed on which Jesus Christ rides will out-travel the fiery warhorse, and will pursue its patient, steadfast path till He 'bring forth righteousness unto judgment,' and 'all the upright in heart shall follow Him.'

III. Lastly, notice the significance of this fact as a prophecy. It was, as I have pointed out, the last solemn appeal to the nation, and in a very real sense it was Christ's coming to judgment. It is impossible to look at it without seeing, besides all its other meanings, gleaming dimly through it, the anticipations of that other coming, when the Lord Himself 'shall descend with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and the trump of God.'

Let me bring into connection with the scene of my text three others, gathered from various parts of Scripture. In the [forty-fifth Psalm](#) we find, side by side with the great words, 'Ride on prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness,' the others, 'Thine arrows are sharp in the hearts of the king's enemies; the people shall fall under Thee.' Now, though it is possible that that later warlike figure may be merely the carrying out of the thought which is more gently put before us in the former words, still it looks as if there were two sides to the conquering manifestation of the king—one being in 'meekness and truth and righteousness,' and the other in some sense destructive and punitive.

But, however that may be, my second scene is drawn from the last book of Scripture, where we read that, when the first seal was opened, there rode forth a Figure, crowned, mounted upon a white steed, bearing bow and arrow, 'conquering and to conquer.' And, though that again may be but an image of the victorious progress of the gentle Gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the whole earth, still it comes as one in a series of judgments, and may rather be taken to express the punitive effects which follow its proclamation even here and now.

But there can be no doubt with regard to the third of the scenes which I connect with the incident of which we are discoursing: 'And I saw heaven opened, and beheld a white horse; and He that sat upon Him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness doth He judge and make war. . . . And out of His mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations; and He shall rule them with a rod of iron; and He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.' That is the Christ who came into Jerusalem on the colt the foal of an ass. That is the Christ who is meek and long-suffering. There is a reserve of punitive and destructive power in the meek King. And oh I what can be so terrible as the anger of meekness, the wrath of infinite gentleness? In the triumphal entry, we find that, when the procession turned the rocky shoulder of Olivet, and the long line of the white city walls, with the gilding of the Temple glittering in the sunshine, burst upon their view, the multitude lifted up their voices in gladness. But Christ sat there, and as He looked across the valley, and beheld, with His divine prescience, the city, now so joyous and full of stir, sitting solitary and desolate, He lifted up His voice in loud wailing. The Christ wept because He must punish, but He punished though He wept.

Our Judge is the gentle Jesus, therefore we can hope. The gentle Jesus is our Judge, therefore let us not presume. I beseech you, brethren, lay, as these poor people did their garments, your lusts and proud wills in His way, and join the welcoming shout that hails the King, 'meek and having salvation.' And then, when He comes forth to judge and to destroy, you will not be amongst the ranks of the enemies, whom He will ride down and scatter, but amongst 'the armies that follow Him, . . . clothed in fine linen, clean and pure.'

'Kiss the Son lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him.'

THE VINEYARD AND ITS KEEPERS

‘Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: 34. And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. 35. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. 36. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. 37. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. 38. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. 39. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. 40. When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh what will he do unto those husbandmen? 41. They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons. 42. Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? 43. Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. 44. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. 45. And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard His parables, they perceived that He spake of them. 46. But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitude, because they took Him for a prophet.’—[MATT. xxi. 33-46](#).

This parable was apparently spoken on the Tuesday of the Passion Week. It was a day of hand-to-hand conflict with the Jewish authorities and of exhausting toil, as the bare enumeration of its incidents shows. It included all that Matthew records between [verse 20](#) of this chapter and the end of the twenty-fifth chapter—the answer to the deputation from the Sanhedrin; the three parables occasioned by it, namely, those of the two sons, this one, and that of the marriage of the king’s son; the three answers to the traps of the Pharisees and Herodians about the tribute, of the Sadducees about the resurrection, and of the ruler about the chief commandment; Christ’s question to His questioners about the Son and Lord of David; the stern woes hurled at the unmasked hypocrites; to which must be added, from other gospels, the sweet eulogium on the widow’s mite, and the deep saying to the Greeks about the corn of wheat, with, possibly, the incident of the woman taken in adultery; and then, following all these, the solemn prophecies of the end contained in [Matthew xxiv.](#) and [xxv.](#), spoken on the way to Bethany, as the evening shadows were falling. What a day! What a fountain of wisdom and love which poured out such streams! The pungent severity of this parable, with its transparent veil of narrative, is only appreciated by keeping clearly in view

the circumstances and the listeners. They had struck at Jesus with their question as to His authority, and He parries the blow. Now it is His turn, and the sharp point goes home.

I. The first stage is the preparation of the vineyard, in which three steps are marked. It is planted and furnished with all appliances needful for making wine, which is its great end. The direct divine origin of the religious ideas and observances of 'Judaism' is thus asserted by Christ. The only explanation of them is that God enclosed that bit of the wilderness, and with His own hands set growing there these exotics. Neither the theology nor the ritual is of man's establishing. We need not seek for special meanings for wall, wine-press, and tower. They simply express the completeness of the equipment of the vineyard, as in Isaiah's song, which lies at the foundation of the parable, and suggest his question, 'What could have been done more?' Thus furnished, the vineyard is next handed over to the husbandmen, who, in Matthew, are exclusively the rulers, while in Luke they are the people. No doubt it was 'like people, like priest.' The strange dominion of the Pharisees rested entirely on popular consent, and their temper accurately indexed that of the nation. The Sanhedrin was the chief object at which Christ aimed the parable. But it only gave form and voice to the national spirit, and 'the people loved to have it so.' National responsibilities are not to be slipped out of by being shifted on to the broad shoulders of governments or influential men. Who lets them be governments and influential?

'Guv'ment ain't to answer for it,
God will send the bill to you.'

Christ here teaches both rulers and ruled the ground and purpose of their privileges. They prided themselves on these as their own, but they were only tenants. They made their 'boast of the law'; but they forgot that fruit was the end of the divine planting and equipment. Holiness and glad obedience were what God sought, and when He found them, He was refreshed as with 'grapes in the wilderness.'

Having installed the husbandmen, the owner goes into another country. The cluster of miracles which inaugurate an epoch of revelation are not continued beyond its beginning. Centuries of comparative divine silence followed the planting of the vineyard. Having given us our charge, God, as it were, steps aside to leave us room to work as we will, and so to display what we are made of. He is absent in so far as conspicuous oversight and retribution are concerned. He is present to help, love, and bless. The faithful husbandman has Him always near, a joy and a strength, else no fruit would grow; but the sin and misery of the unfaithful are that they think of Him as far off.

II. Then comes the habitual ill-treatment of the messengers. These are, of course, the prophets, whose office was not only to foretell, but to plead for obedience and trust, the fruits sought by God. The whole history of the nation is summed up in this dark picture.

Generation after generation of princes, priests, and people had done the same thing. There is no more remarkable historical fact than that of the uniform hostility of the Jews to the prophets. That a nation of such a sort as always to hate and generally to murder them should have had them in long succession, throughout its history, is surely inexplicable on any naturalistic hypothesis. Such men were not the natural product of the race, nor of its circumstances, as their fate shows. How did they spring up? No 'philosophy of Jewish history' explains the anomaly except the one stated here,—'He sent His servants.' We are told nowadays that the Jews had a natural genius for religion, just as the Greeks for art and thought, and the Romans for law and order, and that that explains the origin of the prophets. Does it explain their treatment?

The hostility of the husbandmen grows with indulgence. From beating they go on to killing, and stoning is a specially savage form of killing. The opposition which began, as the former parable tells us, with polite hypocrisy and lip obedience, changed, under the stimulus of prophetic appeals, to honest refusal, and from that to violence which did not hesitate to slay. The more God pleads with men, the more self-conscious and bitter becomes their hatred; and the more bitter their hatred, the more does He plead, sending other messengers, more perhaps in number, or possibly of more weight, with larger commission and clearer light. Thus both the antagonistic forces grow, and the worse men become, the louder and more beseeching is the call of God to them. That is always true; and it is also ever true that he who begins with 'I go, sir, and goes not, is in a fair way to end with stoning the prophets.

Christ treats the whole long series of violent rejections as the acts of the same set of husbandmen. The class or nation was one, as a stream is one, though all its particles are different; and the Pharisees and scribes, who stood with frowning hatred before Him as He spoke, were the living embodiment of the spirit which had animated all the past. In so far as they inherited their taint, and repeated their conduct, the guilt of all the former generations was laid at their door. They declared themselves their predecessors' heirs; and as they reproduced their actions, they would have to bear the accumulated weight of the consequences.

III. [Verses 37-39](#) tell of the mission of the Son and of its fatal issue. Three points are prominent in them. The first is the unique position which Christ here claims, with unwonted openness and decisiveness, as apart from and far above all the prophets. They constitute one order, but He stands alone, sustaining a closer relation to God. They were faithful 'as servants,' but He 'as a Son,' or, as Mark has it, 'the only and beloved Son.' The listeners understood Him well enough. The assertion, which seemed audacious blasphemy to them, fitted in with all His acts in that last week, which was not only the crisis of His life, but of the nation's fate. Rulers and people must decide whether they will own or reject their King, and they must do it with their eyes open. Jesus claimed to fill a unique position. Was He right or wrong in His claim? If He was wrong, what becomes of His wisdom, His meekness, His religion? Is a religious teacher, who made the mistake of thinking that He was the Son

of God in a sense in which no other man is so, worthy of admiration? If He was right, what becomes of a Christianity which sees in Him only the foremost of the prophets?

The next point marked is the owner's vain hope, in sending his Son. He thought that He would be welcomed, and He was disappointed. It was His last attempt. Christ knew Himself to be God's last appeal, as He is to all men, as well as to that generation. He is the last arrow in God's quiver. When it has shot that bolt, the resources even of divine love are exhausted, and no more can be done for the vineyard than He has done for it. We need not wonder at unfulfilled hopes being here ascribed to God. The startling thought only puts into language the great mystery which besets all His pleadings with men, which are carried on, though they often fail, and which must, therefore, in view of His foreknowledge, be regarded as carried on with the knowledge that they will fail. That is the long-suffering patience of God. The difficulty is common to the words of the parable and to the facts of God's unwearyed pleading with impenitent men. Its surface is a difficulty, its heart is an abyss of all-hoping charity.

The last point is the vain calculation of the husbandmen. Christ puts hidden motives into plain words, and reveals to these rulers what they scarcely knew of their own hearts. Did they, in their secret conclaves, look each other in the face, and confess that He was the Heir? Did He not Himself ground His prayer for their pardon on their ignorance? But their ignorance was not entire, else they had had no sin; neither was their knowledge complete, else they had had no pardon. Beneath many an obstinate denial of Him lies a secret confession, or misgiving, which more truly speaks the man than does the loud negation. And such strange contradictions are men, that the secret conviction is often the very thing which gives bitterness and eagerness to the hostility. So it was with some of those whose hidden suspicions are here set in the light. How was the rulers' or the people's wish to 'seize on His inheritance' their motive for killing Jesus? Their great sin was their desire to have their national prerogatives, and yet to give no true obedience. The ruling class clung to their privileges and forgot their responsibilities, while the people were proud of their standing as Jews, and careless of God's service. Neither wished to be reminded of their debt to the Lord of the vineyard, and their hostility to Jesus was mainly because He would call on them for fruits. If they could get this unwelcome and persistent voice silenced, they could go on in the comfortable old fashion of lip-service and real selfishness. It is an account, in vividly parabolic language, not only of their hostility, but of that of many men who are against Him. They wish to possess life and its good, without being for ever pestered with reminders of the terms on which they hold it, and of God's desire for their love and obedience. They have a secret feeling that Christ has the right to ask for their hearts, and so they often turn from Him angrily, and sometimes hate Him.

With what sad calmness does Jesus tell the fate of the son, so certain that it is already as good as done! It was done in their counsels, and yet He does not cease to plead, if perchance some hearts may be touched and withdraw themselves from the confederacy of murder.

IV. We have next the self-condemnation from unwilling lips. Our Lord turns to the rulers with startling and dramatic suddenness, which may have thrown them off their guard, so that their answer leaped out before they had time to think whom it hit. His solemn earnestness laid a spell on them, which drew their own condemnation from them, though they had penetrated the thin veil of the parable, and knew full well who the husbandmen were. Nor could they refuse to answer a question about legal punishments for dishonesty, which was put to them, the fountains of law, without incurring a second time the humiliation just inflicted when He had forced them to acknowledge that they, the fountains of knowledge, did not know where John came from. So from all these motives, and perhaps from a mingling of audacity, which would brazen it out and pretend not to see the bearing of the question, they answer. Like Caiaphas in his counsel, and Pilate with his writing on the Cross, and many another, they spoke deeper things than they knew, and confessed beforehand how just the judgments were, which followed the very lines marked out by their own words.

V. Then come the solemn application and naked truth of the parable. We have no need to dwell on the cycle of prophecies concerning the corner-stone, nor on the original application of the psalm. We must be content with remarking that our Lord, in this last portion of His address, throws away even the thin veil of parable, and speaks the sternest truth in the nakedest words. He puts His own claim in the plainest fashion, as the corner-stone on which the true kingdom of God was to be built. He brands the men who stood before Him as incompetent builders, who did not know the stone needed for their edifice when they saw it. He declares, with triumphant confidence, the futility of opposition to Himself—even though it kill Him. He is sure that God will build on Him, and that His place in the building, which shall rise through the ages, will be, to even careless eyes, the crown of the manifest wonders of God's hand. Strange words from a Man who knew that in three days He would be crucified! Stranger still that they have come true! He is the foundation of the best part of the best men; the basis of thought, the motive for action, the pattern of life, the ground of hope, for countless individuals; and on Him stands firm the society of His Church, and is hung all the glory of His Father's house.

Christ confirms the sentence just spoken by the rulers on themselves, but with the inversion of its clauses. All disguise is at an end. The fatal 'you' is pronounced. The husbandmen's calculation had been that killing the heir would make them lords of the vineyard; the grim fact was that they cast themselves out when they cast him out. He is the heir. If we desire the inheritance, we must get it through Him, and not kill or reject, but trust and obey Him. The sentence declares the two truths, that possession of the vineyard depends on honouring the Son, and on bringing forth the fruits. The kingdom has been taken from the

churches of Asia Minor, Africa, and Syria, because they bore no fruit. It is not held by us on other conditions. Who can venture to speak of the awful doom set forth in the last words here? It has two stages: one a lesser misery, which is the lot of him who stumbles against the stone, while it lies passive to be built on; one more dreadful, when it has acquired motion and comes down with irresistible impetus. To stumble at Christ, or to refuse His grace, and not to base our lives and hopes on Him is maiming and damage, in many ways, here and now. But suppose the stone endowed with motion, what can stand against it? And suppose that the Christ, who is now offered for the rock on which we may pile our hopes and never be confounded, comes to judge, will He not crush the mightiest opponent as the dust of the summer threshing-floor?

THE STONE OF STUMBLING

‘Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.’—[MATT. xxi. 44.](#)

As Christ’s ministry drew to its close, its severity and its gentleness both increased; its severity to the class to whom it was always severe, and its gentleness to the class from whom it never turned away. Side by side, through all His manifestation of Himself, there were the two aspects: ‘He showed Himself froward’ (if I may quote the word) to the self-righteous and the Pharisee; and He bent with more than a woman’s tenderness of yearning love over the darkness and sinfulness, which in its great darkness dimly knew itself blind, and in its sinfulness stretched out a lame hand of faith, and groped after a divine deliverer. Here, in my text, there are only words of severity and awful foreboding. Christ has been telling those Pharisees and priests that the kingdom is to be taken from them, and given to a nation that brings forth the fruits thereof. He interprets for them an Old Testament figure, often recurring, which we read in the [118th Psalm](#) (and I may just say, in passing, that we get here His interpretation of that psalm, and the vindication of our application of it, and other similar ones, to Him and His office); ‘The stone which the builders rejected,’ said He, ‘is become the head of the corner’; and then, falling back on other Old Testament uses of the same figure, He weaves into one the whole of them—that in Isaiah about the ‘sure foundation,’ and that in Daniel about ‘the stone cut out without hands, which became a great mountain,’ crushing down all opposition,—and centres them all in Himself; as fulfilled in Himself, in His person and His work.

The two clauses of my text figuratively point to two different classes of operation on the rejecters of the Gospel. What are these two classes? ‘Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.’ In the one case, the stone is represented as passive, lying quiet; in the other, it has acquired motion. In the one case, the man stumbles and hurts himself; a remediable injury, a self-inflicted injury, a natural injury, without the active operation of Christ to produce it at all; in the other case the injury is worse than remediable, it is utter, absolute, grinding destruction, and it comes from the active operation of the ‘stone of stumbling.’ That is to say, the one class represents the present hurts and harms which, by the natural operation of things, without the action of Christ judicially at all, every man receives in the very act of rejecting the Gospel; and the other represents the ultimate issue of that rejection, which rejection is darkened into opposition and fixed hostility, when the stone that was laid ‘for a foundation’ has got wings (if I may so say), and comes down in judgment, crushing and destroying the antagonist utterly. ‘Whosoever falls on this stone is broken,’ here and now; and ‘on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder,’ hereafter and yonder.

Taking, then, into account the weaving together in this passage of the three figures from the Old Testament to which I have already referred,—the rejected stone, the foundation, and the mountain-stone of Daniel, and looking in the light of these, at the twofold issues, one present and one future, which the text distinctly brings before us,—we have just three points to which I ask your attention now. First, Every man has some kind of contact with Christ. Secondly, Rejection of Him, here and now, is harm and maiming. And, lastly, Rejection of Him, hereafter and yonder, is hopeless, endless, utter destruction.

I. In the first place, every man has some kind of connection with Christ.

I am not going to enter at all now upon any question about the condition of the 'dark places of the earth' where the Gospel has not come as a well-known preached message; we have nothing to do with that; the principles on which they are judged is not the question before us now. I am speaking exclusively about persons who have heard the word of salvation, and are dwelling in the midst of what we call a Christian land. Christ is offered to each of us, in good faith on God's part, as a means of salvation, a foundation on which we may build. A man is free to accept or to reject that offer. If he reject it, he has not thereby cut himself off from all contact and connection with that rejected Saviour, but he still sustains a relation to Him; and the message that he has refused to believe, is exercising an influence upon his character and his destiny.

Christ comes, I say, offered to us all in good faith on the part of God, as a foundation upon which we may build. And then comes in that strange mystery, that a man, consciously free, turns away from the offered mercy, and makes Him that was intended to be the basis of his life, the foundation of his hope, the rock on which, steadfast and serene, he should build up a temple-home for his soul to dwell in,—makes Him a stumbling-stone against which, by rejection and unbelief, he breaks himself!

My friend, will you let me lay this one thing upon your heart,—you cannot hinder the Gospel from influencing you somehow. Taking it in its lowest aspects, it is one of the forces of modern society, an element in our present civilisation. It is everywhere, it obtrudes itself on you at every turn, the air is saturated with its influence. To be unaffected by such an all-pervading phenomenon is impossible. To no individual member of the great whole of a nation is it given to isolate himself utterly from the community. Whether he oppose or whether he acquiesce in current opinions, to denude himself of the possessions which belong in common to his age and state of society is in either case impracticable. 'That which cometh into your mind,' said one of the prophets to the Jews who were trying to cut themselves loose from their national faith and their ancestral prerogatives, 'That which cometh into your mind shall not be at all, that ye say, We will be as the heathen, as the families of the countries to serve wood and stone.' Vain dream! You can no more say, I will pass the Gospel by, and it shall be nothing to me, I will simply let it alone, than you can say, I will shut myself up from other influences proper to my time and nation. You cannot go back to the old naked

barbarism, and you cannot reduce the influence of Christianity, even considered merely as one of the characteristics of the times, to zero. You may fancy you are letting it alone, but it does not let you alone; it is here, and you cannot shut yourself off from it.

But it is not merely as a subtle and diffused influence that the Gospel exercises a permanent effect upon us. It is presented to each of us here individually, in the definite form of an actual offer of salvation for each, and of an actual demand of trust from each. The words pass into our souls, and thenceforward we can never be the same as if they had not been there. The smallest ray of light falling on a sensitive plate produces a chemical change that can never be undone again, and the light of Christ's love, once brought to the knowledge and presented for the acceptance of a soul, stamps on it an ineffaceable sign of its having been there. The Gospel once heard, is always the Gospel which has been heard. Nothing can alter that. Once heard, it is henceforward a perpetual element in the whole condition, character, and destiny of the hearer.

Christ does something to every one of us. His Gospel will tell upon you, it is telling upon you. If you disbelieve it, you are not the same as if you had never heard it. Never is the box of ointment opened without some savour from it abiding in every nostril to which its odour is wafted. Only the alternative, the awful 'either, or,' is open for each—the 'savour of life unto life, or the savour of death unto death.' To come back to the illustration of the text, Christ is something, and does something to every one of us. He is either the rock on which I build, poor, weak, sinful creature as I am, getting security, and sanctity, and strength from Him, I being a living stone' built upon 'the living stone,' and partaking of the vitality of the foundation; or else He is the other thing, 'a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to them which stumble at the word.' Christ stands for ever in some kind of relation to, and exercises for ever some kind of influence on, every man who has heard the Gospel.

II. The immediate issue of rejection of Him is loss and maiming.

'Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken.' Just think for a moment, by way of illustrating this principle, first of all, of the positive harm which you do to yourself in the act of turning away from the mercy offered you in Christ; and then think for a moment of the negative loss which you sustain by the same act.

Note the positive harm. Am I uncharitable when I say that no man ever yet passively neglected the message of love in God's Son; but that always this is the rude outline of the experience of people who know what it is to have a Saviour offered to them, and know what it is to put Him away,—that there is a feeble and transitory movement of heart and will; that Conscience says, 'Thou oughtest'; that Will says, 'I would'; that the heart is touched by some sense of that great and gentle vision of light and love which passes before the eye; that the man, as it were, like some fever-ridden patient, lifts himself up for an instant from the bed on which he is lying, and puts out a hand, and then falls back again, the vacillating, fevered, paralysed will recoiling from the resolution, and the conscience having power to say, 'Thou

oughtest,' but no power to enforce the execution of its decrees, and the heart turning away from the salvation that it would have found in the love of love, to the loss that it finds in the love of self and earth? Or in other words, is it not true that every man who rejects Christ does in simple verity reject Him, and not merely neglect Him; that there is always an effort, that there is a struggle, feeble, perhaps, but real, which ends in the turning away? It is not that you stand there, and simply let Him go past. That were bad enough; but the fact is worse than that. It is that you turn your back upon Him. It is not that His hand is laid on yours, and yours remains dead and cold, and does not open to clasp it; but it is that His hand being laid on yours, you clench yours the tighter, and will not have it. And so every man (I believe) who rejects Christ does these things thereby—wounds his own conscience, hardens his own heart, makes himself a worse man, just because he has had a glimpse, and has willingly, and almost consciously, 'loved darkness rather than light.' Oh, brethren, the message of love can never come into a human soul, and pass away from it unreceived, without leaving that spirit worse, with all its lowest characteristics strengthened, and all its best ones depressed, by the fact of rejection. I have nothing to do now with pursuing that process to its end; but the natural result—if there were no future Judgment at all, if there were no movement ever given to the stone that you ought to build on—the natural result of the simple rejection of the Gospel is that, bit by bit, all the lingering remains of nobleness that hover about the man, like scent about a broken vase, pass away; and that, step by step, through the simple process of saying, 'I will not have Christ to rule over me,' the whole being degenerates, until manhood becomes devil-hood, and the soul is lost by its own want of faith. Unbelief is its own judgment; unbelief is its own condemnation; unbelief, as sin, is punished, like all other sins, by the perpetuation of deeper and darker forms of itself. Every time that you stifle a conviction, fight down a conviction, or drive away a conviction; and every time that you feebly move towards the decision, 'I will trust Him, and love Him, and be His,' yet fail to realise it, you have harmed your soul, you have made yourself a worse man, you have lowered the tone of your conscience, you have enfeebled your will, you have made your heart harder against love, you have drawn another horny scale over the eye, that will prevent you from seeing the light that is yonder; you have, as much as in you is, withdrawn from God, and approximated to the other pole of the universe (if I may say that), to the dark and deadly antagonist of mercy, and goodness, and truth, and grace. 'Whosoever falls on this stone,' by the natural result of his unbelief, 'shall be broken' and maimed, and shall mar his own nature.

I need not dwell on the negative evil results of unbelief; the loss of that which is the only guide for a man, the taking away, or rather the failing to possess, that great love above us, that divine Spirit in us, by which only we are ever made what we ought to be. This only I would leave with you, in this part of my subject, Whoever is not in Christ is maimed. Only he that is 'a man in Christ' has come 'to the measure of the stature of a perfect man.' There, and there alone, do we get the power which will make us full-grown. There alone is the soul

planted in that good soil in which, growing, it becomes as a rounded, perfect tree, with leaves and fruits in their season. All other men are half-men, quarter-men, fragments of men, parts of humanity exaggerated and contorted and distorted from the reconciling whole which the Christian ought to be, and in proportion to his Christianity is on the road to be, and one day will assuredly and actually be, a 'complete and entire man, wanting nothing'; nothing maimed, nothing broken, the realisation of the ideal of humanity, the renewed copy 'of the second Adam, the Lord from heaven.'

There is another consideration closely connected with this second part of my subject, that I just mention and pass on. Not only by the act of rejection of Christ do we harm and maim ourselves, but also all attempts at opposition—formal opposition—to the Gospel as a system, stand self-convicted and self-condemned to speedy decay. What a commentary upon that word, 'Whosoever falls on this stone shall be broken,' is the whole history of the heresies of the Church and the assaults of unbelief! Man after man, rich in gifts, endowed often with far larger and nobler faculties than the people who oppose him, with indomitable perseverance, a martyr to his error, sets himself up against the truth that is sphered in Jesus Christ; and the great divine message simply goes on its way, and all the babblement and noise are like so many bats flying against a light, or like the sea-birds that come sweeping up in the tempest and the night, to the hospitable Pharos that is upon the rock, and smite themselves dead against it. Sceptics well known in their generation, who made people's hearts tremble for the ark of God, what has become of them? Their books lie dusty and undisturbed on the top shelf of libraries; whilst there the Bible stands, with all the scribblings wiped off the page, as though they had never been! Opponents fire their small shot against the great Rock of Ages, and the little pellets fall flattened, and only scale off a bit of the moss that has gathered there! My brother, let the history of the past teach you and me, with other deeper thoughts, a very calm and triumphant confidence about all that opponents say nowadays; for all the modern opposition to this Gospel will go as all the past has done, and the newest systems which cut and carve at Christianity, will go to the tomb where all the rest have gone; and dead old infidelities will rise up from their thrones, and say to the brand-new ones of this generation, when their day is worked out, 'Are ye also become weak as we? art thou also become like one of us?' 'Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken': personally, he will be harmed; and his opinions, and his books, and his talk, and all his argumentation, will come to nothing, like the waves that break into impotent foam against the rocky cliffs.

III. Last of all, the issue, the ultimate issue, of unbelief is irremediable destruction when Christ begins to move.

The former clause has spoken about the harm that naturally follows unbelief whilst the Gospel is being preached; the latter clause speaks about the active agency of Christ when the end shall have come, and the preaching of the Gospel shall have merged into the act of

judgment. I do not mean to dwell, brethren, upon that thought; it seems to me far too awful a one to be handled by my hands, at any rate. Let us leave it in the vagueness and dreadfulness of the words of Him who never spoke exaggerated words, and who, when He said, 'It shall grind him to powder,' meant (as it seems to me) nothing less than a destruction which, contrasted with the former remediable wounding and breaking, was a destruction utter, and hopeless, and everlasting, and without remedy. Ground—ground to powder! Any life left in that? any gathering up of that, and making a man of it again? All the humanity battered out of it, and the life clean gone from it! Does not that sound very much like 'everlasting destruction from the presence of God and from the glory of His power'? Christ, silent now, will begin to speak; passive now, will begin to act. The stone comes down, and the fall of it will be awful. I remember, away up in a lonely Highland valley, where beneath a tall black cliff, all weather-worn, and cracked, and seamed, there lies at the foot, resting on the greensward that creeps round its base, a huge rock, that has fallen from the face of the precipice. A shepherd was passing beneath it; and suddenly, when the finger of God's will touched it, and rent it from its ancient bed in the everlasting rock, it came down, leaping and bounding from pinnacle to pinnacle—and it fell; and the man that was beneath it is there now! 'Ground to powder.' Ah, my brethren, that is not my illustration—that is Christ's. Therefore I say to you, since all that stand against Him shall become 'as the chaff of the summer threshing-floor,' and be swept utterly away, make Him the foundation on which you build; and when the storm sweeps away every 'refuge of lies,' you will be safe and serene, builded upon the Rock of Ages.

TWO WAYS OF DESPISING GOD'S FEAST

‘And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, 2. The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, 3. And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. 4. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. 6. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise; 6. ‘And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. 7. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. & Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. 9. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. 10. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. 11. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding-garment: 12. And he saith unto him, Friend, how earnest thou in hither not having a wedding-garment? And he was speechless. 13. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 14. For many are called, but few are chosen.’—*MATT. xxii. 1-14.*

This parable, and the preceding one of the vine-dressers, make a pair. They are closely connected in time, as well as subject. ‘Jesus answered.’ What? Obviously, the unspoken murderous hate, restrained by fear, which had been raised in the rulers’ minds, and flashed in their eyes, and moved in their gestures. Christ answers it by repeating His blow; for the present parable is, in outline, identical with the preceding, though differing in colouring, and carrying its thoughts farther. That stopped with the transference of the kingdom to the Gentiles; this passes on to speak also of the development among the Gentiles, and ends with the law ‘many called, few chosen,’ which is exemplified in Jew and Gentile. There are, then, two parts in it: [verses 1-9](#) covering the same ground as the former; [verses 10-14](#) adding new matter.

I. The judgment on those who refuse the offered joys of the kingdom. In the previous parable, the kingdom was presented on the side of duty and service. The call was to render obedience. The vineyard was a sphere for toil. The owner had given it indeed, but, having given, he required. That is only half the truth, and the least joyful half. So this parable dismisses all ideas of work, duty, service, requirement, and instead gives the emblem of a marriage feast as the picture of the kingdom. It therein unites two familiar prophetic images for the Messianic times—those of a festival and of a marriage. As Luther says, ‘He calls it a marriage feast, not a time of toil or a time of sorrow, but a time of holiday and a time of joy;

in which we make ourselves fine, sing, play, dance, eat, drink, are glad, and have a good time; else it would not be a wedding feast, if people were to be working, mourning, or crying. Therefore, Christ calls His Christianity and gospel by the name of the highest joy on earth; namely, by the name of a marriage feast.' How pathetic this designation of His kingdom is on Christ's lips, when we remember how near His bitter agony He stood, and that He tasted its bitterness already! It is not the whole truth any more than the vineyard emblem is. Both must be united in our idea of the kingdom, as both may be in experience. It is possible to be at once toiling among the vines in the hot sunshine, and feasting at the table. The Christian life is not all grinding at heavy tasks, nor all enjoyment of spiritual refreshment; but our work may be so done as to be our 'meat'—as it was His—and our glad repose may be unbroken even in the midst of toil. We are, at one and the same time, labourers in the king's vineyard, and guests at the king's table; and the same duality will, in some unknown fashion, continue in the perfect kingdom, where there will be both work and feasting, and all the life shall be both in one.

The second point to be noticed is the invitations of the king. There had been an invitation before the point at which the parable begins, for the servants are sent to summon those who had already been 'called.' That calling, which lies beyond the horizon of our parable, is the whole series of agencies in Old Testament times. So this parable begins almost where the former leaves off. They only slightly overlap. The first servants here are Christ Himself, and His followers in their ministry during His life; and the second set are the apostles and preachers of the gospel during the period between the completion of the preparation of the feast (that is, the death of Christ) and the destruction of Jerusalem. The characteristic difference of their message from that of the servants in the former parable, embodies the whole difference between the preaching of the prophets, as messengers demanding the fruit of righteousness, and the glad tidings of a gospel of free grace which does not demand, but offers, and does not say 'obey' until it has said 'eat, and be glad.' The reiterated invitations not only correspond to the actual facts, but, like the facts, set the miracle of God's patience in a still brighter light than the former story did; for while it is wonderful that the lord of the vineyard should stoop to ask so often for fruit, it is far more wonderful that the founder of the feast, who is king too, should stoop to offer over and over again the refused abundance of his table.

Mark, further, the refusal of the invitations: 'They would not (or "did not wish to") come.' That is Christ's gentle way of describing the unbelief of His generation. It is the second set of refusers who are painted in darker colours. We are accustomed to think that the sin of His contemporaries was great beyond parallel, but he seems here to hint that the sin of those who reject Him after the Cross and the Resurrection, is blacker than theirs. At any rate, it clearly is so. But note that the parable speaks as if the refusers were the same persons throughout, thus taking the same point of view as the former one did, and regarding

the generations of the Jews as one whole. There is a real unity, though the individuals be different, if the spirit actuating successive generations be the same.

Note the two classes of rejecters. The first simply pay no attention, because their heads are full of business. They do not even speak more or less lame excuses, as the refusers in Luke's similar parable had the decency to do. The king's messenger addresses a group, who pause on their road for a moment, to listen listlessly to what he has to say, and, when he has done, disperse without a word, each man going on his road, as if nothing had happened. The ground of their indifference lies in their absorption with this world's good, and their belief that it is best. 'His own farm,' as the original puts it emphatically, holds one man by the solid delight of possessing acres that he can walk over and till; his merchandise draws another, by the excitement of speculation and the lust of acquiring. It is not only the hurry and fever of a great commercial city, but the quiet and leisure of country life, which shut out taste for God's feast. Strange preference of toil and risk of loss to abundance, repose, and joy! Savages barter gold for glass beads. We choose lives of weary work and hunting after uncertain riches, rather than listen to His call, despising the open-handed housekeeping of our Father's house, and trying to fill our hunger with the swine's husks. The suicidal madness of refusing the kingdom is set in a vivid light in these quiet words.

But stranger still is the conduct of the rest. Why should they kill men whose only fault was bringing them a hospitable invitation? The incongruity of the representation has given offence to some interpreters, who are not slow to point out how Christ could have improved His parable. But the reality is more incongruous still, and the unmotivated outburst of wrath against the innocent bearers of a kindly invitation is only too true to life. Mark the distinction drawn by our Lord between the bulk of the people who simply neglected, and the few who violently opposed. He does not charge the guilt on all. The murderers of Him and of His first followers were not the mass of the nation, who, left to themselves, would not have so acted, but the few who stirred up the many. But, though He does not lay the guilt at the doors of all, yet the punishment falls on all, and, when the city is burned, the houses of the negligent and of the slayers are equally consumed; for simple refusal of the message and slaying the messengers were but the positive and superlative degrees of the same crime—rebellion against the king, whose invitation was a command.

The fatal issue is presented, as in the former parable, in two parts: the destruction of the rebels, and the passing over of the kingdom to others. But the differences are noteworthy. Here we read that 'the king was wroth.' Insult to a king is worse than dishonesty to a landlord. The refusal of God's proffered grace is even more certain to awake that awful reality, the wrath of God, than the failure to render the fruits of the good possessed. Love repelled and thrown back on itself cannot but become wrath. That refusal, which is rebellion, is fittingly described as punished by force of arms and the burning of the city. We can scarcely help seeing that our Lord here, in a very striking and unusual way, mingles prose prediction with

parabolic imagery. Some commentators object to this, and take the armies and the burning to be only part of the imagery, but it is difficult to believe that. Note the forcible pronouns, 'His armies,' and 'their city.' The terrible Roman legions were His soldiers for the time being, the axe which He laid to the root of the tree. The city had ceased to be His, just as the temple ceased to be 'My house,' and became, by their sin, 'your house.' The legend told that, before their destruction, a mighty voice was heard saying, 'Let us depart,' and, with the sound of rushing wings, His presence left sanctuary and city. When He was no longer 'the glory in the midst,' He was no longer 'a wall of fire round about,' and the Roman torches worked their will on the city which was no longer 'the city of our God.'

The command to gather in others to fill the vacant places follows on the destruction of the city. This may seem to be opposed to the facts of the transference of the kingdom to the Gentiles, which certainly was begun long before Jerusalem fell. But its fall was the final and complete severance of Christianity from Judaism, and not till then had the messengers to give up the summons to Israel as hopeless. Perhaps Paul had this parable floating in his memory when he said to the howling blasphemers at Antioch in Pisidia, 'Seeing ye . . . judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us.' 'They which were bidden were not worthy,' and their unworthiness consisted not in any other moral demerit, but solely in this, that they had refused the proffered blessings. That is the only thing which makes any of us unworthy. And that will make the best of us unworthy.

II. [Verses 10-14](#) carry us beyond the preceding parable, and show us the judgment on the unworthy accepters of the invitation. There are two ways of sinning against God's merciful gift: the one is refusing to accept it; the other is taking it in outward seeming, but continuing in sin. The former was the sin of the Jews; the latter is the sin of nominal Christians. We may briefly note the points of this appendix to the parable. The first is the indiscriminate invitation, which is more emphatically marked as being so, by the mention of the 'bad' before the good among the guests. God's offer is for all, and, in a very real sense, is specially sent to the worst, just as the doctor goes first to the most severely wounded. So the motley crew, without the least attempt at discrimination, are seated at the table. If the Church understands its business, it will have nothing to do in its message with distinctions of character any more than of class, but, if it makes any difference, will give the outcast and disreputable the first place in its efforts. Is that what it does?

The next point is the king's inspection. The word rendered 'behold' implies a fixed and minute observation. When does that scrutiny take place? Obviously, from the sequel, the final judgment is referred to, and it is remarkable that here there is no mention of the king's son as the judge. No parable can shadow forth all truth, and though the Father 'has committed all judgment to the Son,' the Son's judgment is the Father's, and the exigencies of the parable required that the son as bridegroom should not be brought into view as judge. Note that

there is only one guest without the dress needed. That may be an instance of the lenity of Christ's charity, which hopeth all things; or it may rather be intended to suggest the keenness of the king's glance, which, in all the crowded tables, picks out the one ragged losel who had found his way there—so individual is his knowledge, so impossible for us to hide in the crowd.

Mark that the feast has not begun, though the guests are seated. The judgment stands at the threshold of the heavenly kingdom. The king speaks with a certain coldness, very unlike the welcome fit for a guest; and his question is one of astonishment at the rude boldness of the man who came there, knowing that he had not the proper dress. (That knowledge is implied in the form of the sentence in the Greek.) What, then, is the wedding garment? It can be nothing else than righteousness, moral purity, which fits for sitting at His table in His kingdom. And the man who has it not, is the nominal Christian, who says that he has accepted God's invitation, and lives in sin, not putting off 'the old man with his deeds,' nor putting on 'the new man, which is created in righteousness.' How that garment was to be obtained is no part of this parable. We know that it is only to be received by faith in Jesus Christ, and that if we are to pass the scrutiny of the king, it must be as 'not having our own righteousness,' but His made ours by faith which makes us righteous, and then by all holy effort, and toil in His strength, we must clothe our souls in the dress which befits the banqueting hall; for only they who are washed and clothed in fine linen, clean and white, shall sit there. But Christ's purpose here was not to explain how the robe was to be procured, but to insist that it must be worn.

'He was speechless,'—or, as the word means, 'muzzled.' The man is self-condemned, and, having nothing to say in extenuation, the solemn promise is pronounced of ejection from the lighted hall, with limbs bound so that he cannot struggle, and consignment to the blackness outside, of which our Lord adds, in words not put into the king's mouth, but which we have heard from Him before, 'There shall be the [well-known and terrible] weeping and gnashing of teeth—awful though figurative expressions for despair and passion.

Both parts of the parable come under one law, and exemplify one principle of the kingdom, that its invitations extend more widely than the real possession of its gifts. The unbelieving Jew, in one direction, and the unrighteous Christian in another, are instances of this.

This is not the place to discuss that wide and well-worn question of the ground of God's choice. That does not enter into the scope of the parable. For it, the choice is proved by the actual participation in the feast. They who do not choose to receive the invitation, or to put on the wedding garment, do, in different ways, show that they are not 'chosen' though 'called.' The lesson is, not of interminable and insoluble questionings about God's secrets, but of earnest heed to His gracious call, and earnest, believing effort to make the fair garment our very own, 'if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.'

THE TABLES TURNED: THE QUESTIONERS QUESTIONED

‘But when the Pharisees had heard that He had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together. 35. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked Him a question, tempting Him, and saying, 36. Master, which is the great commandment in the law? 37. Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. 38. This is the first and great commandment. 39. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 40. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. 41. While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, 42. Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose Son is He? They say unto Him, The son of David. 43. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call Him Lord, saying, 44. The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on My right hand, till I make Thine enemies Thy footstool? 45. If David then call Him Lord, how is He his son? 46. And no man was able to answer Him a word; neither durst any man, from that day forth, ask Him any more questions.’—[MATT.xxii. 34-46](#).

Herodians, Sadducees, Pharisees, who were at daggers drawn with each other, patched up an alliance against Jesus, whom they all hated. Their questions were cunningly contrived to entangle Him in the cobwebs of casuistry and theological hair-splitting, but He walked through the fine-spun snares as a lion might stalk away with the nooses set for him dangling behind him. The last of the three questions put to Jesus, and the one question with which He turned the tables and silenced His questioners, are our subject. In the former, Jesus declares the essence of the law or of religion; in the latter, He brings to light the essential loftiness of the Messiah.

I. The two preceding questions are represented to have been asked by deputations; this is specially noted as emanating from an individual. The ‘lawyer’ seems to have anticipated his colleagues, and possibly his question was not that which they had meant to put. His motive in asking it was that of ‘tempting’ Jesus, but we must not give that word too hostile a sense, for it may mean no more than ‘testing’ or trying. The legal expert wished to find out the attainments and standpoint of this would-be teacher, and so he proposed a question which would bring out the whereabouts of Jesus, and give opportunity for a theological wrangle. He did not ask the question for guidance, but as an inquisitor cross-examining a suspected heretic. Probably the question was a stereotyped one, and there are traces in the Gospels that the answer recognised as orthodox was that which Jesus gave ([Luke x. 27](#)). The two commandments are quoted from [Deuteronomy vi. 5](#) and [Leviticus xix. 18](#) respectively. The lawyer probably only desired to raise a discussion as to the relative worth of isolated precepts. Jesus goes deep down below isolated precepts, and unifies, as well as transforms, the law. Supreme and undivided love to God is not only the great, but also the first, commandment. In more modern phrase, it is the sum of man’s duty and the germ of all goodness.

Note that Jesus shifts the centre from conduct to character, from deeds to affections. ‘As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he,’ said the sage of old; Christ says, ‘As a man loves, so is he.’ Two loves we have,—either the dark love of self and sense, or the white love of God, and all character and conduct are determined by which of these sways us. Note, further, that love to God must needs be undivided. God is one and all; man is one and finite. To love such an object with half a heart is not to love. True, our weakness leads astray, but the only real love corresponding to the natures of the lover and the loved is whole-hearted, whole-souled, whole-minded. It must be ‘all in all, or not at all.’

‘A second is like unto it,’—love to man is the under side, as it were, of love to God. The two commandments are alike, for both call for love, and the second is second because it is a consequence of the first. Each sets up a lofty standard; ‘with all thy heart’ and ‘as thyself’ sound equally impossible, but both result necessarily from the nature of the case. Religion is the parent of all morality, and especially of benevolent love to men. Innate self-regard will yield to no force but that of love to God. It is vain to try to create brotherhood among men unless the sense of God’s fatherhood is its foundation. Love of neighbours is the second commandment, and to make it the first, as some do now, is to end all hope of fulfilling it. Still further, Jesus hangs law and prophets on these two precepts, which, at bottom, are one. Not only will all other duties be done in doing these, since ‘love is the fulfilling of the law,’ but all other precepts, and all the prophets’ appeals and exhortations, are but deductions from, or helps to the attainment of, these. All our forms of worship, creeds, and the like, are of worth in so far as they are outcomes of love to God, or aid us in loving Him and our neighbours. Without love, they are ‘as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.’

II. The Pharisees remained ‘gathered together,’ and may have been preparing another question, but Jesus had been long enough interrogated. It was not fitting that He should be catechised only. His questions teach. He does not seek to ‘entangle’ the Pharisees ‘in their speech,’ nor to make them contradict themselves, but brings them full up against a difficulty, that they may open their eyes to the great truth which is its only solution. His first question, ‘What think ye of the Christ?’ is simply preparatory to the second. The answer which He anticipated was given,—as, of course, it would be, for the Davidic descent of the Messiah was a commonplace universally accepted. One can fancy that the Pharisees smiled complacently at the attempt to puzzle them with such an elementary question, but the smile vanished when the next one came. They interpreted [Psalm 110](#) as Messianic, and David in it called Messiah ‘my Lord.’ How can He be both? Jesus’ question is in two forms,—‘If He is son, how does David call Him Lord?’ or, if He is Lord, ‘how then is He his son?’ Take either designation, and the other lands you in inextricable difficulties.

Now what was our Lord’s purpose in thus driving the Pharisees into a corner? Not merely to ‘muzzle’ them, as the word in [verse 34](#), rendered ‘put to silence,’ literally means, but to bring to light the inadequate conceptions of the Messiah and of the nature of His

kingdom, to which exclusive recognition of his Davidic descent necessarily led. David's son would be but a king after the type of the Herods and Cæ³ars, and his kingdom as 'carnal' as the wildest zealot expected, but David's Lord, sitting at God's right hand, and having His foes made His footstool by Jehovah Himself,—what sort of a Messiah King would that be? The majestic image, that shapes itself dimly here, was a revelation that took the Pharisees' breath away, and made them dumb. Nor are the words without a half-disclosed claim on Christ's part to be that which He was so soon to avow Himself before the high priest as being. The first hearers of them probably caught that meaning partly, and were horrified; we hear it clearly in the words, and answer, 'Thou art the King of glory, O Christ! Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father.'

Jesus here says that [Psalm 110](#) is Messianic, that David was the author, and that he wrote it by divine inspiration. The present writer cannot see how our Lord's argument can be saved from collapse if the psalm is not David's.

THE KING'S FAREWELL

'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. 28. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. 29. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, 30. And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. 31. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. 32. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. 33. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell! 34. Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city; 35. That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. 36. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation. 37. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! 38. Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. 39. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see Me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.'—[MATT. xxiii. 27-39](#).

If, with the majority of authorities, we exclude [verse 14](#) from the text, there are, in this chapter, seven woes, like seven thunders, launched against the rulers. They are scathing exposures, but, as the very word implies, full of sorrow as well as severity. They are not denunciations, but prophecies warning that the end of such tempers must be mournful. The wailing of an infinite compassion, rather than the accents of anger, sounds in them; and it alone is heard in the outburst of lamenting in which Christ's heart runs over, as in a passion of tears, at the close. The blending of sternness and pity, each perfect, is the characteristic of this wonderful climax of our Lord's appeals to His nation. Could such tones of love and righteous anger joined have been sent echoing through the ages in this Gospel, if they had not been heard?

I. The woe of the 'whited sepulchres.' The first four woes are directed mainly to the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees; the last three to their characters. The two first of these fasten on the same sin, of hypocritical holiness. There is, however, a difference between the representation of hypocrites under the metaphor of the clean outside of the cup and platter, and that of the whited sepulchre. In the former, the hidden sin is 'extortion and excess'; that is, sensual enjoyment wrongly procured, of which the emblems of cup and plate suggest that good eating and drinking are a chief part. In the latter, it is 'iniquity'—a more general

and darker name for sin. In the former, the Pharisee is 'blind,' self-deceived in part or altogether; in the latter, stress is rather laid on his 'appearance unto men.' The repetition of the same charge in the two woes teaches us Christ's estimate of the gravity and frequency of the sin.

The whitened tombs of Mohammedan saints still gleam in the strong sunlight on many a knoll in Palestine. If the Talmudical practice is as old as our Lord's time, the annual whitewashing was lately over. Its purpose was not to adorn the tombs, but to make them conspicuous, so that they might be avoided for fear of defilement. So He would say, with terrible irony, that the apparent holiness of the rulers was really a sign of corruption, and a warning to keep away from them. What a blow at their self-complacency! And how profoundly true it is that the more punctiliously white the hypocrite's outside, the more foul is he within, and the wider berth will all discerning people give him! The terrible force of the figure needs no dwelling on. In Christ's estimate, such a soul was the very dwelling-place of death; and foul odours and worms and corruption filled its sickening recesses. Terrible words to come from His lips into which grace was poured, and bold words to be flashed at listeners who held the life of the Speaker in their hands! There are two sorts of hypocrites, the conscious and the unconscious; and there are ten of the latter for one of the former, and each ten times more dangerous. Established religion breeds them, and they are specially likely to be found among those whose business is to study the documents in which it is embodied. These woes are not like thunder-peals rolling above our heads, while the lightning strikes the earth miles away. A religion which is mostly whitewash is as common among us as ever it was in Jerusalem; and its foul accompaniments of corruption becoming more rotten every year, as the whitewash is laid on thicker, may be smelt among us, and its fatal end is as sure.

II. The woe of the sepulchre builders (*vs. 29-36*). In these verses we have, first, the specification of another form of hypocrisy, consisting in building the prophets' tombs, and disavowing the fathers' murder of them. Honouring dead prophets was right; but honouring dead ones and killing living ones was conscious or unconscious hypocrisy. The temper of mind which leads to glorifying the dead witnesses, also leads to supposing that all truth was given by them; and hence that the living teachers, who carry their message farther, are false prophets. A generation which was ready to kill Jesus in honour of Moses, would have killed Moses in honour of Abraham, and would not have had the faintest apprehension of the message of either.

It is a great deal easier to build tombs than to accept teachings, and a good deal of the posthumous honour paid to God's messengers means, 'It's a good thing they are dead, and that we have nothing to do but to put up a monument.' Bi-centenaries and ter-centenaries and jubilees do not always imply either the understanding or the acceptance of the principles supposed to be glorified thereby. But the magnifiers of the past are often quite unconscious

of the hollowness of their admiration, and honest in their horror of their fathers' acts; and we all need the probe of such words as Christ's to pierce the skin of our lazy reverence for our fathers' prophets, and let out the foul matter below—namely, our own blindness to God's messengers of to-day.

The statement of the hypocrisy is followed, in [verses 31-33](#), with its unmasking and condemnation. The words glow with righteous wrath at white heat, and end in a burst of indignation, most unfamiliar to His lips. Three sentences, like triple lightning flash from His pained heart. With almost scornful subtlety He lays hold of the words which He puts into the Pharisees' mouths, to convict them of kindred with those whose deeds they would disown. 'Our fathers, say you? Then you do belong to the same family, after all. You confess that you have their blood in your veins; and, in the very act of denying sympathy with their conduct, you own kindred. And, for all your protestations, spiritual kindred goes with bodily descent.' Christ here recognises that children probably 'take after their parents,' or, in modern scientific terms, that 'heredity' is the law, and that it works more surely in the transmission of evil than of good.

Then come the awful words bidding that generation 'fill up the measure of the fathers.' They are like the other command to Judas to do his work quickly. They are more than permission, they are command; but such a command as, by its laying bare of the true character of the deed in view, is love's last effort at prevention. Mark the growing emotion of the language. Mark the conception of a nation's sins as one through successive generations, and the other, of these as having a definite measure, which being filled, judgment can no longer tarry. Generation after generation pours its contributions into the vessel, and when the last black drop which it can hold has been added, then comes the catastrophe. Mark the fatal necessity by which inherited sin becomes darker sin. The fathers' crimes are less than the sons'. This inheritance increases by each transmission. The cloak strikes one more at each revolution of the hands.

It is hard to recognise Christ in the terrible words that follow. We have heard part of them from John the Baptist; and it sounded natural for him to call men serpents and the children of serpents, but it is somewhat of a shock to hear Jesus hurling such names at even the most sinful. But let us remember that He who sees hearts, has a right to tell harsh truths, and that it is truest kindness to strip off masks which hide from men their own real character, and that the revelation of the divine love in Jesus would be a partial and impotent revelation if it did not show us the righteous love which is wrath. There is nothing so terrible as the anger of gentle compassion, and the fiercest and most destructive wrath is 'the wrath of the Lamb.' Seldom, indeed, did He show that side of His character; but it is there, and the other side would not be so blessed as it is, unless that were there too.

The woe ends with the double prophecy that that generation would repeat and surpass the fathers' guilt, and that on it would fall the accumulated penalties of past bloodshed. Note

that solemn 'therefore,' which looks back to the whole preceding context, and forward to the whole subsequent. Because the rulers professed abhorrence of their fathers' deeds, and yet inherited their spirit, they too would have their prophets, and would slay them. God goes on sending His messengers, because we reject them; and the more deaf men are, the more does He peal His words into their ears. That is mercy and compassion, that all men may be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth; but it is judgment too, and its foreseen effect must be regarded as part of the divine purpose in it. Christ's desire is one thing, His purpose another. His desire is that all should find in His gospel 'the savour of life'; but His purpose is that, if it be not that to any, it shall be to them the savour of death. Mark, too, the authority with which He, in the face of these scowling Pharisees, assumes the distinct divine prerogative of sending forth inspired men, who, as His messengers, shall stand on a level with the prophets of old. Mark His silence as to His own fate, which is only obscurely hinted at in the command to fill up the measure of the fathers. Observe the detailed enumeration of His messengers' gifts,—'prophets' under direct inspiration, like those of old, which may especially refer to the apostles; 'wise men,' like a Stephen or an Apollos; 'scribes,' such as Mark and Luke and many a faithful servant since, whose pen has loved to write the name above every name. Note the detailed prophecy of their treatment, which begins with slaying and goes down to the less severe scourging, and thence to the milder persecution. Do the three punishments belong to the three classes of messengers, the severest falling to the lot of the most highly endowed, and even the quiet penman being hunted from city to city?

We need not wriggle and twist to try to avoid admitting that the calling of the martyred Zacharias, 'the son of Barachias,' is an error of some one who confused the author of the prophetic book with the person whose murder is narrated in [2 Chronicles xxiv](#). We do not know who made the mistake, or how it appears in our text, but it is not honest to try to slur it over. The punishment of long ages of sin, carried on from father to son, does in the course of that history of the world, which is a part of the judgment of the world, fall upon one generation. It takes long for the mass of heaped-up sin to become top-heavy; but when it is so, it buries one generation of those who have worked at piling it up, beneath its down-rushing avalanche.

'The mills of God grind slowly,
But they grind exceeding small.'

The catastrophes of national histories are prepared for by continuous centuries. The generation that laid the first powder-hornful of the train is dead and buried, long before the explosion which sends constituted order and institutions sky-high. The misery is that often the generation which has to pay the penalty has begun to awake to the sin, and would be glad to mend it, if it could. England in the seventeenth century, France in the eighteenth,

America in the nineteenth, had to reap harvests from sins sown long before. Such is the law of the judgment wrought out by God's providence in history. But there is another judgment, begun here and perfected hereafter, in which fathers and sons shall each bear their own burden, and reap accurately the fruit of what they have sown. 'The soul that sinneth, it shall die.'

III. The parting wail of rejected love. The lightning flashes of the sevenfold woes end in a rain of pity and tears. His full heart overflows in that sad cry of lamentation over the long-continued foiling of the efforts of a love that would fain have fondled and defended. What intensity of feeling is in the redoubled naming of the city! How yearningly and wistfully He calls, as if He might still win the faithless one, and how lingeringly unwilling He is to give up hope! How mournfully, rather than accusingly, He reiterates the acts which had run through the whole history, using a form of the verbs which suggests continuance. Mark, too, the matter-of-course way in which Christ assumes that He sent all the prophets whom, through the generations, Jerusalem had stoned.

So the lament passes into the solemn final leave-taking, with which our Lord closes His ministry among the Jews, and departs from the temple. As, in the parable of the marriage-feast, the city was emphatically called 'their city,' so here the Temple, in whose courts He was standing, and which in a moment He was to quit for ever, is called 'your house,' because His departure is the withdrawing of the true Shechinah. It had been the house of God: now He casts it off, and leaves it to them to do as they will with it. The saddest punishment of long-continued rejection of His pleading love, is that it ceases at last to plead. The bitterest woe for those who refuse to render to Him the fruits of the vineyard, is to get the vineyard for their own, undisturbed. Christ's utmost retribution for obstinate blindness is to withdraw from our sight. All the woes that were yet to fall, in long, dreary succession on that nation, so long continued in its sin, so long continued in its misery, were hidden in that solemn departure of Christ from the henceforward empty temple. Let us fear lest our unfaithfulness meet the like penalty! But even the departure does not end His yearnings, nor close the long story of the conflict between God's beseeching love and their unbelief. The time shall come when the nation shall once more lift up, with deeper, truer adoration, the hosannas of the triumphal entry. And then a believing Israel shall see their King, and serve Him. Christ never takes final leave of any man in this world. It is ever possible that dumb lips may be opened to welcome Him, though long rejected; and His withdrawals are His efforts to bring about that opening. When it takes place, how gladly does He return to the heart which is now His temple, and unveil His beauty to the long-darkened eyes!

TWO FORMS OF ONE SAYING

‘He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.’ —*MATT. xxiv. 13, R.V.*

‘In your patience possess ye your souls.’—*Luke xxi. 19.*

These two sayings, different as they sound in our Version, are probably divergent representations of one original. The reasons for so supposing are manifold and obvious on a little consideration. In the first place, the two sayings occur in the Evangelists’ reports of the same prophecy and at the same point therein. In the second place, the verbal resemblance is much greater than appears in our Authorised Version, because the word rendered ‘patience’ in Luke is derived from that translated ‘endureth’ in Matthew; and the true connection between the two versions of the saying would have been more obvious if we had had a similar word in both, reading in the one ‘he that endureth,’ and in the other ‘in your endurance.’ In the third place, the difference between these two sayings presented in our Version, in that the one is a promise and the other a command, is due to an incorrect reading of St. Luke’s words. The Revised Version substitutes for the imperative ‘possess’ the promise ‘ye shall possess,’ and with that variation the two sayings are brought a good deal nearer each other. In both endurance is laid down as the condition, which in both is followed by a promise. Then, finally, there need be no difficulty in seeing that ‘possessing,’ or, more literally, ‘gaining your souls,’ is an exact equivalent of the other expression, ‘ye shall be saved.’ One cannot but remember our Lord’s solemn antithetical phrase about a man ‘losing his own soul.’ To ‘win one’s soul’ is to be saved; to be saved is to win one’s soul.

So I think I have made out my thesis that the two sayings are substantially one. They carry a great weight of warning, of exhortation, and of encouragement to us all. Let us try now to reap some of that harvest.

I. First, then, notice the view of our condition which underlies these sayings.

It is a sad and a somewhat stern one, but it is one to which, I think, most men’s hearts will respond, if they give themselves leisure to think; and if they ‘see life steadily, and see it whole.’ For howsoever many days are bright, and howsoever all days are good, yet, on the whole, ‘man is a soldier, and life is a fight.’ For some of us it is simple endurance; for all of us it has sometimes been agony; for all of us, always, it presents resistance to every kind of high and noble career, and especially to the Christian one. Easy-going optimists try to skim over these facts, but they are not to be so lightly set aside. You have only to look at the faces that you meet in the street to be very sure that it is always a grave and sometimes a bitter thing to live. And so our two texts presuppose that life on the whole demands endurance, whatever may be included in that great word.

Think of the inward resistance and outward hindrances to every lofty life. The scholar, the man of culture, the philanthropist—all who would live for anything else than the present, the low, and the sensual—find that there is a banded conspiracy, as it were, against them,

and that they have to fight their way by continual antagonism, by continual persistence, as well as by continual endurance. Within, weakness, torpor, weariness, levity, inconstant wills, bright purposes clouding over, and all the cowardice and animalism of our nature war continually against the better, higher self. And without, there is a down-dragging, as persistent as the force of gravity, coming from the whole assemblage of external things that solicit, and would fain seduce us. The old legends used to tell us how, whensoever a knight set out upon any great and lofty quest, his path was beset on either side by voices, sometimes whispering seductions, and sometimes shrieking maledictions, but always seeking to withdraw him from his resolute march onwards to his goal. And every one of us, if we have taken on us the orders of any lofty chivalry, and especially if we have sworn ourselves knights of the Cross, have to meet the same antagonism. Then, too, there are golden apples rolled upon our path, seeking to draw us away from our steadfast endurance.

Besides the hindrances in every noble path, the hindrances within and the hindrances without, the weight of self and the drawing of earth, there come to us all—in various degrees no doubt, and in various shapes—but to all of us there come the burdens of sorrows and cares, and anxieties and trials. Wherever two or three are gathered together, even if they gather for a feast, there will be some of them who carry a sorrow which they know well will never be lifted off their shoulders and their hearts, until they lay down all their burdens at the grave's mouth; and it is weary work to plod on the path of life with a weight that cannot be shifted, with a wound that can never be stanchd.

Oh, brethren, rosy-coloured optimism is all a dream. The recognition of the good that is in the evil is the devout man's talisman, but there is always need for the resistance and endurance which my texts prescribe. And the youngest of us, the gladdest of us, the least experienced of us, the most frivolous of us, if we will question our own hearts, will hear their Amen to the stern, sad view of the facts of earthly life which underlies this text.

Though it has many other aspects, the world seems to me sometimes to be like that pool at Jerusalem in the five porches of which lay, groaning under various diseases, but none of them without an ache, a great multitude of impotent folk, halt and blind. Astronomers tell us that one, at any rate, of the planets rolls on its orbit swathed in clouds and moisture. The world moves wrapped in a mist of tears. God only knows them all, but each heart knows its own bitterness and responds to the words, 'Ye have need of patience.'

II. Now, secondly, mark the victorious temper.

That is referred to in the one saying by 'he that endureth,' and in the other 'in your endurance.' Now, it is very necessary for the understanding of many places in Scripture to remember that the notion either of patience or of endurance by no means exhausts the power of this noble Christian word. For these are passive virtues, and however excellent and needful they may be, they by no means sum up our duty in regard to the hindrances and sorrows, the burdens and weights, of which I have been trying to speak. For you know it is

only 'what cannot be cured' that 'must be endured,' and even incurable things are not merely to be endured, but they ought to be utilised. It is not enough that we should build up a dam to keep the floods of sorrow and trial from overflowing our fields; we must turn the turbid waters into our sluices, and get them to drive our mills. It is not enough that we should screw ourselves up to lie unresistingly under the surgeon's knife; though God knows that it is as much as we can manage sometimes, and we have to do as convicts under the lash do, get a bit of lead or a bullet into our mouths, and bite at it to keep ourselves from crying out. But that is not all our duty in regard to our trials and difficulties. There is required something more than passive endurance.

This noble word of my texts does mean a great deal more than that. It means active persistence as well as patient submission. It is not enough that we should stand and bear the pelting of the pitiless storm, unmurmuring and unbowed by it; but we are bound to go on our course, bearing up and steering right onwards. Persistent perseverance in the path that is marked out for us is especially the virtue that our Lord here enjoins. It is well to sit still unmurmuring; it is better to march on undiverted and unchecked. And when we are able to keep straight on in the path which is marked out for us, and especially in the path that leads us to God, notwithstanding all opposing voices, and all inward hindrances and reluctances; when we are able to go to our tasks of whatever sort they are and to do them, though our hearts are beating like sledge-hammers; when we say to ourselves, 'It does not matter a bit whether I am sad or glad, fresh or wearied, helped or hindered by circumstances, this one thing I do,' then we have come to understand and to practise the grace that our Master here enjoins. The endurance which wins the soul, and leads to salvation, is no mere passive submission, excellent and hard to attain as that often is; but it is brave perseverance in the face of all difficulties, and in spite of all enemies.

Mark how emphatically our Lord here makes the space within which that virtue has to be exercised conterminous with the whole duration of our lives. I need not discuss what 'the end' was in the original application of the words; that would take us too far afield. But this I desire to insist upon, that right on to the very close of life we are to expect the necessity of putting forth the exercise of the very same persistence by which the earlier stages of any noble career must necessarily be marked. In other departments of life there may be relaxation, as a man goes on through the years; but in the culture of our characters, and in the deepening of our faith, and in the drawing near to our God, there must be no cessation or diminution of earnestness and of effort right up to the close.

There are plenty of people, and I dare say that I address some of them now, who began their Christian career full of vigour and with a heat that was too hot to last. But, alas, in a year or two all the fervency was past, and they settled down into the average, easygoing, unprogressive Christian, who is a wet blanket to the devotion and work of a Christian church. I wonder how many of us would scarcely know our own former selves if we could see them.

Christian people, to how many of us should the word be rung in our ears: 'Ye did run well; what did hinder you'? The answer is—Myself.

But may I say that this emphatic 'to the end' has a special lesson for us older people, who, as natural strength abates and enthusiasm cools down, are apt to be but the shadows of our old selves in many things? But there should be fire within the mountain, though there may be snow on its crest. Many a ship has been lost on the harbour bar; and there is no excuse for the captain leaving the bridge, or the engineer coming up from the engine-room, stormy as the one position and stifling as the other may be, until the anchor is down, and the vessel is moored and quiet in the desired haven. The desert, with its wild beasts and its Bedouin, reaches right up to the city gates, and until we are within these we need to keep our hands on our sword-hilts and be ready for conflict. 'He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.'

III. Lastly, note the crown which endurance wins.

Now, I need not spend or waste your time in mere verbal criticism, but I wish to point out that that word 'soul' in one of our two texts means both the soul and the life of which it is the seat; and also to remark that the being saved and the winning of the life or the soul has distinct application, in our Lord's words, primarily to corporeal safety and preservation in the midst of dangers; and, still further, to note the emphatic 'in your patience,' as suggesting not only a future but a present acquisition of one's own soul, or life, as the result of such persevering endurance and enduring perseverance. All which things being kept in view, I may expand the great promise that lies in my text, as follows:— First, by such persevering persistence in the Christian path, we gain ourselves. Self-surrender is self-possession. We never own ourselves till we have given up owning ourselves, and yielded ourselves to that Lord who gives us back saints to ourselves. Self-control is self-possession. We do not own ourselves as long as it is possible for any weakness in flesh, sense, or spirit to gain dominion over us and hinder us from doing what we know to be right. We are not our own masters then. 'Whilst they promise them liberty, they themselves are the bond-slaves of corruption.' It is only when we have the bit well into the jaws of the brutes, and the reins tight in our hands, so that a finger-touch can check or divert the course, that we are truly lords of the chariot in which we ride and of the animals that impel it.

And such self-control which is the winning of ourselves is, as I believe, thoroughly realised only when, by self-surrender of ourselves to Jesus Christ, we get His help to govern ourselves and so become lords of ourselves. Some little petty Rajah, up in the hills, in a quasi-independent State in India, is troubled by mutineers whom he cannot subdue; what does he do? He sends a message down to Lahore or Calcutta, and up come English troops that consolidate his dominion, and he rules securely, when he has consented to become a feudatory, and recognise his overlord. And so you and I, by continual repetition, in the face of self and sin, of our acts of self-surrender, bring Christ into the field; and then, when we have

said, 'Lord, take me; I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me'; and when we daily, in spite of hindrances, stand to the surrender and repeat the consecration, then 'in our perseverance we acquire our souls.'

Again, such persistence wins even the bodily life, whether it preserves it or loses it. I have said that the words of our texts have an application to bodily preservation in the midst of the dreadful dangers of the siege and destruction of Jerusalem. But so regarded they are a paradox. For hear how the Master introduces them: 'Some of you shall they cause to be put to death, but there shall not a hair of your heads perish. In your perseverance ye shall win your lives.' 'Some of you they will put to death,' but ye 'shall win your lives,'—a paradox which can only be solved by experience. Whether this bodily life be preserved or lost, it is gained when it is used as a means of attaining the higher life of union with God. Many a martyr had the promise, 'Not a hair of your head shall perish,' fulfilled at the very moment when the falling axe shore his locks in twain, and severed his head from his body.

Finally, full salvation, the true possession of himself, and the acquisition of the life which really is life, comes to a man who perseveres to the end, and thus passes to the land where he will receive the recompense of the reward. The one moment the runner, with flushed cheek and forward swaying body, hot, with panting breath, and every muscle strained, is straining to the winning-post; and the next moment, in utter calm, he is wearing the crown.

'To the end,' and what a contrast the next moment will be! Brethren, may it be true of you and of me that 'we are not of them that draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the winning of their souls!'

THE CARRION AND THE VULTURES

‘Wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.’—[MATT. xxiv. 28.](#)

This grim parable has, of course, a strong Eastern colouring. It is best appreciated by dwellers in those lands. They tell us that no sooner is some sickly animal dead, or some piece of carrion thrown out by the way, than the vultures—for the eagle does not prey upon carrion—appear. There may not have been one visible a moment before in the hot blue sky, but, taught by scent or by sight that their banquet is prepared, they come flocking from all corners of the heavens, a hideous crowd round their hideous meal, fighting with flapping wings and tearing it with their strong talons. And so, says Christ, wherever there is a rotting, dead society, a carcase hopelessly corrupt and evil, down upon it, as if drawn by some unerring attraction, will come the angels, the vultures of the divine judgment.

The words of my text were spoken, according to the version of them in Luke’s Gospel, in answer to a question from the disciples. Our Lord had been discoursing, in very solemn words, which, starting from the historical event of the impending fall of Jerusalem, had gradually passed into a description of the greater event of His second coming. And all these solemn warnings had stirred nothing deeper in the bosoms of the disciples than a tepid and idle curiosity which expressed itself in the one almost irrelevant question, ‘Where, Lord?’ He answers—Not here, not there, but everywhere where there is a carcase. The great event which is referred to in our Lord’s solemn words is a future judgment, which is to be universal. But the words are not exhausted in their reference to that event. There have been many ‘comings of the Lord,’ many ‘days of the Lord,’ which on a smaller scale have embodied the same principles as are to be displayed in world-wide splendour and awfulness at the last.

I. The first thing, then, in these most true and solemn words is this, that they are to us a revelation of a law which operates with unerring certainty through all the course of the world’s history.

We cannot tell, but God can, when evil has become incurable; or when, in the language of my text, the mass of any community has become a carcase. There may be flickerings of life, all unseen by our eyes, or there may be death, all unsuspected by our shallow vision. So long as there is a possibility of amendment, ‘sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily’; and God dams back, as it were, the flow of His retributive judgment, ‘not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to the knowledge of the truth.’ But when He sees that all is vain, that no longer is restoration or recovery possible, then He lets loose the flood; or, in the language of my text, when the thing has become a carcase, then the vultures, God’s scavengers, come and clear it away from off the face of the earth.

Now that is the law that has been working from the beginning, working as well in regard to the long delays as in regard to the swift execution. There is another metaphor, in the Old

Testament, that puts the same idea in a very striking form. It speaks about God's 'awakening,' as if His judgment slumbered. All round that dial the hand goes creeping, creeping, creeping slowly, but when it comes to the appointed line, then the bell strikes. And so years and centuries go by, all chance of recovery departs, and then the crash! The ice palace, built upon the frozen blocks, stands for a while, but when the spring thaws come, it breaks up.

Let me remind you of some instances and illustrations. Take that story which people stumble over in the early part of the Old Testament revelation—the sweeping away of those Canaanitish nations whose hideous immoralities had turned the land into a perfect sty of abominations. There they had been wallowing, and God's Spirit, which strives with men ever and always, had been striving with them, we know not for how long, but when the time came at which, according to the grim metaphor of the Old Testament, 'the measure of their iniquity was full,' then He hurled upon them the fierce hosts out of the desert, and in a whirlwind of fire and sword swept them off the face of the earth.

Take another illustration. These very people, who had been the executioners of divine judgment, settled in the land, fell into the snare—and you know the story. The captivities of Israel and Judah were other illustrations of the same thing. The fall of Jerusalem, to which our Lord pointed in the solemn context of these words, was another. For millenniums God had been pleading with them, sending His prophets, rising early and sending, saying, 'Oh, do not do this abominable thing which I hate!' 'And last of all He sent His Son.' Christ being rejected, God had shot His last bolt. He had no more that He could do. Christ being refused, the nation's doom was fixed and sealed, and down came the eagles of Rome, again God's scavengers, to sweep away the nation on which had been lavished such wealth of divine love, but which had now come to be a rotting abomination, and to this day remains in a living death, a miraculously preserved monument of God's Judgments.

Take another illustration how, once more, the executants of the law fall under its power. That nation which crushed the feeble resources of Judaea, as a giant might crush a mosquito in his grasp, in its turn became honeycombed with abominations and immoralities; and then down from the frozen north came the fierce Gothic tribes over the Roman territory. One of their captains called himself the 'Scourge of God,' and he was right. Another swooping down of the vultures flashed from the blue heavens, and the carrion was torn to fragments by their strong beaks.

Take one more illustration—that French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century. The fathers sowed the wind, and the children reaped the whirlwind. Generations of heartless luxury, selfishness, carelessness of the cry of the poor, immoral separation of class from class, and all the sins which a ruling caste could commit against a subject people, had prepared for the convulsion. Then, in a carnival of blood and deluges of fire and sulphur, the rotten thing was swept off the face of the earth, and the world breathed more freely for its destruction.

Take another illustration, through which many of us have lived. The bitter legacy of negro slavery that England gave to her giant son across the Atlantic, which blasted and sucked the strength out of that great republic, went down amidst universal execration. It took centuries for the corpse to be ready, but when the vultures came they made quick work of it.

And so, as I say, all over the world, and from the beginning of time, with delays according to the possibilities of restoration and recovery which the divine eye discerns, this law is working. Verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth. 'The wheels of God grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small.' 'Wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.'

And has the law exhausted its force? Are there going to be no more applications of it? Are there no European societies at this day that in their godlessness and social iniquities are hurrying fast to the condition of carrion? Look around us—drunkenness, sensual immorality, commercial dishonesty, senseless luxury amongst the rich, heartless indifference to the wail of the poor, godlessness over all classes and ranks of the community. Surely, surely, if the body politic be not dead, it is sick nigh unto death. And I, for my part, have little hesitation in saying that as far as one can see, European society is driving as fast as it can, with its godlessness and immorality, to such another 'day of the Lord' as these words of my text suggest. Let us see to it that we do our little part to be the 'salt of the earth' which shall keep it from rotting, and so drive away the vultures of judgment.

II. But let me turn to another point. We have here a law which is to have a far more tremendous accomplishment in the future.

There have been many comings of the Lord, many days of the Lord, when, as Isaiah says in his magnificent vision of one such, 'the loftiness of man has been bowed down, and the haughtiness of man made low, and the Lord alone exalted in that day when He arises to shake terribly the earth. And all these 'days of the Lord' are prophecies, and distinctly point to a future 'day' when the same principles which have been disclosed as working on a small scale in them, shall be manifested in full embodiment. These 'days of the Lord' proclaim 'the day of the Lord.' In the prophecies both of the Old and New Testaments that universal future judgment is seen glimmering through the descriptions of the nearer partial judgments. So interpreters are puzzled to say at what point in a prophecy the transition is made from the smaller to the greater. The prophecies are like the diagrams in treatises on perspective, in which diverging lines are drawn from the eye, enclosing a square or other figure, and which, as they recede further from the point of view, enclose a figure, the same in shape but of greater dimensions. There is a historical event foretold, the fall of Jerusalem. It is close up to the eyes of the disciples, and is comparatively small. Carry out the lines that touch its corners and define its shape, and upon the far distant curtain of the dim future there is thrown a like figure immensely larger, the coming of Jesus Christ to judge the world.

All these little premonitions and foretastes and anticipatory specimens point onwards to the assured termination of the world's history in that great and solemn day, when all men shall be gathered before Christ's throne, and He shall judge all nations—judge you and me amongst the rest. That future judgment is distinctly a part of the Christian revelation. Jesus Christ is to come in bodily form as He went away. All men are to be judged by Him. That judgment is to be the destruction of opposing forces, the sweeping away of the carrion of moral evil.

It is therefore distinctly a part of the message that is to be preached by us, under penalty of the awful condemnation pronounced on the watchman who seeth the sword coming and gives no warning. It is not becoming to make such a solemn message the opportunity for pictorial rhetoric, which vulgarises its greatness and weakens its power. But it is worse than an offence against taste; it is unfaithfulness to the preaching which God bids us, treason to our King, and cruelty to our hearers, to suppress the warning—'The day of the Lord cometh.' There are many temptations to put it in the background. Many of you do not want that kind of preaching. You want the gentle side of divine revelation. You say to us in fact, though not in words, 'Prophesy to us smooth things. Tell us about the infinite love which wraps all mankind in its embrace. Speak to us of the Father God, who "hateth nothing that He hath made."' Magnify the mercy and gentleness and tenderness of Christ. Do not say anything about that other side. It is not in accordance with the tendencies of modern thought.'

So much the worse, then, for the tendencies of modern thought. I yield to no man in the ardour of my belief that the centre of all revelation is the revelation of a God of infinite love, but I cannot forget that there is such a thing as 'the terror of the Lord,' and I dare not disguise my conviction that no preaching sounds every string in the manifold harp of God's truth, which does not strike that solemn note of warning of judgment to come.

Such suppression is unfaithfulness. Surely, if we preachers believe that tremendous truth, we are bound to speak. It is cruel kindness to be silent. If a traveller is about to plunge into some gloomy jungle infested by wild beasts, he is a friend who sits by the wayside to warn him of his danger. Surely you would not call a signalman unfeeling because he held out a red lamp when he knew that just round the curve beyond his cabin the rails were up, and that any train that reached the place would go over in horrid ruin. Surely that preaching is not justly charged with harshness which rings out the wholesome proclamation of a day of judgment, when we shall each give account of ourselves to the divine-human Judge.

Such suppression weakens the power of the Gospel, which is the proclamation of deliverance, not only from the power, but also from the future retribution of sin. In such a maimed gospel there is but an enfeebled meaning given to that idea of deliverance. And though the thing that breaks the heart and draws men to God is not terror, but love, the terror must often be evoked in order to lead to love. It is only 'judgment to come' which will make Felix tremble, and though his trembling may pass away, and he be none the nearer the kingdom,

there will never any good be done to him unless he does tremble. So, for all these reasons, all faithful preaching of Christ's Gospel must include the proclamation of Christ as Judge.

But, if I should be unfaithful, if I did not preach this truth, what shall we call you if you turn away from it? You would not think it a wise thing of the engine-driver to shut his eyes if the red lamp were shown, and to go along at full speed and to pay no heed to that? Do you think it would be right for a Christian minister to lock his lips and never say, 'There is a judgment to come'? And do you think it is wise of you not to think of that, and to shape your conduct accordingly?

Oh, dear friends! I do not doubt that the centre of all divine revelation is the love of God, nor do I doubt that incomparably the highest representation of the power of Christ's Gospel is that it draws men away from the love and the practice of evil, and makes them pure and holy. But that is not all. There is not only the practice and the power of sin to be fought against, but there is the penalty of sin to be taken into account; and as sure as you are living, and as sure as there is a God above us, so sure is it that there is a Day of Judgment, when 'He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He hath ordained.' The believing of that is not salvation, but the belief of that seems to me to be indispensable for any vigorous grasp of the delivering love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

III. And so the last thing that I have to say is that this is a law which need never touch you, nor you know anything about but by the hearing of the ear.

It is told us that we may escape it. When Paul reasoned of righteousness, and temperance, and judgment to come, his hearer trembled as he listened, but there was an end. But the true effect of this message is the effect that Paul himself attached to it when he said in the hearing of Athenian wisdom, 'God hath commanded all men everywhere to repent, because He hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness.' Judgment faithfully preached is the preparation for preaching that 'there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.' If we trust in that great Saviour, we shall be quickened from the death of sin, and so shall not be food for the vultures of judgment. Can these corpses live? Can this eating putrescence, which burrows its foul way through our souls, be sweetened? Is there any antiseptic for it? Yes, blessed be God, and the hand whose touch healed the leper will heal us, and 'our flesh will come again as the flesh of a little child.' Christ has bared His breast to the divine judgments against sin, and if by faith we shelter ourselves in Him, we shall never know the terrors of that awful day.

Be sure that judgment to come is no mere figure dressed up to frighten children, nor the product of blind superstition, but that it is the inevitable issue of the righteousness of the All-ruling God. You and I and all the sons of men have to face it. 'Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness before Him in the Day of Judgment.' Betake yourselves, as poor sinful creatures who know something of the corruption of your own hearts, to that dear Christ who has died on the Cross for you, and all that is obnoxious to

the divine judgments will, by His transforming life breathed into you, be taken out of your hearts; and when that 'day of the Lord' shall dawn, you, trusting in the sacrifice of Him who is your Judge, will 'have a song as when a holy solemnity is kept.' Take Christ for your Saviour, and then, when the vultures of judgment, with their mighty black pinions, are wheeling and circling in the sky, ready to pounce upon their prey, He will gather you 'as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings,' and beneath their shadow you will be safe.

WATCHING FOR THE KING

‘Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. 43. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. 44. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh. 45. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season! 46. Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. 47. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. 48. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; 49. And shall begin to smite his fellow- servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; 50. The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, 51. And shall out him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’—*MATT. xxiv. 42-51.*

The long day’s work was nearly done. Christ had left the temple, never to return. He took His way across the Mount of Olives to Bethany, and was stayed by the disciples’ question as to the date of the destruction of the temple, which He had foretold, and of the ‘end of the world,’ which they attached to it. They could not fancy the world lasting without the temple! We often make a like mistake. So there, on the hillside, looking across to the city lying in the sad, fading evening light, He spoke the prophecies of this chapter, which begin with the destruction of Jerusalem, and insensibly merge into the final coming of the Son of Man, of which that was a prelude and a type. The difficulty of accurately apportioning the details of this prophecy to the future events which fulfil them is common to it with all prophecy, of which it is a characteristic to blend events which, in the fulfilment, are far apart. From the mountain top, the eye travels over great stretches of country, but does not see the gorges, separating points which seem close together, foreshortened by distance.

There are many comings of the Son of Man before His final coming for final judgment, and the nearer and smaller ones are themselves prophecies. So, we do not need to settle the chronology of unfulfilled prophecy in order to get the full benefit of Christ’s teachings here. In its moral and spiritual effect on us, the uncertainty of the time of our going to Christ is nearly identical with the uncertainty of the time of His coming to us.

I. The command of watchfulness enforced by our ignorance of the time of His coming (*vs. 42-44*). The two commands at the beginning and end of the paragraph are not quite the same. ‘Be ye ready’ is the consequence of watchfulness. Nor are the two appended reasons the same; for the first command is grounded on His coming at a day when ‘ye know not,’ and the second on His coming ‘in an hour that ye think not,’ that is to say, it not only is uncertain, but unexpected and surprising. There may also be a difference worth noting in the different designations of Christ as ‘your Lord,’ standing in a special relation to you, and

as 'the Son of Man,' of kindred with all men, and their Judge. What is this 'watchfulness'? It is literally wakefulness. We are beset by perpetual temptations to sleep, to spiritual drowsiness and torpor. 'An opium sky rains down soporifics.' And without continual effort, our perception of the unseen realities and our alertness for service will be lulled to sleep. The religion of multitudes is a sleepy religion. Further, it is a vivid and ever-present conviction of His certain coming, and consequently a habitual realising of the transience of the existing order of things, and of the fast-approaching realities of the future. Further, it is the keeping of our minds in an attitude of expectation and desire, our eyes ever travelling to the dim distance to mark the far-off shining of His coming. What a miserable contrast to this is the temper of professing Christendom as a whole! It is swallowed up in the present, wide awake to interests and hopes belonging to this 'bank and shoal of time,' but sunk in slumber as to that great future, or, if ever the thought of it intrudes, shrinking, rather than desire, accompanies it, and it is soon hustled out of mind.

Christ bases His command on our ignorance of the time of His coming. It was no part of His purpose in this prophecy to remove that ignorance, and no calculations of the chronology of unfulfilled predictions have pierced the darkness. It was His purpose that from generation to generation His servants should be kept in the attitude of expectation, as of an event that may come at any time and must come at some time. The parallel uncertainty of the time of death, though not what is meant here, serves the same moral end if rightly used, and the fact of death is exposed to the same danger of being neglected because of the very uncertainty, which ought to be one chief reason for keeping it ever in view. Any future event, which combines these two things, absolute certainty that it will happen, and utter uncertainty when it will happen, ought to have power to insist on being remembered, at least, till it was prepared for, and would have it, if men were not such fools. Christ's coming would be oftener contemplated if it were more welcome. But what sort of a servant is he, who has no glow of gladness at the thought of meeting his lord? True Christians are 'all them that have loved His appearing.'

The illustrative example which separates these two commands is remarkable. The householder's ignorance of the time when the thief would come is the reason why he does not watch. He cannot keep awake all night, and every night, to be ready for him; so he has to go to sleep, and is robbed. But our ignorance is a reason for wakefulness, because we can keep awake all the night of life. The householder watches to prevent, but we to share in, that for which the watch is kept. The figure of the thief is chosen to illustrate the one point of the unexpected stealthy approach. But is there not deep truth in it, to the effect that Christ's coming is like that of a robber to those who are asleep, depriving them of earthly treasures? The word rendered 'broken up' means literally 'dug through,' and points to a clay or mud house, common in the East, which is entered, not by bursting open doors or windows, but by digging through the wall. Death comes to men sunk in spiritual slumber, to strip them

of good which they would fain keep, and makes his entrance by a breach in the earthly house of this tabernacle. So St. Paul, in his earliest Epistle, refers to this saying (a proof of the early diffusion of the gospel narrative), and says, 'Ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.'

II. The picture and reward of watchfulness. The general exhortation to watch is followed by a pair of contrasted parable portraits, primarily applicable to the apostles and to those 'set over His household.' But if we remember what Christ taught as the condition of pre-eminence in His kingdom, we shall not confine their application to an order.

'The least flower with a brimming cup may stand,
And share its dew-drop with another near,'

and the most slenderly endowed Christian has some crumb of the bread of life intrusted to him to dispense. It is to be observed that watchfulness is not mentioned in this portraiture of the faithful servant. It is presupposed as the basis and motive of his service. So we learn the double lesson that the attitude of continual outlook for the Lord is needed, if we are to discharge the tasks which He has set us, and that the true effect of watchfulness is to harness us to the car of duty. Many other motives actuate Christian faithfulness, but all are reinforced by this, and where it is feeble they are more or less inoperative. We cannot afford to lose its influence. A Church or a soul which has ceased to be looking for Him will have let all its tasks drop from its drowsy hands, and will feel the power of other constraining motives of Christian service but faintly, as in a half-dream.

On the other hand, true waiting for Him is best expressed in the quiet discharge of accustomed and appointed tasks. The right place for the servant to be found, when the Lord comes, is 'so doing' as He commands, however secular the task may be. That was a wise judge who, when sudden darkness came on, and people thought the end of the world was at hand, said, 'Bring lights, and let us go on with the case. We cannot be better employed, if the end has come, than in doing our duty.' Flighty impatience of common tasks is not watching for the King, as Paul had to teach the Thessalonians, who were 'shaken' in mind by the thought of the day of the Lord; but the proper attitude of the watchers is 'that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business.'

Observe, further, the interrogative form of the parable. The question is the sharp point which gives penetrating power, and suggests Christ's high estimate of the worth and difficulty of such conduct, and sets us to ask for ourselves, 'Lord, is it I?' The servant is 'faithful' inasmuch as he does his Lord's will, and rightly uses the goods intrusted to him, and 'wise' inasmuch as he is 'faithful.' For a single-hearted devotion to Christ is the parent of insight into duty, and the best guide to conduct; and whoever seeks only to be true to his Lord in the use of his gifts and possessions, will not lack prudence to guide him in giving to each

his food, and that in due season. The two characteristics are connected in another way also; for, if the outcome of faithfulness be taken into account, its wisdom is plain, and he who has been faithful even unto death will be seen to have been wise though he gave up all, when the crown of eternal life sparkles on his forehead. Such faithfulness and wisdom (which are at bottom but two names for one course of conduct) find their motive in that watchfulness, which works as ever in the great Taskmaster's eye, and as ever keeping in view His coming, and the rendering of account to Him.

The reward of the faithful servant is stated in language similar to that of the parable of the talents. Faithfulness in a narrower sphere leads to a wider. The reward for true work is more work, of nobler sort and on a grander scale. That is true for earth and for heaven. If we do His will here, we shall one day exchange the subordinate place of the steward for the authority of the ruler, and the toil of the servant for the 'joy of the Lord.' The soul that is joined to Christ and is one in will with Him has all things for its servants; and he who uses all things for his own and his brethren's highest good is lord of them all, while he walks amid the shadows of time, and will be lifted to loftier dominion over a grander world when he passes hence.

III. The picture and doom of the unwatchful servant. This portrait presupposes that a long period will elapse before Christ comes. The secret thought of the evil servant is the thought of a time far down the ages from the moment of our Lord's speaking. It would take centuries for such a temper to be developed in the Church. What is the temper? A secret dismissal of the anticipation of the Lord's return, and that not merely because He has been long in coming, but as thinking that He has broken His word, and has not come when He said that He would. This unspoken dimming over of the expectation and unconfessed doubt of the firmness of the promise, is the natural product of the long time of apparent delay which the Church has had to encounter. It will cloud and depress the religion of later ages, unless there be constant effort to resist the tendency and to keep awake. The first generations were all aflame with the glad hope 'Maranatha'—'The Lord is at hand.' Their successors gradually lost that keenness of expectation, and at most cried, 'Will not He come soon?' Their successors saw the starry hope through thickening mists of years; and now it scarcely shines for many, or at least is but a dim point, when it should blaze as a sun.

He was an 'evil' servant who said so in his heart. He was evil because he said it, and he said it because he was evil; for the yielding to sin and the withdrawal of love from Jesus dim the desire for His coming, and make the whisper that He delays, a hope; while, on the other hand, the hope that He delays helps to open the sluices, and let sin flood the life. So an outburst of cruel masterfulness and of riotous sensuality is the consequence of the dimmed expectation. There would have been no usurpation of authority over Christ's heritage by priest or pope, or any other, if that hope had not become faint. If professing Christians lived with the great white throne and the heavens and earth fleeing away before Him that sits on

it, ever burning before their inward eye, how could they wallow amid the mire of animal indulgence? The corruptions of the Church, especially of its official members, are traced with sad and prescient hand in these foreboding words, which are none the less a prophecy because cast by His forbearing gentleness into the milder form of a supposition.

The dreadful doom of the unwatchful servant is couched in terms of awful severity. The cruel punishment of sawing asunder, which, tradition says, was suffered by Isaiah and was not unfamiliar in old times, is his. What concealed terror of retribution it signifies we do not know. Perhaps it points to a fate in which a man shall be, as it were, parted into two, each at enmity with the other. Perhaps it implies a retribution in kind for his sin, which consisted, as the next clause implies, in hypocrisy, which is the sundering in twain of inward conviction and practice, and is to be avenged by a like but worse rending apart of conscience and will. At all events, it shadows a fearful retribution, which is not extinction, inasmuch as, in the next clause, we read that his portion—his lot, or that condition which belongs to him by virtue of his character—is with ‘the hypocrites.’ He was one of them, because, while he said ‘my lord,’ he had ceased to love and obey, having ceased to desire and expect; and therefore whatever is their fate shall be his, even to the ‘dividing asunder of soul and spirit,’ and setting eternal discord among the thoughts and intents of the heart. That is not the punishment of unwatchfulness, but of what unwatchfulness leads to, if unawakened. Let these words of the King ring an alarum for us all, and rouse our sleepy souls to watch, as becomes the children of the day.

THE WAITING MAIDENS

‘Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. 2. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. 3. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: 4. But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. 5. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. 6. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. 7. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. 8. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. 9. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. 10. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. 11 Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. 12. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. 13. Watch therefore; for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh.’—*MATT. xxv. 1-13.*

We shall best understand this beautiful but difficult parable if we look on to its close. Our Lord appends to it the refrain of all this context, the exhortation to watch, based upon our ignorance of the time of His coming. But as in the former little parable of the wise servant it was his faithful, wise dispensing of his lord’s goods, and not his watchfulness, which was the point of the eulogium passed on him, so here it is the readiness of the wise virgins to take their places in the wedding march which is commended. That readiness consists in their having their lamps burning and their oil in store. This, then, is the main thing in the parable. It is an exhibition, under another aspect, of what constitutes fitness for entrance into the festal chamber of the bridegroom, which had just been set forth as consisting in faithful stewardship. Here it is presented as being the possession of lamp and oil.

I. The first consideration, then, must be, What is the meaning of these emblems? A great deal of fine-spun ingenuity has been expended on subordinate points in the parable, such as the significance of the number of maidens, the conclusions from the equal division into wise and foolish, the place from which they came to meet the bridegroom, the point in the marriage procession where they are supposed to join it, whether it was at going to fetch the bride, or at coming back with her; whether the feast is held in her house, or in his, and so on. But all these are unimportant questions, and as Christ has left them in the background, we only destroy the perspective by dragging them into the front. In no parable is it more important than in this to restrain the temptation to run out analogies into their last results. The remembrance that the virgins, as the emblem of the whole body of the visible Church, are the same as the bride, who does not appear in the parable, might warn against such an error. They were ten, as being the usual number for such a company, or as being the round number naturally employed when definiteness was not sought. They were divided equally,

not because our Lord desired to tell, but because He wished to leave unnoticed, the numerical proportion of the two classes. One set are 'wise' and the other 'foolish,' because He wishes to show not only the sin, but the absurdity, of unreadiness, and to teach us that true wisdom is not of the head only, but far more of the heart. The conduct of the two groups of maidens is looked at from the prudent and common-sense standpoint, and the provident action of the one sets in relief the reckless stupidity of the other.

There have been many opinions as to the meaning of the lamps and the oil, which it is needless to repeat. Surely the analogy of scriptural symbolism is our best guide. If we follow it, we get a meaning which perfectly suits the emblems and the whole parable. In the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord uses the same figure of the lamp, and explains it: 'Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works.'

II. Note the sleep of all the virgins. No blame is hinted on account of it. It is not inconsistent with the wisdom of the wise, nor does it interfere with their readiness to meet the bridegroom. It is, then, such a sleep as is compatible with watching. Our Lord's introduction of this point is an example of His merciful allowance for our weakness. There must be a certain slackening of the tension of expectation when the bridegroom tarries. Centuries of delay cannot but modify the attitude of the waiting Church, and Jesus here implies that there will be a long stretch of time before His advent, during which all His people will feel the natural effect of the deferring of hope. But the sleep which He permits, unblamed, is light, and such as one takes by snatches when waiting to be called. He does not ask us always to be on tiptoe of expectation, nor to refuse the teaching of experience; but counts that we have watched aright, if we wake from our light slumbers when the cry is heard, and have our lamps lit, ready for the procession.

III. Then comes the midnight cry and the waking of the maidens. The hour, 'of night's black arch the keystone,' suggests the unexpectedness of His coming; the loudness of the cry, its all-awaking effect; the broken words of the true reading, 'Behold the bridegroom!' the closeness on the heels of the heralds with which the procession flashes through the darkness. The virgins had 'gone forth to meet him' at the beginning of the parable, but the going forth to which they are now summoned is not the same. The Christian soul goes forth once when, at the beginning of its Christian life, it forsakes the world to wait for and on Christ, and again, when it leaves the world to pass with Him into the banquet. Life is the slumber from which some are awaked by the voice of death, and some who 'remain' shall be awaked by the trumpet of judgment. There is no interval between the cry and the appearance of the bridegroom; only a moment to rouse themselves, to look to their lamps, and to speak the hurried words of the foolish and the answer of the wise, and then the procession is upon them. It is all done as in a flash, 'in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.' This impression of swiftness, which leaves no time for delayed preparation, is the uniform impression conveyed by all the Scripture references to the coming of the Lord. The swoop of the eagle,

the fierce blaze of lightning from one side of the sky to the other, the bursting of the flood, that morning's work at Sodom, not begun till dawn and finished before the 'sun was risen on the earth,' are its types. Foolish indeed to postpone preparation till that moment when cry and coming are simultaneous, like lightning and thunder right overhead!

The foolish virgins' imploring request and its answer are not to be pressed, as if they meant more than to set forth the hopelessness of then attempting to procure the wanting oil, and especially the hopelessness of attempting to get it from one's fellows. There is a world of suppressed terror and surprise in that cry, 'Our lamps are going out.' Note that they burned till the bridegroom came, and then, like the magic lamps in old legends, at his approach shivered into darkness. Is not that true of the formal, outward religion, which survives everything but contact with His all-seeing eye and perfect judgment? These foolish maidens were as much astonished as alarmed at seeing their lights flicker down to extinction; and it is possible for professing Christians to live a lifetime, and never to be found out either by themselves or by anybody else. But if there has been no oil in the lamp, it will be quenched when He appears. The atmosphere that surrounds His throne acts like oxygen on the oil-fed flame, and like carbonic acid gas on the other.

The answer of the wise is not selfishness. It is not from our fellows, however bright their lamps, that we can ever get that inward grace. None of them has more than suffices for his own needs, nor can any give it to another. It may be bought, on the same terms as the pearl of great price was bought, 'without money'; but the market is closed, as on a holiday, on the day of the king's son's marriage. That is not touched upon here, except in so far as it is hinted at in the absence of the foolish when he enters the banqueting chamber, and in their fruitless prayer. They had no time to get the oil before he came, and they had not got it when they returned. The lesson is plain. We can only get the new life of the Spirit, which will make our lives a light, from God; and we can get it now, not then.

IV. We see the wise virgins within and the foolish without. They are, indeed, no longer designated by these adjectives, but as 'ready' and 'the others'; for preparedness is fitness, and they who are found of Him in possession of the outward righteousness and of its inward source, His own divine life in them, are prepared. To such the gates of the festal chamber fly open. In that day, place is the outcome of character, and it is equally impossible for the 'ready' to be shut out, and for 'the others' to go in.

'When the bridegroom with his feastful friends passes to bliss at the mid hour of night,' they who have 'filled their odorous lamps with deeds of light' have surely 'gained their entrance.' There is silence as to the unspeakable joys of the wedding feast. Some faint sounds of music and dancing, some gleams from the lighted windows, find their way out; but the closed door keeps its secret, and only the guests know the gladness.

That closed door means security, perpetuity, untold blessedness, but it means exclusion too. The piteous reiterated call of the shut-out maidens, roused too late, and so suddenly,

from songs and laughter to vain cries, evokes a stern answer, through which shines the awful reality veiled in the parable. We do not need to regard the prayer for entrance, and its refusal, as conveying more than the fruitlessness of wishes for entrance then, when unaccompanied with fitness to enter. Such desire as is expressed in this passionate beating at the closed door, with hoarse entreaties, is not fitness. If it were, the door would open; and the reason why it does not lies in the bridegroom's awful answer, 'I know you not.' The absence of the qualification prevents his recognising them as his. Surely the unalleviated darkness of a hopeless exclusion settles down on these sad five, standing, huddled together, at the door, with the extinguished lamps hanging in their despairing hands. 'Too late, too late, ye cannot enter now.' The wedding bell has become a funeral knell. They were not the enemies of the bridegroom, they thought themselves his friends. They let life ebb without securing the one thing needful, and the neglect was irremediable. There is a tragedy underlying many a life of outward religiousness and inward emptiness, and a dreadful discovery will flare in upon such, when they have to say to themselves,

'This might have been once,
And we missed it, lost it for ever.'

DYING LAMPS

‘Our lamps are gone out.’—*MATT. xxv. 8.*

This is one of the many cases in which the Revised Version, by accuracy of rendering the tense of a verb, gives a much more striking as well as correct reproduction of the original than the Authorised Version does. The former reads ‘going out,’ instead of ‘gone out,’ a rendering which the Old Version has, unfortunately, relegated to the margin. It is clearly to be preferred, not only because it more correctly represents the Greek, but because it sets before us a more solemn and impressive picture of the precise time at which the terrible discovery was made by the foolish five. They woke from their sleep, and hastily trimmed their lamps. These burned brightly for a moment, and then began to flicker and die down. The extinction of their light was not the act of a moment, but was a gradual process, which had advanced in some degree before it attracted the attention of the bearers of the lamps. At last it roused the half-sleeping five into startled, wide-awake consciousness. There is a tone of alarm and fear in their sudden exclamation, ‘Our lamps are going out.’ They see now the catastrophe that threatens, and understand that the only means of averting it is to replenish the empty oil-vessels before the flame has quite expired. But their knowledge and their dread were alike too late, and, as they went on their hopeless search for some one to give them what they once might have had in abundance, the last faint flicker ceased, and they had to grope their way in the dark, with their lightless lamps hanging useless in their slack hands, while far off the torches of the bridal procession, in which they might have had a part, flashed through the night. We have nothing to do with the tragical issue of the process of extinction; but solemn lessons of universal application gather round the picture of that process, as represented in our text, and to these we turn now.

I. We must settle the meaning of the oil and the lamps.

The Old Testament symbolism is our best guide as to the significance of the oil. Throughout it, oil symbolises the divine influences that come down on men appointed by God to their several functions, and which are there traced to the Spirit of the Lord. So the priests were set apart by unction with the holy oil; so Samuel poured oil on the black locks of Saul. So, too, the very name Messiah means ‘anointed,’ and the great prophecy, which Jesus claimed for His own in His first sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth, put into the Messiah’s lips the declaration, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me.’ But there are Old Testament symbols which bear still more closely on the emblems of our text. Zechariah saw in vision a golden lamp-stand with seven lamps, and on either side of it an olive tree, from which oil flowed through golden pipes to feed the flame. The interpretation of the vision was given by the ‘angel that talked with’ the prophet as being, ‘not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord.’

So, then, we follow the plainly marked road and Scripture use of a symbol when we take the oil in this parable to be that which every listener to Jesus, who was instructed in the old things which he was bringing forth with new emphasis from the ancient treasure-house of the word of God, would take it to be—namely, the sum of the influences from Heaven which were bestowed through the Spirit of the Lord.

Such being the meaning of the oil, what was meant by the lamp? We have no intention of discussing here the many varying interpretations which have been given to the symbol. To do so would lead us too far afield. We can only say that the interpretation of the oil as the influence of the Holy Spirit necessarily involves the explanation of the lamp which is fed by it, as being the spiritual life of the individual, which is nourished and made visible to the world as light, by the continual communication from God of these hallowing influences. Turning again to the Old Testament, I need only remind you of the great seven-branched lamp which stood in the Tabernacle, and afterwards in the Temple. It was the symbol of the collective Israel, as recipient of divine influences, and thereby made the light of a dark world. Its rays streamed out over the desert first, and afterwards shone from the mountain of the Lord's house, beaming illumination and invitation to those who sat in darkness to behold the great light, and to walk in the light of the Lord. Zechariah's emblem was based on the Temple lamp. In accordance with the greater prominence given by the Old Testament to national than to individual religion, both of these represented the people as a whole. In accordance with the more advanced individualism of the New Testament, our text so far varies the application of the emblem, that each of the ten virgins who, as a whole, stand for the collective professing Church, has her own lamp. But that is the only difference between the Old and the New Testament uses of the symbol.

I need not remind you how the same metaphor recurs frequently in the teachings of our Lord and of the Apostles. Sometimes the Old Testament collective point of view is maintained, as in our Lord's saying in the Sermon on the Mount, 'Ye are the light of the world,' but more frequently, the characteristic individualising of the figure prevails, and we read of Christians shining 'as lights in the world,' and each holding forth, as a lamp does its light, 'the word of life.' Nor must we forget the climax of the uses of this emblem, in the vision of the Apocalypse, where John once more saw the Lord, on whose bosom his head had so often peacefully lain, 'walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.' There, again, the collective rather than the individual bearing of the figure is prominent, but with significant differences from the older use of it. In Judaism there was a formal, outward unity, represented by the one lamp with its manifold lights, all welded together on the golden stem; but the churches of Asia Minor were distinct organisations, and their oneness came, not from outward union of a mechanical kind, but from the presence in their midst of the Son of God.

The sum of all this course of thought is that the lamp is the Christian life of the individual sustained by the communication of the influences of God's Holy Spirit.

II. We note next the gradual dying out of the light. 'Our lamps are going out.'

All spiritual emotions and vitality, like every other kind of emotion and vitality, die unless nourished. Let no theological difficulties about 'the final perseverance of the saints,' or 'the indefeasibility of grace,' and the impossibility of slaying the divine life that has once been given to a man, come in the way of letting this parable have its full, solemn weight. These foolish virgins had oil and had light, the oil failed by their fault, and so the light went out, and they were startled, when they awoke from their slumber, to see how, instead of brilliant flame, there was smoking wick.

Dear brethren, let us take the lesson. There is nothing in our religious emotions which has any guarantee of perpetuity in it, except upon certain conditions. We may live, and our life may ebb. We may trust, and our trust may tremble into unbelief. We may obey, and our obedience may be broken by the mutinous risings of self-will. We may walk in the 'paths of righteousness,' and our feet may falter and turn aside. There is certainty of the dying out of all communicated life, unless the channel of communication with the life from which it was first kindled, be kept constantly clear. The lamp may be 'a burning and a shining light,' or, more accurately translating the phrase of our Lord, 'a light kindled and' (therefore) 'shining,' but it will be light 'for a season' only, unless it is fed from that from which it was first set alight; and that is from God Himself.

'Our lamps are going out,'—a slow process that! The flame does not all die into darkness in a minute. There are stages in its death. The white portion of the flame becomes smaller and the blue part extends; then the flame flickers, and finally shudders itself, as it were, off the wick; then nothing remains but a charred red line along the top; then that line breaks up into little points, and one after another these twinkle out, and then all is black, and the lamp is gone out. And so, slowly, like the ebbing away of the tide, like the reluctant, long-protracted dying of summer days, like the dropping of the blood from some fatal wound, by degrees the process of extinction creeps, creeps, creeps on, and the lamp that was going is finally gone out.

III. Again, we note that extinction is brought about simply by doing nothing.

These five foolish virgins did not stray away into any forbidden paths. No positive sin is alleged against them. They were simply asleep. The other five were asleep too. I do not need to enter, here and now, into the whole interpretation of the parable, or there might be much to say about the difference between these two kinds of sleep. But what I wish to notice is that it was nothing except negligence darkening into drowsiness, which caused the dying out of the light.

It was not of set purpose that the foolish five took no oil with them. They merely neglected to do so, not having the wit to look ahead and provide against the contingency of a

long time of waiting for the bridegroom. Their negligence was the result, not of deliberate wish to let their lights go out, but of their heedlessness; and because of that negligence they earned the name of 'foolish.' If we do not look forward, and prepare for possible drains on our powers, we shall deserve the same adjective. If we do not lay in stores for future use, we may be sent to school to the harvesting ant and the bee. That lesson applies to all departments of life; but it is eminently applicable to the spiritual life, which is sustained only by communications from the Spirit of God. For these communications will be imperceptibly lessened, and may be altogether intercepted, unless diligent attention is given to keep open the channels by which they enter the spirit. If the pipes are not looked to, they will be choked by masses of matted trifles, through which the 'rivers of living water,' which Christ took as a symbol of the Spirit's influences, cannot force a way.

The thing that makes shipwreck of the faith of most professing Christians that do come to grief is no positive wickedness, no conduct which would be branded as sin by the Christian conscience or even by ordinary people, but simply torpor. If the water in a pond is never stirred, it is sure to stagnate, and green scum to spread over it, and a foul smell to rise from it. A Christian man has only to do what I am afraid a good many of us are in great danger of doing—that is, nothing—in order to ensure that his lamp shall go out.

Do you try to keep yours alight? There is only one way to do it—that is to go to Christ and get Him to pour His sweetness and His power into our open hearts. When one of the old patriarchs had committed a great sin, and had unbelievably twitched his hand out of God's hand, and gone away down into Egypt to help himself instead of trusting to God, he was commanded, on his return to Palestine, to go to the place where he dwelt at the first, and begin again, at the point where he began when he first entered the land. Which being translated is just this—the only way to keep our spirits vital and quick is by having recourse, again and again, to the same power which first imparted life to them, and this is done by the first means, the means of simple reliance upon Christ in the consciousness of our own deep need, and of believingly waiting upon Him for the repeated communication of the gifts which we, alas! have so often misimproved. Negligence is enough to slay. Doing nothing is the sure way to quench the Holy Spirit.

And, on the other hand, keeping close to Him is the sure way to secure that He will never leave us. You can choke a lamp with oil, but you cannot have in your hearts too much of that divine grace. And you receive all that you need if you choose to go and ask it from Him. Remember the old story about Elisha and the poor woman. The cruse of oil began to run. She brought all the vessels that she could rake together, big and little, pots and cups, of all shapes and sizes, and set them, one after the other, under the jet of oil. They were all filled; and when she brought no more vessels the oil stayed. If you do not take your empty hearts to God, and say, 'Here, Lord, fill this cup too; poor as it is, fill it with Thine own gracious influences,' be very sure that no such influences will come to you. But if you do go,

be as sure of this, that so long as you hold out your emptiness to Him, He will flood it with His fulness, and the light that seemed to be sputtering to its death will flame up again. He will not quench the smoking wick, if only we carry it to Him; but as the priests in the Temple walked all through the night to trim the golden lamps, so He who walks amidst the seven candlesticks will see to each.

IV. And now one last word. That process of gradual extinction may be going on, and may have been going on for a long while, and the virgin that carries the lamp be quite unaware of it.

How could a sleeping woman know whether her lamp was burning or not? How can a drowsy Christian tell whether his spiritual life is bright or not? To be unconscious of our approximation to this condition is, I am afraid, one of the surest signs that we are in it. I suppose that a paralysed limb is quite comfortable. At any rate, paralysis of the spirit may be going on without our knowing anything about it. So, dear friends, do not put these poor words of mine away from you and say, 'Oh! they do not apply to me.'

I am quite sure that the people to whom they do apply will be the last people to take them to themselves. And while I quite believe, thank God! that there are many of us who may feel and know that our lamps are not going out, sure I am that there are some of us whom everybody but themselves knows to be carrying a lamp that is so far gone out that it is smoking and stinking in the eyes and noses of the people that stand by. Be sure that nobody was more surprised than were the five foolish women when they opened their witless, sleepy eyes, and saw the state of things. So, dear friends, 'let your loins be girt about, and your lamps burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord.'

'THEY THAT WERE READY'

'They that were ready went in with him to the marriage.' —[MATT. xxv. 10.](#)

It is interesting to notice the variety of aspects in which, in this long discourse, Jesus sets forth His Second Coming. It is like the flood that swept away a world. It is like a thief stealing through the dark, and breaking up a house. It is like a master reckoning with his servants. These three metaphors suggest solemn, one might almost say alarming, images. But then this parable comes in and tells how that coming is like that of a bridegroom to the bride's house, with joy and music. I am afraid that the average Christian, when he thinks at all of Christ's coming, takes these three first aspects rather than the last one, and so loses what is meant to be a bright hope and a great stimulus. It is not in human nature to think much about a terrible future. It is not in human nature to avoid thinking a great deal about a blessed future. And although one does not wish to preach carelessness, or the ignoring of the solemn side of that coming, sure I am that our Christian lives would be stronger and purer, brighter and better able to front the solemn side, if the blessed side of it were more often the object of our contemplation.

Turning to the words of my text, which seem to me to be the very centre and heart of this parable, I ask:—

I. What makes readiness?

There have been many answers given to that question. One has been that to be ready means to be perpetually having before us the thought of the coming of the Lord, and that has been taken to be the meaning of the watchfulness which is enjoined in the context. But the parable itself points in an altogether different direction. Who, according to it, were ready? The five who had lamps and oil. To have these was readiness.

It is beautiful to notice how these five who were ready when the Master came had 'slumbered and slept' like the other five. Ah! that touch in the picture shows that 'He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust.' It is not in human nature to keep up permanently a tension of expectation for a far-off good; and in profound knowledge of the weakness of humanity, our Lord, in this parable, says: 'While the Bridegroom tarried they all slumbered'—and yet the five were ready when the Bridegroom came. In like manner, Christian men and women who have no expectation at all that the Second Coming of the Lord will occur during their lifetimes, may nevertheless be ready, if they have the burning lamps and the store of oil. The question then comes to be, What is meant by these?

Perhaps harm has been done by insisting upon too minute and specific interpretation. But, at the same time, we must not forget that, from the very beginning of the Jewish Revelation, from the time when the seven-branched candlestick was appointed for the Tabernacle, right down to the day when the Apocalyptic Seer saw in Patmos the Son of Man walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, the metaphor has had one meaning. The aggregate

of God's people are intended to be, as Jesus told us immediately after He had drawn the character of a true disciple, in the wonderful outlines of the Beatitudes, 'the light of the world,' and they will be so in the measure in which the gentle radiance of that character shines through their lives, as the light of a lamp through frosted glass. But the aggregate is made up of units, and individual Christians are to shine 'as lights in the world,' and their separate brightnesses are to coalesce in the clustered light of the whole Church. What makes an individual Christian a light is a Christ-like life, derived from that Life which was 'the Light of men.' The lamp which the five wise virgins bear is the same as the light which the consistent Christian is. The inner self illuminated from Christ, the source of all our illumination, lights up the outward life, which each of us may be conceived as carrying in our hands. It is not ourselves, and yet it is ourselves made visible. It is not ourselves, but Christ in us; and so we shine as lights in the world, only by 'holding forth the word of life.'

That modification of the figure by Paul is profoundly true and important, for after all we are not so much lights as candelabra, and only as we bear aloft the flashing light of Christ shall we shine 'in a naughty world.' Our lamps, then, are Christ-like characters derived from Christ, and to have and bear these is the first element in being ready for the Bridegroom.

Dear friends, remember that this whole parable is spoken to professing Christians and real members of Christ's Church; and that there is no meaning in it unless it is possible to quench the light of the lamp. Remember that our Lord said once, 'Let your loins be girt,' and put that as the necessary condition of lamps burning. 'Let your loins be girt' with resolved effort of faith and dependence, and make sure that you have the provision for the continuance of the light. So, and only so, shall any man be of the happy company of them that were ready.

II. Note that this readiness is the condition of entrance.

'They that were ready went in with Him to the marriage.' Now faith alone unites a man to Jesus Christ, and makes him an heir of salvation. But faith alone, if that were possible, would not admit a man to the marriage-feast. Of course the supposed case is an impossible case, for as James has taught us in his plain moral way, faith which is alone dies, or perhaps never lived. But what our Lord tells us here is that moral character, which is of such a sort as to shine in the world's darkness, is the condition of entrance. People say that salvation is by faith. Yes, that is true; but salvation is by works also, only that the works are made possible through faith. In the very necessity and nature of things nothing but the readiness which consists in continued Christ-like character will ever allow a man to pass the threshold. Now do you believe that? Or are you saying, 'I trust to Jesus Christ, and so I am sure I shall go to Heaven.' No, you will not, unless your faith is making you heavenly, in your temper and conduct. For to talk about the next world as a place of retribution is but an imperfect statement of the case. It is not a place of retribution so much as of outcome, and the apostle gives a completer view when he says, 'Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.' That future life is not the reward of goodness so much as the necessary consequence of holiness.

Holiness and blessedness are, in some measure, separated here; there they are two names for the one condition. 'No man shall see the Lord,' without that holiness. 'They that were ready went in.' Of course they did. Am I ready? That question means, Am I, by my faith in Jesus Christ, receiving into my heart the anointing which that great anointed One gives us? Am I living a life that is a light in the world? If so, and not else, my entrance is sure.

We have seen what this readiness consists in, and how it is the condition of entrance. There is one last thought—

III. To delay preparation is madness.

There is nothing in all Christ's parables more tragical, more pathetic, than this picture of the hapless five when they woke up to find their lamps going out. They heard the procession coming, the sound of feet drawing nearer, and the music borne every moment more loudly on the midnight air. And there were they, with dying lamps and empty oil-cans. Their shock, their alarm, their bewilderment, are all expressed in that preposterous request of theirs, Give us of your oil.'

The answer of the wise virgins has been said to be cold and unfeeling. It is not that; it is simply a plain statement of facts. The oil that belongs to me cannot be given to you. That is the first lesson taught us by the request of the foolish and the answer of the wise. 'If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself; and if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.' 'Every man shall bear his own burden.' There is no possible transference of moral character or spiritual gifts in that fashion. The awful individuality of each soul, and its unshareable personal responsibility, come solemnly to view in the words which superficial readers pass by: 'Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you.' You cannot share your brother's oil. You may share many of his possessions; not this.

'Go to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.' The question of whether there was time to buy was not for the five wise to answer. There was not much chance that the would-be buyers would find a shop open and anybody waiting to sell them oil at twelve o'clock at night. But they risked it; and when they came back they were too late.

Now, dear friends, all the lessons of this parable may be taken by us, though we do not believe, and think we have good reason for not believing, that the literal return of Jesus Christ is to take place in our time. It does not matter very much, in so far as the teaching of this parable is concerned, whether the Bridegroom comes to us, or whether we go to the Bridegroom. I do not for a moment say that there is no such thing as coming to Jesus Christ in the last hours of life, and becoming ready to enter even then, but I do say that it is a very rare case, and that there is a terrible risk in delaying till then. But I pray you to remember that our parable is addressed to, and contemplates the case of, not people who are away from Jesus Christ, but Christians, and that it is to them that its message is chiefly brought. It is they whom it warns not to put off making sure that they have provision for the continuance of the Christ-life. We have, day by day, to go to Him that sells and 'buy for ourselves.'

And we know, what it did not fall within our Lord's purpose to say in this parable, that the price of the oil is the surrender of ourselves, and the opening of our hearts to the entrance of that divine Spirit. Then there will be no fear but that the lamp will hold out to burn, and no fear but that 'when the Bridegroom, with His feastful friends, passes to bliss, at the mid-hour of night,' we shall gain our entrance.

TRADERS FOR THE MASTER

‘For the kingdom of heaven la as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. 15. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. 16. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. 17. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. 18. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord’s money. 19. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. 20. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. 21. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. 22. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. 23. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. 24. Then to which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: 25. And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. 26. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: 27. Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. 28. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. 29. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. 30. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’
—[MATT. xxv. 14-30.](#)

The parable of the Ten Virgins said nothing about their working whilst they waited. This one sets forth that side of the duties of the servants in their master’s absence, and so completes the former. It is clearly in its true historical connection here, and is closely knit to both the preceding and following context. It is a strange instance of superficial reading that it should ever have been supposed to be but another version of Luke’s parable of the pounds. The very resemblances of the two are meant to give force to their differences, which are fundamental. They are the converse of each other. That of the pounds teaches that men who have the same gifts intrusted to them may make a widely different use of these, and will be rewarded differently, in strictly graduated proportion to their unlike diligence. The lesson of the parable before us, on the other hand, is that men with dissimilar gifts may

employ them with equal diligence; and that, if they do, their reward shall be the same, however great the endowments of one, and slender those of another. A reader who has missed that distinction must be very shortsighted, or sworn to make out a case against the Gospels.

I. We may consider the lent capital and the business done with it.

Masters nowadays do not give servants their money to trade with, when they leave home; but the incident is true to the old-world relations of master and slave. Our Lord's consciousness of His near departure, which throbs in all this context, comes out emphatically here. He is preparing His disciples for the time when they will have to work without Him, like the managers of some branch house of business whose principal has gone abroad. What are the 'talents' with which He will start them on their own account? We have taken the word into common language, however little we remember the teaching of the parable as to the hand that gives 'men of talent' their endowments. But the natural powers usually called by the name are not what Christ means here, though the principles of the parable may be extended to include them. For these powers are the 'ability' according to which the talents are given. But the talents themselves are the spiritual knowledge and endowments which are properly the gifts of the ascended Lord to His Church. Two important lessons as to these are conveyed. First, that they are distributed in varying measure, and that not arbitrarily, by the mere will of the giver, but according to his discernment of what each servant can profitably administer. The 'ability' which settles their amount is not more closely defined. It may include natural faculty, for Christ's gifts usually follow the line of that; and the larger the nature, the more of Him it can contain. But it also includes spiritual receptiveness and faithfulness, which increase the absorbing power. The capacity to receive will also be the capacity to administer, and it will be fully filled.

The second lesson taught is that spiritual gifts are given for trading with. In other words, they are here considered not so much as blessings to the possessor as his stock-in-trade, which he can employ for the Master's enrichment. We are all tempted to think of them mostly as given us for our own blessing and joy; and the reminder is never unseasonable that a Christian receives nothing for himself alone. God hath shined into our hearts, that we may give to others the light of the knowledge which has flashed glad day into our darkness. The Master intrusts us with a portion of His wealth, not for expending on ourselves, but for trading with.

A third principle here is that the right use of His gifts increases them in our hands. 'Money makes money.' The five talents grow to ten, the two to four. The surest way to increase our possession of Christ's grace is to try to impart it. There is no better way of strengthening our own faith than to seek to make others share in it. Christian convictions, spoken, are confirmed, but muffled in silence are weakened. 'There is that scattereth and yet increaseth.' Seed heaped and locked up in a granary breeds weevils and moths; flung

broadcast over the furrows, it multiplies into seed that can be sown again, and bread that feeds the sower. So we have in this part of the parable almost the complete summary of the principles on which, the purposes for which, and the results to faithful use with which, Christ gives His gifts.

The conduct of the slenderly endowed servant who hides his talent will be considered farther on.

II. We note the faithful servants' balance-sheet and reward.

Our Lord again sounds the note of delay—'After a long time'—an indefinite phrase which we know carries centuries in its folds, how many more we know not nor are intended to know. The two faithful servants present their balance-sheet in identical words, and receive the same commendation and reward. Their speech is in sharp contrast with the idle one's excuse, inasmuch as it puts a glad acknowledgment of the lord's giving in the forefront, as if to teach that the thankful recognition of his liberality underlies all joyful and successful service, and deepens while it makes glad the sense of responsibility. The cords of love are silken; and he who begins with setting before himself the largeness of Christ's gifts to him, will not fail in using these so as to increase them. In the light of that day, the servant sees more clearly than when he was at work the results of his work. We do not know what the year's profits have been till stock-taking and balancing-time comes. Here we often say, 'I have laboured in vain.' There we shall say, 'I have gained five talents.'

The verbatim repetition of the same words to both servants teaches the great lesson of this parable as contrasted with that of the pounds, that where there has been the same faithful work, with different amounts of capital, there will be the same reward. Our Master does not care about quantity, but about quality and motive. The slave with a few shillings, enough to stock meagrely a little stall, may show as much business capacity, diligence, and fidelity, as if he had millions to work with. Christ rewards not actions, but the graces which are made visible in actions; and these can be as well seen in the tiniest as in the largest deeds. The light that streams through a pin-prick is the same that pours through the widest window. The crystals of a salt present the same facets, flashing back the sun at the same angles, whether they be large or microscopically small. Therefore the judgment of Christ, which is simply the utterance of fact, takes no heed of the extent but only of the kind of service, and puts on the same level of recompense all who, with however widely varying powers, were one in spirit, in diligence, and devotion. The eulogium on the servants is not 'successful' or 'brilliant,' but 'faithful,' and both alike get it.

The words of the lord fall into three parts. First comes his generous and hearty praise,—the brief and emphatic monosyllable 'Well,' and the characterisation of the servants as 'good and faithful.' Praise from Christ's lips is praise indeed; and here He pours it out in no grudging or scanty measure, but with warmth and evident delight. His heart glows with pleasure, and His commendation is musical with the utterance of His own joy in His servants.

He 'rejoices over them with singing'; and more gladly than a fond mother speaks honeyed words of approval to her darling, of whose goodness she is proud, does He praise these two. When we are tempted to disparage our slender powers as compared with those of His more conspicuous servants, and to suppose that all which we do is nought, let us think of this merciful and loving estimate of our poor service. For such words from such lips, life itself were wisely flung away; but such words from such lips will be spoken in recognition of many a piece of service less high and heroic than a martyr's. 'Good and faithful' refers not to the more general notion of goodness, but to the special excellence of a servant, and the latter word seems to define the former. Fidelity is the grace which He praises,—manifested in the recognition that the capital was a loan, given to be traded with for Him, and to be brought back increased to Him. He is faithful who ever keeps in view, and acts on, the conditions on which, and the purposes for which, he has received his spiritual wealth; and 'he who is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much.'

The second part of the lord's words is the appointment to higher office, as the reward of faithfulness. Here on earth, the tools come, in the long run, to the hands that can use them, and the best reward of faithfulness in a narrower sphere is to be lifted to a wider. Promotion means more to do; and if the world were rightly organised, the road to advancement would be diligence; and the higher a man climbed, the wider would be the horizon of his labour. It is so in Christ's kingdom, and should be so in His visible Church. It will be so in heaven. Clearly this saying implies the active theory of the future life, and the continuance in some ministry of love, unknown to us, of the energies which were trained in the small transactions of earth. 'If five talents are "a few things," how great the "many things" will be!' In the parable of the pounds, the servant is made a ruler; here being 'set over' seems rather still to point to the place of a steward or servant. The sphere is enlarged, but the office is unaltered. The manager who conducted a small trade rightly will be advanced to the superintendence of a larger business.

'We doubt not that for one so true
There must be other, nobler work to do,'

and that in that work the same law will continue to operate, and faithfulness be crowned with ever-growing capacities and tasks through a dateless eternity.

The last words of the lord pass beyond our poor attempts at commenting. No eye can look undazzled at the sun. When Christ was near the Cross, He left His disciples a strange bequest at such a moment,—His joy; and that is their brightest portion here, even though it be shaded with many sorrows. The enthroned Christ welcomes all who have known 'the fellowship of His sufferings' into the fulness of His heavenly joy, unshaded, unbroken, unspeakable; and they pass into it as into an encompassing atmosphere, or some broad land

of peace and abundance. Sympathy with His purposes leads to such oneness with Him that His joy is ours, both in its occasions and in its rapture. 'Thou makest them drink of the river of Thy pleasures,' and the lord and the servant drink from the same cup.

III. The excuse and punishment of the indolent servant.

His excuse is his reason. He did think hardly of his lord, and, even though he had His gift in his hand to confute him, he slandered Him in his heart as harsh and exacting. To many men the requirements of religion are more prominent than its gifts, and God is thought of as demanding rather than as 'the giving God.' Such thoughts paralyse action. Fear is barren, love is fruitful. Nothing grows on the mountain of curses, which frowns black over against the sunny slopes of the mountain of blessing with its blushing grapes. The indolence was illogical, for, if the master was such as was thought, the more reason for diligence; but fear is a bad reasoner, and the absurd gap between the premises and the conclusion is matched by one of the very same width in every life that thinks of God as rigidly requiring obedience, which, therefore, it does not give! Still another error is in the indolent servant's words. He flings down the hoarded talent with 'Lo, thou hast thine own.' He was mistaken. Talents hid are not, when dug up, as heavy as they were when buried. This gold does rust, and a life not devoted to God is never carried back to Him unspoiled.

The lord's answer again falls into three parts, corresponding to that to the faithful servants. First comes the stern characterisation of the man. As with the others' goodness, his badness is defined by the second epithet. It is slothfulness. Is that all? Yes; it does not need active opposition to pull down destruction on one's head. Simple indolence is enough, the negative sin of not doing or being what we ought. Ungirt loins, unlit lamps, unused talents, sink a man like lead. Doing nothing is enough for ruin.

The remarkable answer to the servant's charge seems to teach us that timid souls, conscious of slender endowments, and pressed by the heavy sense of responsibility, and shrinking from Christian enterprises, for fear of incurring heavier condemnation, may yet find means of using their little capital. The bankers, who invest the collective contributions of small capitalists to advantage, may, or may not, be intended to be translated into the Church; but, at any rate, the principle of united service is here recommended to those who feel too weak for independent action. Slim houses in a row hold each other up; and, if we cannot strike out a path for ourselves, let us seek strength and safety in numbers.

The fate of the indolent servant has a double horror. It is loss and suffering. The talent is taken from the slack hands and coward heart that would not use it, and given to the man who had shown he could and would. Gifts unemployed for Christ are stripped off a soul yonder. How much will go from many a richly endowed spirit, which here flashed with unconsecrated genius and force! We do not need to wait for eternity to see that true possession, which is use, increases powers, and that disuse, which is equivalent to not possessing, robs of them. The blacksmith's arm, the scout's eye, the craftsman's delicate finger, the

student's intellect, the sensualist's passions, all illustrate the law on its one side; and the dying out of faculties and tastes, and even of intuitions and conscience, by reason of simple disuse, are melancholy instances of it on the other. But the solemn words of this condemnation seem to point to a far more awful energy in its working in the future, when everything that has not been consecrated by employment for Jesus shall be taken away, and the soul, stripped of its garb, shall 'be found naked.' How far that process of divesting may affect faculties, without touching the life, who can tell? Enough to see with awe that a spirit may be cut, as it were, to the quick, and still exist.

But loss is not all the indolent servant's doom. Once more, like the slow toll of a funeral bell, we hear the dread sentence of ejection to the 'mirk midnight' without, where are tears undried and passion unavailing. There is something very awful in the monotonous repetition of that sentence so often in these last discourses of Christ's. The most loving lips that ever spoke, in love, shaped this form of words, so heart-touching in its wailing, but decisive, proclamation of blackness, homelessness, and sorrow, and cannot but toll them over and over again into our ears, in sad knowledge of our forgetfulness and unbelief,—if perchance we may listen and be warned, and, having heard the sound thereof, may never know the reality of that death in life which is the sure end of the indolent who were blind to His gifts, and therefore would not listen to His requirements.

WHY THE TALENT WAS BURIED

‘Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: 25. And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth.’—[MATT. xxv. 24, 25.](#)

That was a strangely insolent excuse for indolence. To charge an angry master to his face with grasping greed and injustice was certainly not the way to conciliate him. Such language is quite unnatural and incongruous until we remember the reality which the parable was meant to shadow—viz., the answers for their deeds which men will give at Christ’s judgment bar. Then we can understand how, by some irresistible necessity, this man was compelled, even at the risk of increasing the indignation of the master, to turn himself inside out, and to put into harsh, ugly words the half-conscious thoughts which had guided his life and caused his unfaithfulness. ‘Every one of us shall give account of himself to God.’ The unabashed impudence of such an excuse for idleness as this is but putting into vivid and impressive form this truth, that then a man’s actions in their true character, and the ugly motives that underlie them, and which he did not always honestly confess to himself, will be clear before him. It will be as much of a surprise to the men themselves, in many cases, as it could be to listeners. Thus it becomes us to look well to the under side of our lives, the unspoken convictions and the unformulated motives which work all the more mightily upon us because, for the most part, they work in the dark. This is Christ’s explanation of one very operative and fruitful cause of the refusal to serve Him.

I. I ask you, then, to consider, first, the slander here and the truth that contradicts it.

‘I knew thee that thou art an hard man,’ says he, ‘reaping where they hast not sown’ (and he was standing with the unused talent in his hand all the while), ‘and gathering where thou hast not strawed.’ That is to say, deep down in many a heart that has never said as much to itself, there lies this black drop of gall—a conception of the divine character rather as demanding than as giving, a thought of Him as exacting. What He requires is more considered than what He bestows. So religion is thought to be mainly a matter of doing certain things and rendering up certain sacrifices, instead of being regarded, as it really is, as mainly a matter of receiving from God. Christ’s authority makes me bold to say that this error underlies the lives of an immense number of nominal Christians, of people who think themselves very good and religious, as well as the lives of thousands who stand apart from religion altogether. And I want, not to drag down any curtain by my own hand, but to ask you to lift away the veil which hides the ugly thing in your hearts, and to put your own consciousness to the bar of your own conscience, and say whether it is not true that the uppermost thought about God, when you think about Him at all, is, ‘Thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown.’

It is not difficult to understand why such a thought of God should rise in a heart which has no delight in Him nor in His service. There is a side of the truth as to God's relations to man which gives a colour of plausibility to the slander. Grave and stringent requirements are made by the divine law upon each of us; and our consciences tell us that they have not been kept. Therefore we seek to persuade ourselves that they are too severe. Then, further, we are, by reason of our own selfishness, almost incapable of rising to the conception of God's pure, perfect, disinterested love; and we are far too blind to the benefits that He pours upon us all every day of our lives. And so from all these reasons taken together, and some more besides, it comes about that, for some of us, the blessed sun in the heavens, the God of all mercy and love, has been darkened into a lurid orb shorn of all its beneficent beams, and hangs threatening there in our misty sky. 'I knew Thee that Thou art an hard man.' Ah! I am sure that if we would go down into the deep places of our own hearts, and ask ourselves what our real thought of God is, many of us would acknowledge that it is something like that.

Now turn to the other side. What is the truth that smites this slander to death? That God is perfect, pure, unmingled, infinite love. And what is love? The infinite desire to impart itself. His 'nature and property' is to be merciful, and you can no more stop God from giving than you can shut up the rays of the sun within itself. To be and to bestow are for Him one and the same thing. His love is an infinite longing to give, which passes over into perpetual acts of beneficence. He never reaps where He has not sown. Is there any place where He has not sown? Is there any heart on which there have been no seeds of goodness scattered from His rich hand? The calumniator in the text was speaking his slanders with that in his hand which should have stopped his mouth. He who complained that the hard master was asking for fruit of what He had not given would have had nothing at all, if he had not obtained the one talent from His hand. And there is no place in the whole wide universe of God where His love has not scattered its beneficent gifts. There are no fallow fields out of cultivation and unsown, in His great farm. He never asks where He has not given.

He never asks until after He has given. He begins with bestowing, and it is only after the vineyard has been planted on the very fruitful hill, and the hedge built round about it, and the winepress digged, and the tower erected, and miracles of long-suffering mercy and skilful patience have been lavished upon it, that then He looks that it should bring forth grapes. God's gifts precede His requirements. He ever sows before He reaps. More than that, He gives what He asks, helping us to render to Him the hearts that He desires. He, by His own merciful communications, makes it possible that we should lay at His feet the tribute of loving thanks. Just as a parent will give a child some money in order that the child may go and buy the giver a birthday present, so God gives to us hearts, and enriches them with many bestowments. He scatters round about us good from His hand, like drops of a fragrant perfume from a blazing torch, in order that we may catch them up and have some portion

of the joy which is especially His own—the joy of giving. It would be a poor affair if our sole relation to God were that of receiving. It would be a tyrannous affair if our sole relation to God were that of rendering up. But both relations are united, and if it be ‘more blessed to give than to receive,’ the Giver of all good does not leave us without the opportunity of entering in even to that superlative blessing. We have to come to Him and say, when we lay the gifts, either of our faculties or of our trust, of our riches or of our virtues, at His feet, ‘All things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee.’

He asks for our sakes, and not for His own. ‘If I were hungry I would not tell thee, for the cattle upon a thousand hills are Mine. Offer unto God praise, and pay thy vows unto the Most High.’ It is blessed to us to render. He is none the richer for all our giving, as He is none the poorer for all His. Yet His giving to us is real, and our giving is real and a joy to Him. That is the truth lifted up against the slander of the natural heart. God is love, pure giving, unlimited and perpetual disposition to bestow. He gives all things before He asks for anything, and when He asks for anything it is that we may be blessed.

But you say, ‘That is all very well—where do you learn all that about God?’ My answer is a very simple one. I learn it, and I believe there is no other place to learn it, at the Cross of Jesus Christ. If that be the very apex of the divine love and self-revelation; if, looking upon it, we understand God better than by any other means, then there can be no question but that instead of gathering where He has not strawed, and reaping where He has not sown, God is only, and always, and utterly, and to every man, infinite love that bestows itself. My heart says to me many a time, ‘God’s laws are hard, God’s judgment is strict. God requires what you cannot give. Crouch before Him, and be afraid.’ And my faith says, ‘Get thee behind me, Satan!’ ‘He that spared not His own Son, . . . how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?’ The Cross of Christ is the answer to the slander, and the revelation of the giving God.

II. Secondly, mark here the fear that dogs such a thought, and the love that casts out the fear.

‘I was afraid.’ Yes, of course. If a man is not a fool, his emotions follow his thoughts, and his thoughts ought to shape his emotions. And wherever there is the twilight of uncertainty upon the great lesson that the Cross of Jesus Christ has taught us, there there will be, however masked and however modified by other thoughts, deep in the human heart, a perhaps unspoken, but not therefore ineffectual, dread of God. Just as the misconception of the divine character does influence many a life in which it has never been spoken articulately, and needs some steady observation of ourselves to be detected, so is it with this dread of Him. Carry the task of self-examination a little further, and ask yourselves whether there does not lie coiled in many of your hearts this dread of God, like a sleeping snake which only needs a little warmth to be awakened to sting. There are all the signs of it. There are many of you who have a distinct indisposition to be brought close up to the thought of Him.

There are many of you who have a distinct sense of discomfort when you are pressed against the realities of the Christian religion. There are many of you who, though you cover it over with a shallow confidence, or endeavour to persuade yourselves into speculative doubts about the divine nature, or hide it from yourselves by indifference, yet know that all that is very thin ice, and that there is a great black pool down below—a dread at the heart, of a righteous Judge somewhere, with whom you have somewhat to do, that you cannot shake off. I do not want to appeal to fear, but it goes to one's heart to see the hundreds and thousands of people round about us who, just because they are afraid of God, will not think about Him, put away angrily and impatiently solemn words like these that I am trying to speak, and seek to surround themselves with some kind of a fool's paradise of indifference, and to shut their eyes to facts and realities. You do not confess it to yourselves. What kind of a thought must that be about your relation to God which you are afraid to speak? Some of you remember the awful words in one of Shakespeare's plays: 'Now I, to comfort him, bid him he should not think of God. I hoped there was no need to trouble himself with any such thoughts yet.' What does that teach us? 'I knew Thee that Thou art an hard man; and I was afraid.'

Dear friend, there are two religions in this world: there is the religion of fear, and there is the religion of love; and if you have not the one, you must have the other, if you have any at all. The only way to get perfect love that casts out fear is to be quite sure of the Father-love in heaven that begets it. And the only way to be sure of the infinite love in the heavens that kindles some little spark of love in our hearts here, is to go to Christ and learn the lesson that He reveals to us at His Cross. Love will annihilate the fear; or rather, if I may take such a figure, will set a light to the wreathing smoke that rises, and flash it all up into a ruddy flame. For the perfect love that casts out fear sublimates it into reverence and changes it into trust. Have you got that love, and did you get it at Christ's Cross?

III. Lastly, mark the torpor of fear and the activity of love. 'I was afraid, and I went and hid thy talent in the earth.'

Fear paralyses service, cuts the nerve of activity, makes a man refuse obedience to God. It was a very illogical thing of that indolent servant to say, 'I knew that you were so hard in exacting what was due to you that therefore I determined not to give it to you.' Is it more illogical and more absurd than what hundreds of men and women round about us do today, when they say, 'God's requirements are so great that I do not attempt to fulfil them'? One would have thought that he would have reasoned the other way, and said, 'Because I knew that Thy requirements were so great and severe, therefore I put myself with all my powers to my work.' Not so. Logical or illogical, the result remains, that that thought of God, that black drop of gall, in many a heart, stops the action of the hand. Fear is barren, or if it produces anything it is nothing to the purpose, and it brings gifts that not even God's love can accept, for there is no love in them. Fear is barren; Love is fruitful—like the two

mountains of Samaria, from one of which the rolling burden of the curses of the Law was thundered, and from the other of which the sweet words of promise and of blessing were chanted in musical response. On the one side are black rocks, without a blade of grass on them, the Mount of Cursing; on the other side are blushing grapes and vineyards, the Mount of Blessing. Love moves to action, fear paralyses into indolence. And the reason why such hosts of you do nothing for God is because your hearts have never been touched with the thorough conviction that He has done everything for you, and asks you but to love Him back again, and bring Him your hearts. These dark thoughts are like the frost which binds the ground in iron fetters, making all the little flowers that were beginning to push their heads into the light shrink back again. And love, when it comes, will come like the west wind and the sunshine of the Spring; and before its emancipating fingers the earth's fetters will be cast aside, and the white snowdrops and the yellow crocuses will show themselves above the ground. If you want your hearts to bear any fruit of noble living, and holy consecration, and pure deeds, then here is the process—Begin with the knowledge and belief of 'the love which God hath to us'; learn that at the Cross, and let it silence your doubts, and send them back to their kennels, silenced. Then take the next step, and love Him back again. 'We love Him because He first loved us.' That love will be the productive principle of all glad obedience, and you will keep His commandments, and here upon earth find, as the faithful servant found, that talents used increase; and yonder will receive the eulogium from His lips whom to please is blessedness, by whom to be praised is heaven's glory, 'Well done! good and faithful servant.'

THE KING ON HIS JUDGMENT THRONE

‘When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory: 32. And before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: 33. And He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. 34. Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35. For I was an hungred, and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in: 36. Naked, and ye clothed Me: I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came unto Me. 37. Then shall the righteous answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred, and fed Thee? or thirsty, and gave Thee drink? 38. When saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in! or naked, and clothed Thee! 39. Or when saw we Thee sick, or in prison, and came unto Thee? 40. And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me. 41. Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: 42. For I was an hungred, and ye gave Me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me no drink: 43. I was a stranger, and ye took Me not in: naked, and ye clothed Me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited Me not. 44. Then shall they also answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto Thee? 45. Then shall He answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me. 46. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.’—[MATT. xxv. 31-46](#).

The teachings of that wonderful last day of Christ’s ministry, which have occupied so many of our pages, are closed with this tremendous picture of universal judgment. It is one to be gazed upon with silent awe, rather than to be commented on. There is fear lest, in occupying the mind in the study of the details, and trying to pierce the mystery it partly unfolds, we should forget our own individual share in it. Better to burn in on our hearts the thought, ‘I shall be there,’ than to lose the solemn impression in efforts to unravel the difficulties of the passage. Difficulties there are, as is to be expected in even Christ’s revelation of so unparalleled a scene. Many questions are raised by it which will never be solved till we stand there. Who can tell how much of the parabolic element enters into the description? We, at all events, do not venture to say of one part, ‘This is merely drapery, the sensuous representation of spiritual reality,’ and of another, ‘That is essential truth.’ The curtain is the picture, and before we can separate the elements of it in that fashion, we must have lived through it. Let us try to grasp the main lessons, and not lose the spirit in studying the letter.

I. The first broad teaching is that Christ is the Judge of all the earth. Sitting there, a wearied man on the Mount of Olives, with the valley of Jehoshaphat at His feet, which the Jew regarded as the scene of the final judgment, Jesus declared Himself to be the Judge of the world, in language so unlimited in its claims that the speaker must be either a madman or a god. Calvary was less than three days off, when He spoke thus. The contrast between the vision of the future and the reality of the present is overwhelming. The Son of Man has come in weakness and shame; He will come in His glory, that flashing light of the self-revealing God, of which the symbol was the 'glory' which shone between the cherubim, and which Jesus Christ here asserts to belong to Him as 'His glory.' Then, heaven will be emptied of its angels, who shall gather round the enthroned Judge as His handful of sorrowing followers were clustered round Him as He spoke, or as the peasants had surrounded the meek state of His entry yesterday. Then, He will take the place of Judge, and 'sit,' in token of repose, supremacy, and judgment, 'on the throne of His glory,' as He now sat on the rocks of Olivet. Then, mankind shall be massed at His feet, and His glance shall part the infinite multitudes, and discern the character of each item in the crowd as easily and swiftly as the shepherd's eye picks out the black goats from among the white sheep. Observe the difference in the representation from those in the previous parables. There, the parting of kinds was either self-acting, as in the case of the foolish maidens; or men gave account of themselves, as in the case of the servants with the talents. Here, the separation is the work of the Judge, and is completed before a word is spoken. All these representations must be included in the complete truth as to the final judgment. It is the effect of men's actions; it is the result of their compelled disclosing of the deepest motives of their lives; it is the act of the perfect discernment of the Judge. Their deeds will judge them; they will judge themselves; Christ will judge.

Singularly enough, every possible interpretation of the extent of the expression 'all nations' has found advocates. It has been taken in its widest and plainest meaning, as equivalent to the whole race; it has been confined to mankind exclusive of Christians, and it has been confined to Christians exclusive of heathens. There are difficulties in all these explanations, but probably the least are found in the first. It is most natural to suppose that 'all nations' means all nations, unless that meaning be impossible. The absence of the limitation to the 'kingdom of heaven,' which distinguishes this section from the preceding ones having reference to judgment, and the position of the present section as the solemn close of Christ's teachings, which would naturally widen out into the declaration of the universal judgment, which forms the only appropriate climax and end to the foregoing teachings, seem to point to the widest meaning of the phrase. His office of universal Judge is unmistakably taught throughout the New Testament, and it seems in the highest degree unnatural to suppose that He did not speak of it in these final words of prophetic warning. We may therefore, with some confidence, see in the magnificent and awful picture here drawn the vision of

universal judgment. Parabolic elements there no doubt are in the picture; but we have no governing revelation, free from these, by which we can check them, and be sure of how much is form and how much substance. This is clear, 'that we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ'; and this is clear, that Jesus Christ put forth, when at the very lowest point of His earthly humiliation, these tremendous claims, and asserted His authority as Judge over every soul of man. We are apt to lose ourselves in the crowd. Let us pause and think that 'all' includes 'me.'

II. Note the principles of Christ's universal judgment. It is important to remember that this section closes a series of descriptions of the judgment, and must not be taken as if, when isolated, it set forth all the truth. It is often harped upon by persons who are unfriendly to evangelical teaching, as if it were Christ's only word about judgment, and interpreted as if it meant that, no matter what else a man was, if only he is charitable and benevolent, he will find mercy. But this is to forget all the rest of our Lord's teaching in the context, and to fly in the face of the whole tenor of New Testament doctrine. We have here to do with the principles of judgment which apply equally to those who have, and to those who have not, heard the gospel. The subjects of the kingdom are shown the principles more immediately applicable to them, in the previous parables, and here they are reminded that there is a standard of judgment absolutely universal. All men, whether Christians or not, are judged by 'the things done in the body, whether they be good or bad.' So Christ teaches in His closing words of the Sermon on the Mount, and in many another place. 'Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.' The productive source of good works is not in question here; stress is laid on the fruits, rather than on the root. The gospel is as imperative in its requirements of righteousness as the law is, and its conception of the righteousness which it requires is far deeper and wider. The subjects of the kingdom ever need to be reminded of the solemn truth that they have not only, like the wise maidens, to have their lights burning and their oil vessels filled, nor only, like the wise servants, to be using the gifts of the kingdom for their lord, but, as members of the great family of man, have to cultivate the common moralities which all men, heathen and Christian, recognise as binding on all, without which no man shall see the Lord. The special form of righteousness which is selected as the test is charity. Obviously it is chosen as representative of all the virtues of the second table of the law. Taken in its bare literality, this would mean that men's relations to God had no effect in the judgment, mid that no other virtues but this of charity came into the account. Such a conclusion is so plainly repugnant to all Christ's teaching, that we must suppose that love to one's neighbour is here singled out, just as it is in His summary of 'the law and the prophets,' as the crown and flower of all relative duties, and as, in a very real sense, being 'the fulfilling of the law.' The omission of any reference to the love of God sufficiently shows that the view here is rigidly limited to acts, and that all the grounds of judgment are not meant to be set forth.

But the benevolence here spoken of is not the mere natural sentiment, which often exists in great energy in men whose moral nature is, in other respects, so utterly un-Christlike that their entrance into the kingdom prepared for the righteous is inconceivable. Many a man has a hundred vices and yet a soft heart. It is very much a matter of temperament. Does Christ so contradict all the rest of His teaching as to say that such a man is of 'the sheep,' and 'blessed of the Father'? Surely not. Is every piece of kindness to the distressed, from whatever motive, and by whatsoever kind of person done, regarded by Him as done to Himself? To say so, would be to confound moral distinctions, and to dissolve all righteousness into a sentimental syrup. The deeds which He regards as done to Himself, are done to His 'brethren.' That expression carries us into the region of motive, and runs parallel with His other words about 'receiving a prophet,' and 'giving a cup of cold water to one of these little ones,' because they are His. Seeing that all nations are at the bar, the expression, 'My brethren,' cannot be confined to the disciples, for many of those who are being judged have never come in contact with Christians, nor can it be reasonably supposed to include all men, for, however true it is that Christ is every man's brother, the recognition of kindred here must surely be confined to those at the right hand. Whatever be included under the 'righteous,' that is included under the 'brethren.' We seem, then, led to recognise in the expression a reference to the motive of the beneficence, and to be brought to the conclusion that what the Judge accepts as done to Himself is such kindly help and sympathy as is extended to these His kindred, with some recognition of their character, and desire after it. To 'receive a prophet' implies that there is some spiritual affinity with him in the receiver. To give help to His brethren, because they are so, implies some affinity with Him or feeling after likeness to Him and them. Now, if we hold fast by the universality of the judgment here depicted, we shall see that this recognition must necessarily have different degrees in those who have heard of Christ and in those who have not. In the former, it will be equivalent to that faith which is the root of all goodness, and grasps the Christ revealed in the gospel. In the latter, it can be no more than a feeling after Him who is the 'light that lighteneth every man that cometh into the world.' Surely there are souls amid the darkness of heathenism yearning toward the light, like plants grown in the dark. By ways of His own, Christ can reach such hearts, as the river of the water of life may percolate through underground channels to many a tree which grows far from its banks.

III. Note the surprises of the judgment. The astonishment of the righteous is not modesty disclaiming praise, but real wonder at the undreamed-of significance of their deeds. In the parable of the talents, the servants unveiled their inmost hearts, and accurately described their lives. Here, the other side of the truth is brought into prominence, that, at that day, we shall be surprised when we hear from His lips what we have really done. True Christian beneficence has consciously for its motive the pleasing of Christ; but still he who most earnestly strove, while here, to do all as unto Jesus, will be full of thankful wonder at the

grace which accepts his poor service, and will learn, with fresh marvelling, how closely He associates Himself with His humblest servant. There is an element of mystery hidden from ourselves in all our deeds. Our love to Christ's followers never goes out so plainly to Him that, while here, we can venture to be sure that He takes it as done for Him. We cannot here follow the flight of the arrow, nor know what meaning He will attach to, or what large issues He will evolve from, our poor doings. So heaven will be full of blessed surprises, as we reap the fruit growing 'in power' of what we sowed 'in weakness,' and as doleful will be the astonishment which will seize those who see, for the first time, in the lurid light of that day, the true character of their lives, as one long neglect of plain duties, which was all a defrauding the Saviour of His due. Mere doing nothing is enough to condemn, and its victims will be shudderingly amazed at the fatal wound it has inflicted on them.

IV. The irrevocableness of the judgment. That is an awful contrast between the 'Come! ye blessed,' and 'Depart! ye cursed.' That is a more awful parallel between 'eternal punishment' and 'eternal life.' It is futile to attempt to alleviate the awfulness by emptying the word 'eternal' of reference to duration. It no doubt connotes quality, but its first meaning is ever-during. There is nothing here to suggest that the one condition is more terminable than the other. Rather, the emphatic repetition of the word brings the unending continuance of each into prominence, as the point in which these two states, so wofully unlike, are the same. In whatever other passages the doctrine of universal restoration may seem to find a foothold, there is not an inch of standing-room for it here. Reverently accepting Christ's words as those of perfect and infallible love, the present writer feels so strongly the difficulty of bringing all the New Testament declarations on this dread question into a harmonious whole, that he abjures for himself dogmatic certainty, and dreads lest, in the eagerness of discussing the duration (which will never be beyond the reach of discussion), the solemn reality of the fact of future retribution should be dimmed, and men should argue about 'the terror of the Lord' till they cease to feel it.

THE DEFENCE OF UNCALCULATING LOVE

‘Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, 7. There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on His head, as He sat at meat. 8. But when His disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? 9. For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. 10. When Jesus understood it, He said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon Me. 11. For ye have the poor always with you; but Me ye have not always. 12. For in that she hath poured this ointment on My body, she did it for My burial. 13. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her. 14. Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, 15. And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver Him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. 16. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him.’—*MATT. xxvi. 6-16.*

John tells us that the ‘woman’ was Mary, and the objector Judas. Both the deed and the cavil are better understood by knowing whence they came. Lazarus was a guest, and as his sister saw him sitting there by Jesus her heart overflowed, and she could not but catch up her most precious possession, and lavish it on His head and feet. Love’s impulses appear absurd to selfishness. How could Judas understand Mary? Detracting comments find ready ears. One sneer will cool down to contempt and blame the feelings of a company. People are always eager to pick holes in conduct which they uneasily feel to be above their own reach. Poor Mary! she had but yielded to the uncalculating impulse of her great love, and she finds herself charged with imprudence, waste, and unfeeling neglect of the poor. No wonder that her gentle heart was ‘troubled.’ But Jesus threw the shield of His approval over her, and that was enough. Never mind how Judas and better men than he may find fault, if Jesus smiles acceptance.

His great words set forth, first, the vindication of the act, because of its motive. Anything done with no regard to any end but Himself is, in His eyes, ‘good.’ The perfection of conduct is that it shall all be referred to Jesus. That ‘altar’ sanctifies gift and giver. Conversely, whatever has no reference to Him lacks the highest beauty of goodness. A pebble in the bed of a sunlit stream has its veins of colour brought out; lift it out, and, as it dries, it dulls. So our deeds plunged into that great river are heightened in loveliness. Everything which has ‘For Christ’s sake’ stamped on it is thereby hallowed. That is the unfailing recipe for making a life fair. Mary was thinking only of Jesus and of her love to Him, therefore what she did was sweet to Him. The greater part of a deed is its motive, and the perfect motive is love to Jesus.

But, further, Christ defends the side of Mary’s deed which the critics fastened on. They posed as being more practical and benevolent than she was. They were utilitarians, she was

wasteful. Their objection sounds sensible, but it belongs to the low levels of life. One flash of lofty love would have killed it. Christ's reply to it draws a contrast between constant duties and special, transient moments. It is coloured, too, by His consciousness of His near end, and has an undertone of sadness in that 'Me ye have not always.' There are high tides of Christian emotion, when the question of what good this thing will do is submerged, and the only question is, 'What best thing shall I render to the Lord?' The critics were not more beneficent, but less inflamed with love to Jesus, and the leader of them only wished that the proceeds of the ointment had come into his hands, where some of it would have stuck. We hear the same sort of taunt today,—What is the sense of all this money being spent on missions and religious objects? How much more useful it would be if expended on better dwellings for the poor or hospitals or technical schools! But there is a place in Christ's treasury for useless deeds, if they are the pure expression of love to Him, and Mary's alabaster box, which did no good at all, lies beside the cups that held cold water which slaked some thirsty lips. Uncalculating impulse, which only knows that it would fain give all to the Lover of souls, is not merely excused, but praised, by Jesus. Lovers on earth do not concern themselves about the usefulness of their gifts, and the divine Lover rejoices over what cold-blooded spectators, who do not in the least understand the ways of loving hearts, find useless 'waste.' The world would put all the emotions of Christian hearts, and all the heroisms of Christian martyrs, and all the sacrifices of Christian workers, into the same class. Jesus accepts them all.

Again, He breathes a meaning into the gift beyond what the giver meant. Mary did not regard her anointing as preparatory to His burial, but He had His thoughts fixed on it, and He sought to prepare the disciples for the coming storm. How far away from the simple festivities in Simon's house were His thoughts! What a gulf between the other guests and Him! But Jesus always puts significance into the service which He accepts, and surprises the givers by the far-reaching issues of their gifts. We know not what He may make our poor deeds mean. Results are beyond our vision. Therefore let us make sure of what is within our horizon—namely, motives. If we do anything for His sake, He will take care of what it comes to. That is true even on earth, and still more true in heaven. 'Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred, and fed Thee?' What surprises will wait Christ's humble servants in heaven, when they see what was the true nature and the widespread consequences of their humble deeds! 'Thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, . . . but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him.'

Again, Mark gives an additional clause in Christ's words, which brings out the principle that the measure of acceptable service is ability. 'She hath done what she could' is an apology, or rather a vindication, for the shape of the gift. Mary was not practical, and could not 'serve' like Martha; she probably had no other precious thing that she could give, but she could love, and she could bestow her best on Jesus. But the saying implies a stringent demand, as

well as a gracious defence. Nothing less than the full measure of ability is the measure of Christian obligation. Power to its last particle is duty. Jesus does not ask how much His servants do or give, but He does ask that they should do and give all that they can. He wishes us to be ourselves in serving Him, and to shape our methods according to character and capabilities, but He also wishes us to give Him our whole selves. If anything is kept back, all that is given is marred.

Jesus' last word gives perpetuity to the service which He accepts. Mary is promised immortality for her deed, and the promise has been fulfilled, and here are we, all these centuries after, looking at her as she breaks the box and pours it on His head. Jesus is not unrighteous to forget any work of love done for Him. The fragrance of the ointment soon passed away, and the shreds of the broken cruse were swept into the dust-bin, with the other relics of the feast; but all the world knows of that act of all-surrendering love, and it smells sweet and blossoms for evermore.

THE NEW PASSOVER

‘Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto Him, Where wilt Thou that we prepare for Thee to eat the passover? 18. And He said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with My disciples. 19. And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover. 20. Now when the even was come, He sat down with the twelve. 21. And as they did eat, He said, Verily I say unto you, That one of you shall betray Me. 22. And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto Him, Lord, is it I? 23. And He answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with Me in the dish, the same shall betray Me. 24. The Son of Man goeth as it is written of Him; but woe unto that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born. 25. Then Judas, which betrayed Him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said. 26. And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is My body. 27. And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; 28. For this is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. 29. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom. 30. And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives.’—[MATT. xxvi. 17-30](#).

The Tuesday of Passion Week was occupied by the wonderful discourses which have furnished so many of our meditations. At its close Jesus sought retirement in Bethany, not only to soothe and prepare His spirit but to ‘hide Himself’ from the Sanhedrin. There He spent the Wednesday. Who can imagine His thoughts? While He was calmly reposing in Mary’s quiet home, the rulers determined on His arrest, but were at a loss how to effect it without a riot. Judas comes to them opportunely, and they leave it to him to give the signal. Possibly we may account for the peculiar secrecy observed as to the place for the last supper, by our Lord’s knowledge that His steps were watched, and by His earnest wish to eat the Passover with the disciples before He suffered. The change between the courting of publicity and almost inviting of arrest at the beginning of the week, and the evident desire to postpone the crisis till the fitting moment which marks the close of it, is remarkable, and most naturally explained by the supposition that He wished the time of His death to be that very hour when, according to law, the paschal lamb was slain. On the Thursday, then, he sent Peter and John into the city to prepare the Passover; the others being in ignorance of the place till they were there, and Judas being thus prevented from carrying out his purpose till after the celebration.

The precautions taken to ensure this have left their mark on Matthew’s narrative, in the peculiar designation of the host,—‘Such a man!’ It is a kind of echo of the mystery which he so well remembered as round the errand of the two. He does not seem to have heard of

the token by which they knew the house, viz., the man with the pitcher whom they were to meet. But he does know that Peter and John got secret instructions, and that he and the others wondered where they were to go. Had there been a previous arrangement with this unnamed 'such an one,' or were the token and the message alike instances of Christ's supernatural knowledge and authority? It is difficult to say. I incline to the former supposition, which would be in accordance with the distinct effort after secrecy which marks these days; but the narratives do not decide the question. At all events, the host was a disciple, as appears from the authoritative 'the Master saith'; and, whether he had known beforehand that 'this day' incarnate 'salvation would come to his house' or no, he eagerly accepts the peril and the honour. His message is royal in its tone. The Lord does not ask permission, but issues His commands. But He is a pauper King, not having where to lay His head, and needing another man's house in which to gather His own household together for the family feast of the Passover. What profound truths are wrapped up in that 'My time is come'! It speaks of the voluntariness of His surrender, the consciousness that His Cross was the centre point of His work, His superiority to all external influences as determining the hour of His death, and His submission to the supreme appointment of the Father. Obedience and freedom, choice and necessity, are wonderfully blended in it.

So, late on that Thursday evening, the little band left Bethany for the last time, in a fashion very unlike the joyous stir of the triumphal entry. As the evening is falling, they thread their way through the noisy streets, all astir with the festal crowds, and reach the upper room, Judas vainly watching for an opportunity to slip away on his black errand. The chamber, prepared by unknown hands, has vanished, and the hands are dust; but both are immortal. How many of the living acts of His servants in like manner seem to perish, and the doers of them to be forgotten or unknown! But He knows the name of 'such an one,' and does not forget that he opened his door for Him to enter in and sup.

The fact that Jesus put aside the Passover and founded the Lord's Supper in its place, tells much both about His authority and its meaning. What must He have conceived of Himself, who bade Jew and Gentile turn away from that God-appointed festival, and think not of Moses, but of Him? What did He mean by setting the Lord's Supper in the place of the Passover, if He did not mean that He was the true Paschal Lamb, that His death was a true sacrifice, that in His sprinkled blood was safety, that His death inaugurated the better deliverance of the true Israel from a darker prison-house and a sorer bondage, that His followers were a family, and that 'the children's bread' was the sacrifice which He had made? There are many reasons for the doubling of the commemorative emblem, but this is obviously one of the chief—that, by the separation of the two in the rite, we are carried back to the separation in fact; that is to say, to the violent death of Christ. Not His flesh alone, in the sense of Incarnation, but His body broken and His blood shed, are what He wills should be

for ever remembered. His own estimate of the centre point of His work is unmistakably pronounced in His institution of this rite.

But we may consider the force of each emblem separately. In many important points they mean the same things, but they have each their own significance as well. Matthew's condensed version of the words of institution omits all reference to the breaking of the body and to the memorial character of the observance, but both are implied. He emphasises the reception, the participation, and the significance of the bread. As to the latter, 'This is My body' is to be understood in the same way as 'the field is the world,' and many other sayings. To speak in the language of grammarians, the copula is that of symbolic relationship, not that of existence; or, to speak in the language of the street, 'is' here means, as it often does, 'represents.' How could it mean anything else, when Christ sat there in His body, and His blood was in His veins? What, then, is the teaching of this symbol? It is not merely that He in His humanity is the bread of life, but that He in His death is the nourishment of our true life. In that great discourse in John's Gospel, which embodies in words the lessons which the Lord's Supper teaches by symbols, He advances from the general statement, 'I am the Bread of Life,' to the yet more mysterious and profound teaching that His flesh, which at some then future point He will 'give for the life of the world,' is the bread; thus distinctly foreshadowing His death, and asserting that by that death we live, and by partaking of it are nourished. The participation in the benefits of Christ's death, which is symbolised by 'Take, eat,' is effected by living faith. We feed on Christ when our minds are occupied with His truth, and our hearts nourished by His love, when it is the 'meat' of our wills to do His will, and when our whole inward man fastens on Him as its true object, and draws from Him its best being. But the act of reception teaches the great lesson that Christ must be in us, if He is to do us any good. He is not 'for us' in any real sense, unless He be 'in us.' The word rendered in John's Gospel 'eateth' is that used for the ruminating of cattle, and wonderfully indicates the calm, continual, patient meditation by which alone we can receive Christ into our hearts, and nourish our lives on Him. Bread eaten is assimilated to the body, but this bread eaten assimilates the eater to itself, and he who feeds on Christ becomes Christ-like, as the silk-worm takes the hue of the leaves on which it browses. Bread eaten to-day will not nourish us to-morrow, neither will past experiences of Christ's sweetness sustain the soul. He must be 'our daily bread' if we are not to pine with hunger.

The wine carries its own special teaching, which clearly appears in Matthew's version of the words of institution. It is 'My blood,' and by its being presented in a form separate from the bread which is His body suggests a violent death. It is 'covenant blood,' the seal of that 'better covenant' than the old, which God makes now with all mankind, wherein are given renewed hearts which carry the divine law within themselves; the reciprocal and mutually blessed possession of God by men and of men by God, the universally diffused knowledge of God, which is more than head knowledge, being the consciousness of possessing

Him; and, finally, the oblivion of all sins. These promises are fulfilled, and the covenant made sure, by the shed blood of Christ. So, finally, it is 'shed for many, for the remission of sins.' The end of Christ's death is pardon which can only be extended on the ground of His death. We are told that Christ did not teach the doctrine of atonement. Did He establish the Lord's Supper? If He did (and nobody denies that), what did He mean by it, if He did not mean the setting forth by symbol of the very same truth which, stated in words, is the doctrine of His atoning death? This rite does not, indeed, explain the rationale of the doctrine; but it is a piece of unmeaning mummery, unless it preaches plainly the fact that Christ's death is the ground of our forgiveness.

Bread is the 'staff of life,' but blood is the life. So 'this cup' teaches that 'the life' of Jesus Christ must pass into His people's veins, and that the secret of the Christian life is 'I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.' Wine is joy, and the Christian life is not only to be a feeding of the soul on Christ as its nourishment, but a glad partaking, as at a feast, of His life and therein of His joy. Gladness of heart is a Christian duty, 'the joy of the Lord is your strength' and should be our joy; and though here we eat with loins girt, and go out, some of us to deny, some of us to flee, all of us to toil and suffer, yet we may have His joy fulfilled in ourselves, even whilst we sorrow.

The Lord's Supper is predominantly a memorial, but it is also a prophecy, and is marked as such by the mysterious last words of Jesus, about drinking the new wine in the Father's kingdom. They point the thoughts of the saddened eleven, on whom the dark shadow of parting lay heavily, to an eternal reunion, in a land where 'all things are become new,' and where the festal cup shall be filled with a draught that has power to gladden and to inspire beyond any experience here. The joys of heaven will be so far analogous to the Christian joys of earth that the same name may be applied to both; but they will be so unlike that the old name will need a new meaning, and communion with Christ at His table in His kingdom, and our exuberance of joy in the full drinking in of His immortal life, will transcend the selectest hours of communion here. Compared with that fulness of joy they will be 'as water unto wine,'—the new wine of the kingdom.

'IS IT I?'

'And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto Him, Lord, is it I? 25. Then Judas, which betrayed Him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said.'—[MATT. xxvi. 22, 25](#).

'He then lying on Jesus' breast saith unto Him, Lord, who is it?'—[JOHN xiii. 25](#).

The genius of many great painters has portrayed the Lord's Supper, but the reality of it was very different from their imaginings. We have to picture to ourselves some low table, probably a mere tray spread upon the ground, round which our Lord and the twelve reclined, in such a fashion as that the head of each guest came against the bosom of him that reclined above him; the place of honour being at the Lord's left hand, or higher up the table than Himself, and the second place being at His right, or below Himself.

So there would be no eager gesticulations of disciples starting to their feet when our Lord uttered the sad announcement, 'One of you shall betray Me!' but only horror-struck amazement settled down upon the group. These verses, which we have put together, show us three stages in the conversation which followed the sad announcement. The three evangelists give us two of these; John alone omits these two, and only gives us the third.

First, we have their question, born of a glimpse into the possibilities of evil in their hearts, 'Lord, is it I?' The form of that question in the original suggests that they expected a negative answer, and might be reproduced in English: 'Surely it is not I?' None of them could think that he was the traitor, yet none of them could be sure that he was not. Their Master knew better than they did; and so, from a humble knowledge of what lay in them, coiled and slumbering, but there, they would not meet His words with a contradiction, but with a question. His answer spares the betrayer, and lets the dread work in their consciences for a little longer, for their good. For many hands dipped in the dish together, to moisten their morsels; and to say, 'He that dippeth with Me in the dish, the same shall betray Me,' was to say nothing more than 'One of you at the table.'

Then comes the second stage. Judas, reassured that he has escaped detection for the moment, and perhaps doubting whether the Master had anything more than a vague suspicion of treachery, or knew who was the traitor, shapes his lying lips with loathsome audacity into the same question, but yet not quite the same. The others had said, 'Is it I, Lord?' he falters when he comes to that name, and dare not say 'Lord!' That sticks in his throat. 'Rabbi!' is as far as he can get. 'Is it I, Rabbi?' Christ's answer to him, 'Thou hast said,' is another instance of patient longsuffering. It was evidently a whisper that did not reach the ears of any of the others, for he leaves the room without suspicion. Our Lord still tries to save him from himself by showing Judas that his purpose is known, and by still concealing his name.

Then comes the third stage, which we owe to John's Gospel. Here again he is true to his task of supplementing the narrative of the three synoptic Gospels. Remembering what I

have said about the attitude of the disciples at the table, we can understand that Peter, if he occupied the principal place at the Lord's left, was less favourably situated for speaking to Christ than John, who reclined in the second seat at His right, and so he beckoned over the Master's head to John. The Revised Version gives the force of the original more vividly than the Authorised does: 'He, leaning back, as he was, on Jesus' breast, saith unto Him, Lord! who is it?' John, with a natural movement, bends back his head on his Master's breast, so as to ask and be answered, in a whisper. His question is not, 'Is it I?' He that leaned on Christ's bosom, and was compassed about by Christ's love, did not need to ask that. The question now is, 'Who is it?' Not a question of presumption, nor of curiosity, but of affection; and therefore answered: 'He it is to whom I shall give the sop, when I have dipped it.'

The morsel dipped in the dish and passed by the host's hand to a guest, was a token of favour, of unity and confidence. It was one more attempt to save Judas, one more token of all-forgiving patience. No wonder that that last sign of friendship embittered his hatred and sharpened his purpose to an unalterable decision, or, as John says: 'After the sop, Satan entered into him.' For then, as ever, the heart which is not melted by Christ's offered love is hardened by it.

Now, if we take these three stages of this conversation we may learn some valuable lessons from them. I take the first form of the question as an example of that wholesome self-distrust which a glimpse into the slumbering possibilities of evil in our hearts ought to give us all. I take the second on the lips of Judas, as an example of the very opposite of that self-distrust, the fixed determination to do a wrong thing, however clearly we know it to be wrong. And I take the last form of the question, as asked by John, as an illustration of the peaceful confidence which comes from the consciousness of Christ's love, and of communion with Him. Now a word or two about each of these.

I. First, we have an example of that wholesome self-distrust, which a glimpse into the possibilities of evil that lie slumbering in all our hearts ought to teach every one of us.

Every man is a mystery to himself. In every soul there lie, coiled and dormant, like hibernating snakes, evils that a very slight rise in the temperature will wake up into poisonous activity. And let no man say, in foolish self-confidence, that any form of sin which his brother has ever committed is impossible for him. Temperament shields us from much, no doubt. There are sins that 'we are inclined to,' and there are sins that 'we have no mind to.' But the identity of human nature is deeper than the diversity of temperament, and there are two or three considerations that should abate a man's confidence that anything which one man has done it is impossible that he should do. Let me enumerate them very briefly. Remember, to begin with, that all sins are at bottom but varying forms of one root. The essence of every evil is selfishness, and when you have that, it is exactly as with cooks who have the 'stock' by the fireside. They can make any kind of soup out of it, with the right flavouring. We have got the mother tincture of all wickedness in each of our hearts; and therefore do

not let us be so sure that it cannot be manipulated and flavoured into any form of sin. All sin is one at bottom, and this is the definition of it—living to myself instead of living to God. So it may easily pass from one form of evil into another, just as light and heat, motion and electricity, are all—they tell us—various forms and phases of one force. Just as doctors will tell you that there are types of disease which slip from one form of sickness into another, so if we have got the infection about us it is a matter very much of accidental circumstances what shape it takes. And no man with a human heart is safe in pointing to any sin, and saying, 'That form of transgression I reckon alien to myself.'

And then let me remind you, too, that the same consideration is reinforced by this other fact, that all sin is, if I may so say, gregarious; is apt not only to slip from one form into another, but that any evil is apt to draw another after it. The tangled mass of sin is like one of those great fields of seaweed that you some times come across upon the ocean, all hanging together by a thousand slimy growths; which, if lifted from the wave at any point, drags up yards of it inextricably grown together. No man commits only one kind of transgression. All sins hunt in couples. According to the grim picture of the Old Testament, about another matter, 'None of them shall want his mate. The wild beasts of the desert shall meet with the wild beasts of the islands.' One sin opens the door for another, 'and seven other spirits worse than himself' come and make holiday in the man's heart.

Again, any evil is possible to us, seeing that all sin is but yielding to tendencies common to us all. The greatest transgressions have resulted from yielding to such tendencies. Cain killed his brother from jealousy; David besmirched his name and his reign by animal passion; Judas betrayed Christ because he was fond of money. Many a man has murdered another one simply because he had a hot temper. And you have got a temper, and you have got the love of money, and you have got animal passions, and you have got that which may stir you up into jealousy. Your neighbour's house has caught fire and been blown up. Your house, too, is built of wood, and thatched with straw, and you have as much dynamite in your cellars as he had in his. Do not be too sure that you are safe from the danger of explosion.

And, again, remember that this same wholesome self-distrust is needful for us all, because all transgression is yielding to temptations that assail all men. Here are one hundred men in a plague-stricken city; they have all got to draw their water from the same well. If five or six of them died of cholera it would be very foolish of the other ninety-five to say, 'There is no chance of our being touched.' We all live in the same atmosphere; and the temptations that have overcome the men that have headed the count of crimes appeal to you. So the lesson is, 'Be not high-minded, but fear.'

And remember, still further, that the same solemn consideration is enforced upon us by the thought that men will gradually drop down to the level which, before they began the descent, seemed to be impossible to them. 'Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?' said Hazeel when the crime of murdering his master first floated before him. Yes, but he

did it. By degrees he came down to the level to which he thought that he would never sink. First the imagination is inflamed, then the wish begins to draw the soul to the sin, then conscience pulls it back, then the fatal decision is made, and the deed is done. Sometimes all the stages are hurried quickly through, and a man spins downhill as cheerily and fast as a diligence down the Alps. Sometimes, as the coast of a country may sink an inch in a century until long miles of the flat seabeach are under water, and towers and cities are buried beneath the barren waves, so our lives may be gradually lowered, with a motion imperceptible but most real, bringing us down within high-water mark, and at last the tide may wash over what was solid land.

So, dear friends, there is nothing more foolish than for any man to stand, self-confident that any form of evil that has conquered his brother has no temptation for him. It may not have for you, under present circumstances; it may not have for you to-day; but, oh! we have all of us one human heart, and 'he that trusteth in his own heart is a fool.' 'Blessed is the man that feareth always.' Humble self-distrust, consciousness of sleeping sin in my heart that may very quickly be stirred into stinging and striking; rigid self-control over all these possibilities of evil, are duties dictated by the plainest common-sense.

Do not say, 'I know when to stop.' Do not say, 'I can go so far; it will not do me any harm.' Many a man has said that, and many a man has been ruined by it. Do not say, 'It is natural to me to have these inclinations and tastes, and there can be no harm in yielding to them.' It is perfectly natural for a man to stoop down over the edge of a precipice to gather the flowers that are growing in some cranny in the cliff; and it is as natural for him to topple over, and be smashed to a mummy at the bottom. God gave you your dispositions and your whole nature 'under lock and key,'—keep them so. And when you hear of, or see, great criminals and great crimes, say to yourself, as the good old Puritan divine said, looking at a man going to the scaffold, 'But for the grace of God there go I!' And in the contemplation of sins and apostasies, let us each look humbly at our own weakness, and pray Him to keep us from our brother's evils which may easily become ours.

II. Secondly, we have here an example of precisely the opposite sort, namely, of that fixed determination to do evil which is unshaken by the clearest knowledge that it is evil.

Judas heard his crime described in its own ugly reality. He heard his fate proclaimed by lips of absolute love and truth; and notwithstanding both, he comes unmoved and unshaken with his question. The dogged determination in his heart, that dares to see his evil stripped naked and is 'not ashamed,' is even more dreadful than the hypocrisy and sleek simulation of friendship in his face.

Now most men turn away with horror from even the sins that they are willing to do, when they are put plainly and bluntly before them. As an old mediaeval preacher once said, 'There is nothing that is weaker than the devil stripped naked.' By which he meant exactly this—that we have to dress wrong in some fantastic costume or other, so as to hide its native

ugliness, in order to tempt men to do it. So we have two sets of names for wrong things, one of which we apply to our brethren's sins, and the other to the same sins in ourselves. What I do is 'prudence,' what you do of the same sort is 'covetousness'; what I do is 'sowing my wild oats,' what you do is 'immorality' and 'dissipation'; what I do is 'generous living,' what you do is 'drunkenness' and 'gluttony'; what I do is 'righteous indignation,' what you do is 'passionate anger.' And so you may go the whole round of evil. Very bad are the men who can look at their deed, described in Its own inherent deformity, and yet say, 'Yes; that is it, and I am going to do it.' 'One of you shall betray Me.' 'Yes; I will betray you!' It must have taken something to look into the Master's face, and keep the fixed purpose steady.

Now I ask you to think, dear friends, of this, that that obstinate condition of dogged determination to do a wrong thing, knowing it to be a wrong thing, is a condition to which all evil steadily tends. We may not come to it in this world—I do not know that men ever do so wholly; but we are all getting towards it in regard to the special wrong deeds and desires which we cherish and commit. And when a man has once reached the point of saying to evil, 'Be thou my good,' then he is a 'devil' in the true meaning of the word; and wherever he is, he is in hell! And the one unpardonable sin is the sin of clear recognition that a given thing is contrary to God's will, and unflinching determination, notwithstanding, to do it. That is the only sin that cannot be pardoned, 'either in this world or in the world to come.'

And so, my brother, seeing that such a condition is possible, and that all the paths of evil, however tentative and timorous they may be at first, and however much the sin may be wrapped up with excuses and forms and masks, tend to that condition, let us take that old prayer upon our lips, which befits both those who distrust themselves because of slumbering sins, and those who dread being conquered by manifest iniquity:—'Who can understand his errors? Cleanse Thou me from secret faults. Keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins. Let them not have dominion over me.'

III. Now, lastly, we have in the last question an example of the peaceful confidence that comes from communion with Jesus Christ.

John leaned on the Master's bosom. 'He was the disciple whom Jesus loved.' And so compassed with that great love, and feeling absolute security within the enclosure of that strong hand, his question is not, 'Is it I?' but 'Who is it?' From which I think we may fairly draw the conclusion that to feel that Christ loves me, and that I am compassed about by Him, is the true security against my falling into any sin.

It was not John's love to Christ, but Christ's to John that made his safety. He did not say: 'I love Thee so much that I cannot betray Thee.' For all our feelings and emotions are but variable, and to build confidence upon them is to build a heavy building upon quicksand; the very weight of it drives out the foundations. But he thought to himself—or he felt rather than he thought—that all about him lay the sweet, warm, rich atmosphere of his Master's love; and to a man who was encompassed by that, treachery was impossible.

Sin has no temptation so long as we actually enjoy the greater sweetness of Christ's felt love. Would thirty pieces of silver have been a bribe to John? Would anything that could have terrified others have frightened him from his Master's side whilst he felt His love? Will a handful of imitation jewellery, made out of coloured glass and paste, be any temptation to a man who bears a rich diamond on his finger? And will any of earth's sweetness be a temptation to a man who lives in the continual consciousness of the great rich love of Christ wrapping him round about? Brethren, not ourselves, not our faith, not our emotion, not our religious experience; nothing that is in us, is any security that we may not be tempted, and yield to the temptation, and deny or betray our Lord. There is only one thing that is a security, and that is that we be folded to the heart, and held by the hand, of that loving Lord. Then—then we may be confident that we shall not fall; for 'the Lord is able to make us stand.'

Such confidence is but the other side of our self-distrust; is the constant accompaniment of it, must have that self-distrust for its condition and prerequisite, and leads to a yet deeper and more blessed form of that self-distrust. Faith in Him and 'no confidence in the flesh' are but the two sides of the same coin, the obverse and the reverse. The seed, planted in the ground, sends a little rootlet down, and a little spikelet up, by the same vital act. And so in our hearts, as it were, the downward rootlet is self-despair, and the upward shoot is faith in Christ. The two emotions go together—the more we distrust ourselves the more we shall rest upon Him, and the more we rest upon Him, and feel that all our strength comes, not from our foot, but from the Rock on which it stands, the more we shall distrust our own ability and our own faithfulness.

Therefore, dear brethren, looking upon all the evil that is around us, and conscious in some measure of the weakness of our own hearts, let us do as a man would do who stands upon the narrow ledge of a cliff, and look sheer down into the depth below, and feels his head begin to reel and turn giddy; let us lay hold of the Guide's hand, and if we cleave by Him, He will hold up our goings that our footsteps slip not. Nothing else will. No length of obedient service is any guarantee against treachery and rebellion. As John Bunyan saw, there was a backdoor to hell from the gate of the Celestial City. Men have lived for years consistent professing Christians, and have fallen at last. Many a ship has come across half the world, and gone to pieces on the harbour bar. Many an army, victorious in a hundred fights, has been annihilated at last. No depths of religious experience, no heights of religious blessedness, no attainments of past virtue and self-sacrifice, are any guarantees for to-morrow. Trust in nothing and in nobody, least of all in yourselves and your own past. Trust only in Jesus Christ.

'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 for ever.' Amen.

'THIS CUP'

'And Jesus took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; 28. For this is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins'—[MATT. xxvi. 27, 28.](#)

The comparative silence of our Lord as to the sacrificial character of His death has very often been urged as a reason for doubting that doctrine, and for regarding it as no part of the original Christian teaching. That silence may be accounted for by sufficient reasons. It has been very much exaggerated, and those who argue from it against the doctrine of the Atonement have forgotten that Jesus Christ founded the Lord's Supper.

That rite shows us what He thought, and what He would have us think, of His death; and in the presence of its testimony it seems to me impossible to deny that His conception of it was distinctly sacrificial. By it He points out the moment of His whole career which He desires that men should remember. Not His words of tenderness and wisdom; not His miracles, amazing and gracious as these were; not the flawless beauty of His character, though it touches all hearts and wins the most rugged to love, and the most degraded to hope; but the moment in which He gave His life is what He would imprint for ever on the memory of the world.

And not only so, but in the rite he distinctly tells us in what aspect He would have that death remembered. Not as the tragic end of a noble career which might be hallowed by tears such as are shed over a martyr's ashes; not as the crowning proof of love; not as the supreme act of patient forgiveness; but as a death for us, in which, as by the blood of the sacrifice, is secured the remission of sins.

And not only so, but the double symbol in the Lord's Supper—whilst in some respects the bread and wine speak the same truths, and certainly point to the same Cross—has in each of its parts special lessons intrusted to it, and special truths to proclaim. The bread and the wine both say:—'Remember Me and My death.' Taken in conjunction they point to that death as violent; taken separately they each suggest various aspects of it, and of the blessings that will flow to us therefrom. And it is my present purpose to bring out, as briefly and as clearly as I can, the special lessons which our Lord would have us draw from that cup which is the emblem of His shed blood.

I. First, then, observe that it speaks to us of a divine treaty or covenant.

Ancient Israel had lived for nearly 2000 years under the charter of their national existence which, as we read in the Old Testament, was given on Sinai amidst thunderings and lightnings—'Now, therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine, and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests and an holy nation.'

And that covenant, or agreement, or treaty, on the part of God, was ratified by a solemn act, in which the blood of the sacrifice, divided into two portions, was sprinkled, one half upon the altar, and the other half, after their acceptance of the conditions and obligations of the covenant, on the people, who had pledged themselves to obedience.

And now, here is a Galilean peasant, in a borrowed upper room, within four-and-twenty hours of His ignominious death which might seem to blast all His work, who steps forward and says, 'I put away that ancient covenant which knits this nation to God. It is antiquated. I am the true offering and sacrifice, by the blood of which, sprinkled on altar and on people, a new covenant, built upon better promises, shall henceforth be.'

What a tremendous piece of audacity, except on the one hypothesis that He that spake was indeed the Word of God; and that He was making that which Himself had established of old, to give way to that which He establishes now! The new covenant which Christ seals in His blood, is the charter, the better charter, under the conditions of which, not a nation but the world may find an external salvation which dwarfs all the deliverances of the past. That idea of a covenant confirmed by Christ's blood may sound to many hearers dry and hard. But if you will try to think what great truths are wrapped up in the theological phrasology, you will find them very real and very strong. Is it not a grand thought that between us and the infinite divine Nature there is established a firm and unmovable agreement? Then He has revealed His purposes; we are not left to grope in darkness, at the mercy of 'peradventures' and 'probabilities'; nor reduced to consult the ambiguous oracles of nature or of Providence, or the varying voices of our own hearts, or painfully and dubiously to construct more or less strong bases for confidence in a loving God out of such hints and fragments of revelation as these supply. He has come out of His darkness, and spoken articulate words, plain words, faithful words, which bind Him to a distinctly defined course of action. Across the great ocean of possible modes of action for a divine nature He has, if I may so say, buoyed out for Himself a channel, so as that we know His path, which is in the deep waters. He has limited Himself by the utterance of a faithful word, and we can now come to Him with His own promise, and cast it down before Him, and say: 'Thou hast spoken, and Thou art bound to fulfil it.' We have a covenant wherein God has shown us His hand, has told us what He is going to do and has thereby pledged Himself to its performance.

And, still further, in order to get the full sweetness of this thought, to break the husk and reach to the kernel, you must remember what, according to the New Testament, are the conditions of this covenant. The old agreement was, 'If ye will obey My voice and do My commandments, then,'—so and so will happen. The old condition was, 'Do and live; be righteous and blessed!' The new condition is: 'Take and have; believe and live!' The one was law, the other is gift; the one was retribution, the other is forgiveness. One was outward, hard, rigid law, fitly 'graven with a pen of iron on the rocks for ever'; the other is impulse,

love, a power bestowed that will make us obedient; and the sole condition that we have to render is the condition of humble and believing acceptance of the divine gift. The new covenant, in the exuberant fulness of its mercy, and in the tenderness of its gracious purposes, is at once the completion and the antithesis of the ancient covenant with its precepts and its retribution.

And, still further, this 'new covenant,' of which the essence is God's bestowment of Himself on every heart that wills to possess Him; this new covenant, according to the teaching of these words of my text and of the symbol to which they refer, is ratified and sealed by that great sacrifice. The blood was sprinkled on the altar; the blood was sprinkled on the people, which being translated into plain, unmetaphorical language is simply this, that Christ's death remains for ever present to the divine mind as the great reason and motive which modifies His government, and which ensures that His love shall ever find its way to every seeking soul. His death is the token; His death is the reason; His death is the pledge of the unending and the inexhaustible mercy of God bestowed upon each of us. 'He that spared not His own Son, shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?' The outward rite with its symbol is the exhibition in visible form of that truth, that the blood of Jesus Christ seals to the world the infinite mercy of God.

And, on the other hand, that same blood of the covenant, sprinkled upon the other parties to the treaty, even our poor sinful hearts, binds them to the fulfilment of the condition which belongs to them. That is to say, by the power of that sacrifice there are evoked in our poor souls, faith, love, surrender. It, and it alone, knits us to God; it, and it alone, binds us to the fulfilment of the covenant. My brother, have you entered into that sweet, solemn, sacred alliance and union with God? Have you accepted and fulfilled the conditions? Is your heart 'sprinkled with the blood so freely shed for you'; and have you thereby been brought into living alliance with the God who has pledged His being and His name to be the all-sufficient God to you?

II. Still further, this cup speaks to us of the forgiveness of sins.

One theory, and one theory only, as it seems to me, of the meaning of Christ's death, is possible if these words of my text ever dropped from Christ's lips, or if He ever instituted the rite to which they refer; He must have believed that His death was a sacrifice, without which the sins of the world were not forgiven; and by which forgiveness came to us all.

And I do not think that we rightly conceive the relation between the sacrifices of barbarous heathen tribes, or the sacrifices appointed in Israel, and the great sacrifice on the Cross, if we say that our Lord's death is only figuratively accommodated to these in order to meet lower or grosser conceptions, but rather, I take it, that the accommodation is the other way. In all nations beyond the limits of Israel the sacrifices of living victims spoke not only of surrender and dependence, but likewise of the consciousness of demerit and evil on the part of the offerers, and were at once a confession of sin, a prayer for pardon, and a propitiation

of an offended God. And I believe that the sacrifices in Israel were intended and adapted not only to meet the deep-felt want of human nature, common to them as to all other tribes, but also were intended and adapted to point onwards to Him in whose death a real want of mankind was met, in whose death a real sacrifice was offered, in whose death an angry God was not indeed propitiated, but in whose death the loving Father of our souls Himself provided the Lamb for the offering, without which, for reasons deeper than we can wholly fathom, it was impossible that sin should be remitted.

I insist upon no theory of an Atonement. I believe there is no Gospel, worth calling so, worth the preaching, worth your believing, or that will ever move the world or purify society, except the Gospel which begins with the fact of an Atonement, and points to the Cross as the altar on which the Sacrifice for the sins of the world, without whose death pardon is impossible, has died for us all.

Oh! dear friends, do not let yourselves be confused by the difficulties that beset all human and incomplete statements of the philosophy of the death of Christ; but getting away from these, cleave you to the fact that your sins were laid upon Christ, and that He has died for us all; that His death is a sacrifice; His body broken for us; and for the remission of our sins, His blood freely shed. Thus, and only thus, will you come to the understanding either of the sweetness of His love or of the power of His example; then, and only then, shall we know why it was that He elected to be remembered, out of all the moments of His life, by that one when He hung in weakness upon the Cross, and out of the darkness came the cry, 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?'

III. And now, again, let me remind you that this cup speaks likewise of a life infused.

'The blood is the life,' says the physiology of the Hebrews. The blood is the life, and when men drink of that cup they symbolise the fact that Christ's own life and spirit are imparted to them that love Him. 'Except ye eat the flesh, and drink the blood of the Son of Man, ye have no life in you.' The very heart of Christ's gift to us is the gift of His own very life to be the life of our lives. In deep, mystical reality He Himself passes into our being, and the 'law of the spirit of life makes us free from the law of sin and death,' so that we may say: 'He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit,' and the humble believing soul may rejoice in this: 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in Me.' This is, in one aspect, the very deepest meaning of this Communion rite. As physicians sometimes tried to restore life to an almost dead man by the transfusion into his shrunken veins of the fresh warm blood from a young and healthy subject, so into our fevered life, into our corrupted blood, there is poured the full tide of the pure and perfect life of Jesus Christ Himself, and we live, not by our own power, nor for our own will, nor in obedience to our own caprices, but by Him and in Him, and with Him and for Him. This is the heart of Christianity, the possession within us of the life, the immortal life of Him that died for us.

My brother have you that great gift in your heart? Be sure of this, that unless the life of Christ is in you by faith, ye are dead, 'dead in trespasses and in sins'; dead, and sure to rot away and disintegrate into corruption. The cup of blessing which we drink speaks to us of the transfusion into our spirits of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

IV. And lastly, it speaks of a festal gladness.

The bread says nothing to us of the remission of sins. The broken bread proclaims, indeed, our nourishment from Jesus, but falls short of the deep and solemn truth that it is the very life-blood of Christ Himself which nourishes us and vitalises us. And the bread, in like manner, proclaims indeed the fact that we are fed on Him, but says nothing of the joy of that feeding. The wine is the symbol of that, and it proclaims to us that the Christian life here on earth, just because it is the feeding on and the drinking in of Jesus Christ, ought ever to be a life of blessedness, of abounding joy, by whatsoever darkness, burdens, cares, toils, sorrows, and solitude it may be shaded and saddened. They who live on Christ, they who drink in of His spirit, they should be glad in all circumstances, they, and they alone. We sit at a table, though it be in the wilderness, though it be in the presence of our enemies, where there ought to be joy and the voice of rejoicing.

But beyond that, as our Master Himself taught these apostles in that upper room, this cup points onwards to a future feast. At that solemn hour Jesus stayed His own heart with the vision of the perfected kingdom and the glad festival then. So this Communion has a prophetic element in it, and links on with predictions and parables which speak of the 'marriage supper' of the great King, and of the time when we shall sit at His table in His kingdom.

For the past the Lord's Supper speaks of the one sufficient oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. For the present it speaks of life produced and sustained by communion with Jesus Christ. And for the future it speaks of the unending, joyful satisfaction of all desires in the 'upper room' of the heavens.

How unlike, and yet how like to that scene in the upper room at Jerusalem! From it the sad disciples went out, some of them to deny their Master; all of them to struggle, to sin, to lose Him from their sight, to toil, to sorrow, and at last to die. From that other table we shall go no more out, but sit there with Him in full fruition of unfailing blessedness and participation of His immortal life for evermore.

Dear brethren, these are the lessons, these the hopes, which this 'blood of the new covenant' teaches and inspires. Have you entered into that covenant with God? Have you made sure work of the forgiveness of your sins through His blood? Have you received into your spirits His immortal life? Then you may humbly be confident that, after life's weariness and lonesomeness are past, you will be welcomed to the banqueting hall by the Lord of the feast, and sit with Him and His servants who loved Him at that table and be glad.

'UNTIL THAT DAY'

'I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.'—*MATT. xxvi. 29.*

This remarkable saying of our Lord's is recorded in all of the accounts of the institution of the Lord's Supper. The thought embodied in it ought to be present in the minds of all who partake of that rite. It converts what is primarily a memorial into a prophecy. It bids us hope as well as, and because we, remember. The light behind us is cast forward on to the dimness before. So the Apostle Paul, in his solitary reference to the Communion—which, indeed, is an entirely incidental one, and evoked simply by the corruptions in the Corinthian Church, emphasises this prophetic and onward-looking aspect of the backward-looking rite when he says, 'Ye do show the Lord's death till He come.'

Now, it seems to me that those of us who so strongly hold that the Communion is primarily a simple memorial service, with no mysterious or magical efficacy of any sort about it, do rather ignore in our ordinary thoughts the other aspect which is brought out in my text; and that comparative ignoring seems to me to be but a part of a very lamentable and general tendency of this day, whereby the prospect of a future life has become somewhat dimmed and does not fill the place either in ordinary Christian thinking, or as a motive for Christian service which the proportion of faith, and the relative importance of the present and the future suggest that it ought to fill. The Christianity of this day has so much to do with the present life, and the thought of the Gospel as a power in the present has been so emphasised, in legitimate reaction from the opposite exaggeration, that there is great need, as I believe, to preach to Christian people the wisdom of making more prominent in their faith their immortal hope. I wish, then, to turn now to this aspect of the rite which we regard as a memorial, and try to emphasise its forward-looking attitude, and the large blessed truths that emerge if we consider that.

I. First, let me say just a word about the twin aspect of the Communion as a memorial prophecy, or prophetic remembrance.

Now, I need not remind you, I suppose, that according to the view which, as I believe, the New Testament takes, and which certainly we Nonconformists take, of all the rites of external worship, every one of them is a prophecy, because every act in which our sense is brought in to reinforce the spirit—and by outward forms, be they vocal, or be they manual, or be they of any other sort, we try to express and to quicken spiritual emotions and intellectual convictions—declares its own imperfection, digs its own grave, and prophecies its own resurrection in a nobler and better fashion. Just because these outward symbols of bread and wine do, through the senses, quicken the faith and the love of the spirit, they declare themselves to be transitory, and they point onwards to the time when that which is perfect shall absorb, and so destroy, that which is in part, and when sense shall be no longer

necessary as the ally and humble servant of spirit. 'I saw no temple therein.' Temples, and rites, and services, and holy days, and all the external apparatus of worship, are but scaffolding, and just as the scaffolding round a building is a prophecy of its own being pulled down when the building is reared and completed, so we cannot partake of these external symbols rightly, unless we recognise their transiency, and feel that they say to us, 'A mightier than I cometh after me, the latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to unloose.' The light that shines in the dark heralds the day and its own extinction.

So, looking back we must look forward, and partaking of the symbol, we must reach out to the time when the symbol shall be antiquated, the reality having come. The Passover of Israel did not more truly point onwards to the true Lamb of Sacrifice, and to the true Passover that was slain for us, and to its own elevation into the Lord's Supper of the Christian Church, than the Lord's Supper of the Christian Church points onwards to the 'marriage supper of the Lamb,' and its own cessation.

But then, again, let me remind you that this prophetic aspect is inherent in the memorial aspect of the Communion, because what we remember necessarily demands the coming of what we hope. That is to say, if Jesus Christ be what the Lord's Supper says that He is, and if He has done what that broken bread and poured out wine proclaim, according to His own utterance, that He has done, then clearly that death which was for the life of the world, that death which was the seal of a covenant, that body broken for the remission of sins, that wine partaken of as a reception into ourselves of the very life-blood of Jesus Christ, do all demand something far nobler and more perfect than the broken, incomplete obedience and loyalties and communions which Christian men here exercise and possess.

If He died, as the rite says that He did, and if dying He left such a commentary upon His act as that ordinance affords, then He cannot have done with the world; then the powers that were set in motion by His death cannot pause nor cease their action until they have reached their appropriate culmination in effecting all that it was in them to effect. If, leaving His people, He said to them, 'Never forget My death for you, My broken body, and My shed blood,' He therein said that the time will come, must come, when all the powers of the Cross shall be incorporated in humanity, and when the parted shall be reunited. The Communion would stand as the expression of Christ's mistaken estimate of His own importance, if there were not beyond the grave the perfecting of it, and the full appropriation and joyful possession of all which the death that it signifies brought to mankind.

Therefore, dear brethren, it seems to me that the best way by which Christians can deepen their confidence and brighten their hope in the perfect reunion and blessedness of the heavens, is to increase the firmness of their faith in, and the depth of their apprehension of, the sacrifice of the Cross. If the Cross demands the Crown, then our surest way to realise as certain our own possession of that Crown is to cling very close to that Cross. The more we look backwards to it the more will it fling its light into all the dark places that are in front

of us, and flush the heavens up to the seventh and beyond, with the glories that stream from it. Hold fast by the Cross, and the more fully, believingly, joyously, unfalteringly, we recognise in it the foundation of our salvation, the more gladly, clearly, operatively, shall we cherish the hope that 'the headstone shall be brought forth with shoutings,' and that the imperfect symbolical communion of earth will grow and greaten into complete and real union in eternal bliss.

Let me urge, then, this, that, as a matter of fact, a faith in eternal glory goes with and fluctuates in the same degree and manner as does the faith in the past sacrifice that Christ has made. He, and He alone, as I believe, turns nebulae into solidity, and makes of the more or less tremulous anticipation of a more or less dim and distant future, a calm, still certainty. We know that He will come because, and in proportion as, we believe that He has come. Keep these two things, then, always together, the memory and the hope. They stand like two great piers, one on either side of a narrow, dark glen, and suspended from them is stretched the bridge, along which the happy pilgrims may travel and enter into rest.

II. And now, let us turn for a moment to the lovely vision of that future which is suggested by our text.

The truest way, I was going to say the only way, by which we can have any conceptions of a condition of being of which we have no experience, is to fall back upon the experiences which we have, and use them as symbols and metaphors. The curtain is the picture. So our Lord here, in accordance with the necessary limitations of our human knowledge, contents Himself with using what lay at His hand, and taking it as giving faint shadows and metaphorical suggestions as to spiritual blessedness yonder.

There is one other way, as it seems to me, by which we can in any measure body forth to ourselves that unknown condition of things, and that is to fall back upon our present experiences in another fashion, and negative all of them which involve pain and limitation and incompleteness. There shall be no night—no sorrow—no tears—no sighing, and the like. These negatives of the strong and stinging griefs and limitations of the present are perhaps our second-best way of coming to some prophetic vision of that great future.

Remembering, then, that we are dealing with pure metaphor, and that the exact translation of the metaphor into reality is not yet possible for us, let us take one or two very plain thoughts out of this great saying—'Until I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.'

Then, we have to think of the completion of the Christian life beyond, which is also the completion of the results of Christ's death on the Cross, as being, according to the very frequent metaphor both of the Old and the New Testament, a prolonged festival. I do not need to speak of the details of the thoughts that thence emerge. Let me sum them up as briefly as may be. They include the satisfaction of every desire and the nourishment of all strength, and food for every faculty. When we think of the hungry hearts that all men carry, and how true it is that even the wisest and the holiest of us are 'spending our money for that which

is not bread, and our labour for that which satisfieth not'; when we think of how the choicest foods that life can provide, even for the noblest hunger of noble hearts, are too often to us but as a feeding on ashes that will leave grit between the teeth and a foul taste upon the palate, surely it is blessed to think that we may, after all life's disappointments, cherish the hope of a perfect fruition, and that yonder, if not here, it will be fully true that 'God never sends mouths but He sends meat to feed them.' That is not so in this world, for we all carry hungers which impel us forward to nobler living, and which it would not be good for us to have satisfied here. But, unless the whole universe is a godless chaos, there must be somewhere a state in which a man shall have all that he wants, and shall want only what he ought.

The emblem of a feast suggests also society. The solitary travellers who have been toiling and moiling through the desert all the day long, snatching up a hasty mouthful as they march, and lonely many a time, come together at last, and sit together there joyous and united. Deep down in our hearts some of us have gashes that always bleed. We know losses and loneliness, and we can feel, I hope, how blessed is the thought that all the wanderers shall sit there together, and rejoice in each other's communion, 'and so shall we ever be with the Lord.'

But besides satisfaction and society the figure suggests repose. That rest is not indolence, for we have to carry other metaphors with us in order to come to the full significance of this one, and the festal imagery is not all that we have to take into account; for we read, 'I grant unto you a kingdom, and ye shall sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel,' as well as 'ye shall eat and drink with Me at My table in My kingdom.' So repose, which is consistent and coexistent with the intensest activity, is the great hope that comes out of these metaphors. But for many of us—I suppose for all of us elderly people—who are about weary of work and worry, there is no deeper hope than the hope of rest. 'I have had labour enough for one,' says one of our poets. And I think there is something in most of our hearts that echoes that and rejoices to hear that, after the long march, 'ye shall sit with Me at My table.'

But besides satisfaction, society, and rest, the figure suggests gladness. Wine is the emblem of the joyous side of a feast, just as bread is the emblem of the necessary nourishment. And it is new wine; joy raised to a higher power, transformed and glorified; and yet the old emotion in a new form. As for that gladness, 'eye hath not seen, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, the things that God hath prepared for them that love Him.' Only all we weary, heavy-laden, saddened, anxious, disappointed, tormented people may hope for these festal joys, if we are Christ's. The feast will last when all the troubles and the cares which helped us to it are dead and buried and forgotten.

These four things, brethren—satisfaction, society, rest, new gladness—are proclaimed and prophesied to each of us, if we will, by this memorial rite.

Again, there comes from this aspect of the Communion the thought that the blessed condition of the Christian soul hereafter is a feast on a sacrifice. We must distinguish between the sense in which our Lord drinks with us, and the sense in which we alone partake of that feast of which He provides the viands. But just as in the symbolic ordinance of the Communion the very essence of it is that what was offered as sacrifice is now incorporated into the participant's spiritual being, and becomes part of himself, and the life of his life, so, in the future, all the blessedness of the clustered and constellated joys of that life, which is one eternal festival, shall arise from the reception into perfected spirits with ever-growing greatness and blessedness of the Christ that died and ever lives for them. That heavenly glory, to its highest pinnacle of aspiration, to its most rapt completeness of gladness, is all the consequence of Christ's death on the Cross. That death, which we commemorate, is the procuring cause of man's entrance into bliss, and that death is the subject of the continual, grateful remembrance of the saints in the seventh heaven of their glory. Life yonder, as all true life here, consists in taking into ourselves the life of Jesus Christ, and the law for heaven is the same as the law for earth, 'He that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me.'

Lastly, the conception of the future for Christian souls arising from this aspect of the Lord's Supper is that it is not only a feast, and a feast on a sacrifice, but that it is a feast with the King.

'With you I will drink it.' Brethren, we pass beyond metaphor when we gather up and condense all the vague brightness and glories of that perfect future into this one rapturous, overwhelming, all-embracing thought: 'So shall we ever be with the Lord.' I could almost wish that Christian people had no other thought of that future than this, for surely in its grand simplicity, in its ineffable depth, there lie the germs of every blessedness. How poor all the material emblems are of which sensuous imaginations make so much, when compared with that hope! As the good old hymn has it, which to me says more, in its bold simplicity, than all the sentimental enlargements of Scriptural metaphors which some people admire so much—

'It is enough that Christ knows all,
And I shall be with Him.'

Strange that He says, 'I will drink it with you.' Does He need sustenance? Does He need any external things in order to make His feast? No! and Yes! 'I will sup with Him' as well as 'He with me.' And, surely, His meat and drink are the love, the loyalty, the obedience, the receptiveness, the society of His redeemed children. 'The joy of the Lord' comes from 'seeing of the travail of His soul,' and His servants do enter into that joy in deep and wondrous fashion. We not only shall live on Christ, but He Himself puts to His own lips the chalice that He

commends to ours, and in marvellous condescension to, and identity with, our glorified humanity drinks with us the 'new wine' in the Father's kingdom.

GETHSEMANE, THE OIL-PRESS

‘Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. 37. And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. 38. Then saith He unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with Me. 39. And He went a little farther, and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt. 40. And He cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with Me one hour! 41. Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. 42. He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O My Father, if this cup may not pass away from Me, except I drink it, Thy will be done. 43. And He came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy. 44. And He left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. 45. Then cometh He to His disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46. Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray Me.’—[MATT. xxvi. 36-46](#).

One shrinks from touching this incomparable picture of unexampled sorrow, for fear lest one’s finger-marks should stain it. There is no place here for picturesque description, which tries to mend the gospel stories by dressing them in to-day’s fashions, nor for theological systematisers and analysers of the sort that would ‘botanise upon their mother’s grave.’ We must put off our shoes, and feel that we stand on holy ground. Though loving eyes saw something of Christ’s agony, He did not let them come beside Him, but withdrew into the shadow of the gnarled olives, as if even the moonbeams must not look too closely on the mystery of such grief. We may go as near as love was allowed to go, but stop where it was stayed, while we reverently and adoringly listen to what the Evangelist tells us of that unspeakable hour.

I. Mark the ‘exceeding sorrow’ of the Man of Sorrows. Somewhere on the western foot of Olivet lay the garden, named from an oil-press formerly or then in it, which was to be the scene of the holiest and sorest sorrow on which the moon, that has seen so much misery, has ever looked. Truly it was ‘an oil-press,’ in which ‘the good olive’ was crushed by the grip of unparalleled agony, and yielded precious oil, which has been poured into many a wound since then. Eight of the eleven are left at or near the entrance, while He passes deeper into the shadows with the three. They had been witnesses of His prayers once before, on the slopes of Hermon, when He was transfigured before them. They are now to see a no less wonderful revelation of His glory in His filial submission. There is something remarkable in Matthew’s expression, ‘He began to be sorrowful,’—as if a sudden wave of emotion, breaking over His soul, had swept His human sensibilities before it. The strange word

translated by the Revisers 'sore troubled' is of uncertain derivation, and may possibly be simply intended to intensify the idea of sorrow; but more probably it adds another element, which Bishop Lightfoot describes as 'the confused, restless, half-distracted state which is produced by physical derangement or mental distress.' A storm of agitation and bewilderment broke His calm, and forced from His patient lips, little wont to speak of His own emotions, or to seek for sympathy, the unutterably pathetic cry, 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful'—compassed about with sorrow, as the word means—'even unto death.' No feeble explanation of these words does justice to the abyss of woe into which they let us dimly look. They tell the fact, that, a little more and the body would have sunk under the burden. He knew the limits of human endurance, for 'all things were made by Him,' and, knowing it, He saw that He had grazed the very edge. Out of the darkness He reaches a hand to feel for the grasp of a friend, and piteously asks these humble lovers to stay beside Him, not that they could help Him to bear the weight, but that their presence had some solace in it. His agony must be endured alone, therefore He bade them tarry there; but He desired to have them at hand, therefore He went but 'a little forward.' They could not bear it with Him, but they could 'watch with' Him, and that poor comfort is all He asks. No word came from them. They were, no doubt, awed into silence, as the truest sympathy is used to be, in the presence of a great grief. Is it permitted us to ask what were the fountains of these bitter floods that swept over Christ's sinless soul? Was the mere physical shrinking from death all? If so, we may reverently say that many a maiden and old man, who drew all their fortitude from Jesus, have gone to stake or gibbet for His sake, with a calm which contrasts strangely with His agitation. Gethsemane is robbed of its pathos and nobleness if that be all. But it was not all. Rather it was the least bitter of the components of the cup. What lay before Him was not merely death, but the death which was to atone for a world's sin, and in which, therefore, the whole weight of sin's consequences was concentrated. 'The Lord hath made to meet on Him the iniquities of us all'; that is the one sufficient explanation of this infinitely solemn and tender scene. Unless we believe that, we shall find it hard to reconcile His agitation in Gethsemane with the perfection of His character as the captain of 'the noble army of martyrs.'

II. Note the prayer of filial submission. Matthew does not tell us of the sweat falling audibly and heavily, and sounding to the three like slow blood-drops from a wound, nor of the strengthening angel, but he gives us the prostrate form, and the threefold prayer, renewed as each moment of calm, won by it, was again broken in upon by a fresh wave of emotion. Thrice He had to leave the disciples, and came back, a calm conqueror; and twice the enemy rallied and returned to the assault, and was at last driven finally from the field by the power of prayer and submission. The three Synoptics differ in their report of our Lord's words, but all mean the same thing in substance; and it is obvious that much more must have been spoken than they report. Possibly what we have is only the fragments that reached the three

before they fell asleep. In any case, Jesus was absent from them on each occasion long enough to allow of their doing so.

Three elements are distinguishable in our Lord's prayer. There is, first, the sense of Sonship, which underlies all, and was never more clear than at that awful moment. Then there is the recoil from 'the cup,' which natural instinct could not but feel, though sinlessly. The flesh shrank from the Cross, which else had been no suffering; and if no suffering, then had been no atonement. His manhood would not have been like ours, nor His sorrows our pattern, if He had not thus drawn back, in His sensitive humanity, from the awful prospect now so near. But natural instinct is one thing, and the controlling will another. However currents may have tossed the vessel, the firm hand at the helm never suffered them to change her course. The will, which in this prayer He seems so strangely to separate from the Father's, even in the act of submission, was the will which wishes, not that which resolves. His fixed purpose to die for the world's sin never wavered. The shrinking does not reach the point of absolutely and unconditionally asking that the cup might pass. Even in the act of uttering the wish, it is limited by that 'if it be possible,' which can only mean—possible, in view of the great purpose for which He came. That is to be accomplished, at any cost; and unless it can be accomplished though the cup be withdrawn, He does not even wish, much less will, that it should be withdrawn. So, the third element in the prayer is the utter resignation to the Father's will, in which submission He found peace, as we do.

He prayed His way to perfect calm, which is ever the companion of perfect self-surrender to God. They who cease from their own works do 'enter into rest.' All the agitations which had come storming in massed battalions against Him are defeated by it. They have failed to shake His purpose, they now fail even to disturb His peace. So, victorious from the dreadful conflict, and at leisure of heart to care for others, He can go back to the disciples. But even whilst seeking to help them, a fresh wave of suffering breaks in on His calm, and once again He leaves them to renew the struggle. The instinctive shrinking reasserts itself, and, though overcome, is not eradicated. But the second prayer is yet more rooted in acquiescence than the first. It shows that He had not lost what He had won by the former; for it, as it were, builds on that first supplication, and accepts as answer to its contingent petition the consciousness, accompanying the calm, that it was not possible for the cup to pass from Him. The sense of Sonship underlies the complete resignation of the second prayer as of the first. It has no wish but God's will, and is the voluntary offering of Himself. Here He is both Priest and Sacrifice, and offers the victim with this prayer of consecration. So once more He triumphs, because once more, and yet more completely, He submits, and accepts the Cross. For Him, as for us, the Cross accepted ceases to be a pain, and the cup is no more bitter when we are content to drink it. Once more in fainter fashion the enemy came on, casting again his spent arrows, and beaten back by the same weapon. The words were the

same, because no others could have expressed more perfectly the submission which was the heart of His prayers and the condition of His victory.

Christ's prayer, then, was not for the passing of the cup, but that the will of God might be done in and by Him, and 'He was heard in that He feared,' not by being exempted from the Cross, but by being strengthened through submission for submission. So His agony is the pattern of all true prayer, which must ever deal with our wishes, as He did with His instinctive shrinking,—present them wrapped in an 'if it be possible,' and followed by a 'nevertheless.' The meaning of prayer is not to force our wills on God's, but to bend our wills to His; and that prayer is really answered of which the issue is our calm readiness for all that He lays upon us.

III. Note the sad and gentle remonstrance with the drowsy three. 'The sleep of the disciples, and of these disciples, and of all three, and such an overpowering sleep, remains even after Luke's explanation, "for sorrow," a psychological riddle' (Meyer). It is singularly parallel with the sleep of the same three at the Transfiguration—an event which presents the opposite pole of our Lord's experiences, and yields so many antithetical parallels to Gethsemane. No doubt the tension of emotion, which had lasted for many hours, had worn them out; but, if weariness had weighed down their eyelids, love should have kept them open. Such sleep of such disciples may have been a riddle, but it was also a crime, and augured imperfect sympathy. Gentle surprise and the pain of disappointed love are audible in the question, addressed to Peter especially, as he had promised so much, but meant for all. This was all that Jesus got in answer to His yearning for sympathy. 'I looked for some to take pity, but there was none.' Those who loved Him most lay curled in dead slumber within earshot of His prayers. If ever a soul tasted the desolation of utter loneliness, that suppliant beneath the olives tasted it. But how little of the pain escapes His lips! The words but hint at the slightness of their task compared with His, at the brevity of the strain on their love, and at the companionship which ought to have made sleep impossible. May we not see in Christ's remonstrance a word for all? For us, too, the task of keeping awake in the enchanted ground is light, measured against His, and the time is short, and we have Him to keep us company in the watch, and every motive of grateful love should make it easy; but, alas, how many of us sleep a drugged and heavy slumber!

The gentle remonstrance soon passes over into counsel as gentle. Watchfulness and prayer are inseparable. The one discerns dangers, the other arms against them. Watchfulness keeps us prayerful, and prayerfulness keeps us watchful. To watch without praying is presumption, to pray without watching is hypocrisy. The eye that sees clearly the facts of life will turn upwards from its scanning of the snares and traps, and will not look in vain. These two are the indispensable conditions of victorious encountering of temptation. Fortified by them, we shall not 'enter into' it, though we encounter it. The outward trial will remain, but its power to lead us astray will vanish. It will still be danger or sorrow, but it will not be

temptation; and we shall pass through it, as a sunbeam through foul air, untainted, and keeping heaven's radiance. That is a lesson for a wider circle than the sleepy three.

It is followed by words which would need a volume to expound in all their depth and width of application, but which are primarily a reason for the preceding counsel, as well as a loving apology for the disciples' sleep. Christ is always glad to give us credit for even imperfect good; His eye, which sees deeper than ours, sees more lovingly, and is not hindered from marking the willing spirit by recognising weak flesh. But these words are not to be made a pillow for indolent acquiescence in the limitations which the flesh imposes on the spirit. He may take merciful count of these, and so may we, in judging others, but it is fatal to plead them at the bar of our own consciences. Rather they should be a spur to our watchfulness and to our prayer. We need these because the flesh is weak, still more because, in its weakness toward good, it is strong to evil. Such exercise will give governing power to the spirit, and enable it to impose its will on the reluctant flesh. If we watch and pray, the conflict between these two elements in the renewed nature will tend to unity and peace by the supremacy of the spirit; if we do not, it will tend to cease by the unquestioned tyranny of the flesh. In one or other direction our lives are tending.

Strange that such words had no effect. But so it was, and so deep was the apostles' sleep that Christ left them undisturbed the second time. The relapse is worse than the original disease. Sleep broken and resumed is more torpid and fatal than if it had not been interrupted. We do not know how long it lasted, though the whole period in the garden must have been measured by hours; but at last it was broken by the enigmatical last words of our Lord. The explanation of the direct opposition between the consecutive sentences, by taking the 'Sleep on now' as ironical, jars on one's reverence. Surely irony is out of keeping with the spirit of Christ then. Rather He bids them sleep on, since the hour is come, in sad recognition that the need for their watchful sympathy is past, and with it the opportunity for their proved affection. It is said with a tone of contemplative melancholy, and is almost equivalent to 'too late, too late.' The memorable sermon of F. W. Robertson, on this text, rightly grasps the spirit of the first clause, when it dwells with such power on the thought of 'the irrevocable past' of wasted opportunities and neglected duty. But the sudden transition to the sharp, short command and broken sentences of the last verse is to be accounted for by the sudden appearance of the flashing lights of the band led by Judas, somewhere near at hand, in the valley. The mood of pensive reflection gives place to rapid decision. He summons them to arise, not for flight, but that He may go out to meet the traitor. Escape would have been easy. There was time to reach some sheltering fold of the hill in the darkness; but the prayer beneath the silver-grey olives had not been in vain, and these last words in Gethsemane throb with the Son's willingness to yield Himself up, and to empty to its dregs the cup which the Father had given Him.

THE LAST PLEADING OF LOVE

‘And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come?’—[MATT. xxvi. 50.](#)

We are accustomed to think of the betrayer of our Lord as a kind of monster, whose crime is so mysterious in its atrocity as to put him beyond the pale of human sympathy. The awful picture which the great Italian poet draws of him as alone in hell, shunned even there, as guilty beyond all others, expresses the general feeling about him. And even the attempts which have been made to diminish the greatness of his guilt, by supposing that his motive was only to precipitate Christ’s assumption of His conquering Messianic power, are prompted by the same thought that such treason as his is all but inconceivable. I cannot but think that these attempts fail, and that the narratives of the Gospels oblige us to think of his crime as deliberate treachery. But even when so regarded, other emotions than wondering loathing should be excited by the awful story.

There had been nothing in his previous history to suggest such sin, as is proved by the disciples’ question, when our Lord announced that one of them should betray Him. No suspicion lighted on him—no finger pointed to where he sat. But self-distrust asked, ‘Lord, is it I?’ and only love, pillowed on the Master’s breast, and strong in the happy sense of His love, was sufficiently assured of its own constancy, to change the question into ‘Lord! who is it?’ The process of corruption was unseen by all eyes but Christ’s. He came to his terrible pre-eminence in crime by slow degrees, and by paths which we may all tread. As for his guilt, that is in other hands than ours. As for his fate, let us copy the solemn and pitying reticence of Peter, and say, ‘that he might go to his own place’—the place that belongs to him, and that he is fit for, wherever that may be. As for the growth and development of his sin, let us remember that ‘we have all of us one human heart,’ and that the possibilities of crime as dark are in us all. And instead of shuddering abhorrence at a sin that can scarcely be understood, and can never be repeated, let us be sure that whatever man has done, man may do, and ask with humble consciousness of our own deceitful hearts, ‘Lord, is it I?’ These remarkable and solemn words of Christ, with which He meets the treacherous kiss, appear to be a last appeal to Judas. They may possibly not be a question, as in our version—but an incomplete sentence, ‘What thou hast come to do’—leaving the implied command, ‘That do,’ unexpressed. They would then be very like other words which the betrayer had heard but an hour or two before, ‘That thou doest, do quickly.’ But such a rendering does not seem so appropriate to the circumstances as that which makes them a question, smiting on his heart and conscience, and seeking to tear away the veil of sophistications with which he had draped from his own eyes the hideous shape of his crime. And, if so, what a wonderful instance we have here of that long-suffering love. They are the last effort of the divine patience to win back even the traitor. They show us the wrestle between infinite mercy and a treacherous, sinful heart, and they bring into awful prominence the power which that heart

has of rejecting the counsel of God against itself. I venture to use them now as suggesting these three things: the patience of Christ's love; the pleading of Christ's love; and the refusal of Christ's love.

I. The patience of Christ's love.

If we take no higher view of this most pathetic incident than that the words come from a man's lips, even then all its beauty will not be lost. There are some sins against friendship in which the manner is harder to bear than the substance of the evil. It must have been a strangely mean and dastardly nature, as well as a coarse and cold one, that could think of fixing on the kiss of affection as the concerted sign to point out their victim to the legionaries. Many a man who could have planned and executed the treason would have shrunk from that. And many a man who could have borne to be betrayed by his own familiar friend would have found that heartless insult worse to endure than the treason itself. But what a picture of perfect patience and unruffled calm we have here, in that the answer to the poisonous, hypocritical embrace was these moving words! The touch of the traitor's lips has barely left His cheek, but not one faint passing flush of anger tinges it. He is perfectly self-oblivious—absorbed in other thoughts, and among them in pity for the guilty wretch before Him. His words have no agitation in them, no instinctive recoil from the pollution of such a salutation. They have grave rebuke, but it is rebuke which derives its very force from the appeal to former companionship. Christ still recognises the ancient bond, and is true to it. He will still plead with this man who has been beside Him long; and though His heart be wounded yet He is not wroth, and He will not cast him off. If this were nothing more than a picture of human friendship it would stand alone, above all other records that the world cherishes in its inmost heart, of the love that never fails, and is not soon angry.

But we, I hope, dear brethren, think more loftily and more truly of our dear Lord than as simply a perfect manhood, the exemplar of all goodness. How He comes to be that, if He be not more than that, I do not understand, and I, for one, feel that my confidence in the flawless completeness of His human character lives or dies with my belief that He is the Eternal Word, God manifest in the flesh. Certainly we shall never truly grasp the blessed meaning of His life on earth until we look upon it all as the revelation of God. The tears of Christ are the pity of God. The gentleness of Jesus is the long-suffering of God. The tenderness of Jesus is the love of God. 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father'; and all that life so beautiful but so anomalous as to be all but incredible, when we think of it as only the life of a man, glows with a yet fairer beauty, and corresponds with the nature which it expresses, when we think of it as being the declaration to us by the divine Son of the divine Father—our loftiest, clearest, and authentic revelation of God.

How that thought lifts these words before us into a still higher region! We are now in the presence of the solemn greatness of a divine love. If the meaning of this saying is what

we have suggested, it is pathetic even in the lower aspect, but how infinitely that pathos is deepened when we view it in the higher!

Surely if ever there was a man who might have been supposed to be excluded from the love of God, it was Judas. Surely if ever there was a moment in a human life, when one might have supposed that even Christ's ever open heart would shut itself together against any one, it was this moment. But no, the betrayer in the very instant of his treason has that changeless tenderness lingering around him, and that merciful hand beckoning to him still.

And have we not a right to generalise this wonderful fact, and to declare its teaching to be—that the love of God is extended to us all, and cannot be made to turn away from us by any sins of ours? Sin is mighty; it can work endless evils on us; it can disturb and embitter all our relations with God; it can, as we shall presently have to point out, make it necessary for the tenderest 'grace of God to come disciplining'—to 'come with a rod,' just because it comes in 'the spirit of meekness.' But one thing it cannot do, and that is—make God cease to love us. I suppose all human affection can be worn out by constant failure to evoke a response from cold hearts. I suppose that it can be so nipped by frosts, so constantly checked in blossoming, that it shrivels and dies. I suppose that constant ingratitude, constant indifference can turn the warmest springs of our love to a river of ice. 'Can a mother forget her child?—Yea, she may forget.' But we have to do with a God, whose love is His very being; who loves us not for reasons in us but in Himself; whose love is eternal and boundless as all His nature; whose love, therefore, cannot be turned away by our sin—but abides with us for ever, and is granted to every soul of man. Dear brethren, we cannot believe too firmly, we cannot trust too absolutely, we cannot proclaim too broadly that blessed thought, without which we have no hope to feed on for ourselves, or to share with our fellows—the universal love of God in Christ.

Is there a worst man on earth at this moment? If there be, he, too, has a share in that love. Harlots and thieves, publicans and sinners, leprous outcasts, and souls tormented by unclean spirits, the wrecks of humanity whom decent society and respectable Christianity passes by with averted head and uplifted hands, criminals on the gibbet with the rope round their necks—and those who are as hopeless as any of these, self-complacent formalists and 'Gospel-hardened professors'—all have a place in that heart. And that, not as undistinguished members of a class, but as separate souls, singly the objects of God's knowledge and love. He loves all, because He loves each. We are not massed together in His view, nor in His regard. He does not lose the details in the whole; as we, looking on some great crowd of up-turned faces, are conscious of all but recognise no single one. He does not love a class—a world—but He loves the single souls that make it up—you and me, and every one of the millions that we throw together in the vague phrase, 'the race.' Let us individualise that love in our thoughts as it individualises us in its outflow—and make our own the 'exceeding

broad' promises, which include us, too. 'God loves me; Christ gave Himself for me. I have a place in that royal, tender heart.'

Nor should any sin make us doubt this. He loved us with exceeding love, even when we were 'dead in trespasses.' He did not begin to love because of anything in us; He will not cease because of anything in us. We change; 'He abideth faithful, He cannot deny Himself.' As the sunshine pours down as willingly and abundantly on filth and dunghills, as on gold that glitters in its beam, and jewels that flash back its lustre, so the light and warmth of that unsetting and unexhausted source of life pours down 'on the unthankful and on the good.' The great ocean clasps some black and barren crag that frowns against it, as closely as with its waves it kisses some fair strand enamelled with flowers and fragrant with perfumes. So that sea of love in which we 'live, and move, and have our being,' encircles the worst with abundant flow. He Himself sets us the pattern, which to imitate is to be the children of 'our Father which is in heaven,' in that He loves His enemies, blessing them that curse, and doing good to them that hate. He Himself is what He has enjoined us to be, in that He feeds His enemies when they hunger, and when they thirst gives them drink, heaping coals of fire on their heads, and seeking to kindle in them thereby the glow of answering love, not being overcome of their evil, so that He repays hate with hate and scorn with scorn, but in patient continuance of loving kindness seeking to overcome evil with good. He is Himself that 'charity' which 'is not easily provoked, is not soon angry, beareth all things, hopeth all things, and never faileth.' His love is mightier than all our sins, and waits not on our merits, nor is turned away by our iniquities. 'God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'

II. Then, secondly, we have here—the pleading of Christ's patient love.

I have been trying to say as broadly and strongly as I can, that our sins do not turn away the love of God in Christ from us. The more earnestly we believe and proclaim that, the more needful is it to set forth distinctly—and that not as limiting, but as explaining the truth—the other thought, that the sin which does not avert, does modify the expression of, the love of God. Man's sin compels Him to do what the prophet calls his 'strange work'—the work which is not dear to His heart, nor natural, if one may so say, to His hands—His work of judgment.

The love of Christ has to come to sinful men with patient pleading and remonstrance, that it may enter their hearts and give its blessings. We are familiar with a modern work of art in which that long-suffering appeal is wonderfully portrayed. He who is the Light of the world stands, girded with the royal mantle clasped with the priestly breastplate, bearing in His hand the lamp of truth, and there, amidst the dew of night and the rank hemlock, He pleads for entrance at the closed door which has no handle on its outer side, and is hinged to open only from within. 'I stand at the door and knock. If any man open the door, I will come in.'

And in this incident before us, we see represented not only the endless patience of God's pitying love, but the method which it needs to take in order to reach the heart.

There is an appeal to the traitor's heart, and an appeal to his conscience. Christ would have him think of the relations that have so long subsisted between them; and He would have him think, too, of the real nature of the deed he is doing, or, perhaps, of the motives that impel him. The grave, sad word, by which He addresses him, is meant to smite upon his heart. The sharp question which He puts to him is meant to wake up his conscience; and both taken together represent the two chief classes of remonstrance which He brings to bear upon us all—the two great batteries from which He assails the fortress of our sins.

There is first, then—Christ's appeal to the heart. He tries to make Judas feel the considerations that should restrain him. The appellation by which our Lord addresses him does not in the original convey quite so strongly the idea of amity, as our word 'Friend' does. It is not the same as that which He had used a few hours before in the upper chamber, when He said, 'Henceforth I call you not servants, but I have called you friends.—Ye are My friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.' It is the same as is put into the lips of the Lord of the vineyard, remonstrating with his jealous labourer, 'Friend, I do thee no wrong.' There is a tone, then, of less intimate association and graver rebuke in it than in that name with which He honours those who make His will theirs, and His word the law of their lives. It does not speak of close confidence, but it does suggest companionship and kindness on the part of the speaker. There is rebuke in it, but it is rebuke which derives its whole force from the remembrance of ancient concord and connection. Our Lord would recall to the memory of the betrayer the days in which they had taken sweet counsel together. It is as if He had said—'Hast thou forgotten all our former intercourse? Thou hast eaten My bread, thou hast been Mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted—canst thou lift up thy heel against Me?' What happy hours of quiet fellowship on many a journey, of rest together after many a day of toil, what forgotten thoughts of the loving devotion and the glow of glad consecration that he had once felt, what a long series of proofs of Christ's gentle goodness and meek wisdom should have sprung again to remembrance at such an appeal! And how black and dastardly would his guilt have seemed if once he had ventured to remember what unexampled friendship he was sinning against!

Is it not so with us all, dear brethren? All our evils are betrayals of Christ, and all our betrayals of Christ are sins against a perfect friendship and an unvaried goodness. We, too, have sat at His table, heard His wisdom, seen His miracles, listened to His pleadings, have had a place in His heart; and if we turn away from Him to do our own pleasure, and sell His love for a handful of silver, we need not cherish shuddering abhorrence against that poor wretch who gave Him up to the cross. Oh! if we could see aright, we should see our Saviour's meek, sad face standing between us and each of our sins, with warning in the pitying eyes, and His pleading voice would sound in our ears, appealing to us by loving remembrances

of His ancient friendship, to turn from the evil which is treason against Him, and wounds His heart as much as it harms ours. Take heed lest in condemning the traitor we doom ourselves. If we flush into anger at the meanness of his crime, and declare, 'He shall surely die,' do we not hear a prophet's voice saying to each, 'Thou art the man'?

The loving hand laid on the heart-strings is followed by a strong stroke on conscience. The heart vibrates most readily in answer to gentle touches: the conscience, in answer to heavier, as the breath that wakes the chords of an Aeolian harp would pass silent through the brass of a trumpet. 'Wherefore art thou come?'—if to be taken as a question at all, which, as I have said, seems most natural, is either, 'What hast thou come to do?'—or, 'Why hast thou come to do it?' Perhaps it maybe fairly taken as including both. But, at all events, it is clearly an appeal to Judas to make him see what his conduct really is in itself, and possibly in its motive too. And this is the constant effort of the love of Christ—to get us to say to ourselves the real name of what we are about.

We cloak our sins from ourselves with many wrappings, as they swathe a mummy in voluminous folds. And of these veils, one of the thickest is woven by our misuse of words to describe the very same thing by different names, according as we do it, or another man does it. Almost all moral actions—the thing to which we can apply the words right or wrong—have two or more names, of which the one suggests the better and the other the worse side of the action. For instance what in ourselves we call prudent regard for our own interest, we call, in our neighbour, narrow selfishness; what in ourselves is laudable economy, in him is miserable avarice. We are impetuous, he is passionate; we generous, he lavish; we are clever men of business, he is a rogue; we sow our wild oats and are gay, he is dissipated. So we cheat ourselves by more than half-transparent veils of our own manufacture, which we fling round the ugly features and misshapen limbs of these sins of ours, and we are made more than ever their bond-slaves thereby.

Therefore, it is the office of the truest love to force us to look at the thing as it is. It would go some way to keep a man from some of his sins if he would give the thing its real name. A distinct conscious statement to oneself, 'Now I am going to tell a lie'—'This that I am doing is fraud'—'This emotion that I feel creeping with devilish warmth about the roots of my heart is revenge'—and so on, would surely startle us sometimes, and make us fling the gliding poison from our breast, as a man would a snake that he found just lifting its head from the bosom of his robe. Suppose Judas had answered the question, and, gathering himself up, had looked his Master in the face, and said—'What have I come for?' 'I have come to betray Thee for thirty pieces of silver!' Do you not think that putting his guilt into words might have moved even him to more salutary feelings than the remorse which afterwards accompanied his tardy discernment of what he had done? So the patient love of Christ comes rebuking, and smiting hard on conscience. 'The grace of God that bringeth salvation to all men hath appeared disciplining'—and His hand is never more gentle than when it

plucks away the films with which we hide our sins from ourselves, and shows us the 'rotteness and dead men's bones' beneath the whited walls of the sepulchres and the velvet of the coffins.

He must begin with rebukes that He may advance to blessing. He must teach us what is separating us from Him that, learning it, we may flee to His grace to help us. There is no entrance for the truest gifts of His patient love into any heart that has not yielded to His pleading remonstrance, and in lowly penitence has answered His question as He would have us answer it, 'Friend and Lover of my soul, I have sinned against Thy tender heart, against the unexampled patience of Thy love. I have departed from Thee and betrayed Thee. Blessed be Thy merciful voice which hath taught me what I have done! Blessed be Thine unwearied goodness which still bends over me! Raise me fallen! forgive me treacherous! Keep me safe and happy, ever true and near to Thee!'

III. Notice the possible rejection of the pleading of Christ's patient love.

Even that appeal was vain. Here we are confronted with a plain instance of man's mysterious and awful power of 'frustrating the counsel of God'—of which one knows not whether is greater, the difficulty of understanding how a finite will can rear itself against the Infinite Will, or the mournful mystery that a creature should desire to set itself against its loving Maker and Benefactor. But strange as it is, yet so it is; and we can turn round upon Sovereign Fatherhood bidding us to its service, and say, 'I will not.' He pleads with us, and we can resist His pleadings. He holds out the mercies of His hands and the gifts of His grace, and we can reject them. We cannot cease to be the objects of His love, but we can refuse to be the recipients of its most precious gifts. We can bar our hearts against it. Then, of what avail is it to us? To go back to an earlier illustration, the sunshine pours down and floods a world, what does that matter to us if we have fastened up shutters on all our windows, and barred every crevice through which the streaming gladness can find its way? We shall grope at noontide as in the dark within our gloomy house, while our neighbours have light in theirs. What matters it though we float in the great ocean of the divine love, if with pitch and canvas we have carefully closed every aperture at which the flood can enter? A hermetically closed jar, plunged in the Atlantic, will be as dry inside as if it were lying on the sand of the desert. It is possible to perish of thirst within sight of the fountain. It is possible to separate ourselves from the love of God, not to separate the love of God from ourselves.

The incident before us carries another solemn lesson—how simple and easy a thing it is to repel that pleading love. What did Judas do? Nothing; it was enough. He merely held his peace—no more. There was no need for him to break out with oaths and curses, to reject his Lord with wild words. Silence was sufficient. And for us—no more is required. We have but to be passive; we have but to stand still. Not to accept is to refuse; non-submission is rebellion. We do not need to emphasise our refusal by any action—no need to lift our clenched hands in defiance. We have simply to put them behind our backs or to keep them

folded. The closed hand must remain an empty hand. 'He that believeth not is condemned.' My friend, remember that, when Christ pleads and draws, to do nothing is to oppose, and to delay is to refuse. It is a very easy matter to ruin your soul. You have simply to keep still when He says 'Come unto Me'—to keep your eyes fixed where they were, when He says, 'Look unto Me, and be ye saved,' and all the rest will follow of itself.

Notice, too, how the appeal of Christ's love hardens where it does not soften. That gentle voice drove the traitor nearer the verge over which he fell into a gulf of despair. It should have drawn him closer to the Lord, but he recoiled from it, and was thereby brought nearer destruction. Every pleading of Christ's grace, whether by providences, or by books, or by His own word, does something with us. It is never vain. Either it melts or it hardens. The sun either scatters the summer morning mists, or it rolls them into heavier folds, from whose livid depths the lightning will be flashing by mid-day. You cannot come near the most inadequate exhibition of the pardoning love of Christ without being either drawn closer to Him or driven further from Him. Each act of rejection prepares the way for another, which will be easier, and adds another film to the darkness which covers your eyes, another layer to the hardness which incrusts your hearts.

Again, that silence, so eloquent and potent in its influence, was probably the silence of a man whose conscience was convicted while his will was unchanged. Such a condition is possible. It points to solemn thoughts, and to deep mysteries in man's awful nature. He knew that he was wrong, he had no excuse, his deed was before him in some measure in its true character, and yet he would not give it up. Such a state, if constant and complete, presents the most frightful picture we can frame of a soul. That a man shall not be able to say, 'I did it ignorantly'; that Christ shall not be able to ground His intercession on, 'They know not what they do'; that with full knowledge of the true nature of the deed, there shall be no wavering of the determination to do it—we may well turn with terror from such an awful abyss. But let us remember that, whether such a condition in its completeness is conceivable or not, at all events we may approach it indefinitely; and we do approach it by every sin, and by every refusal to yield to the love that would touch our consciences and fill our hearts.

Have you ever noticed what a remarkable verbal correspondence there is between these words of our text, and some other very solemn ones of Christ's? The question that He puts into the lips of the king who came in to see his guests is, 'Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having on a wedding garment?' The question asked on earth shall be repeated again at last. The silence which once indicated a convinced conscience and an unchanged will may at that day indicate both of these and hopelessness beside. The clear vision of the divine love, if it do not flood the heart with joy and evoke the bliss of answering love, may fill it with bitterness. It is possible that the same revelation of the same grace may be the heaven of heaven to those who welcome it, and the pain of hell to those who turn from it. It is possible

that love believed and received may be life, and love recognised and rejected may be death. It is possible that the vision of the same face may make some break forth with the rapturous hymn, 'Lo, this is our God, we have waited for Him!' and make others call on the hills to fall on them and cover them from its brightness.

But let us not end with such words. Rather, dear brethren, let us yield to His patient beseechings; let Him teach us our evil and our sin. Listen to His great love who invites us to plead, and promises to pardon—'Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.'

THE REAL HIGH PRIEST AND HIS COUNTERFEIT

‘And they that had laid hold on Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. 58. But Peter followed Him afar off unto the high priest’s palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end. 59. Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put Him to death; 60. But found none: yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none. At the last came two false witnesses, 61. And said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days. 62 And the high priest arose, and said unto Him, Answerest Thou nothing? what is it which these witness against Thee? 63. But Jesus held His peace. And the high priest answered and said unto Him, I adjure Thee by the living God, that Thou tell us whether Thou be the Christ, the Son of God. 64. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. 65. Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard His blasphemy. 66. What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death. 67. Then did they spit in His face, and buffeted Him; and others smote Him with the palms of their hands, 68. Saying, Prophecy unto us, Thou Christ, Who is he that smote Thee?’—[MATT. xxvi. 57-68.](#)

John’s Gospel tells us that Jesus was brought before ‘Annas first,’ probably in the same official priestly residence as Caiaphas, his son-in-law, occupied. That preliminary examination brought out nothing to incriminate the prisoner, and was flagrantly illegal, being an attempt to entrap Him into self-accusing statements. It was baffled by Jesus being silent first, and subsequently taking His stand on the undeniable principle that a charge must be sustained by evidence, not based on self-accusation. Annas, having made nothing of this strange criminal, ‘sent Him bound unto Caiaphas.’

A meeting of the Sanhedrin had been hastily summoned in the dead of night, which was itself an illegality. Now Jesus stands before the poor shadow of a judicial tribunal, which, though it was all that Rome had left a conquered people, was still entitled to sit in judgment on Him. Strange inversion, and awful position for these formalists! And with sad persistence of bitter prejudice they proceeded to try the prisoner, all unaware that it was themselves, not Him, that they were trying.

They began wrongly, and betrayed their animus at once. They were sitting there to inquire whether Jesus was guilty or no; they had made up their minds beforehand that He was, and their effort now was but to manufacture some thin veil of legality for a judicial murder. So they ‘sought false witness, . . . that they might put Him to death.’ Matthew simply says that no evidence sufficient for the purpose was forthcoming; Mark adds that the weak point, was that the lies contradicted each other. Christ’s presence has a strange, solemn

power of unmasking our falsehoods, both of thought and deed, and it is hard to speak evil of Him before His face. If His calumniators were confused when He stood as Prisoner, what will they be when He sits as a Judge?

Only Matthew and Mark tell us of the two witnesses whose twisted version of the word about 'destroying the Temple and rebuilding it in three days' seemed to Caiaphas serious enough to require an answer. Their mistake was one which might have been made in good faith, but none the less was their travesty 'false witness.' Their version of His great word shows how easily the teaching of a lofty soul, passed through the popular brain, is degraded, and made to mean the opposite of what he had meant by it. For the destruction of the Temple had appeared in the saying as the Jews' work, and Jesus had presented Himself in it as the Restorer, not the Destroyer, of the Temple and of all that it symbolised. We destroy, He rebuilds. The murder of Jesus was the suicide of the nation. Caiaphas and his council were even now pulling down the Temple. And that murder was the destruction, so far as men could effect it, of the true 'Temple of His body,' in which the fulness of the Godhead dwelt, and which was more gloriously reconstituted in the Resurrection. The risen Christ rears the true temple on earth, for through Him the Holy Ghost dwells in His Church, which is collectively 'the Temple,' and in all believing spirits, which are individually 'the temples' of God. So the false witnesses distorted into a lie a great truth.

The Incarnate Word was dumb all the while. He 'was still and refrained' Himself. It was the silence of the King before a lawless tribunal of rebels, of patient meekness, 'as a sheep before her shearers'; of innocence that will not stoop to defend itself from groundless accusations; of infinite pity and forbearing love, which sees that it cannot win, but will not smite. Jesus is still silent, but one day, 'with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked.' Caiaphas seems to have been annoyed as well as surprised at Jesus' silence, for there is a trace of irritation, as at 'contempt of court,' in his words. But our Lord's continued silence appears to have somewhat awed him, and the dawning consciousness of his dignity is, perhaps, the reason for the high priest's casting aside all the foolery of false witnessing, and coming at last to the real point,— the Messianic claims of Jesus.

Caiaphas was doing his duty as high priest in inquiring into such claims, but he was somewhat late in the day, and he had made up his mind before he inquired. What he wished to get was a plain assertion on which the death sentence could be pronounced. Jesus knew this, and yet He answered. But Luke tells us that He first scathingly pointed to the unreality and animus of the question by saying, 'If I tell you, ye will not believe.' But yet it was fitting that He should solemnly, before the supreme court, representative of the nation, declare that He was the Messiah, and that, if He was to be rejected and condemned, it should be on the ground of that declaration. Before Caiaphas He claimed to be Messiah, before Pilate He claimed to be King. Each rejected Him in the character that appealed to them most. The many-sidedness of the perfect Revealer of God brings Him to each soul in the aspect that

most loudly addresses each. Therefore the love in the appeal and the guilt in its rejection are the greater.

But Christ's self-attestation to the council was not limited to the mere claim to the name of Messiah. It disclosed the implications of that name in a way altogether unlike the conceptions held by Caiaphas. When Caiaphas put in apposition 'the Christ' and 'the Son of God,' he was not speaking from the ordinary Jewish point of view, but from some knowledge, of Christ's teaching, and there are two charges combined into one.

But Jesus' answer, while plainly claiming to be the Messiah, expands itself in regard to the claim to be 'Son of God,' and shows its tremendous significance. It involves participation in divine authority and omnipotence. It involves a future coming to be the Judge of His judges. It declares that these blind scribes and elders will see Him thus exalted, and it asserts that all this is to begin then and there ('henceforth'), as if that hour of humiliation was to His consciousness the beginning of His manifestation as Lord, or, as John has it, 'the hour that the Son of Man should be glorified.' Nor must we leave out of sight the fact that it is 'the Son of Man' of whom all this is said, for thereby are indicated the raising of His perfect humanity to participation in Deity, and the possibility that His brethren, too, may sit where He sits. Much was veiled in the answer to the council, much is veiled to us. But this remains,—that Jesus, at that supreme moment, when He was bound to leave no misunderstandings, made the plainest claim to divinity, and could have saved His life if He had not done so. Either Caiaphas, in his ostentatious horror of such impiety, was right in calling Christ's words blasphemy, and not far wrong in inferring that Jesus was not fit to live, or He is the everlasting 'Son of the Father,' and will 'come to be our Judge.'

JESUS CHARGED WITH BLASPHEMY

‘Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses?’—[MATT. xxvi. 65.](#)

Jesus was tried and condemned by two tribunals, the Jewish ecclesiastical and the Roman civil. In each case the charge corresponded to the Court. The Sanhedrin took no cognisance of, and had no concern with, rebellion against Caesar; though for the time they pretended loyalty. Pilate had still less concern about Jewish superstitions. And so the investigation in each case turned on a different question. In the one it was, ‘Art Thou the Son of God?’ in the other, ‘Art Thou the King of Israel?’ The answer to both was a simple ‘Yes!’ but with very significant differences. Pilate received an explanation; the Sanhedrin none. The Roman governor was taught that Christ’s title of King belonged to another region altogether from that of Caesar, and did not in the slightest degree infringe upon the dominion that he represented. But ‘Son of God’ was capable of no explanation that could make it any less offensive; and the only thing to be done was to accept it or to condemn Him.

So this saying of the high priest differs from other words of our Lord’s antagonists, which we have been considering in recent pages, in that it is no distortion of our Lord’s characteristics or meaning. It correctly understands, but it fatally rejects, His claims; and does not hesitate to take the further step, on the ground of these, of branding Him as a blasphemer.

We may turn the high priest’s question in another direction: ‘What further need have we of witnesses?’ These horror-stricken judges, rending their garments in simulated grief and zeal, and that silent Prisoner, knowing that His life was the forfeit of His claims, yet saying no word of softening or explanation of them, may teach us much. They are witnesses to some of the central facts of the revelation of God in Christ. Let us turn to these for a few moments.

I. First, then, they witness to Christ’s claims.

The question that was proposed to Jesus, ‘Art Thou the Christ, the Son of the living God?’ was suggested by the facts of His ministry, and not by anything that had come out in the course of this investigation. It was the summing up of the impression made on the ecclesiastical authorities of Judaism by His whole attitude and demeanour. And if we look back to His life we shall see that there were instances, long before this, on which, on the same ground, the same charge was flung at Him. For example, when He would heal the paralytic, and, before He dealt with bodily disease, attended to spiritual weakness, and said, ‘Thy sins be forgiven thee,’ ere He said, ‘Take up thy bed and walk,’ there was a group of keen-eyed hunters after heresy sitting eagerly on the watch, who snatched at the words in a moment, and said, ‘Who is this that forgiveth sins? No man forgiveth sins, but God only! This man

speakeeth blasphemies!’ And they were right. He did claim a divine prerogative; and either the claim must be admitted or the charge of blasphemy urged.

Again, when He infringed Rabbinical Sabbath law by a cure, and they said, ‘This Man has broken the Sabbath day,’ His vindication was worse than His offence, for He answered, ‘My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.’ And then they sought the more to kill Him, because He not only brake the Sabbath, but also called God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.’ And again, when He declared that the safety of His sheep in His hands was identical with their safety in His Father’s hands, and vindicated the audacious parallelism by the tremendous assertion, ‘I and My Father are One,’ the charge of blasphemy rang out; and was inevitable, unless the claim was true.

These outstanding instances are but, as it were, summits that rise above the general level. But the general level is that of One who takes an altogether unique position. No one else, professing to lead men in paths of righteousness, has so constantly put the stress of His teaching, not upon morality, nor religion, nor obedience to God, but upon this, ‘Believe in Me’; or ever pushed forward His own personality into the foreground, and made the whole nobleness and blessedness and security and devoutness of a life to hinge upon that one thing, its personal relation to Him.

People talk about the sweet and gentle wisdom that flowed from Christ’s lips, and so on; about the lofty morality, about the beauty of pity and tenderness, and all the other commonplaces so familiar to us, and we gladly admit them all. But I venture to go a step further than all these, and to say that the outstanding differentia, the characteristic which marks off Christ’s teaching as something new, peculiar, and altogether per se, is not its morality, not its philanthropy, not its meek wisdom, not its sweet reasonableness, but its tremendous assertions of the importance of Himself.

And if I am asked to state the ground upon which such an assertion may be vindicated, I would point you to such facts as these, that this Man took up a position of equality with, and of superiority to, the legislation which He and the people to whom He was speaking regarded as being divinely sent, and said, ‘Ye have heard that it hath been said to them of old time’ so and so; ‘but I say unto you’: that this Man declared that to build upon His words was to build upon a rock; that this Man declared that He—He—was the legitimate object of absolute trust, of utter submission and obedience; that He claimed from His followers affiance, love, reverence which cannot be distinguished from worship, and that He did not therein conceive that He was intercepting anything that belonged to the Father. This Man professed to be able to satisfy the desires of every human heart when He said, ‘If any man thirst let him come to Me and drink.’ This Man claimed to be able to breathe the sanctity of repose in the blessedness of obedience over all the weary and the heavy laden; and assured them that He Himself, through all the ages, and in all lands, and for all troubles, would give them rest. This Man declared that He who stood there, in the quiet homes of Galilee, and

went about its acres with those blessed feet for our advantage, was to be Judge of the whole world. This Man said that His name was ‘Son of God’; and this Man declared, ‘He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.’

And then people say to us, ‘Oh! your Gospel narratives, even if they be the work of men in good faith, telling what they suppose He said, mistook the Teacher; and if we could strip away the accretion of mistaken reverence, and come to the historical person, we should find no claims like these.’

Well, this is not the time to enter into the large questions which that contention involves, but I point you to the incident which makes my text, and I say, ‘What need we any further witnesses?’ Nobody denies that Jesus Christ was crucified as the result of a combination of Sanhedrin and Pilate. What set the Jewish rulers against Him with such virulent and murderous determination? Is there anything in the life of Jesus Christ, if it is watered down as the people, who want to knock out all the supernatural, desire to water it down—is there anything in the life that will account for the inveterate acrimony and hostility which pursued Him to the death? The fact remains that, whether or not Evangelists and Apostles misconceived His teaching when they gave such prominence to His personality and His lofty claims, His enemies were under the same delusion, if it were a delusion; and the reason why the whole orthodox religionism of Judaism rejoiced when He was nailed to the Cross was summed up in the taunt which they flung at Him as He hung there, ‘If He be the Son of God, let Him come down, and we will believe Him.’

So, brethren, I put into the witness-box Annas and Caiaphas and all their satellites, and I say, ‘What need we any further witnesses?’ He died because He declared that He was the Son of God.

And I beseech you ask yourselves whether we are not being put off with a maimed version of His teaching, if there is struck out of it this its central characteristic, that He, ‘the sage and humble,’ declared that He was ‘likewise One with the Creator.’

II. Secondly, note how we have here the witness that Jesus Christ assented always to the loftiest meaning that men attached to His claims.

I have already pointed out the remarkable difference between the explanations which He condescended to give to the Roman governor as to the perfectly innocent meaning of His claim to be the King of Israel, and His silence before the Sanhedrin. That silence is only explicable because they rightly understood the meaning of the claim which they contemptuously and perversely rejected. Jesus Christ knew that His death was the forfeit, as I have said, and yet He locked His lips and said not a word.

In like manner when, on the other occasion to which I have already referred, the Pharisees stumbled at His claims to forgive sins, He said nothing to soften down that claim. If He had meant then only what some people would desire to make Him mean when He said, ‘Thy sins be forgiven thee’—viz., that He was simply acting as a minister of the divine for-

givenness, and assuring a poor sinner that God had pardoned him—why in common honesty, in discharge of His plain obligations of a teacher, did He not say so—not for His own sake, but for the sake of preventing such a tremendous misunderstanding of His meaning? But He let them go away with the conviction that He intended to claim a divine prerogative, and vindicated the assertion by doing what only a divine power could do: ‘That ye may know that the Son of Man hath power enough on earth to forgive sins, He saith unto the sick of the palsy, Take up thy bed and walk.’ There was no need for Him to have wrought a miracle to establish His right to tell a poor soul that God forgave sin. And the fact that the miracle was supposed to be the demonstration and the vindication of His right to declare forgiveness shows that He was exercising that prerogative which belongs, as they rightly said, to God only.

And in precisely the same manner, the commonest obligations of honesty, the plain duty of a misunderstood Teacher, to say nothing of the duty of self-preservation, ought to have opened His lips in the presence of the Jewish authorities, if they understood wrongly and set too high their estimate of the meaning of His claims. His silence establishes the fact that they understood these aright.

And so, all through His life, we note this peculiarity, that He never puts aside as too lofty for truth men’s highest interpretations of His claims, nor as too lowly for their mutual relation the lowest reverence which bowed before Him. Peter, in the house of Cornelius, said, ‘Stand up! for I myself also am a man.’ Paul and Barnabas, when the priests brought out the oxen and garlands to the gates of Lystra, could say, ‘We also are men of like passions with yourselves.’ But this meek Jesus lets men fall at His feet; and women wash them with their tears and wipe them with the hairs of their head; and souls stretch out maimed hands of faith, and grasp Him as their only hope. When His apostle said, ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,’ His answer was, ‘Blessed art thou, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee,’ and when another exclaimed, ‘My Lord and my God!’ this Pattern of all meekness accepted and endorsed the title, and pronounced a benediction on all who, not having seen Him, should hereafter attain a like faith.

Now I want to know whether that characteristic, which runs through all His life, and is inseparable from it, can be vindicated on any ground except the ground that He was ‘God manifest in the flesh.’ Either Jesus Christ had a greedy appetite for excessive adoration, was a victim to diseased vanity and ever-present self-regard—the most damning charge that you can bring against a religious teacher—or He accepted love and reverence and trust, because the love and the reverence and the trust knit souls to the Incarnate God their Saviour.

III. And so, lastly we have here witness to the only alternative to the acceptance of His claims.

He hath spoken ‘blasphemy,’ not because He had derogated from the dignity of divinity, but because He had presumed to participate in it. And it seems to me, with all deference,

that this rough alternative is the only legitimate one. If Jesus Christ did make such claims, and His relation to the Jewish hierarchy and His death are, as I have shown you, apart even from the testimony of the Evangelists, strong confirmation of the fact that He did—if Jesus Christ did make such claims, and they were not valid, one of two things follows. Either He believed them, and then, what about His sanity? or He did not believe them, and then, what about His honesty? In either case, what about His claims to be a Teacher of religion? What about His claims to be the Pattern of humanity? That part of His teaching and character is either the manifestation of His glory or it is like one of those fatal black seams that run through and penetrate into the substance of a fair white marble statue, marring all the rest of its pale and celestial beauty. Brethren, it seems to me that, when all is said and done, we come to one of three things about Jesus Christ. Either ‘He blasphemeth’ if He said these things, and they were not true, or ‘He is beside Himself’ if He said these things and believed them, or

‘Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ;
Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father.’

Now I know that there are many men who, I venture to say, are far better than their creed, and who, believing it impossible to accept, in their plain meaning, the plain claims of Jesus Christ to divinity, do yet cleave to Him with a love and a reverence and an obedience which more orthodox men might well copy. And far be it from me to say one word which might seem even to quench the faintest beam of light that, shining from His perfect character, draws any heart, however imperfectly, to Himself. Only, if I speak to any such at this time, I beseech them to follow the light which draws them, and to see whether their reverence for that fair character should not lead them to accept implicitly the claims that came from His own lips. I humbly venture to say that if we know anything at all about Jesus Christ, we know that He lived declaring Himself to be the Everlasting Son of the Father, and that He died because He did so declare Himself. And I beseech you to ponder the question whether reverence for Him and admiration of His character can be logically and reasonably retained, side by side with the repudiation of that which is the most distinctive part of His message to men.

Oh, brethren, if it is true that God has come in the flesh, and that that sweet, gracious, infinitely beautiful life is really the revelation of the heart of God, then what a beam of sunshine falls upon all the darkness of this world! Then God is love; then that love holds us all; did not shrink from dying for us, and lives for ever to bless us. If these claims are true, what should our attitude be but that of infinite trust, love, submission, obedience, and the shaping of our lives after the pattern of His life?

These rejectors, when they said, 'He speaketh blasphemies,' were sealing their own doom, and the ruined Temple and nineteen centuries of wandering misery show what comes to men who hear Christ declaring that He is the Son of the living God and the Judge of the world, and who find nothing in the words but blasphemy. On the other hand, if we will answer His question, 'Whom say ye that I am?' as the apostle answered it, we shall, like the apostle, receive a benediction from His lips, and be set on that faith as on a rock against which the 'gates of hell' shall not prevail.

'SEE THOU TO THAT!'

'I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? See thou to that. 24. I am innocent of the blood of this just Person: see ye to it.'—*MATT. xxvii. 4, 24.*

So, what the priests said to Judas, Pilate said to the priests. They contemptuously bade their wretched instrument bear the burden of his own treachery. They had condescended to use his services, but he presumed too far if he thought that that gave him a claim upon their sympathies. The tools of more respectable and bolder sinners are flung aside as soon as they are done with. What were the agonies or the tears of a hundred such as he to these high-placed and heartless transgressors? Priests though they were, and therefore bound by their office to help any poor creature that was struggling with a wounded conscience, they had nothing better to say to him than this scornful gibe, 'What is that to us? See thou to that.'

Pilate, on the other hand, metes to them the measure which they had meted to Judas. With curious verbal correspondence, he repeats the very words of Judas and of the priests. 'Innocent blood,' said Judas. 'I am innocent of the blood of this just Person,' said Pilate. 'See thou to that,' answered they. 'See ye to it,' says he. He tries to shove off his responsibility upon them, and they are quite willing to take it. Their consciences are not easily touched. Fanatical hatred which thinks itself influenced by religious motives is the blindest and cruellest of all passions, knowing no compunction, and utterly unperceptive of the innocence of its victim.

And so these three, Judas, the priests, and Pilate, suggest to us, I think, a threefold way in which conscience is perverted. Judas represents the agony of conscience, Pilate represents the shuffling sophistications of a half-awakened conscience, and those priests and people represent the torpor of an altogether misdirected conscience.

I. Judas, or the agony of conscience.

'I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.' We do not need to enter at any length upon the difficult question as to what were the motives of Judas in his treachery. For my part I do not see that there is anything in the Scripture narrative, simply interpreted, to bear out the hypothesis that his motives were mistaken zeal and affection for Christ; and a desire to force Him to the avowal of His Messiahship. One can scarcely suppose zeal so strangely perverted as to begin by betrayal, and if the object was to make our Lord speak out His claims, the means adopted were singularly ill-chosen. The story, as it stands, naturally suggests a much less far-fetched explanation.

Judas was simply a man of a low earthly nature, who became a follower of Christ, thinking that He was to prove a Messiah of the vulgar type, or another Judas Maccabæus³. He was not attracted by Christ's character and teaching. As the true nature of Christ's work

and kingdom became more obvious, he became more weary of Him and it. The closest proximity to Jesus Christ made eleven enthusiastic disciples, but it made one traitor. No man could live near Him for three years without coming to hate Him if he did not love Him. Then, as ever, He was set for the fall and for the rise of many. He was the 'savour of life unto life, or of death unto death.'

But be this as it may, we have here to do with the sudden revulsion of feeling which followed upon the accomplished act. This burst of confession does not sound like the words of a man who had been actuated by motives of mistaken affection. He knows himself a traitor, and that fair, perfect character rises before him in its purity, as he had never seen it before—to rebuke and confound him.

So this exclamation of his puts into a vivid shape, which may help it to stick in our memories and hearts, this thought—what an awful difference there is in the look of a sin before we do it and afterwards! Before we do it the thing to be gained seems so attractive, and the transgression that gains it seems so comparatively insignificant. Yes! and when we have done it the two change places; the thing that we win by it seems so contemptible—thirty pieces of silver! pitch them over the Temple enclosure and get rid of them!—and the thing that we did to win them dilates into such awful magnitude!

For instance, suppose we do anything that we know to be wrong, being tempted to it by a momentary indulgence of some mere animal impulse. By the very nature of the case, that dies in its satisfaction and the desire dies along with it. We do not wish the prize any more when once we have got it. It lasts but a moment and is past. Then we are left alone with the thought of the sin that we have done. When we get the prize of our wrong-doing, we find out that it is not as all-satisfying as we expected it would be. Most of our earthly aims are like that. The chase is a great deal more than the hare. Or, as George Herbert has it, 'Nothing between two dishes—a splendid service of silver plate, and when you take the cover off there is no food to eat—such are the pleasures here.'

Universally, this is true, that sooner or later, when the delirium of passion and the rush of temptation are over and we wake to consciousness, we find that we are none the richer for the thing gained, and oh! so infinitely the poorer for the means by which we gained it. It is that old story of the Veiled Prophet that wooed and won the hearts of foolish maidens, and, when he had them in his power in the inner chamber, removed the silver veil which they had thought hid dazzling glory and showed hideous features that struck despair into their hearts. Every man's sin does that for him. And to you I come now with this message: every wrong thing that you do, great or small, will be like some of those hollow images of the gods that one hears of in barbarian temples—looked at in front, fair, but when you get behind them you find a hollow, full of dust and spiders' webs and unclean things. Be sure of this, every sin is a blunder.

That is the first lesson that lies in these words of this wretched traitor; but again, here is an awful picture for us of the hell upon earth, of a conscience which has no hope of pardon. I do not suppose that Judas was lost, if he were lost, because he betrayed Jesus Christ, but because, having betrayed Jesus Christ, he never asked to be forgiven. And I suppose that the difference between the traitor who betrayed Him and the other traitor who denied Him, was this, that the one, when 'he went out and wept bitterly,' had the thought of a loving Master with him, and the other, when 'he went out and hanged himself,' had the thought of nothing but that foul deed glaring before him. I pray you to learn this lesson—you cannot think too much, too blackly, of your own sins, but you may think too exclusively of them, and if you do they will drive you to madness of despair.

My dear friend, there is no penitence or remorse which is deep enough for the smallest transgression; but there is no transgression which is so great but that forgiveness for it may come. And we may have it for the asking, if we will go to that dear Christ that died for us. The consciousness of sinfulness is a wholesome consciousness. I would that every man and woman listening to me now had it deep in their consciences, and then I would that it might lead us all to that one Lord in whom there is forgiveness and peace. Be sure of this, that if Judas Iscariot, when his 'soul flared forth in the dark,' died without hope and without pardon, it was not because his crime was too great for forgiveness, but because the forgiveness had never been asked. There is no unpardonable sin except that of refusing the pardon that avails for all sin.

II. So much, then, for this first picture and the lessons that come out of it. In the next place we take Pilate, as the representative of what I have ventured to call the shufflings of a half-awakened conscience.

'I am innocent of the blood of this just Person,' says he: 'see ye to it.' He is very willing to shuffle off his responsibility upon priests and people, and they, for their part, are quite as willing to accept it; but the responsibility can neither be shuffled off by him nor accepted by them. His motive in surrendering Jesus to them was probably nothing more than the low and cowardly wish to humour his turbulent subjects, and so to secure an easy tenure of office. For such an end what did one poor man's life matter? He had a great contempt for the accusers, which he is scarcely at the pains to conceal. It breaks out in half-veiled sarcasms, by which he cynically indemnifies himself for his ignoble yielding to the constraint which they put upon him. He knows perfectly well that the Roman power has nothing to fear from this King, whose kingdom rested on His witness to the Truth. He knows perfectly well that unavowed motives of personal enmity lie at the bottom of the whole business. In the words of our text he acquits Christ, and thereby condemns himself. If Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent, he knew that he, as governor, was guilty of prostituting Roman justice, which was Rome's best gift to her subject nations, and of giving up an innocent man to death, in order to save himself trouble and to conciliate a howling mob. No washing of his

hands will cleanse them. 'All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten that hand. But his words let us see how a man may sophisticate his conscience and quibble about his guilt.

Here, then, we get once more a vivid picture that may remind us of what, alas! we all know in our own experience, how a man's conscience may be clear-sighted enough to discern, and vocal enough to declare, that a certain thing is wrong, but not strong enough to restrain from doing it. Conscience has a voice and an eye; alas! it has no hands. It shares the weakness of all law, it cannot get itself executed. Men will get over a fence, although the board that says, 'Trespassers will be prosecuted' is staring them in the face in capital letters at the very place where they leap it. Your conscience is a king without an army, a judge without officers. 'If it had authority, as it has the power, it would govern the world,' but as things are, it is reduced to issuing vain edicts and to saying, 'Thou shalt not,' and if you turn round and say, 'I will, though,' then conscience has no more that it can do.

And then here, too, is an illustration of one of the commonest of the ways by which we try to slip our necks out of the collar, and to get rid of the responsibilities that really belong to us. 'See ye to it' does not avail to put Pilate's crime on the priests' shoulders. Men take part in evil, and each thinks himself innocent, because he has companions. Half-a-dozen men carry a burden together; none of them fancies that he is carrying it. It is like the case of turning out a platoon of soldiers to shoot a mutineer—nobody knows whose bullet killed him, and nobody feels himself guilty; but there the man lies dead, and it was somebody that did it. So corporations, churches, societies, and nations do things that individuals would not do, and each man of them wipes his mouth and says, 'I have done no harm.' And even when we sin alone we are clever at finding scapegoats. 'The woman tempted me, and I did eat,' is the formula universally used yet. The schoolboy's excuse, 'Please, sir, it was not me, it was the other boy,' is what we are all ready to say.

Now I pray you, brethren, to remember that, whether our consciences try to shuffle off responsibility for united action upon the other members of the firm, or whether we try to excuse our individual actions by laying blame on our tempers, or whether we adopt the modern slang, and talk about circumstances and heredity and the like, as being reasons for the diminution or the extinction of the notion of guilt, it is sophistical trifling; and down at the bottom most of us know that we alone are responsible for the volition which leads to our act. We could have helped it if we had liked. Nobody compelled us to keep in the partnership of evil, or to yield to the tempter. Pilate was not forced by his subjects to give the commandment that 'it should be as they required.' They had their own burden to carry. Each man has to bear the consequences of his actions. There are many 'burdens' which we can 'bear for one another, and so fulfil the law of Christ'; but every man has to bear as his own the burden of the fruits of his deeds. In that harvest, he that soweth and he that reapeth are one, and each of us has to drink as we ourselves have brewed. You have to pay for your share, however many companions you may have had in the act.

So do not you sophisticate your consciences with the delusion that your responsibility may be shifted to any other person or thing. These may diminish, or may modify your responsibility, and God takes all these into account. But after all these have been taken into account there is this left—that you yourselves have done the act, which you need not have done unless you had so willed, and that having done it, you have to carry it on your back for evermore. 'See thou to that,' was a heartless word, but it was a true one. 'Every one of us shall give an account of himself to God,' and as the old Book of Proverbs has it, 'If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself: and if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.'

III. And so, lastly, we have here another group still—the priests and people. They represent for us the torpor and misdirection of conscience.

'Then answered all the people and said, His blood be on us and on our children.' They were perfectly ready to take the burden upon themselves. They thought that they were 'doing God service' when they slew God's Messenger. They had no perception of the beauty and gentleness of Christ's character. They believed Him to be a blasphemer, and they believed it to be a solemn religious duty to slay Him then and there. Were they to blame because they slew a blasphemer? According to Jewish law—no. They were to blame because they had brought themselves into such a moral condition that that was all which they thought of and saw in Jesus Christ. With their awful words they stand before us, as perhaps the crowning instances in Scripture history of the possible torpor which may paralyse consciences.

I need not dwell, I suppose, even for a moment, upon the thought of how the highest and noblest sentiments may be perverted into becoming the allies of the lowest crime. 'O Liberty! what crimes have been done in thy name!' you remember one of the victims of the guillotine said, as her last words. 'O Religion! what crimes have been done in thy name!' is one of the lessons to be gathered from Calvary.

But, passing that, to come to the thing that is of more consequence to each of us, let us take this thought, dear brethren, as to the awful possibility of a conscience going fast asleep in the midst of the wildest storm of passion, like that unfaithful prophet Jonah, down in the hold of the heathen ship. You can lull your consciences into dead slumber. You can stifle them so that they shall not speak a word against the worst of your sins. You can do so by simply neglecting them, by habitually refusing to listen to them. If you keep picking all the leaves and buds off the tree before they open, it will stop flowering. You can do it by gathering round yourself always, and only, evil associations and evil deeds. The habit of sinning will lull a conscience faster than almost anything else. We do not know how hot a room is, or how much the air is exhausted, when we have been sitting in it for an hour and a half. But if we came into it from outside we should feel the difference. Styrian peasants thrive and fatten upon arsenic, and men may flourish upon all iniquity and evil, and conscience will

say never a word. Take care of that delicate balance within you; and see that you do not tamper with it nor twist it.

Conscience may be misguided as well as lulled. It may call evil good, and good evil; it may take honey for gall, and gall for honey. And so we need something outside of ourselves to be our guide, our standard. We are not to be contented that our consciences acquit us. 'I know nothing against myself, yet I am not hereby justified,' says the apostle; 'he that judgeth me is the Lord.' And it is quite possible that a man may have no prick of conscience and yet have done a very wrong thing. So we want, as it seems to me, something outside of ourselves that shall not be affected by our variations. Conscience is like the light on the binnacle of a ship. It tosses up and down along with the vessel. We want a steady light yonder on that headland, on the fixed solid earth, which shall not heave with the heaving wave, nor vary at all. Conscience speaks lowest when it ought to speak loudest. The worst man is least troubled by his conscience. It is like a lamp that goes out in the thickest darkness. Therefore we need, as I believe, a revelation of truth and goodness and beauty outside of ourselves to which we may bring our consciences that they may be enlightened and set right. We want a standard like the authorised weights and measures that are kept in the Tower of London, to which all the people in the little country villages may send up their yard measures and their pound weights, and find out if they are just and true. We want a Bible, and we want a Christ to tell us what is duty, as well as to make it possible for us to do it.

These groups which we have been looking at now, show us how very little help and sympathy a wounded conscience can get from its fellows. The conspirators turn upon each other as soon as the detectives are amongst them, and there is always one of them ready to go into the witness-box and swear away the lives of the others to save his own neck. Wolves tear sick wolves to pieces.

Round us there stand Society, pitiless and stern, and Nature, rigid and implacable; not to be besought, not to be turned. And when I, in the midst of this universe of fixed law and cause and consequence, wail out, 'I have sinned,' a thousand voices say to me, 'What is that to us? See thou to that.' And so I am left with my guilt—it and I together. There comes One with outstretched, wounded hands, and says, 'Cast all thy burden upon Me, and I will free thee from it all.' 'Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows!' Trust in Him, in His great sacrifice, and you will find that His 'innocent blood' has a power that will liberate your conscience from its torpor, its vain excuses, its agony and despair.

THE SENTENCE WHICH CONDEMNED THE JUDGES

And Jesus stood before the governor: and the governor asked Him, saying, Art Thou the King of the Jews? And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest. 12. And when He was accused of the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing. 13. Then said Pilate unto Him, Hearest Thou not how many things they witness against Thee? 14. And He answered him to never a word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly. 15. Now at that feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would. 16. And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas. 17. Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ? 18. For he knew that for envy they had delivered Him. 19. When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him. 20. But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. 21. The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas. 22. Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let Him be crucified. 23. And the governor said, Why, what evil hath He done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified. 24. When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just Person: see ye to it. 25. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children. 26. Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified.’—[ST. MATT. xxvii. 11-26](#).

The principal figures in this passage are Pilate and the Jewish rulers and people. Jesus is all but passive. They are busy in condemning Him, and little know that they are condemning themselves. They are unconsciously exemplifying the tragic truth of Christ’s saying, ‘Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken.’ They do not dislodge it, but their attempt to dislodge it wounds them.

I. Matthew gives a very summary account of our Lord’s appearing before Pilate, but, brief as it is, and much as it omits, it throws up into strong light the two essential points,—Christ’s declaration that He was the King of the Jews, and His silence while a storm of accusations raged around Him. As to the former, it was the only charge with which Pilate was properly concerned. He had a right to know whether this strange criminal was dangerous to Rome, because He claimed kingship, and, if he were satisfied that He was not, his bounden duty was to liberate Him. One can understand the scornful emphasis which Pilate laid on ‘Thou’ as he looked on his Prisoner, who certainly would not seem to his practical eyes a very formidable leader of revolt. There is a world of contempt, amused rather than alarmed, in the question, and behind it lies the consciousness of commanding legions enough to

crush any rising headed by such a person. John's account shows the pains which Jesus took to make sure of the sense in which the question was asked before He answered it, and then to make clear that His kingship bore no menace to Rome. That being made plain, He answered with an affirmative. Just as He had in unmistakable language claimed before the Sanhedrin to be the Messiah, the Son of God, so He claimed before Pilate to be the King of Israel, answering each tribunal as to what each had the right to inquire into, and thus 'before Pontius Pilate witnessing the good confession,' and leaving both tribunals without excuse. Jesus died because He would not bate His claims to Messianic dignity. Did He fling away His life for a false conception of Himself? He was either a dreamer intoxicated with an illusion, and His death was suicide, or He was—what?

The one avowal was all that Pilate was entitled to. For the rest Jesus locked His lips, and He whose very name was The Word was silent. What was the meaning of that silence? It was not disdain, nor unwillingness to make Himself known; but it was partly merciful—inasmuch as He knew that all speech would have been futile, and would but have added to the condemnation of such hearers as Caiaphas, Herod, and Pilate—and partly judicial. Still more was it the silence of perfect, unresisting submission,—'as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth.' And it is a pattern for us, as Peter tells us in his Epistle; for it is with regard to this very matter of taking unjust suffering patiently and without resistance that the apostle says that Jesus has 'left us an example.' There are limits to such silent endurance of wrong, for Paul defended himself tooth and nail before priests and kings; but Christ's followers are strongest by meek patience, and descend when they take a leaf out of their enemies' book.

II. The next point is Pilate's weak attempt to save Jesus. Christ's silence had impressed Pilate, and, if he had been a true man, he would not have stopped at 'marvelling greatly.' He was clearly convinced of Christ's innocence of any crime that threatened Roman supremacy, and therefore was bound to have given effect to his convictions, and let Jesus go. He had read the motives of the priests, which were too plain for a shrewd man of the world to be blind to them. That Jews should be taken with such a sudden fit of loyalty as to yell for the death of a fellow-countryman because he was a rebel against Caesar was too absurd to swallow, and Pilate was not taken in. He knew that something else was working below ground, and hit on 'envy' as the solution. He was not far wrong; for the zeal which to the priests themselves seemed to be excited by devout regard for God's honour was really kindled by determination to keep their own prerogatives, and keen insight into the curtailment of these which would follow if this Jesus were recognised as Messiah. Pilate's diagnosis coincided with Christ's in the parable: 'This is the Heir; come, let us kill Him, and the inheritance shall be ours.'

So, willing to deliver Jesus, and yet afraid to cross the wishes of his ticklish subjects, Pilate, like other weak men, tries a trick by which he may get his way and seem to give them

theirs. He hoped that they would choose Jesus rather than Barabbas as the object of the customary release. It was ingenious of him to narrow the choice to one or other of the two, ignoring all other prisoners who might have had the benefit of the custom. But there is also, perhaps, a dash of sarcasm, and a hint of his having penetrated the priests' motives, in his confining their choice to Jesus or Barabbas; for Barabbas was what they had charged Jesus with being,—a rebel; and, if they preferred him to Jesus, the hypocrisy of their suspicious loyalty would be patent. The same sub-acid tone is obvious in Pilate's twice designating our Lord as 'Jesus which is called Christ.' He delights to mortify them by pushing the title into their faces, as it were. He dare not be just, and he relieves and revenges himself by being cynical and mocking.

III. Having referred the choice to the 'multitude,' Pilate takes his place on his official seat to wait for, and then to ratify, their vote. In that pause, he perhaps felt some compunction at paltering with justice, which it was Rome's one virtue to administer. How his wife's message would increase his doubt! Was her dream a divine warning, or a mere reflection in sleep of waking thoughts? It is noticeable that Matthew records several dreams which conveyed God's will,—for example, to Joseph and to the Magi, and here may be another instance; or some tidings as to Jesus may have reached the lady, though not her husband, and her womanly sense of right may have shaped the dream, and given her vivid impressions of the danger of abetting a judicial murder. But Matthew seems to tell of her intervention mainly in order to preserve her testimony to Jesus' innocence, and to point out one more of the fences which Pilate trampled down in his dread of offending the rulers. A wife's message, conveying what both he and she probably regarded as a supernatural warning, was powerless to keep him back from his disgraceful failure of duty.

IV. While he was fighting against the impression of that message, the rulers were busy in the crowd, suggesting the choice of Barabbas. It was perhaps his wife's words that stung him to act at once, and have done with his inner conflict. So he calls for the decision of the alternative which he had already submitted. His dignity would suffer, if he had to wait longer for an answer. He got it at once, and the unanimous vote was for Barabbas. Probably the rulers had skilfully manipulated the people. The multitude is easily led by demagogues, but, left to itself, its instincts are usually right, though its perception of character is often mistaken. Why was Barabbas preferred? Probably just because he had been cast into prison for sedition, and so was thought to be a good patriot. Popular heroes often win their reputation by very questionable acts, and Barabbas was forgiven his being a murderer for the sake of his being a rebel. But it was not so much that Barabbas was loved as that Jesus was hated, and it was not the multitude so much as the rulers that hated him. Many of those now shrieking 'Crucify Him!' had shouted 'Hosanna!' a day or two before till they were hoarse. The populace was guilty of fickleness, blindness, rashness, too easy credence of the crafty calumnies of the rulers. But a far deeper stain rests on these rulers who had resisted the light,

and were now animated by the basest self-interest in the garb of keen regard for the honour of God. There were very different degrees of guilt in the many voices that roared 'Barabbas!' Pilate made one more feeble attempt to save Jesus by asking what was to be done with Him. The question was an ignoble abdication of his judicial office, and perhaps was meant as a salve for his own conscience, and an excuse to his wife, enabling him to say, 'I did not crucify Him; they did,'—a miserable pretext, the last resort of a weak man, who knew that he was doing a wrong and cowardly thing.

V. The same nervous fear and vain attempt to shuffle responsibility off himself give tragic interest to his theatrical washing of his hands. The one thing that he feared was a riot, which would be like a spark in a barrel of gunpowder, if it broke out at the Passover, when Jerusalem swarmed with excited crowds. To avoid that, the sacrifice of one Jew's life was a small matter, even though he was an interesting and remarkable person, and Pilate knew Him to be perfectly harmless.

But no washing of hands could shift the guilt from Pilate.

'Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No.'

His vain declaration of innocence is an acknowledgment of guilt, for he is forced by conscience to declare that Jesus is a 'righteous Man,' and, as such, He should have been under the broad shield of Roman justice. We too often deceive ourselves by throwing the blame of our sins on companions or circumstances, and try to cheat our consciences into silence. But our guilt is ours, however many allies we have had, and however strong have been our temptations; and though we may say, 'I am innocent,' God will sooner or later say to each of us, 'Thou art the man!' The wild cry of passion with which the multitude accepted the responsibility has been only too completely fulfilled in the millennium-long Iliad of woes which has attended the Jews. Surely, the existence, in such circumstances, for all these centuries, of that strange, weird, fated race, is a standing miracle, and the most conspicuous proof that 'verily, there is a God that judgeth in the earth.' But it is also a prophecy that Israel shall 'turn to the Lord,' and that the blood which has so long been on them as a crime, carrying its own punishment, will at last be sprinkled on their hearts, and take away their sin.

THE CRUCIFIXION

‘And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull, 34. They gave Him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when He had tasted thereof, He would not drink. 35. And they crucified Him, and parted His garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted My garments among them, and upon My vesture did they cast lots. 36. And sitting down they watched Him there; 37. And set up over His head His accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS. 38. Then were there two thieves crucified with Him, one on the right hand, and another on the left 39. And they that passed by reviled Him, wagging their heads, 40. And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save Thyself. If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. 41. Likewise also the chief priests mocking Him, with the scribes and elders, said, 42. He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He be the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. 43. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him: for He said, I am the Son of God. 44. The thieves also, which were crucified with Him, cast the same in His teeth. 45. Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. 46. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? 47. Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said. This Man calleth for Elias. 48. And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave Him to drink. 49. The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save Him. 50. Jesus, when He had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.’ —[MATT. xxvii. 33-50.](#)

The characteristic of Matthew’s account of the crucifixion is its representation of Jesus as perfectly passive and silent. His refusal of the drugged wine, His cry of desolation, and His other cry at death, are all His recorded acts. The impression of the whole is ‘as a sheep before his shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth.’ We are bid to look on the grim details of the infliction of the terrible death, and to listen to the mockeries of people and priests; but reverent awe forbids description of Him who hung there in His long, silent agony. Would that like reticence had checked the ill-timed eloquence of preachers and teachers of later days!

I. We have the ghastly details of the crucifixion.—Conder’s suggestion of the site of Calvary as a little knoll outside the city, seems possible. It is now a low, bare hillock, with a scanty skin of vegetation over the rock, and in its rounded shape and bony rockiness explains why it was called ‘skull.’ It stands close to the main Damascus road, so that there would be many ‘passers by’ on that feast day. Its top commands a view over the walls into the temple enclosure, where, at the very hour of the death of Jesus, the Passover lamb was perhaps being slain. Arrived at the place, the executioners go about their task with stolid precision. What

was the crucifying of another Jew or two to them? Before they lift the cross or fasten their prisoner to it, a little touch of pity, or perhaps only the observance of the usual custom, leads them to offer a draught of wine, in which some anodyne had been mixed, to deaden agony. But the cup which He had to drink needed that He should be in full possession of all His sensibilities to pain, and of all His unclouded firmness of resolve; and so His patient lips closed against the offered mercy. He would not drink because He would suffer, and He would suffer because He would redeem. His last act before He was nailed to the cross was an act of voluntary refusal of an opened door of escape from some portion of His pains.

What a gap there is between [verses 34 and 35](#)! The unconcerned soldiers went on to the next step in their ordinary routine on such an occasion,—the fixing of the cross and fastening of the victim to it. To them it was only what they had often done before; to Matthew, it was too sacred to be narrated, He cannot bring his pen to write it. As it were, he bids us turn away our eyes for a moment; and when next we look, the deed is done, and there stands the cross, and the Lord hanging, dumb and unresisting, on it. We see not Him, but the soldiers, busy at their next task. So little were they touched by compassion or awe, that they paid no heed to Him, and suspended their work to make sure of their perquisites,—the poor robes which they stripped from His body. Thus gently Matthew hints at the ignominy of exposure attendant on crucifixion, and gives the measure of the hard stolidity of the guards. Gain had been their first thought, comfort was their second. They were a little tired with their march and their work, and they had to stop there on guard for an indefinite time, with nothing to do but two more prisoners to crucify: so they take a rest, and idly keep watch over Him till He shall die. How possible it is to look at Christ's sufferings and see nothing! These rude legionaries gazed for hours on what has touched the world ever since, and what angels desired to look into, and saw nothing but a dying Jew. They thought about the worth of the clothes, or about how long they would have to stay there, and in the presence of the most stupendous fact in the world's history were all unmoved. We too may gaze on the cross and see nothing. We too may look at it without emotion, because without faith, or any consciousness of what it may mean for us. Only they who see there the sacrifice for their sins and the world's, see what is there. Others are as blind as, and less excusable than, these soldiers who watched all day by the Cross, seeing nothing, and tramped back at night to their barrack utterly ignorant of what they had been doing. But their work was not quite done. There was still a piece of grim mockery to be performed, which they would much enjoy. The 'cause,' as Matthew calls it, had to be nailed to the upper part of the cross. It was tri-lingual, as John tells us,—in Hebrew, the language of revelation; in Greek, the tongue of philosophy and art; in Latin, the speech of law and power. The three chief forces of the human spirit gave unconscious witness to the King; the three chief languages of the western world proclaimed His universal monarchy, even while they seemed to limit it to one nation. It was meant as a gibe at Him and at the nation, and as Pilate's statement of the reason for his

sentence; but it meant more than Pilate meant by it, and it was fitting that His royal title should hang above His head; for the cross is His throne, and He is the King of men because He has died for them all. One more piece of work the soldiers had still to do. The crucifixion of the two robbers (perhaps of Barabbas' gang, though less fortunate than he) by Christ's side was intended to associate Him in the public mind with them and their crimes, and was the last stroke of malice, as if saying, 'Here is your King, and here are two of His subjects and ministers.' Matthew says nothing of the triumph of Christ's love, which won the poor robber for a disciple even at that hour of ignominy. His one purpose seems to be to accumulate the tokens of suffering and shame, and so to emphasise the silent endurance of the meek Lamb of God. Therefore, without a word about any of our Lord's acts or utterances, he passes on to the next group of incidents.

II. The mockeries of people and priests. There would be many coming and going on the adjoining road, most of them too busy about their own affairs to delay long; for crucifixion was a slow process, and, when once the cross has been lifted, there would be little to see. But they were not too busy to spit venom at Him as they passed. How many of these scoffers, to whom death cast no shield round the object of their poor taunts, had shouted themselves hoarse on the Monday, and waved palm branches that were not withered yet! What had made the change? There was no change. They were running with the stream in both their hosannas and their jeers, and the one were worth as much as the other. They had been tutored to cry, 'Blessed is He that cometh!' and now they were tutored to repeat what had been said at the trial about destroying the temple. The worshippers of success are true to themselves when they mock at failure. They who shout round Jesus, when other people are doing it, are only consistent when they join in the roar of execration. Let us take care that our worship of Him is rooted in our own personal experience, and independent of what rulers or influential minds today say of Him.

A common passion levels all distinctions of culture and rank. The reverend dignitaries echoed the ferocious ridicule of the mob, whom they despised so much. The poorest criminal would have been left to die in peace; but brutal laughter surged round the silent sufferer, and showers of barbed sarcasms were flung at Him. The throwers fancied them exquisite jests, and demonstrations of the absurdity of Christ's claims; but they were really witnesses to His claims, and explanations of His sufferings. Look at them in turn, with this thought in our minds. 'He saved others; Himself He cannot save,' was launched as a sarcasm which confuted His alleged miracles by His present helplessness. How much it admits, even while it denies! Then, He did work miracles; and they were all for others, never for His own ends; and they were all for saving, never for destroying. Then, too, by this very taunt His claim to be the 'Saviour' is presupposed. And so, 'Physician, heal Thyself,' seemed to them an unanswerable missile to fling. If they had only known what made the 'cannot,' and seen that it was a 'will not,' they would have stood full in front of the great miracle of love which was

before them unsuspected, and would have learned that the not saving Himself, which they thought blew to atoms His pretensions to save others, was really the condition of His saving a world. If He is to save others He cannot save Himself. That is the law for all mutual help. The lamp burns out in giving light, but the necessity for the death of Him who is the life of the world is founded on a deeper 'must.' His only way of delivering us from the burden of sin is His taking it on Himself. He has to 'bear our griefs and carry our sorrows,' if He is to bear away the sin of the world. But the 'cannot' derives all its power from His own loving will. The rulers' taunt was a venomous lie, as they meant it. If for 'cannot' we read 'will not,' it is the central truth of the Gospel.

Nor did they succeed better with their second gibe, which made mirth of such a throne, and promised allegiance if He would come down. O blind leaders of the blind! That death which seemed to them to shatter His royalty really established it. His Cross is His throne of saving power, by which He sways hearts and wills, and because of it He receives from the Father universal dominion, and every knee shall bow to Him. It is just because He did not come down from it that we believe on Him. On His head are many crowns; but, however many they be, they all grow out of the crown of thorns. The true kingship is absolute command over willingly submitted spirits; and it is His death which bows us before Him in raptures of glad love which counts submission, liberty, and sacrifice blessed. He has the right to command because He has given Himself for us, and His death wakes all-surrendering and all-expecting faith.

Nor was the third taunt more fortunate. These very religious men had read their Bibles so badly that they might never have heard of Job, nor of the latter half of Isaiah. They had been poring over the letter all their lives, and had never seen, with their microscopes, the great figure of the Innocent Sufferer, so plain there. So they thought that the Cross demonstrated the hollowness of Jesus' trust in God, and the rejection of Him by God. Surely religious teachers should have been slow to scoff at religious trust, and surely they might have known that failure and disaster even to death were no signs of God's displeasure. But, in one aspect, they were right. It is a mystery that such a life should end thus; and the mystery is none the less because many another less holy life has also ended in suffering. But the mystery is solved when we know that God did not deliver Him, just because He 'would have Him,' and that the Father's delight in the Son reached its very highest point when He became obedient until death, and offered Himself 'a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing unto God.'

III. We pass on to the darkness, desolation, and death. Matthew represents these three long hours from noon till what answers to our 3 P.M. as passed in utter silence by Christ. What went on beneath that dread veil, we are not meant to know. Nor do we need to ask its physical cause or extent. It wrapped the agony from cruel eyes; it symbolised the blackness of desolation in His spirit, and by it God draped the heavens in mourning for man's sin.

What were the onlookers doing then? Did they cease their mocking, and feel some touch of awe creeping over them?

‘His brow was chill with dying,
And His soul was faint with loss.’

The cry that broke the awful silence, and came out of the darkness, was more awful still. The fewer our words the better; only we may mark how, even in His agony, Jesus has recourse to prophetic words, and finds in a lesser sufferer’s cry voice for His desolation. Further, we may reverently note the marvellous blending of trust and sense of desertion. He feels that God has left Him, and yet he holds on to God. His faith, as a man, reached its climax in that supreme hour when, loaded with the mysterious burden of God’s abandonment, He yet cried in His agony, ‘My God!’ and that with reduplicated appeal. Separation from God is the true death, the ‘wages of sin’; and in that dread hour He bore in His own consciousness the uttermost of its penalty. The physical fact of Christ’s death, if it could have taken place without this desolation from the consciousness of separation from God, would not have been the bearing of all the consequences of man’s sins. The two must never be parted in our grateful contemplations; and, while we reverently abjure the attempt to pierce into that which God hid from us by the darkness, we must reverently ponder what Christ revealed to us by the cry that cleft it, witnessing that He then was indeed bearing the whole weight of a world’s sin. By the side of such thoughts, and in the presence of such sorrow, the clumsy jest of the bystanders, which caught at the half-heard words, and pretended to think that Jesus was a crazy fanatic calling for Elijah with his fiery chariot to come and rescue Him, may well be passed by. One little touch of sympathy moistened His dying lips, not without opposition from the heartless crew who wanted to have their jest out. Then came the end. The loud cry of the dying Christ is worthy of record; for crucifixion ordinarily killed by exhaustion, and this cry was evidence of abundant remaining vitality. In accordance therewith, the fact of death is expressed by a phrase, which, though used for ordinary deaths, does yet naturally express the voluntariness of Christ. ‘He sent away His spirit,’ as if He had bid it depart, and it obeyed. Whether the expression may be fairly pressed so far or no, the fact is the same, that Jesus died, not because He was crucified, but because He chose. He was the Lord and Master of Death; and when He bid His armour-bearer strike, the slave struck, and the King died, not like Saul on the field of his defeat, but a victor in and by and over death.

THE BLIND WATCHERS AT THE CROSS

‘And sitting down they watched Him there.’ —*MATT. xxvii. 36.*

Our thoughts are, rightly, so absorbed by the central Figure in this great chapter that we pass by almost unnoticed the groups round the cross. And yet there are large lessons to be learned from each of them. These rude soldiers, four in number, as we infer from John’s Gospel, had no doubt joined with their comrades in the coarse mockery which preceded the sad procession to Calvary; and then they had to do the rough work of the executioners, fastening the sufferers to the rude wooden crosses, lifting these, with their burden, filing them into the ground, then parting the raiment. And when all that is done they sit stolidly down to take their ease at the foot of the cross, and idly to wait, with eyes that look and see nothing, until the sufferers die. A strange picture; and a strange thing to think of, how they were so close to the great event in the world’s history, and had to stare at it for three or four hours, and never saw anything!

The lessons that the incident teaches us may be very simply gathered together.

I. First we infer from this the old truth of how ignorant men are of the real meaning and outcome of what they do.

These four Roman soldiers were foreigners; I suppose that they could not speak a word to a man in that crowd. They had no means of communication with them. They had had plenty of practice in crucifying Jews. It was part of their ordinary work in these troublesome times, and this was just one more. Think of what a corporal’s guard of rough English soldiers, out in Northern India, would think if they were bidden to hang a native who was charged with rebellion against the British Government. So much, and not one whit more, did these men know of what they were doing; and they went back to their barracks, stolid and unconcerned, and utterly ignorant of what they had been about.

But in part it is so with us all, though in less extreme fashion. None of us know the real meaning, and none of us know the possible issues and outcome of a great deal of our lives. We are like people sowing seed in the dark; it is put into our hands and we sow. We do the deed; this end of it is in our power, but where it runs out to, and what will come of it, lie far beyond our ken. We are compassed about, wherever we go, by this atmosphere of mystery, and enclosed within a great ring of blackness.

And so the simple lesson to be drawn from that clear fact, about all our conduct, is this—let results alone. Never mind about what you cannot get hold of; you cannot see to the other end, and you have nothing to do with it. You can see this end; make that right. Be sure that the motive is right, and then into whatever unlooked-for consequences your act may run out at the further end, you will be right. Never mind what kind of harvest is coming out of your deeds, you cannot forecast it. ‘Thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain. . . . God giveth it a body as it pleaseth Him.’ Let alone that profitless investigation, the

attempt to fashion and understand either the significance or the issues of your conduct, and stick fast by this—look after your motive for doing it, and your temper in doing it; and then be quite sure, ‘Thou shalt find it after many days,’ and the fruit will be ‘unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.’

II. Take another very simple and equally plain lesson from this incident, viz., the limitation of responsibility by knowledge.

These men, as I said, were ignorant of what they were doing, and, therefore, they were guiltless. Christ Himself said so: ‘They know not what they do.’ But it is marvellous to observe that whilst the people who stood round the cross, and were associated in the act that led Jesus there, had all degrees of responsibility, the least guilty of the whole were the men who did the actual work of nailing Him to the cross, and lifting it with Him upon it. These soldiers were not half as much to blame as were many of the men that stood by; and just in the measure in which the knowledge or the possibility of knowledge increased, just in that measure did the responsibility increase. The high priest was a great deal more to blame than the Roman soldiers. The rude tool that nailed Christ to the cross, the hammer that was held in the hand of the legionary, was almost as much to blame as the hand that wielded it. For the hand that wielded it had very little more knowledge than it had.

In so far as it was possible that these men might have known something of what they were doing, in so far were they to blame; but remember what a very, very little light could possibly have shone upon these souls. If there is no light there cannot be any shadow; and if these men were, as certainly they were, all but absolutely ignorant, and never could have been anything else, of what they were doing, then they were all but absolutely guiltless. And so you come to this, which is only a paradox to superficial thinkers, that the men that did the greatest crime in the whole history of the world, did it with all but clean hands; and the people that were to be condemned were those who delivered ‘the Just One’ into the hands of more lawless, and therefore less responsible, men.

So here is the general principle, that as knowledge and light rise and fall, so responsibility rises and falls along with them. And therefore let us be thankful that we have not to judge one another, but that we have all to stand before that merciful and loving tribunal of the God who is a God of knowledge, and by whom actions are weighed, as the Old Book has it—not counted, but weighed. And let us be thankful, too, that we may extend our charity to all round us, and refrain from thinking of any man or woman that we can pronounce upon their criminality, because we do not know the light in which they walk.

III. And now the last lesson, and the one that I most desire to lay upon your hearts, is this, how possible it is to look at Christ on the cross, and see nothing.

For half a day there they sat, and it was but a dying Jew that they saw, one of three. A touch of pity came into their hearts once or twice, alternating to mockery, which was not savage because it was simply brutal; but when it was all over, and they had pierced His side,

and gone away back to their barracks, they had not the least notion that they, with their dim, purblind eyes, had been looking at the most stupendous miracle in the whole world's history, had been gazing at the thing into which angels desired to look; and had seen that to which the hearts and the gratitude of unconverted millions would turn for all eternity. They laid their heads down on their pillows that night and did not know what had passed before their eyes, and they shut the eyes that had served them so ill, and went to sleep, unconscious that they had seen the pivot on which the whole history of humanity had turned; and been the unmoved witnesses of 'God manifest in the flesh,' dying on the cross for the whole world, and for them. What should they have seen if they had seen the reality? They should have seen not a dying rebel but a dying Christ; they should have looked with emotion, they should have looked with faith, they should have looked with thankfulness.

Any one who looks at that cross, and sees nothing but a pure and perfect man dying upon it, is very nearly as blind as the Roman legionaries. Any one to whom it is only an example of perfect innocence and patient suffering has only seen an inch into the Infinite; and the depths of it are as much concealed from him as they were from them. Any one who looks with an unmoved heart, without one thrill of gratitude, is nearly as blind as the rough soldiers. He that looks and does not say—

'My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of Thine;
While like a penitent I stand
And there confess my sin,'

has not learned more of the meaning of the Cross than they did. And any one who looks to it, and then turns away and forgets, or who looks at it and fails to recognise in it the law of his own life and pattern for his own conduct, has yet to see more deeply into it before he sees even such portion of its meaning as here we can apprehend.

Oh! dear friends, we all of us, as the apostle says in one of his letters, have had this Christ 'manifestly set forth before us as if painted upon a placard upon a wall' (for that is the meaning of the picturesque words that he employs). And if we look with calm, unmoved hearts; if we look without personal appropriation of that Cross and dying love to ourselves, and if we look without our hearts going out in thankfulness and laying themselves at His feet in a calm rapture of life-long devotion, then we need not wonder that four ignorant heathen men sat and looked at Him for four long hours and saw nothing, for we are as blind as ever they were.

You say, 'We see.' Do you see? Do you look? Does the look touch your hearts? Have you fathomed the meaning of the fact? Is it to you the sacrifice of the living Christ for your salvation? Is it to you the death on which all your hopes rest? You say that you see. Do you

see that in it? Do you see your only ground of confidence and peace? And do you so see that, like a man who has looked at the sun for a moment or two, when you turn away your head you carry the image of what you beheld still stamped on your eyeball, and have it both as a memory and a present impression? So is the cross photographed on your heart; and is it true about us that every day, and all days, we behold our Saviour, and beholding Him are being changed into His likeness? Is it true about us that we thus bear about with us in the body 'the dying of the Lord Jesus'? If we look to Him with faith and love, and make His Cross our own, and keep it ever in our memory, ever before us as an inspiration and a hope and a joy and a pattern, then we see. If not, 'for judgment am I come into the world, that they which see not may see, and that they which see might be made blind.' For what men are so blind to the infinite pathos and tenderness, power, mystery, and miracle of the Cross, as the men and women who all their lives long have heard a Gospel which has been held up before their lack-lustre eyes, and have looked at it so long that they cannot see it any more?

Let us pray that our eyes may be purged, that we may see, and seeing may copy, that dying love of the ever-loving Lord.

TAUNTS TURNING TO TESTIMONIES

‘. . . The chief priests mocking Him . . . said, 42. He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He be the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. 43. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him.’ —[MATT. xxvii. 41-43.](#)

It is an old saying that the corruption of the best is the worst. What is more merciful and pitiful than true religion? What is more merciless and malicious than hatred which calls itself ‘religious’? These priests, like many a persecutor for religion since, came to feast their eyes on the long-drawn-out agonies of their Victim, and their rank tongues blossomed into foul speech. Characteristically enough, though they shared in the mockeries of the mob, they kept themselves separate. The crowd pressed near enough to the cross to speak their gibes to Jesus; the dignified movers of the ignorant crowd stood superciliously apart, and talked scoffingly about Him. Whilst the populace yelled, ‘Thou that destroyest the Temple and buildest it in three days, come down,’ the chief priests, with the scribes, looked at each other with a smile, and said, ‘He saved others; Himself He cannot save.’ Now, these brutal taunts have lessons for us. They witness to the popular impression of Christ, and what His claims were. He asserted Himself to be a worker of miracles, the Messiah-King of Israel, the Son of God, therefore He died. And they witness to the misconception which ruled in the minds of these priests as to the relation of His claims to the Cross. They thought that it had finally burst the bubble, and disposed once for all of these absurd and blasphemous pretensions. Was it credible that a man who possessed miraculous power should not, in this supreme moment, use it to deliver Himself? Did not ‘Physician, heal Thyself,’ come in properly there? Would any of the most besotted followers of this pretender retain a rag of belief in His Messiahship if He was crucified? Could it be possible that, if there was a God at all, He should leave a man that really trusted in Him, not to say who was really His Son, to die thus? A cracked mirror gives a distorted image. The facts were seen, but their relation was twisted. If we will take the guidance of these gibes, and see what is the real explanation to the anomaly that they suggest, then we shall find that the taunts turn to Him for a testimony, and that ‘out of the mouths of mockers there is ‘perfected praise.’ The stones flung at the Master turn to roses strewed in His path.

I. So, then, first the Cross shows us the Saviour who could not save Himself.

The priests did not believe in Christ’s miracles, and they thought that this final token of his impotence, as they took it to be, was clear proof that the miracles were either tricks or mistakes. They saw the two things, they fatally misunderstood the relation between them. Let us put the two things together.

Here, on the one hand, is a Man who has exercised absolute authority in all the realms of the universe, who has spoken to dead matter, and it has obeyed; who by His word has

calmed the storm, and hushed the winds by His word, has multiplied bread, has transmuted pale water into ruddy wine; who has moved omnipotent amongst the disturbed minds and diseased bodies of men, who has cast His sovereign word into the depth and darkness of the grave, and brought out the dead, stumbling and entangled in the grave-clothes. All these are facts on the one side. And on the other there is this—that there, passive, and, to superficial eyes, impotent, He hangs the helpless Victim of Roman soldiers and of Jewish priests. The short and easy vulgar way to solve the apparent contradiction was to deny the reality of the one of its members; to say ‘Miracles? Absurd! He never worked one, or He would have been working one now.’

But let their error lead us into truth, and let us grasp the relation of the two apparently contradictory facts. ‘He saved others,’ that is certain. He did not ‘save Himself,’ that is also certain. Was the explanation ‘cannot’? The priests by ‘cannot’ meant physical impossibility, defect of power, and they were wrong. But there is a profound sense in which the word ‘cannot’ is absolutely true. For this is in all time, and in all human relations, the law of service—sacrifice; and no man can truly help humanity, or an individual, unless he is prepared to surrender himself in the service. The lamp burns away in giving light. The fire consumes in warming the hearth, and no brotherly sympathy or help has ever yet been rendered, or ever will be, except at the price of self-surrender. Now, some people think that this is the whole explanation of our Lord’s history, both in His life and in His death. I do not believe that it is the whole explanation, but I do believe it carries us some way towards the central sanctuary, where the explanation lies. And yet it is not complete or adequate, because, to parallel Christ’s work with the work of any of the rest of us to our brethren, however beautiful, disinterested, self-oblivious, and self-consuming it may be, seems to me—I say it with deference, though I must here remember considerations of brevity and be merely assertive—entirely to ignore the unique special characteristic of the work of Jesus Christ—viz., that it was the atonement for the sins of the world. He could not bear away our sins, unless the burden of them was laid on His own back, and He carried our griefs, our sorrows, our diseases, and our transgressions. ‘He saved others, Himself He cannot save.’ But the impossibility was purely the result of His own willing and obedient love; or, if I put it in more epigrammatic form, the priests’ ‘cannot’ was partially true, but if they had said ‘would not’ they would have hit the mark, and come to full truth. The reason for His death becomes clear, and each of the contrasted facts is enhanced, when we set side by side the opulence and ease of His manifold miracles and the apparent impotence and resourcelessness of the passive Victim on the cross.

That ‘cannot’ did not come from defect of power, but from plenitude of love, and it was a ‘will not’ in its deepest depths. For you will find scattered throughout Scripture, especially these Gospels, indications from our Lord’s own lips, and by His own acts, that, in the truest and fullest sense, His sufferings were voluntary. ‘No man taketh it from me’—He says about

His life—‘I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.’ And once He did choose to flash out for a moment the always present power, that we might learn that when it did not appear, it was not because he could not, but because he would not. When the soldiers came to lay their hands upon Him, He presented Himself before them, saving them all the trouble of search, and when He asked a question, and received the answer that it was He of whom they were in search, there came one sudden apocalypse of His majesty, and they fell to the ground, and lay there prone before Him. They could have had no power at all against Him, except He had willed to surrender Himself to them. Again, though it is hypercritical perhaps to attach importance to what may only be natural idiomatic forms of speech, yet in this connection it is not to be overlooked that the language of all the Evangelists, in describing the supreme moment of Christ’s death, is congruous with the idea that He died neither from the exhaustion of crucifixion, nor from the thrust of the soldier’s spear, but because He would. For they all have expressions equivalent to that of one of them, ‘He gave up His spirit.’ Be that as it may, the ‘cannot’ was a ‘will not’; and it was neither nails that fastened Him to the tree, nor violence that slew Him, but He was fixed there by His own steadfast will, and He died because He would. So if we rightly understand the ‘cannot’ we may take up with thankfulness the taunt which, as I say, is tuned to a testimony, and reiterate adoringly, ‘He saved others, Himself He cannot save.’

II. The Cross shows us the King on His throne.

To the priests it appeared ludicrous to suppose that a King of Israel should, by Israel, be nailed upon the cross. ‘Let Him come down, and we will believe Him.’ They saw the two facts, they misconceived their relation. There was a relation between them, and it is not difficult for us to apprehend it.

The Cross is Christ’s throne. There are two ways in which the tragedy of His crucifixion is looked at in the Gospels, one that prevails in the three first, another that prevails in the fourth. These two seem superficially to be opposite; they are complementary. It depends upon your station whether a point in the sky is your zenith or your nadir. Here it is your zenith; at the antipodes it is the nadir. In the first three gospels the aspect of humiliation, degradation, inanition, suffering, is prominent in the references to the Crucifixion. In the fourth gospel the aspect of glory and triumph is uppermost. ‘Even so must the Son of Man be lifted up’; ‘I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me’; ‘Now the hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified.’ And it is His glory, for on that Cross Jesus Christ manifests, in transcendent and superlative form, at once power and love that are boundless and divine. The Cross is the foundation of His kingdom. In his great passage in Philippians the Apostle brings together, in the closest causal connection, His obedience unto death, the death of the Cross, and His exaltation and reception of ‘the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.’ The title over the Cross was meant for a gibe. It was a prophecy. By the Cross He becomes the ‘King,’ and not only the ‘King of the Jews.’ The

sceptre that was put in His hand, though it was meant for a sneer, was a forecast of a truth, for He rules, not with a rod of iron, but with the reed of gentleness; and the crown of thorns, that was pressed down on His wounded and bleeding head, foretold for our faith the great truth that suffering is the foundation of dominion, and that men will bow as to their King and Lord before Him who died for them, with a prostration of spirit, a loyalty of allegiance, and an alertness of service, which none other, monarch or superior, may even dream of attaining. The Cross establishes, not destroys, Christ's dominion over men.

Yes; and that Cross wins their faith as nothing else can. The blind priests said, 'Let Him come down, and we will believe Him.' Precisely because He did not come down, do sad and sorrowful and sinful hearts turn to Him from the ends of the earth, and from the distances of the ages pour the treasures of their trust and their love at His feet. Did you ever think how strange it is, except with one explanation, that the gibes of the priests did not turn out to be true? Why is it that Christ's shameful death did not burst the bubble, as they thought it had done? Why is it that in His case—and I was going to say, and it would have been no exaggeration, in His case only—the death of the leader did not result in the dispersion of the led? Why is it that His fate and future were the opposite of that of multitudes of other pseudo-Messiahs, of whom it is true that when they were slain their followers came to nought? Why? There is only one explanation, I think, and that is that the death was not the end, but that He rose again from the dead. My brother, you will either have to accept the Resurrection, with all that comes from it, or else you will have to join the ranks of the priests, and consider that Christ's death blew to atoms Christ's pretensions. If we know anything about Him, we know that He asserted miraculous power, Messiahship, and a filial relation to God. These things are facts. Did He rise or did He not? If He did not, He was an enthusiast. If He did, He is the King to whom our hearts can cleave, and to whom our loyalty is due.

III. Now, lastly, the Cross shows us the Son, beloved of the Father.

The priests thought that it was altogether incredible that His devotion should have been genuine, or His claim to be the Son of God should have any reality, since the Cross, to their vulgar eyes, disproved them both. Like all coarse-minded people, they estimated character by condition, but they who do that make no end of mistakes. They had forgotten their own Prophecies, which might have told them that 'the Servant of the Lord in whom' His 'heart delighted,' was a suffering Servant. But whilst they recognised the facts, here again, as in the other two cases, they misconceived the relation. We have the means of rectifying the distorted image.

We ought to know, and to be sure, that the Cross of Christ was the very token that this was God's 'beloved Son in whom He was well pleased.' If we dare venture on the comparison of parts of that which is all homogeneous and perfect, we might say that in the moment of His death Jesus Christ was more than ever the object of the Father's delight.

Why? It is not my purpose now to enlarge upon all the reasons which might be suggested. Let me put them together in a sentence or two. In that Cross Jesus Christ revealed God as God's heart had always yearned to be revealed, infinite in love, pitifulness, forbearance, and pardoning mercy. There was the highest manifestation of the glory of God. 'What?' you say, 'a poor weak Man, hanging on a cross, and dying in the dark—is that the very shining apex of all that humanity can know of divinity?' Yes, for it is the pure manifestation that God is Love. Therefore the whole sunshine of the Father's presence rested on the dying Saviour. It was the hour when God most delighted in Him, if I may venture the comparison, for the other reasons that then He carried filial obedience to its utmost perfection, that then His trust in God was deepest, even at the hour when His spirit was darkened by the cloud that the world's sin, which He was carrying, had spread thunderous between Him and the sunshine of the Father's face. For in that mysterious voice, which we can never understand in its depths, there were blended trust and desolation, each in its highest degree: 'My God! my God! Why hast Thou forsaken Me?' And the Cross was the complete carrying out of God's dearest purpose for the world, that He might be 'just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.' Therefore, then—I was going to say as never before—was Christ His Son, in whom He delighted.

Brethren, let us, led by the errors of these scoffers, grasp the truths that they pervert. Let us see that weak Man hanging helpless on the cross, whose 'cannot' is the impotence of omnipotence, imposed by His own loving will to save a world by the sacrifice of Himself. Let us crown Him our King, and let our deepest trust and our gladdest obedience be rendered to Him because He did not come down from, but 'endured, the cross.' Let us behold with wonder, awe, and endless love the Father not withholding His only Son, but 'delivering Him up to the death for us all,' and from the empty grave and the occupied Throne let us learn how the Father by both proclaims to all the world concerning Him hanging dying on the cross: 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'

THE VEIL RENT

‘Behold, the veil of the Temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.’—[MATT. xxvii. 51.](#)

As I suppose we are all aware, the Jewish Temple was divided into three parts: the Outer Court, open to all; the Holy Place, to which the ministering priests had daily access to burn incense and trim the lamps; and the Holy of Holies, where only the High Priest was permitted to go, and that but once a year, on the great Day of Atonement. For the other three hundred and sixty-four days the shrine lay silent, untrudged, dark. Between it and the less sacred Holy Place hung the veil, whose heavy folds only one man was permitted to lift or to pass. To all others it was death to peer into the mysteries, and even to him, had he gone at another time, and without the blood of the sacrifice, death would have ensued.

If we remember all this and try to cast ourselves back in imagination to the mental attitude of the ordinary Jew, the incident of my text receives its true interpretation. At the moment when the loud cry of the dying Christ rung over the heads of the awestruck multitude, that veil was, as it were, laid hold of by a pair of giant hands and torn asunder, as the Evangelist says, ‘from the top to the bottom.’ The incident was a symbol. In one aspect it proclaimed the end of the long years of Israel’s prerogative. In another it ushered in an epoch of new relations between man and God. If Jesus Christ was what He said He was, if His death was what He declared it to be, it was fitting that it should be attended by a train of subordinate and interpreting wonders. These were, besides that of my text, the darkened sun, the trembling earth, the shivered rocks, the open graves, the rising saints—all of them, in their several ways, illuminating the significance of that death on Calvary.

Not less significant is this symbol of my text, and I desire now to draw your attention to its meanings.

I. The rent veil proclaims the desecrated temple.

There is a striking old legend, preserved by the somewhat mendacious historian of the Jewish people, that, before Jerusalem fell, the anxious watchers heard from within the sanctuary a great voice saying, ‘Let us depart hence!’ and through the night were conscious of the winnowing of the mighty wings of the withdrawing cherubim. And soon a Roman soldier tossed a brand into the most Holy Place, and the ‘beautiful house where their fathers praised was burned with fire.’ The legend is pathetic and significant. But that ‘departing’ had taken place forty years before; and at the moment when Jesus ‘gave up the ghost,’ purged eyes might have seen the long trail of brightness as the winged servitors of the Most High withdrew from the desecrated shrine. The veil rent declared that the sacred soil within it was now common as any foot of earth in Galilee; and its rending, so to speak, made way for a departing God.

That conception, that the death of Christ Jesus was the de-consecration—if I may coin a word—of the Temple, and the end of all its special sanctity, and that thenceforward the Presence had departed from it, is distinctly enough taught us by Himself in words which move in the same circle of ideas as that in which the symbol resides. . . . You remember, no doubt, that, if we accept the testimony of John's Gospel, at the very beginning of our Lord's ministry He vindicated His authority to cleanse the sanctuary against the cavils of the sticklers for propriety by the enigmatical words, 'Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will build it up,' to which the Evangelist appends the comment, 'He spake of the Temple of His body,' that body in which 'all the fulness of the Godhead' dwelt, and which was, and is to-day, all that the Temple shadowed and foretold, the dwelling-place of God in humanity, the place of sacrifice, the meeting-place between God and man. But just because our Lord in these dark words predicted His death and His resurrection, He also hinted the destruction of the literal stone and lime building, and its rearing again in nobler and more spiritual form. When He said, 'Destroy this Temple,' He implied, secondarily, the destruction of the house in which He stood, and laid that destruction, whensoever it should come to pass, at their doors. And, inasmuch as the saying in its deepest depth meant His death by their violence and craft, therefore, in that early saying of His, was wrapped up the very same truth which was symbolised by the rent veil, and was bitterly fulfilled at last. When they slew Christ they killed the system under which they lived, and for which they would have been glad to die, in a zeal without knowledge; and destroyed the very Temple on the distorted charge of being the destroyer of which, they handed Him over to the Roman power.

The death of Christ is, then, the desecration and the destruction of that Temple. Of course it is; because when a nation that had had millenniums of education, of forbearance, of revelation, turned at last upon the very climax and brightest central light of all the Revelation, standing there amongst them in a bodily form, there was nothing more to be done. God had shot His last arrow; His quiver was empty. 'Last of all He sent unto them His Son, saying,' with a wistful kind of half-confidence, 'They will reverence My Son,' and the divine expectation was disappointed, and exhaustless Love was empty-handed, and all was over. He could turn to themselves and say, 'Judge between Me and My vineyard. What more could have been done that I have not done to it?' Therefore, there was nothing left but to let the angels of destruction loose, and to call for the Roman eagles with their broad-spread wings, and their bloody beaks, and their strong talons, to gather together round the carcase. When He gave up the Ghost, 'the veil of the Temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.'

A time of repentance was given. It was possible for the most guilty participator in that judicial murder to have his gory hands washed and made white in the very blood that he had shed; but, failing repentance, that death was the death of Israel, and the destruction of Israel's Temple. Let us take the lesson, dear brethren. If we turn away from that Saviour,

and refuse the offered gifts of His love, there is no other appeal left in the power of Heaven; and there is nothing for it after that except judgment and destruction. We can 'crucify the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame.' And the hearts that are insensitive, as are some of our hearts, to that great love and grace, are capable of nothing except to be pulverised by means of a judgment. Repentance is possible for us all, but, failing that, the continuance of rejection of Christ is the pulling down, on our own heads, of the ruins of the Temple, like the Israelitish hero in his blindness and despair.

II. Now, secondly, the rent veil means, in another way of looking at the incident, light streaming in on the mystery of God.

Let me recall to your imaginations what lay behind that heavy veil. In the Temple, in our Lord's time, there was no presence of the Shekinah, the light that symbolised the divine presence. There was the mercy-seat, with the outstretched wings of the cherubim; there were the dimly pictured forms on the tapestry hangings; there was silence deep as death; there was darkness absolute and utter, whilst the Syrian sun was blazing down outside. Surely that is the symbol of the imperfect knowledge or illumination as to the divine nature which is over all the world. 'The veil is spread over all nations, and the covering over all people.' And surely that sudden, sharp tearing asunder of the obscuring medium, and letting the bright sunlight stream into every corner of the dark chamber, is for us a symbol of the great fact that in the life, and especially in the death, of Jesus Christ our Lord, we have light thrown in to the depths of God.

What does that Cross tell us about God that the world did not know? And how does it tell us? and why does it tell us? It tells us of absolute righteousness, of that in the divine nature which cannot tolerate sin; of the stern law of retribution which must be wrought out, and by which the wages of every sin is death. It tells us not only of a divine righteousness which sees guilt and administers punishment, but it tells us of a divine love, perfect, infinite, utter, perennial, which shrinks from no sacrifice, which stoops to the lowest conditions, which itself takes upon it all the miseries of humanity, and which dies because it loves and will save men from death. And as we look upon that dying Man hanging on the cross, the very embodiment and consummation of weakness and of shame, we have to say, 'Lo! this is our God! We have waited for Him'—through all the weary centuries—'and He will save us.' How does it tell us all this? Not by eloquent and gracious thoughts, not by sweet and musical words, but by a deed. The only way by which we can know men is by what they do. The only way by which we know God is by what He does. And so we point to that Cross and say, 'There! not in words, not in thoughts, not in speculations, not in hopes and fears and peradventures and dim intuitions, but in a solid fact; there is the Revelation which lays bare the heart of God, and shows us its very throbbing of love to every human soul.' 'The veil was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.'

The Cross will reveal God to you only if you believe that Jesus Christ was the Incarnate Word. Brethren, if that death was but the death of even the very holiest, noblest, sweetest, perfectest soul that ever lived on earth and breathed human breath, there is no revelation of God in it for us. It tells us what Jesus was, and by a very roundabout inference may suggest something of what the divine nature is, but unless you can say, as the New Testament says, 'In the beginning was the Word, and 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,' I fail to see how the death of Christ can be a revelation of the love of God.

I need not occupy time in dilating upon the contrast between this solid certitude, and all that the world, apart from Jesus Christ, has to lay hold of about God. We want something else than mist on which to build, and on which to lay hold. And there is a substantial, warm, flesh-and-blood hand, if I may so say, put out to us through the mist when we believe in Christ the Son of God, who died on the cross for us all. Then, amidst whirling mists and tossing seas, there is a fixed point to which we can moor; then our confidence is built, not on peradventures or speculations or wishes or dreams or hopes, but on a historical fact, and grasping that firm we may stand unmoved.

Dear friends, I may be very old-fashioned and very narrow—I suppose I am; but I am bound to declare my conviction, which I think every day's experience of the tendency of thought only makes more certain, that, practically for this generation, the choice lies between accepting the life and death of Jesus Christ as the historical Revelation of God, or having no knowledge of Him—knowledge, I say,—of Him at all; you must choose between the barred sanctuary, within which lies couched a hidden Something—with a capital S—or perhaps a hidden Someone whom you never can know and never will; or the rent veil, rent by Christ's death, through which you can pass, and behold the mercy-seat and, above the outstretched wings of the adoring cherubim, the Father whose name is Love.

III. Lastly, the rent veil permits any and every man to draw near to God.

You remember what I have already said as to the jealous guarding of the privacy of that inner shrine, and how not only the common herd of the laity, but the whole of the priesthood, with the solitary exception of its titular head, were shut out from ever entering it. In the old times of Israel there was only one man alive at once who had ever been beyond the veil. And now that it is rent, what does that show but this, that by the death of Jesus Christ any one, every one, is welcome to pass in to the very innermost sanctuary, and to dwell, nestling as close as he will, to the very heart of the throned God? There is a double veil, if I may so say, between man and God: the side turned outward is woven by our own sins; and the other turned inwards is made out of the necessary antagonism of the divine nature to man's sin. There hangs the veil, and when the Psalmist asked, 'Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord; or who shall stand in His holy place?' he was putting a question which echoes despair-

ingly in the very heart of all religions. And he answered it as conscience ever answers it when it gets fair play: 'He that hath clean hands and a pure heart, who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity.' And where or who is he? Nowhere; nobody. Access is barred, because it is impossible that a holy and righteous God should communicate the selectest gifts of His love, even the sense of His favour, and of harmony and fellowship with Him, to sinful men, and barred, because it is impossible that men, with the consciousness of evil and the burden of guilt sometimes chafing their shoulders, and always bowing down their backs, should desire to possess, or be capable of possessing, that fellowship and union with God. A black, frowning wall, if I may change the metaphor of my text, rises between us and God. But One comes with the sacrificial vessel in His hand, and pours His blood on the barrier, and that melts the black blocks that rise between us and God, and the path is patent and permeable for every foot. 'The veil of the Temple was rent in twain' when Christ died. That death, because it is a sacrifice, makes it possible that the whole fulness of the divine love should be poured upon man. That death moves our hearts, takes away our sense of guilt, draws us nearer to Him; and so both by its operation—not on the love of God—but on the government of God, and by its operation on the consciousness of men, throws open the path into His very presence.

If I might use abstract words, I would say that Christ's death potentially opens the path for every man, which being put into plain English—which is better—is just that by the death of Christ every man can, if he will, go to God, and live beside Him. And our faith is our personal laying hold of that great sacrifice and treading on that path. It turns the 'potentiality' into an actuality, the possibility into a fact. If we believe on Him who died on the cross for us all, then by that way we come to God, than which there is none other given under heaven among men.

So all believers are priests, or none of them are. The absolute right of direct access to God, without the intervention of any man who has an officially greater nearness to Him than others, and through whom as through a channel the grace of sacrament comes, is contained in the great symbol of my text. And it is a truth that this day needs. On the one hand there is agnostic unbelief, which needs to see in the rent veil the illumination streaming through it on to the depths of God; and on the other hand there is the complementary error—and the two always breed each other—the superstition which drags back by an anachronism the old Jewish notions of priesthood into the Christian Church. It needs to see in the rent veil the charter of universal priesthood for all believers, and to hearken to the words which declare, 'Ye are a chosen generation, a spiritual house, a royal priesthood, that ye should offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable unto God by Jesus Christ.' That is the lesson that this day wants. 'Having, therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest of all, by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He has consecrated for us through the veil, that is His flesh, let us draw near with true hearts in full assurance of faith.'

THE PRINCE OF LIFE

‘In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. 2. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. 3. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: 4. And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. 5. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. 6. He is not here: for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. 7. And go quickly, and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead; and, behold, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him: lo, I have told you. 8. And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring His disciples word. 9. And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held Him by the feet, and worshipped Him. 10. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell My brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see Me. 11. Now, when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. 12. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, 13. Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole Him away while we slept. 14. And if this come to the governor’s ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. 15. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.’ —[MATT. xxviii. 1-15.](#)

The attempts at harmonising the resurrection narratives are not only unsatisfactory, but they tend to blur the distinctive characteristics of each account. We shall therefore confine ourselves entirely to Matthew’s version, and leave the others alone, with the simple remark that a condensed report of a series of events does not deny what it omits, nor contradict a fuller one. The peculiarities of Matthew’s last chapter are largely due to the purpose of his gospel. Throughout, it has been the record of the Galilean ministry, the picture of the King of Israel, and of His treatment by those who should have been His subjects. This chapter establishes the fact of His resurrection; but, passing by the Jerusalem appearances of the risen Lord, as being granted to individuals and having less bearing on His royalty, emphasises two points: His rejection by the representatives of the nation, whose lie is endorsed by popular acceptance; and the solemn assumption, in Galilee, so familiar to the reader, of universal dominion, with the world-wide commission, in which the kingdom bursts the narrow national limits and becomes co-extensive with humanity. It is better to learn the meaning of Matthew’s selection of his incidents than to wipe out instructive peculiarities in the vain attempt after harmony.

First, notice his silence (in which all the four narratives are alike) as to the time and circumstances of the resurrection itself. That had taken place before the grey twilight summoned the faithful women, and before the earthquake and the angel's descent. No eye saw Him rise. The guards were not asleep, for the statement that they were is a lie put into their mouths by the rulers; but though they kept jealous watch, His rising was invisible to them. 'The prison was shut with all safety,' for the stone was rolled away after He was risen, 'and the keepers standing before the doors,' but there was 'no man within.' As in the evening of that day He appeared in the closed chamber, so He passed from the sealed grave. Divine decorum required that that transcendent act should be done without mortal observers of the actual rising of the Sun which scatters for ever the darkness of death.

Matthew next notices the angel ministrant and herald. His narrative leaves the impression that the earthquake and appearance of the angel immediately preceded the arrival of the women, and the 'Behold!' suggests that they felt and saw both. But that is a piece of chronology on which there may be difference of opinion. The other narratives tell of two angels. Matthew's mention of one only may be due either to the fact that one was speaker, or to the subjective impressions of his informant, who saw but the one, or to variation in the number visible at different times. We know too little of the laws which determine their appearances to be warranted in finding contradiction or difficulty here. The power of seeing may depend on the condition of the beholder. It may depend, not as with gross material bodies, on optics, but on the volition of the radiant beings seen. They may pass from visibility to its opposite, lightly and repeatedly, flickering into and out of sight, as the Pleiades seem to do. Where there is such store of possibilities, he is rash who talks glibly about contradictions.

Of far more value is it to note the purpose served by this waiting angel. We heard much of a herald angel of the Lord in the story of the Nativity. We hear nothing of him during the life of Christ. Now again he appears, as the stars, quenched in the noontide, shine again when the sun is out of the sky. He attends as humble servitor, in token that the highest beings gazed on that empty grave with reverent adoration, and were honoured by being allowed to guard the sacred place. Death was an undreaded thing to them, and no hopes for themselves blossomed from Christ's grave; but He who had lain in it was their King as well as ours, and new lessons of divine love were taught them, as they wondered and watched. They come to minister by act and word to the weeping women's faith and joy. Their appearance paralyses the guards, who would have kept the Marys from the grave. They roll away the great circular stone, which women's hands, however nerved by love, could not have moved in its grooves. They speak tender words to them. There by the empty tomb, the strong heavenly and the weak earthly lovers of the risen King meet together, and clasp hands of help, the pledge and first-fruits of the standing order henceforth, and the inauguration of their office of 'ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for . . . heirs of salvation.' The risen

Christ hath made both one. The servants of the same King must needs be friends of one another.

The angel's words fall into three parts. First, he calms fears by the assurance that the seekers for Christ are dear to Him. 'Fear not ye' glances at the prostrate watchers, and almost acknowledges the reasonableness of their abject terror. To them he could not but be hostile, but to hearts that longed for their and his Lord, he and all his mighty fellows were brethren. Let us learn that all God's angels are our lovers and helpers, if we love and seek for Jesus. Superstition has peopled the gulf between God and man with crowds of beings; revelation assures us that it is full of creatures who excel in strength. Men have cowered before them, but 'whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers,' our King was their Creator, and is their Sovereign, and, if we serve Him, all these are on our side. The true deliverer from superstitious terrors is the risen Christ. Again, the angel announces in simplest words the glorious fact, 'He is risen,' and helps them to receive it by a double way. He reminds them of Christ's own words, which had seemed so mysterious and had turned out so simple, so incredible, and now had proved so true. He calls them with a smile of welcome to draw near, and with him to look into the empty place. The invitation extends to us all, for the one assurance of immortality; and the only answer to the despairing question, 'If a man die, shall he live again?' which is solid enough to resist the corrosion of modern doubt as of ancient ignorance, is that empty grave, and the filled throne, which was its necessary consequence. By it we measure the love that stooped so low, we school our hearts to anticipate without dread or reluctance our own lying down there, we fasten our faith on the risen Forerunner, and rejoice in the triumphant assurance of a living Christ. If the wonder of the women's stunned gaze is no more ours, our calm acceptance of the familiar fact need be none the less glad, and our estimate of its far-reaching results more complete than their tumult of feeling permitted to them.

No wonder that, swiftly, new duty which was privilege followed on the new, glad knowledge. It was emphatically 'a day of good tidings,' and they could not hold their peace. A brief glance, enough for certitude and joy, was permitted; and then, with urgent haste, they are sent to be apostles to the Apostles. The possession of the news of a risen Saviour binds the possessors to be its preachers. Where it is received in any power, it will impel to utterance. He who can keep silence has never felt, as he ought, the worth of the word, nor realised the reason why he has seen the Cross or the empty grave. 'He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see.' It was but two complete days and one night since Christ had said to the disciples that He would rise again, and, as the Shepherd of the scattered flock, go before them into Galilee. How long ago since that saying it would seem! The reasons for Matthew's omission of all the other appearances of our Lord in Jerusalem, with the exception of the one which immediately follows, and for the stress he lays on this rendezvous in their native Galilee, have already been touched on, and need not detain us now.

The next point in the narrative is the glad interview with the risen Jesus. The women had been at the grave but for a few moments. But they lived more in these than in years of quiet. Time is very elastic, and five minutes or five seconds may change a life. These few moments changed a world. Haste, winged by fear which had no torment, and by joy which found relief in swift movement, sent them running, forgetful of conventional proprieties, towards the awakening city. Probably Mary Magdalene had left them, as soon as they saw the open grave, and had hurried back alone to tell the tidings. And now the crowning joy and wonder comes. How simply it is told!—the introductory ‘Behold!’ just hinting at the wonderfulness, and perhaps at the suddenness, of our Lord’s appearance, and the rest being in the quietest and fewest words possible. Note the deep significance of the name ‘Jesus’ here. The angel spoke of ‘the Lord,’ but all the rest of the chapter speaks of ‘Jesus.’ The joy and hope that flow from the Resurrection depend on the fact of His humanity. He comes out of the grave, the same brother of our mortal flesh as before. It was no phantom whose feet they clasped, and He is not withdrawn from them by His mysterious experience. All through the Resurrection histories and the narrative of the forty days, the same emphasis attaches to the name, which culminates in the angel’s assurance at the Ascension, that ‘this same Jesus,’ in His true humanity, who has gone up on high our Forerunner, shall come again our Brother and our Judge. ‘It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again’; but that triumphant assurance loses all its blessedness, unless we say too, ‘Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and . . . rose again the third day.’

Note, too, the calmness of His greeting. He uses the common form of salutation, as if He had but been absent on some common occasion, and met them in ordinary circumstances. He speaks out of His own deep tranquillity, and desires to impart it to their agitated spirits. He would calm their joy, that it may be the deeper, like His own. If we may give any weight to the original meaning of the formula of greeting which He employs, we may see blessed prophecy in it. The lips of the risen Christ bid us all ‘rejoice.’ His salutation is no empty wish, but a command which makes its own fulfilment possible. If our hearts welcome Him, and our faith is firm in His risen power and love, then He gives us a deep and central gladness, which nothing

‘That is at enmity with joy
Can utterly abolish or destroy.’

The rush to His feet, and the silent clasp of adoration, are eloquent of a tumult of feeling most natural, and yet not without turbid elements, which He does not wholly approve. We have not here the prohibition of such a touch which was spoken to Mary, but we have substantially the same substitution, by His command, of practical service for mere emotion. That carries a lesson always in season. We cannot love Christ too much, nor try to get too

near Him, to touch Him with the hand of our faith. But there have been modes of religious emotion, represented by hymns and popular books, which have not mingled reverence rightly with love, and have spoken of Him, and of the emotions binding us to Him, in tones unwholesomely like those belonging to earthly passion. But, apart from that, Jesus taught these women, and us through them, that it is better to proclaim His Resurrection than to lie at His feet; and that, however sweet the blessedness which we find in Him may be, it is meant to put a message into our lips, which others need. Our sight of Him gives us something to say, and binds us to say it. It was a blessing to the women to have work to do, in doing which their strained emotions might subside. It was a blessing to the mournful company in the upper room to have their hearts prepared for His coming by these heralds. It was a wonderful token of His unchanged love, and an answer to fears and doubts of how they might find Him, that He sends the message to them as brethren.

In the hurry of that Easter morning, they had no time to ponder on all that it had brought them. The Resurrection as the demonstration of Christ's divinity and of the acceptance of His perfect sacrifice, or as the pledge of their resurrection, or as the type of their Christian life, was for future experience to grasp. For that day, it was enough to pass from despair to joy, and to let the astounding fact flood them with sunny hope.

We know the vast sweep of the consequences and consolations of it far better than they did. There is no reason, in our distance from it, for its diminishing either in magnitude, in certitude, or in blessedness in our eyes. No fact in the history of the world stands on such firm evidence as the resurrection of Jesus Christ. No age of the world ever needed to believe it more than this one does. It becomes us all to grasp it for ourselves with an iron tenacity of hold, and to echo, in the face of the materialisms and know-nothing philosophy of this day, the old ringing confession, 'Now is Christ risen from the dead!' We need say little about the last point in this narrative—the obstinate blindness of the rulers, and their transparent lie to account for the empty grave. The guard reports to the rulers, not to the governor, as they had been handed over by Pilate for special service. But they were Roman soldiers, as appears from the danger which the rulers provided against, that of their alleged crime against military discipline, in sleeping at their post, coming to his ears. The trumped-up story is too puerile to have taken in any one who did not wish to believe it. How could they tell what happened when they were asleep? How could such an operation as forcing back a heavy stone, and exhuming a corpse, have been carried on without waking them? How could such a timid set of people have mustered up courage for such a bold act? What did they do it for? Not to bury their Lord. He had been lovingly laid there by reverent hands, and costly spices strewn upon the sacred limbs. The only possible motive would be that the disciples might tell lies about His resurrection. That hypothesis that the Resurrection was a deliberately concocted falsehood has proved too strong for the stomach of modern unbelief, and has been long abandoned, as it had need to be. When figs grow on thistles, such characters as

the early Christians, martyrs, heroes, saints, will be produced by a system which has a lie, known to be one, for its foundation. But the lame story is significant in two ways. It confesses, by its desperate attempt to turn the corner of the difficulty, that the great rock, on which all denials of Christ's resurrection split, is the simple question—If He did not rise again, what became of the body? The priests' answer is absurd, but it, at all events, acknowledges that the grave was empty, and that it is incumbent to produce an explanation which reasonable men can accept without laughter.

Further, this last appearance of the rulers in the gospel is full of tragic significance, and is especially important to Matthew, whose narrative deals especially with Jesus as the King and Messiah of Israel. This is the end of centuries of prophecy and patience! This is what all God's culture of His vineyard has come to! The husbandmen cast the Heir out of the vineyard, and slew him. But there was a deeper depth than even that. They would not be persuaded when He rose again from the dead. They entrenched themselves in a lie, which only showed that they had a glimmering of the truth and hated it. And the lie was willingly swallowed by the mass of the nation, who thereby showed that they were of the same stuff as they who made it. A conspiracy of falsehood, which knew itself to be such, was the last act of that august council of Israel. It is an awful lesson of the penalties of unfaithfulness to the light possessed, an awful instance of 'judicial blindness.' So sets the sun of Israel. And therefore Matthew's Gospel turns away from the apostate nation, which has rejected its King, to tell, in its last words, of His assumption of universal dominion, and of the passage of the glad news from Israel to the world.

THE RISEN LORD'S GREETINGS AND GIFTS

'And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail.'—[MATT. xxviii. 9.](#)

'Then the same day at evening . . . came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.'—[JOHN xx. 19.](#)

So did our Lord greet His sad followers. The first of these salutations was addressed to the women as they hurried in the morning from the empty tomb bewildered; the second to the disciples assembled in the upper room in the evening of the same day. Both are ordinary greetings. The first is that usual in Greek, and literally means 'Rejoice'; the second is that common in Hebrew. The divergence between the two may be owing to the Evangelist Matthew having rendered the words which our Lord actually did speak, in the tongue familiar to His time, into their equivalent Greek. But whatever account may be given of the divergence does not materially affect the significance which I find in the salutations. And I desire to turn to them for a few moments now, because I think that, if we ponder them, we may gain some precious lessons from these Easter greetings of the Lord Himself.

I. First, then, notice their strange and majestic simplicity.

He meets His followers after Calvary and the Tomb and the Resurrection, with the same words with which two casual acquaintances, after some slight absence, might salute one another by the way. Their very simplicity is their sublimity here. For think of what tremendous experiences He had passed through since they saw Him last, and of what a rush of rapture and disturbance of joy shook the minds of the disciples, and then estimate the calm and calming power of that matter-of-fact and simple greeting. It bears upon its very front the mark of truth. Would anybody have imagined the scene so? There have been one or two great poets who might conceivably have risen to the height of putting such words under such circumstances into the mouths of creatures of their own imagination. Analogous instances of the utmost simplicity of expression in moments of intense feeling may be quoted from Æschylus or Shakespeare, and are regarded as the high-water marks of genius. But does any one suppose that these evangelists were exceptionally gifted souls of that sort, or that they could have imagined anything like this—so strange in its calm, so unnatural at first sight, and yet vindicating itself as so profoundly natural and sublime—unless for the simple reason that they had heard it themselves, or been told it by credible witnesses? Neither the delicate pencil of the great dramatic genius nor the coarser brush of legend can have drawn such an incident as this, and it seems to me that the only reasonable explanation of it is that these greetings are what He really did say.

For, as I have remarked, unnatural as it seems at first sight, if we think for a moment, the very simplicity and calm, and, I was going to say, the matter-of-factness, of such a greeting, as the first that escaped from lips that had passed through death and yet were red

and vocal, is congruous with the deepest truths of His nature. He has come from that tremendous conflict, and He reappears, not flushed with triumph, nor bearing any trace of effort, but surrounded as by a nimbus with that strange tranquillity which evermore enveloped Him. So small does the awful scene which He has passed through seem to this divine-human Man, and so utterly are the old ties and bonds unaffected by it, that when He meets His followers, all He has to say to them as His first greeting is, 'Peace be unto you!'—the well-worn salutation that was bandied to and fro in every market-place and scene where men were wont to meet. Thus He indicates the divine tranquillity of His nature; thus He minimises the fact of death; thus He reduces it to its true insignificance as a parenthesis across which may pass unaffected all sweet familiarities and loving friendships; thus He reknits the broken ties, and, though the form of their intercourse is hereafter to be profoundly modified, the substance of it remains, whereof He giveth assurance unto them in these His first words from the dead. So, as to a man standing on some mountain plateau, the deep gorges which seam it become invisible, and the unbroken level runs right on. So, there are a marvellous proof of the majesty and tranquillity of the divine Man, a glorious manifestation of His superiority over death; a blessed assurance of the reknitting of all ancient ties, after it as before it, coming to us from pondering on the trivial words—trivial from other lips, but profoundly significant on His—wherewith He greeted His servants when He rose again from the dead.

II. Then note, secondly, the universal destination of the greetings of the risen Lord.

I have said that it is possibly a mere accident that we should have the two forms of salutation preserved for us here; and that it is quite conceivable that our Lord really spoke but one, which has been preserved unaltered from its Hebrew or Aramaic original in John, and rendered by its Greek equivalent by the Evangelist Matthew.

But be that as it may, I cannot help feeling that in this fact, that the one salutation is the common greeting among Greek-speaking peoples, and the other the common greeting amongst Easterns, we may permissibly find the thought of the universal aspect of the gifts and greetings of the risen Christ. He comes to all men, and each man hears Him, 'in his own tongue wherein he was born,' breathing forth to him greetings which are promises, and promises which are gifts. Just as the mocking inscription on the Cross proclaimed, in 'Hebrew and Greek and Latin,' the three tongues known to its readers, the one kingdom of the crucified King—so in the greetings from the grave, the one declares that, to all the desires of eager, ardent, sensuous, joy-loving Westerns, and all the aspirations of repose-loving Easterns, who had had bitter experience of the pangs and pains of a state of warfare, Jesus Christ is ready to respond and to bring answering gifts. Whatsoever any community or individual has conceived as its highest ideal of blessedness and of good, that the risen Christ hath in His hands to bestow. He takes men's ideals of blessedness, and deepens and purifies and refines them.

The Greek notion of joy as being the good to be most wished for those dear to us, is but a shallow one. They had to learn, and their philosophy and their poetry and their art came to corruption because they would not learn, that the corn of wheat must be cast into the ground and die before it bring forth fruit. They knew little of the blessing and meaning of sorrow, and therefore the false glitter passed away, and the pursuit of the ideal became gross and foul and sensuous. And, on the other hand, the Jew, with his longing for peace, had an equally shallow and unworthy conception of what it meant, and what was needed to produce it. If he had only external concord with men, and a competency of outward good within his reach without too much trouble, he thought that because he 'had much goods laid up for many years' he might 'take his ease; and eat, and drink, and be merry.' But Jesus Christ comes to satisfy both aspirations by contradicting both, and to reveal to Greek and Jew how much deeper and diviner was his desire than he dreamed it to be; and, therefore, how impossible it was to find the joy that would last, in the dancing fireflies of external satisfactions or the delights of art and beauty; and how impossible it was to find the repose that ennobled and was wedded to action, in anything short of union with God.

The Lord Christ comes out of the grave in which He lay for every man, and brings to each man's door, in a dialect intelligible to the man himself, the satisfaction of the single soul's aspirations and ideals, as well as of the national desires. His gifts and greetings are of universal destination, meant for us all and adapted for us each.

III. Then, thirdly, notice the unfailing efficacy of the Lord's greetings.

Look at these people to whom He spoke. Remember what they were between the Friday and the Sunday morning; utterly cowed and beaten, the women, in accordance with the feminine nature, apparently more deeply touched by the personal loss of the Friend and Comforter; and the men apparently, whilst sharing that sorrow, also touched by despair at the going to water of all the hopes that they had been building upon His official character and position. 'We trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel,' they said, 'as they walked and were sad.' They were on the point of parting. The Keystone withdrawn, the stones were ready to fall apart. Then came something—let us leave a blank for a moment—then came something; and those who had been cowards, dissolved in sorrow and relaxed by despair, in eight-and-forty hours became heroes. From that time, when, by all reasonable logic and common sense applied to men's motives, the Crucifixion should have crushed their dreams and dissolved their society, a precisely opposite effect ensues, and not only did the Church continue, but the men changed their characters, and became, somehow or other, full of these very two things which Christ wished for them—namely, joy and peace.

Now I want to know—what bridges that gulf? How do you get the Peter of the Acts of the Apostles out of the Peter of the Gospels? Is there any way of explaining that revolution of character, whilst yet its broad outlines remain identical, which befell him and all of them, except the old-fashioned one that the something which came in between was the Resurrection

of Jesus Christ, and the consequent gift of joy and peace in Him, a joy that no troubles or persecutions could shake, a peace that no conflicts could for a moment disturb? It seems to me that every theory of Christianity which boggles at accepting the Resurrection of Jesus Christ as a plain fact, is shattered to pieces on the sharp-pointed rock of this one demand—'Very well! If it is not a fact, account for the existence of the Church, and for the change in the characters of its members.' You may wriggle as you like, but you will never get a reasonable theory of these two undeniable facts until you believe that He rose from the dead. In His right hand He carried peace, and in His left joy. He gave these to them, and therefore 'out of weakness they were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens,' and when the time came, 'were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.' There is omnipotent efficacy in Christ's greetings.

The one instance opens up the general law, that His wishes are gifts, that all His words are acts, that He speaks and it is done, and that when He desires for us joy, it is a deed of conveyance and gift, and invests us with the joy that He desires if we observe the conditions.

Christ's wishes are omnipotent, ours are powerless. We wish for our friends many good things, and the event turns wishes to mockery, and the garlands which we prepared for their birthdays have sometimes to be hung on their tombs. The limitations of human friendship and of our deepest and sincerest wishes, like a dark background, enhance the boundless efficacy of the greetings of the Master, which are not only wishes but bestowments of the thing wished, and therein given, by Him.

IV. So, lastly, notice our share in this twofold greeting.

When it was first heard, I suppose that the disciples and the women apprehended the salutation only in its most outward form, and that all other thoughts were lost in the mere rapture of the sudden change from the desolate sense of loss to the glad consciousness of renewed possession. When the women clung to His feet on that Easter morning, they had no thought of anything but—'we clasp Thee again, O Soul of our souls.' But then, as time went on, the meaning and blessedness and far-reaching issues of the Resurrection became more plain to them. And I think we can see traces of the process, in the development of Christian teaching as presented in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Epistles. Peter in his early sermons dwells on the Resurrection all but exclusively from one point of view—viz., as being the great proof of Christ's Messiahship. Then there came by degrees, as is represented in the same Peter's letter, and abundantly in the Apostle Paul's, the recognition of the light which the Resurrection of Jesus Christ threw upon immortality; as a prophecy and a pattern thereof. Then, when the historical fact had become fully accepted and universally diffused, and its bearings upon men's future had been as fully apprehended as is possible here, there came, finally, the thought that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ was the symbol of the new life, which from that risen Lord passed into all those who loved and trusted Him.

Now, in all these three aspects—as proof of Messiahship, as the pattern and prophecy of immortality, and as the symbol of the better life which is accessible for us, here and now—the Resurrection of Jesus Christ stands for us even more truly than for the rapturous women who caught His feet, or for the thankful men who looked upon Him in the upper chamber, as the source of peace and of joy.

For, dear brethren, therein is set forth for us the Christ whose work is thereby declared to be finished and acceptable to God, and all sorrow of sin, all guilt, all disturbance of heart and mind by reason of evil passions and burning memories of former iniquity, and all disturbance of our concord with God, are at once and for ever swept away. If Jesus Christ was ‘declared to be the Son of God with power by His Resurrection from the dead,’ and if in that Resurrection, as is most surely the case, the broad seal of the divine acceptance is set to the charter of our forgiveness and sonship by the blood of the Cross, then joy and peace come to us from Him and from it.

Again, the resurrection of Jesus Christ sets Him forth before us as the pattern and the prophecy of immortal life. This Samson has taken the gates of the prison-house on His broad shoulders and carried them away, and now no man is kept imprisoned evermore in that darkness. The earthquake has opened the doors and loosened every man’s bonds. Jesus Christ hath risen from the dead, and therein not only demonstrated the certainty that life subsists through death, and that a bodily life is possible thereafter, but hath set before all those who give the keeping of their souls into His hands the glorious belief that ‘the body of their humiliation shall be’ ‘changed into the likeness of the body of His glory, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.’ Therefore the sorrows of death, for ourselves and for our dear ones, the agitation which it causes, and all its darkness into which we shrink from passing, are swept away when He comes forth from the grave, serene, radiant, and victorious, to die no more, but to dispense amongst us His peace and His joy.

And, again, the risen Christ is the source of a new life drawn from Him and received into the heart by faith in His sacrifice and Resurrection and glory. And if I have, deep-seated in my soul, though it may be in imperfect maturity, that life which is hid with Christ in God, an inward fountain of gladness, far better than the effervescent, and therefore soon flat, waters of Greek or earthly joy, is mine; and in my inmost being dwells a depth of calm peace which no outward disturbance can touch, any more than the winds that rave along the surface of the ocean affect its unmoved and unsounded abysses. Jesus Christ comes to thee, my brother, weary, distracted, care-laden, sin-laden, sorrowful and fearful. And He says to each of us from the throne what He said in the upper room before the Cross, and on leaving the grave after it, ‘My joy will remain in you, and your joy shall be full. My peace I leave to you, My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you.’

ON THE MOUNTAIN

‘Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. 17. And when they saw Him, they worshipped Him: but some doubted.’ —[MATT. xxviii. 16, 17.](#)

‘After that, He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once.’ —[1 COR. xv. 4.](#)

To infer an historian’s ignorance from his silence is a short and easy, but a rash, method. Matthew has nothing to say of our Lord’s appearances in Jerusalem, except in regard to that of the women in the early morning of Easter Day. But it does not follow that he was ignorant of these appearances. Imperfect knowledge may be the explanation; but the scope and design of his Gospel is much more likely to be so. It is emphatically the Gospel of the King of Israel, and it moves, with the exception of the story of the Passion, wholly within the limits of the Galilean ministry. What more probable than that the same motive which induced Jesus to select the mountain which He had appointed as the scene of this meeting should have induced the Evangelist to pass by all the other manifestations in order to fix upon this one? It was fitting that in Galilee, where He had walked in lowly gentleness, ‘kindly with His kind,’ He should assume His sovereign authority. It was fitting that in ‘Galilee of the Gentiles,’ that outlying and despised province, half heathen in the eyes of the narrow-minded Pharisaic Jerusalem, He should proclaim the widening of His kingdom from Israel to all nations.

If we had Matthew’s words only, we should suppose that none but the eleven were present on this occasion. But it is obviously the same incident to which Paul refers when he speaks of the appearance to ‘five hundred brethren at once.’ These were the Galilean disciples who had been faithful in the days of His lowliness, and were thus now assembled to hear His proclamation of exaltation. Apparently the meeting had been arranged beforehand. They came without Him to ‘the mountain where Jesus had appointed.’ Probably it was the same spot on which the so-called Sermon on the Mount, the first proclamation of the King, had been delivered, and it was naturally chosen to be the scene of a yet more exalted proclamation. A thousand tender memories and associations clustered round the spot. So we have to think of the five hundred gathered in eager expectancy; and we notice how unlike the manner of His coming is to that of the former manifestations. Then, suddenly, He became visibly present where a moment before He had been unseen. But now He gradually approaches, for the doubting and the worshipping took place ‘when they saw Him,’ and before ‘He came to them.’ I suppose we may conceive of Him as coming down the hill and drawing near to them, and then, when He stands above them, and yet close to them—else the five hundred could not have seen Him ‘at once’—doubts vanish; and they listen with silent awe and love. The words are majestic; all is regal. There is no veiled personality now, as there had been to Mary, and to the two on the road to Emmaus. There is no greeting now, as there had been in the upper chamber; no affording of a demonstration of the reality of His appear-

ance, as there had been to Thomas and to the others. He stands amongst them as the King, and the music of His words, deep as the roll of thunder, and sweet as harpers harping with their harps, makes all comment or paraphrase sound thin and poor. But yet so many great and precious lessons are hived in the words that we must reverently ponder them. The material is so abundant that I can but touch it in the slightest possible fashion. This great utterance of our Lord's falls into three parts: a great claim, a great commission, a great promise.

I. There is a Great Claim.

'All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.' No words can more absolutely express unconditional, unlimited authority and sovereignty. Mark the variety of the gift—'all power'; every kind of force, every kind of dominion is in His hands. Mark the sphere of sovereignty—'in heaven and in earth.' Now, brethren, if we know anything about Jesus Christ, we know that He made this claim. There is no reason, except the unwillingness of some people to admit that claim, for casting any sort of doubt upon these words, or making any distinction in authority between them and the rest of the words of graciousness which the whole world has taken to its heart. But if He said this, what becomes of His right to the veneration of mankind, as the Perfect Example of the self-sacrificing, self-oblivious religious life? It is a mystery that I cannot solve, how any man can keep his reverence for Jesus, and refuse to believe that beneath these tremendous words there lies a solemn and solid reality.

Notice, too, that there is implied a definite point of time at which this all-embracing authority was given. You will find in the Revised Version a small alteration in the reading, which makes a great difference in the sense. It reads, 'All power has been given'; and that points, as I say, to a definite period. When was it given? Let another portion of Scripture answer the question—'Declared to be the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead.' Then to the Man Jesus was given authority over heaven and earth. All the early Christian documents concur in this view of the connection between the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and His investiture with this sovereign power. Harken to Paul, 'Became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross; wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name that is above every name.' Harken to Peter, 'Who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory.' Harken to the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, 'We see Jesus crowned with glory and honour for the suffering of death.' Harken to John, 'To Him that is the Faithful Witness, and the First-born from the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth.' Look with his eyes to the vision of the 'Lamb as it had been slain,' enthroned in the midst of the throne, and say whether this unanimous consent of the earliest Christian teachers is explicable on any reasonable grounds, unless there had been underlying it just the words of our text, and the Master Himself had taught them that all power was given to Him in heaven and in earth. As it seems to me impossible to account for the existence of the Church if we deny the Resurrection, so it seems to me impossible to account for the faith of the earliest stratum of the Christian Church without the acceptance of some such

declaration as this, as having come from the Lord Himself. And so the hands that were pierced with the nails wield the sceptre of the Universe, and on the brows that were wounded and bleeding with the crown of thorns are wreathed the many crowns of universal Kingdom.

But we have further to notice that in this investiture, with 'all power in heaven and on earth,' we have not merely the attestation of the perfection of His obedience, the completeness of His work, and the power of His sacrifice, but that we have also the elevation of Manhood to enthronement with Divinity. For the new thing that came to Jesus after His resurrection was that His humanity was taken into, and became participant of, 'the glory which I had with Thee, before the world was.' Then our nature, when perfect and sinless, is so cognate and kindred with the Divine that humanity is capable of being invested with, and bearing, that 'exceeding and eternal weight of glory.' In that elevation of the Man Christ Jesus, we may read a prophecy, that shall not be unfulfilled, of the destiny of all those who conform to Him through faith, love, and obedience, finally to sit down with Him on His throne, even as He is set down with the Father on His throne.

Ah! brethren, Christianity has dark and low views of human nature, and men say they are too low and too dark. It is 'Nature's sternest painter,' and, therefore, 'its best.' But if on its palette the blacks are blacker than anywhere else, its range of colour is greater, and its white is more lustrous. No system thinks so condemnatorily of human nature as it is; none thinks so glowingly of human nature as it may become. There are bass notes far down beyond the limits of the scale to which ears dulled by the world and sin and sorrow are sensitive; and there are clear, high tones, thrilling and shrilling far above the range of perception of such ears. The man that is in the lowest depths may rise with Jesus to the highest, but it must be by the same road by which the Master went. 'If we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him,' and only 'if.' There is no other path to the Throne but the Cross. *Via crucis*, *via lucis*—the way of the Cross is the way of light. It is to those who have accepted their Gethsemanes and their Calvarys that He appoints a kingdom, as His Father has appointed unto Him.

So much, then, for the first point here in these words; turn now to the second.

II. The Great Commission.

One might have expected that the immediate inference to be drawn from 'All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth' would have been some word of encouragement and strengthening to those who were so soon to be left, and who were beginning to be conscious of their feebleness. But there is nothing more striking in the whole of the incidents of those forty days than the prominence which is given in them to the work of the Church when the Master had left it, and to the imperative obligations devolving upon it. And so here, not encouragement, but obligation is the inference that is drawn from that tremendous claim. 'Because I have all power, therefore you are charged with the duty of winning the world for its King.' The all-ruling Christ calls for the universal proclamation of His sovereignty by

His disciples. These five hundred little understood the sweep of the commandment, and, as history shows, terribly failed to apprehend the emancipating power of it. But He says to us, as to them, 'I am not content with the authority given to Me by God, unless I have the authority that each man for himself can give Me, by willing surrender of his heart and will to Me.' Jesus Christ craves no empty rule, no mere elevation by virtue of Divine supremacy, over men. He regards that elevation as incomplete without the voluntary surrender of men to become His subjects and champions. Without its own consent He does not count that His universal power is established in a human heart. Though that dominion be all-embracing like the ocean, and stretching into all corners of the universe, and dominating over all ages, yet in that ocean there may stand up black and dry rocks, barren as they are dry, and blasted as they are black, because, with the awful power of a human will, men have said, 'We will not have this Man to reign over us.' It is willing subjects whom Christ seeks, in order to make the Divine grant of authority a reality.

In that work He needs His servants. The gift of God notwithstanding, the power of His Cross notwithstanding, the perfection and completeness of His great reconciling and redeeming work notwithstanding, all these are vain unless we, His servants, will take them in our hands as our weapons, and go forth on the warfare to which He has summoned us. This is the command laid upon us all, 'Make disciples of all nations.' Only so will the reality correspond to the initial and all-embracing grant.

It would take us too far to deal at all adequately, or in anything but the most superficial fashion, with the remaining parts of this great commission. 'Make disciples of all nations'—that is the first thing. Then comes the second step: 'Baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.' Who are to be baptized? Now, notice, if I may venture upon being slightly technical for a moment, that the word 'nations' in the preceding clause is a neuter one, and that the word for 'them' in this clause is a masculine, which seems to me fairly to imply that the command 'baptizing them' does not refer to 'all nations,' but to the disciples latent among them, and to be drawn from them. Surely, surely the great claim of absolute and unbounded power has for its consequence something better than the lame and impotent conclusion of appointing an indiscriminate rite, as the means of making disciples! Surely that is not in accordance with the spirituality of the Christian faith!

'Baptizing them into the Name'—the name is one, that of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Does that mean the name of God, and of a man, and of an influence, all jumbled up together in blasphemous and irrational union? Surely, if Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have one name, the name of Divinity, then it is but a step to say that three Persons are one God! But there is a great deal more here than a baptismal formula, for to be baptized into the Name is but the symbol of being plunged into communion with this one threefold God of our salvation. The ideal state of the Christian disciple is that he shall be as a vase

dropped into the Atlantic, encompassed about with God, and filled with Him. We all 'live, and move, and have our being' in Him, but some of us have so wrapped ourselves, if I may venture to use such a figure, in waterproof covering, that, though we are floating in an ocean of Divinity, not a drop finds its way in. Cast the covering aside, and you will be saturated with God, and only in the measure in which you live and move and have your being in the Name are you disciples.

There is another step still. Making disciples and bringing into communion with the Godhead is not all that is to flow from, and correspond to, and realise in the individual, the absolute authority of Jesus Christ—'Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.' We hear a great deal in these days about the worthlessness of mere dogmatic Christianity. Jesus Christ anticipated all that talk, and guarded it from exaggeration. For what He tells us here that we are to train ourselves and others in, is not creed but conduct; not things to be believed or credenda but things to be done or agenda—'teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.' A creed that is not wrought out in actions is empty; conduct that is not informed, penetrated, regulated by creed, is unworthy of a man, not to say of a Christian. What we are to know we are to know in order that we may do, and so inherit the benediction, which is never bestowed upon them that know, but upon them that, knowing these things, are blessed in, as well as for, the doing of them.

That training is to be continuous, educating to new views of duty; new applications of old truths, new sensitiveness of conscience, unveiling to us, ever as we climb, new heights to which we aspire. The Christian Church has not yet learnt—thank God it is learning, though by slow degrees—all the moral and practical implications and applications of 'the truth as it is in Jesus.' And so these are the three things by which the Church recognises and corresponds to the universal dominion of Christ, the making disciples universally; the bringing them into the communion of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and the training of them to conduct ever approximating more and more to the Divine ideal of humanity in the glorified Christ.

And now I must gather just into a sentence or two what is to be said about the last point. There is—

III. The Great Promise.

'I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world,' or, as it might be read, 'with you all the days, even to the accomplishment of the age.' Note that emphatic 'I am,' which does not only denote certainty, but is the speech of Him who is lifted above the lower regions where Time rolls and the succession of events occurs. That 'I am' covers all the varieties of was, is, will be. Notice the long vista of variously tinted days which opens here. Howsoever many they be, howsoever different their complexion, days of summer and days of winter, days of sunshine and days of storm, days of buoyant youth and days of stagnant, stereotyped old age, days of apparent failure and days of apparent prosperity, He is with us in them all.

They change, He is 'the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.' Notice the illimitable extent of the promise—'even unto the end.' We are always tempted to think that long ago the earth was more full of God than it is to-day, and that away forward in the future it will again be fuller, but that this moment is comparatively empty. The heavens touch the earth on the horizon in front and behind, and they are highest and remotest above us just where we stand. But no past day had more of Christ in it than to-day has, and that He has gone away is the condition of His coming. 'He therefore departed for a season, that we might receive Him for ever.'

But mark that the promise comes after a command, and is contingent, for all its blessedness and power, upon our obedience to the prescribed duty. That duty is primarily to make disciples of all nations, and the discharge of it is so closely connected with the realisation of the promise that a non-missionary Church never has much of Christ's presence. But obedience to all the King's commands is required if we stand before Him, and are to enjoy His smile. If you wish to keep Christ very near you, and to feel Him with you, the way to do so is no mere cultivation of religious emotion, or saturating your mind with religious books and thoughts, though these have their place; but on the dusty road of life doing His will and keeping His commandments. 'If a man love Me he will keep My words, and My Father will love Him. We will come to Him, and make our abode with Him.'

Indexes

Index of Scripture References

Leviticus

19:18

Deuteronomy

6:5

2 Chronicles

24:1-27

Job

9:8

Psalms

45:1-17 110 110 118:1-29

Isaiah

35:5-6 61:1

Ezekiel

34:1-31

Matthew

8:1-34 8:1-34 8:1-34 9:1-38 9:1-38 9:1-38 9:2 9:2 9:6 9:6 9:9-17 9:9-17 9:15
9:18-31 9:18-31 9:36 9:36 9:36 10:1-42 10:1-42 10:5 10:5 10:5-8 10:5-15 10:5-16
10:5-16 10:15 10:15 10:16 10:16 10:16 10:16-31 10:16-31 10:17-22 10:21 10:23
10:24-25 10:24-25 10:26-31 10:32-33 10:32-42 10:32-42 10:39 10:39 10:41-42
10:41-42 11:2-6 11:2-15 11:2-15 11:7-15 11:19 11:19 11:20 11:20 11:25 11:25
11:28-29 11:28-29 12:1-14 12:1-14 12:6 12:8 12:24 12:24 12:24 12:33 12:33 12:40
12:41 12:41 12:42 12:42 13:1-9 13:1-9 13:8 13:9 13:12 13:12 13:13 13:13 13:19
13:24-30 13:24-30 13:33 13:33 13:36 13:44-46 13:44-46 13:53 14:1-12 14:1-12
14:12 14:12 14:19-20 14:19-20 14:22-36 14:22-36 14:27 14:28 14:28 15:21-31
15:21-31 16:13-20 16:13-28 16:13-28 16:21 16:21 16:21 16:21-23 16:24-28 16:25
16:26 16:27 16:28 17:1-13 17:1-13 17:19-20 17:19-20 17:25-26 17:25-26 18:1-14
18:1-14 18:3 18:5-6 18:6 18:8 18:8 18:10-14 18:11 18:11 18:12 18:12 18:13 18:13
18:14 18:18 18:18 18:22 18:22 18:27 19:16-26 19:16-26 20:23 20:23 20:28 20:28
20:28 20:28 21:1-16 21:1-16 21:4-5 21:4-5 21:20 21:33-46 21:33-46 21:37-39 21:44
21:44 22:1-9 22:1-14 22:1-14 22:10-14 22:10-14 22:34 22:34-46 22:34-46 23:14
23:27-39 23:27-39 23:29-36 23:31-33 24:1-51 24:13 24:13 24:13 24:28 24:28
24:42-44 24:42-51 24:42-51 25:1-13 25:1-13 25:1-46 25:8 25:8 25:10 25:10 25:14-30
25:14-30 25:24-25 25:24-25 25:31-46 25:31-46 26:6-16 26:6-16 26:17-30 26:17-30
26:22 26:22 26:25 26:25 26:27-28 26:27-28 26:29 26:29 26:35 26:36-46 26:36-46
26:50 26:50 26:57-68 26:57-68 26:65 27:4 27:4 27:11-26 27:11-26 27:24 27:24

27:33-50 27:33-50 27:34-35 27:36 27:36 27:41-43 27:41-43 27:51 27:51 28:1-15
28:1-15 28:8 28:8 28:9 28:9 28:16-17 28:16-17 28:19

Mark

6:8 13:13

Luke

6:40 10:27 11:15 15 15:1-32 15:4 15:4 21:19 21:19 21:19 22:36

John

2:19 13:16 13:25 13:25 16:33 20:19 20:19

Acts

23:11

Romans

5:1-21

1 Corinthians

15:4 15:6

Hebrews

1:1

Index of Scripture Commentary

Matthew

9 9:2 9:6 9:9-17 9:18-31 9:36 10 10:5 10:5-16 10:16-31 10:24-25 10:32-42 10:39
11 11:2-15 11:19 11:20 11:25 11:28-29 12 12:1-14 12:24 12:33 12:41 12:42 13
13:1-9 13:9 13:12 13:13 13:24-30 13:33 13:44-46 14 14:1-12 14:12 14:19-20
14:22-36 14:28 15 15:21-31 16 16:13-28 16:21 17 17:1-13 17:19-20 17:25-26 18
18:1-14 18:8 18:12 18:13 18:22 19 19:16-26 20 20:23 20:28 20:28 21 21:1-16
21:4-5 21:33-46 21:44 22 22:1-14 22:34-46 23 23:27-39 24 24:13 24:28 24:42-51
25 25:1-13 25:8 25:10 25:14-30 25:24-25 25:31-46 26 26:6-16 26:17-30 26:22
26:25 26:27-28 26:29 26:35 26:36-46 26:50 26:57-68 27 27:4 27:11-26 27:24
27:33-50 27:36 27:41-43 27:51 28 28:1-15 28:8 28:9 28:16-17